

A commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians

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Galatians and the Law of Moses by Sean Kehoe

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A COMMENTARY ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

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GALATIANS INTRODUCTION

If your priority is to examine the issue of the Law of Moses rather than study the letter to the Galatians as a whole, I would advise you to look first at the lengthy article I have written entitled “*Has the Law of Moses ended?*” That focuses directly on the issue of the Law and in some ways provides stronger proofs that it has ended than we find in Galatians itself.

Moreover, that article also addresses the so-called ‘problem passages’ such as Matthew 5:17-20 and Luke 16:16-17 which many people wrongly believe contradict Paul and say the Law continues in operation. It gets more quickly to the point and disproves the idea that Paul’s teaching was in conflict with Jesus’. Otherwise, if you want a commentary on Galatians, then start here.

People tend to find Galatians one of the hardest books or letters to understand – even more so than Paul’s letter to the Romans. That’s partly because Galatians is rarely taught in most churches and, even when it is, it is generally taught badly. The problem is further compounded by the fact that many words and concepts referred to in Galatians are either not known at all or are badly misunderstood.

For example, do you understand words such as: ‘the law’, ‘legalism’, ‘grace’, ‘licence’, ‘works of the law’, ‘the Law of Moses’, ‘covenant’, ‘the Abrahamic covenant’, ‘adoption’, ‘inheritance’, ‘the law of Christ’, ‘the flesh’, ‘the old man’? There are many more such words which come up when we discuss Galatians. Some would admit they have no idea what they mean or, at best, a hazy understanding. In one sense, that’s not so bad, because if you *know you don’t know* what a thing is you can at least look it up and find out.

But many are in a worse position. They think they do understand them, but they don’t. Thus, when they read Galatians its meaning is obscured or misunderstood. Therefore, in this commentary I hope to explain these words to assist in my main objective which is to explain what Paul is saying in each verse and why he says it.

My second aim is to focus on *what God intends us to do about it*. The Bible was not written as an academic book for people to pass exams on. Our duty, after we have correctly understood a passage, is to *obey what it says*. So, there is always a practical objective which is to *apply* what is written in the Bible, not just to talk about it.

Remember also that, although Paul was only a man, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and was, therefore, telling us what God wants us to know. Therefore, never forget we are not merely looking at Paul’s personal opinions. We have in our hands *God’s own Word* and we need to approach it with reverence and with the full intention of applying it.

That means being willing to change our current beliefs, attitudes and practices to come into line with what the letter says, not to pass judgement on Paul and decide to what extent we agree with him. We are not here to critically appraise Paul but *to do as he says*, because he is telling us what God says and we must never forget that.

Many commentaries on Galatians devote a lot of time to discussing issues which don’t greatly matter to me such as exactly when the letter was written and whether it was sent to the churches in northern or southern Galatia. I propose to ignore such issues because I don’t see how answering them would make any practical difference to us today in how we apply this letter to our own lives.

More to the point, nobody actually knows when it was written anyway, or to which part of Galatia it was sent. Therefore, even if we devoted hundreds of pages to debating such issues, it would all be speculation and have no authority. It is wiser to focus on what God has chosen to focus on rather than become preoccupied with things He chose not to focus upon, or did not even mention at all.

So, if you want to know about such matters you will find dozens of commentaries which speculate on them. However, I will leave such issues aside and concentrate on the central questions, which are:

- a) What does the letter mean?
- b) Why was it written?
- c) Why did Paul consider it so crucial?
- d) What relevance does it have for us today?
- e) How are we to apply it?

The essence of the letter to the Galatians is that we are not under, or subject to, or required to obey, the Law of Moses. Neither are the Jews for that matter. Moreover, we are not under, or required to obey, any other set of rules that men create in place of, or in addition to, the Law of Moses. Thus, neither the Law of Moses nor any other set of rules has to be obeyed in order to:

- a) become a Christian
- b) continue as a Christian
- c) achieve righteousness or 'justification'
- d) please God
- e) become sanctified

None of those things are now achieved or could ever be achieved, even in the past, by observing the Law of Moses or any other sets of rules that men have created over the centuries in their place.

In short, *the Law of Moses is at an end and is no longer operative*. So, it doesn't apply to Christians, or even Jews, and it hasn't applied ever since Jesus died on the cross. When He died He *fulfilled, and ended*, the Law of Moses. He perfectly obeyed it during His life on Earth, which nobody else ever has, before or since. In doing that, He "*accomplished*" its purpose and brought it to an end.

To say the Law of Moses has come to an end, and that we no longer have to obey it, has major implications. It is an issue which creates deep confusion, not just amongst the churches of first century Galatia as they tried to deal with the 'Judaisers', but to today's churches as well. Many Christians are still unsure whether they are under the Law of Moses or not.

Others are adamant they are under it and aggressively tell others they are too. By the way, I deliberately use the word 'aggressively' as I have found it to be an almost consistent behaviour pattern amongst those who believe we are still under the Law. They are rarely open-minded or courteous in debate. They speak as people who know they are right and that that is all there is to it.

Only yesterday, I was engaging in a discussion on Facebook and I said the Law of Moses has ended and there is no command for us to observe the Jewish feasts or the Sabbath. A woman (purporting to be a Christian) got very angry and called me "*a disciple of Satan*". She was unable to control her rage at my saying the Law has ended. She thought I was against God and was refusing to obey the Bible. That is the level of the confusion and hostility that is now commonplace.

That poor woman's anger and lack of self control was fairly typical but it is in stark contrast to those who believe the Law has ended, most of whom are calm and gracious. I know something about the scale of the confusion and the intensity of people's opinions because I am active on social media and regularly see posts from impassioned advocates of the Law claiming stridently that everybody must:

- a) observe the Sabbath
- b) obey the Ten Commandments
- c) observe Jewish feast days
- d) obey the food laws
- e) obey the Law of Moses – which they insist is still binding upon us

At the risk of incurring yet more anger, let me say at the outset that we do NOT have to observe the Law of Moses, or Jewish feast days, or the Sabbath, or tithes, or act like Jews, or even obey the Ten Commandments. Concerning that last point, we *do* need to obey nine of the Ten Commandments, i.e. the ones restated in the New Testament.

But even for those, we don't obey them because Moses said so, *but because the command was reaffirmed* elsewhere in the Old or New Testaments, i.e. outside of the Law of Moses. That is not a pedantic distinction. It matters that the reason we must not murder is because Jesus told us not to, not because the Law of Moses forbids it.

By the way, the only one of the Ten Commandments that was *never* restated, and thus which we are not bound by, is the fourth, which tells us to observe the Sabbath. That command is made within the Law of Moses and nowhere else. So, when the Law of Moses ended, the duty to keep the Sabbath also ended and neither Jesus nor the apostles ever restated it.

If you disagree and feel you should observe some of the Law of Moses, then you need to realise that you must go further and obey *all* of the 613 commands within it, not just parts. Moreover, you must do so *all the time* not just when it is convenient. That is a crucial point which very few people realise. And even if they are told, they don't seem to let it bother them and it doesn't cause them to question their own beliefs.

We shall see from this letter, and from Romans, that to break any part of the Law of Moses, even once, is to break the whole Law. Therefore, it is no use arguing, as some do, that we are only under a duty to keep the "*moral law*" but have been released from the food laws or liturgical laws about how to operate in the Temple and how to do sacrifices etc. That is a false argument.

The Law of Moses is an all or nothing arrangement so either all of it still applies or none of it does because it is one complete whole or one entire package which you must take, or leave, in its entirety. It is like breaking one link of a 613 link necklace. The whole necklace would then be considered broken.

So, with the Law of Moses if you believe you are under it you would have to obey it all - and all the time. Otherwise, you are no better off because you would still be classified as a 'lawbreaker' just as much as a man who never observed any of it. Just to prove Paul is not alone in what he says that point is also made clear in the book of James:

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

James 2:10 (RSV)

If, nevertheless, you believe you must observe some parts of the Law of Moses, such as keeping the Sabbath or the Jewish feasts, it's a good idea to ask yourself *why* you are doing so. Is your real motive:

- a) to gain, earn or keep righteousness, i.e. justification?
- b) to become or remain sanctified?
- c) because you have been told God requires it?
- d) you have no idea why you do it and are just fitting in with what your church does?

It is common, both inside and outside the Church, to think Christianity is about "*being a good person*" or at least "*more good than bad*". Therefore, people invent all sorts of rules and traditions and imagine that by keeping those they will impress God. It boils down to thinking that you need to have "*faith and(insert extra requirement of your choice).....*" *instead of faith alone.*

Nobody ever says it out loud, but what it amounts to is that 'merely' to have all the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to you is not enough for achieving salvation and you also need to add some extra features such as Sabbath observance, or feasts, or tithing, or not drinking alcohol. Any such approach implies you need that extra 'additive' to satisfy God, be a real Christian, or achieve righteousness.

I believe that for many of the people who want to add these extra requirements it is done to give them a certain distinction so that they stand out as different from other "ordinary" Christians who lack this vital extra ingredient. Some do this innocently because they are confused or have been deceived. But I believe that in many cases it is about pride and the desire to differentiate themselves from 'lesser' Christians.

However, the central theme of Galatians is that the Gospel does not operate that way and must be kept free of all 'additives', like organic food. We must never add any conditions, rules or requirements which the Bible doesn't speak of.

To paraphrase Paul, any person, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, can only be saved "*by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone*". Therefore, once we have repented and believed the Gospel, there are no other requirements needed to become a Christian.

Any extra requirement or condition is invalid and must never be imposed upon us by anyone. Never let anyone tell you that you need the Gospel and Any such additional requirement is invalid and any such advice is wrong. In saying that, they are in danger of creating a false, manmade gospel in place of the true Gospel.

Once you realise the enormous implications of that you see why Paul got so worked up about this issue and felt he even had to confront Peter himself to make sure the true Gospel was preserved and not contaminated by 'additives' of any kind.

Accordingly, as well as starting the Christian life through faith alone, we have to continue it thereafter, to the very end, by faith alone. The Gospel never changes, either before or after we are saved and there is no point at which we then need to add observance of the Law of Moses or any other set of rules or denominational traditions to become a 'proper' Christian. We are truly free from the Law.

However, that freedom is not given to us so that we can live a life of sin and compromise. On the contrary, God wants us to live lives of obedience and discipleship. But that obedience is not legalism

either. It is freedom and Paul's letter to the Galatians is about what that freedom consists of, why it matters, and how it can be maintained.

By the way, I have also done a series of audio talks covering both Galatians and my article on the Law of Moses and I recommend both. The talks are, perhaps, easier to understand than the commentary as the spoken word sometimes has a way of making things less complicated than the written word.

Furthermore, if you lack time, or only want a brief introduction, there is also a short single talk covering all of Galatians and the Law of Moses. I gave that talk impromptu, without notes, when a speaker was delayed at a conference and I was asked to fill in for him. So, I condensed the whole subject into less than one hour. That talk is useful if you want a short simple introduction to this whole area.

Finally, in my article on the Law of Moses I have included quite a lengthy discussion of exactly *when it ended*. I personally believe it was actually very shortly after Jesus died, i.e. on the morning of the resurrection after He had met Mary Magdalene, when He told her not to touch Him.

I explain all of that there, together with looking at what the letter to the Hebrews tells us about how Jesus then began to operate as our High Priest in Heaven and how He also offered His own blood in the original Tabernacle in Heaven, of which the Temple in Jerusalem was just a replica. All of that has relevance to the ending of the Law and also helps to explain *why* it needed to end.

However, I do not want to repeat all of that information in this commentary so please refer to my article on the Law of Moses to see what that extra material from Hebrews is all about and why it further proves that the Law of Moses has ended.

Sean Kehoe
4 May 2024

GALATIANS 1 (RSV)

1 Paul an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

Of all Paul's letters, the opening words of Galatians are the bluntest as Paul gets straight down to business without any greeting by asserting his authority as an apostle and as having been appointed to that status by God Himself, not by men. The openings of all the other letters are gentler and friendlier, without the self-assertiveness we see here.

There is a good reason for that. Paul is about to write the boldest, firmest, most confrontational letter he ever wrote. He knew it would spark controversy and call into question his own authority and what right he had to make inflammatory statements about the Law of Moses, which is the central theme of the letter.

The reason he emphasises that his position as an apostle is "*not from men nor through man*" is that his credentials are being challenged. Moreover, that challenge was coming from men whose authority was merely man-made, and thus infinitely lower than his. Those opposing him were teaching falsely about the status of the Law of Moses and saying we are still obliged to obey it.

They were not speaking for God and had no authority at all to say what they said. They were just self-appointed men preaching a message of their own making. In short, they actually were what they falsely accused Paul of being and they actually lacked the credentials that they alleged he lacked.

Paul was a modest, humble, unassuming man who never usually made great claims about himself or his enormous knowledge or the unique revelation given to him. However, he begins this letter very differently by seeking to prove he has the God-given authority to make the controversial statements he is about to make. He knew this was such a life or death issue for the Church he had to assert himself strongly and that it was not a time for false modesty.

By the way, when Paul refers to being made an apostle through Jesus Christ, he is not only speaking of how and by whom he was appointed to that role but also of how and by whom he was trained and taught for it. That is Paul was *personally disciplined by Jesus Himself*, and much of this training took place *in Heaven*.

We learn this in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, where Paul reveals he was "*caught up to the third Heaven*" and how, while there, he "*heard things which cannot be told, which man may not utter.*" It means Paul did not miss out by not being one of the 12 apostles and travelling with Jesus for three and a half years during His earthly ministry.

Not being part of that was more than made up for by the things Paul was taught and allowed to see and hear while he was in Heaven. Therefore, Paul was not inferior to any of the other apostles, not even the 12. On the contrary, he knew and understood more than they did. The point of asserting his credentials was therefore to show that in the crucial and very heated argument he is about to deal with, Paul is speaking with divine authority, not merely stating his own opinions.

Therefore, we must not make the mistake which some of the Galatian Christians made of underestimating Paul or assuming he was not equal to the 12, because he certainly was. Indeed, at least in

his knowledge, he was far above them which is why God entrusted the writing of so much of the New Testament to him, and especially the formulation of doctrine.

I need to stress this point about not under-estimating or despising apostle Paul because it is a live issue, even today. Indeed, there are a surprising number of people who are negative towards Paul, or even hostile, and who ignore or disparage his letters or accuse him of absurd things such as being anti women or even anti Jewish.

I recall one young man I met in an evangelical church who said “*Apostle Paul and I don't get on*”. He meant he didn't like some of the things Paul said, or disagreed with him on various issues. But can you see how idiotic that is? Who but a fool would disagree with a man who has been personally tutored face to face by Jesus and who has even been to Heaven and seen and heard things which no other man has ever had revealed to him?

Therefore, if there is any trace of that disrespect for Paul in your mind then make a decision to cut it out immediately and to pay close attention to everything he says from now on.

2 and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

From this verse we see Paul worked together with a team of fellow missionaries. Moreover, *they agreed with him*. One error made when dealing with the current status of the Law of Moses is to assume Paul was the only one who thought it had come to an end and that others, including the 12 apostles disagreed.

Absolutely not! Paul's fellow workers shared his view and fully supported him. Indeed, as we shall see, so did Peter and also James the brother of Jesus who acted as Chairman at the great Council of the Church in Acts chapter 15.

3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; 5 to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

In the three verses above, after delaying his usual greeting in order to assert his credentials, Paul now greets them in his usual friendly manner before launching into the vital message he is about to give.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—

In verse six, however, Paul gets straight back to business with remarkably blunt language. This letter is written to people Paul knows personally because he founded their churches. These Galatians were, in the main, Gentiles who had turned from pagan idolatry to Christianity but Paul is now accusing them of “*deserting Jesus*” and “*turning to a different gospel*”.

By that he means a false or perverted gospel because that is how seriously he takes this issue. That is why he speaks more bluntly than in any of his other letters because our eternal lives are at stake if we get our understanding of the Gospel wrong.

Indeed, Paul appears to be more agitated about the errors of the Judaisers and their misguided legalism than he is about the sexual immorality of the Corinthians. At least he gets more worked up about it. That alone speaks volumes about the importance of this letter.

7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Just in case there is any doubt on the matter Paul then makes clear there is no ‘other gospel’ because there is only one Gospel. That is why he uses such a strong word, “*pervert*”, to describe any attempt to alter or misrepresent the true Gospel in any way whatsoever.

In stark contrast to Paul’s approach, there is a widespread view in today’s churches that we should be “ecumenical”. That means we should all try to be flexible and agree with everybody else, or at least refrain from openly disagreeing.

That is not how Paul operated. He was definite, absolute and precise about doctrine and willing to disagree publicly wherever anything important was misunderstood or misrepresented. Being clear about doctrine is unfashionable today. It is seen as “narrow minded”, “arrogant” and “bigoted” such that we should not contradict what others think but embrace all ideas equally to show we are broadminded.

Just look, for example, at the disgraceful apostate Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who even as I write this, is urging Christians to celebrate Ramadan with Muslims so as to “build bridges” between Christianity and Islam. No! That is not what God wants and it is the very opposite of how Paul operated.

Indeed, I shudder to think of what Paul would say to false teachers and wolves like Archbishop Welby, and most of his fellow bishops in the Church of England, about their blatant apostasy, heresy and deception.

The truth, and especially a true presentation of the Gospel message, really mattered to Paul. That is why he was willing to use words as strong as “*deserting*”, “*different gospel*” and “*pervert*”, which very few leaders would use today.

If a preacher spoke like that now most would condemn him and say he was “*intolerant*” and “*creating division*”. But Paul was not willing to ‘tolerate’ heresy and was courageous enough to confront anyone, no matter how high or famous they might be, who was leading God’s people astray. And he would do so even if he had to stand alone.

It would have been very different if the argument had not been about a vital matter of doctrine. So, if Paul and his friends had been ordering a pizza online and disagreement arose as to what toppings to have, he would not have joined in with the debate. Paul would have said, “*I will just go along with whatever you choose.*”

He would not have been willing to argue or to risk upsetting someone over a topic which was trivial or which did not touch upon any vital issue of doctrine or morals. However, Paul did not think these differences about the status of the Law of Moses were just matters of style or merely peripheral matters.

The arguments addressed in his letter to the Galatians really matter and Paul wanted his readers to take it as seriously as he took it. I want to stress that because if we do not see the seriousness of these issues we will miss the whole meaning of the letter to the Galatians.

We may even find we are following a false gospel based on observance of rules and other ‘*dead works*’, trying to earn righteousness for ourselves rather than receiving it as a free gift, by God’s grace, through faith, which is the only way the true Gospel operates.

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.

In verse 8 two key points are made. The first is it does not matter who presents us with a false gospel or how famous or senior they may be. If their gospel is different from what apostle Paul presents, then it is false. That is how emphatic Paul is. He makes himself the yardstick by which we are to decide whether a presentation of the Gospel is genuine or false.

Indeed, he goes so far as to say that even if an angel from Heaven should preach some gospel which is different in any way from what Paul preaches then it is a false gospel and should be rejected. In referring to angels Paul was not being fanciful or poetic. His words are to be taken literally because, over the centuries, many have done exactly that and have listened to what they assumed to be angels who presented some improved or updated version of the gospel.

This was how some false religions and cults were formed such as Mormonism but, above all, Islam, the most wicked and vicious of them all. That began when the so-called ‘prophet’ Mohammed was visited by what he initially (and rightly) took to be a demon but later came to believe was the angel Gabriel.

This demonic visitor gave him the instructions which were later made into the Koran. By the way, *Mohammed was not a prophet* and should never be referred to as such, not even to be diplomatic to Muslims. He was an evil, sadistic murderer and paedophile and no respect whatsoever should be shown to him.

If only Mohammed had paid attention to what Paul says in this verse. He could have saved himself, and the world, from the horror of Islam. In other words, Islam cannot be true for many reasons, but the first of that long list of reasons is that it contradicts this verse because someone who claimed to be an angel gave Mohammed a set of teachings which were *not the same as Paul’s teaching*.

That fact alone, i.e. disagreeing with Paul, ought to have been enough to prove to Mohammed that the person speaking to him was lying and was no angel but actually a demon as he initially assumed. This also applies to Mohammed’s followers. They too should look at this verse and know Mohammed’s teachings must be false *because they contradict Paul*.

Likewise, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, should have realised, and so should his deluded followers, that his teachings were false and had not been given to him by a genuine angel. Whether Joseph Smith saw and heard a demon claiming to be the (alleged) angel Moroni or whether it was all a lie that he made up (because Smith was a known liar and a convicted fraudster) the point is no one should have accepted his new amended gospel.

They should have rejected it instantly simply because it was *different from Paul’s*. That one single fact, that it contradicts Paul, is all we need in order to know that any teaching is false. Paul is a yardstick by which any teaching is to be measured,

But it is not only at that strategic level that people become deceived, as with the founders of the cults. Every one of us needs to realise that if our pastor, friend or relative presents a gospel message, or indeed any teaching, which is contrary to Paul's, *then it is false, for that reason alone.*

That is a huge claim for Paul to make because it implies enormous and unique authority. Ordinarily, we would be appalled by anyone today making such an audacious claim. However, as the letter progresses, we see why Paul claims to have such unprecedented authority and why he was right to do so.

The second key point within verse 8 is the extraordinary vehemence Paul displays towards anyone who preaches a false gospel. He even says "*let him be accursed*". The Greek word Paul uses is *anathema* which means Paul is invoking God's judgment, or God's curse, upon anyone who does so. Indeed, the implication is Paul is declaring they should be damned eternally.

At the very least, it means Paul wishes God would oppose and even remove such people so their false gospel does not continue to be broadcast. Paul uses these shockingly blunt words because the preservation of the true Gospel is of infinite importance.

There is nothing more important than the Gospel, so to pervert it in any way is a matter of the utmost seriousness. When you see it in those stark terms you realise why Paul uses such a strong expression in condemning those who preach a false gospel, whoever they may be.

The point is that if a false gospel is preached men and women will not be saved and will therefore go to Hell and then the Lake of Fire for all eternity, unsaved and unforgiven, because they never heard the true Gospel. What could possibly be more serious and more important than that?

Therefore, it was no mere slip of the tongue or outburst of temper which caused Paul to use such a strong word as *anathema*, i.e. *accursed*. He was speaking soberly and meant exactly what he said. We can be sure of that because, in the very next verse, he repeats that same curse.

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

So, although it is perfectly alright to have all sorts of cultural variations in our style of singing, whether we are reserved or demonstrative, what musical instruments we use, when we meet, how we conduct meetings, whether we wear suits and ties or casual dress, and so forth, there is no scope whatsoever for variation when it comes to the Gospel itself.

The Gospel message is sacred and unchangeable and must not be tampered with in any way by anyone, no matter how famous or eminent they may be. Accordingly, even if your pastor or your entire denomination preaches a gospel that is different from Paul's presentation of the Gospel *then they are all wrong and Paul is right.*

There cannot be different 'flavours' to the Gospel depending on where we live, our cultural background, our personal opinions, or the opinions of our leaders. The Gospel is the only Gospel and there is no other gospel. It is as simple as that, no matter who gets offended by my saying so.

I emphasise that point because, in this lukewarm apostate age, that is not the majority view. On the contrary, the average Christian, and even the average leader, is willing to compromise and alter the

message wherever it suits them in order to avoid arguments. But in view of Paul's words, and the curse he invokes, we must preserve the authentic Gospel and never alter it in any way.

10 Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

Again, Paul distinguishes his own motives and practices from those of other leaders, many of whom are still in churches today. Paul is not seeking to make himself popular, rich or famous. On the contrary, if Paul wanted an easy life, or to become wealthy, the last thing he would do is preach the true Gospel or contend for the truth in any area of doctrine.

That is not how you become popular today and it was the same then. Paul's aim is not to please his audience but simply to tell them the truth even if that infuriates them and even if it puts his own life in danger.

He goes so far as to say it is impossible to be a proper servant of Christ if your aim is to please other people. You cannot have true doctrine and popularity at the same time, especially in an apostate age such as ours. You must choose between truth **or** popularity and between pleasing men **or** pleasing God. You cannot do both.

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Verses 11 and 12 contain information which few people notice or take seriously. That is that the Gospel Paul preached was not given to him by any man. It was literally given to him personally, one-to-one, by Jesus Christ Himself. That explains a lot because, as a new believer, many years ago, I wondered why God chose to use Paul in such a major way given that he had never been one of the 12 disciples and had not heard Jesus' teachings at first hand.

However, I later realised that Paul did receive direct face-to-face teaching from Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, he may have spent more time with Jesus than the 12 apostles did. We are even told in 1 Corinthians 12:2-9 that Paul was allowed to go to Heaven and then to return here and that he saw and heard things he was not permitted to reveal to us.

Given that Heaven is outside of time, it is possible that Paul was there not just for a few moments, but for long enough to be fully taught by Jesus Himself, perhaps for what would seem years in our time. When we see the enormity of Paul's knowledge and understanding, which apostle Peter acknowledged, the likelihood is he did spend a long period receiving personal tuition from Jesus.

That being so, Paul is not only a direct personal witness of the resurrection, as the other apostles were, but he also received direct one to one teaching from Jesus. Those facts require us to give Paul very serious attention because he is the only man ever to have gone to Heaven and come back again.

Admittedly, he was not authorised to tell us what he saw and heard there, but the fact remains that his knowledge and understanding that he acquired from being personally tutored by Jesus Himself, far exceeds even that of the 12 apostles.

On top of all that, Paul was the only apostle who had a formal academic education, to the very highest level, like an Oxford professor. That is another reason why Peter gave Paul such enormous respect,

even declaring, while both of them were still living, that Paul's letters were Scripture. (See 2 Peter 3:15-16)

We all know Paul had a vision and heard Jesus' voice on the road to Damascus, but many assume that all he ever saw was the bright light referred to in Acts 26:12-15. But Paul then goes on to say in Acts 26:16 (NASB) that Jesus had said to him "*But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you as a servant and a witness not only to the things in which you have seen Me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you,*".

In that verse which was spoken while giving evidence to King Agrippa, Paul makes it clear that Jesus had told him, at the outset, *that He would visibly appear to him repeatedly thereafter*. Thus, he did not just see Jesus on a single occasion on the road to Damascus but on other occasions afterwards, including at least one period spent in Heaven itself.

Let the significance of that sink in as you re-evaluate the scale of Paul's authority and the hugeness of the revelation granted to him and to no one else in the history of the world, not even Moses or Solomon. In fact, not even Elijah because although Elijah went to Heaven he has not, as yet, returned from there. Neither has he been able to teach us with the benefit of the knowledge acquired from going there.

See also Acts 9:1 in which Paul says "*.....Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?....*" In addition, see 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 which makes clear that Jesus Himself explained to Paul what was said at the Last Supper, at which Paul was not present, but which he is now able to teach on as if he had been there.

See also Acts 23:11 in which Luke says of Paul "*The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome.'*" That was yet another face to face meeting with Jesus.

The point I am making is that Paul did not only see a bright light and hear a voice on the road to Damascus. He saw and spoke with Jesus *on various other occasions thereafter*, which so few people seem to realise. The reason Paul draws attention to seeing and speaking with Jesus Himself is that he is seeking to establish his credentials.

Paul knows the argument in which he is engaged is so important it is necessary to point out who and what he is and the fact that he has unique authority in the entire history of the Church to teach true doctrine. He was in a situation where, very reluctantly, he had to assert himself. It must have made Paul wince with embarrassment to be put in a position where he had no choice but to make claims about himself and to draw attention to his exceptional knowledge.

13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; 14 and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

In verses 13 and 14 Paul refers to the years before he became a Christian, when he was persecuting the Church. However, for the same reason as above, he points out that even within Judaism he had advanced beyond many of his own age (probably beyond any) and was extremely zealous for the "*traditions of the fathers*".

By that he means *the oral law*, the alleged oral teachings of Moses, which he never wrote down, but which had, supposedly, been preserved over the centuries. I hasten to add that this was untrue. There

were no such oral teachings. All God gave us was the Scriptures and He wants us to rely solely on those. Sadly, however, the Scribes and Pharisees, of whom Paul was one, valued these alleged extra laws as much as, if not more than, the Scriptures.

In saying this Paul was again seeking to establish his credentials to speak into the debate as to the current status of the Law of Moses and whether we are now subject to it. Not 'only' was Paul personally tutored by Jesus, but, prior to that, he was already probably one of the foremost experts on the oral law and the traditions of the elders which were so important to the Pharisees.

Therefore, Paul's overall knowledge of both right theology *and wrong theology* is unprecedented because in addition to the divine revelations given to him, he had also spent many years in academic study. Of course, some of that study was valid and gave him a huge knowledge of the details of the Law of Moses. But some of it was the study of the oral law, *which was not of God* and was only man made and therefore futile or even false.

However, even his extensive study of their wrong theology did at least help to give him a broader knowledge and understanding, and a better recognition of the errors of the Judaisers, than probably anybody else in the world. This was entirely unlike the other apostles, who were all uneducated working class men and had never studied either the Law of Moses or the oral law to anything like the same extent as Paul had.

15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace,

This single verse could occupy us for an entire book if we were to consider in detail God's foreknowledge and predestination in conjunction with our free will either to accept or reject God and to obey or disobey him. I will not even attempt that here, but I do refer you to my audio teaching on the errors of Calvinism.

The key point is the Bible clearly teaches **both** predestination **and** free will, not just one or the other as so many people assume. Therefore, in some way too complex for us to understand, God is not only aware of the future, He also makes decisions and fixes things ahead of time and He also intervenes to alter the course of our lives and human history.

Yet it is also true that He gives us free will to make decisions of our own. How exactly He can do all that at the same time, given that it sounds contradictory, is beyond us and cannot be neatly explained. But what we can say is we should not adopt just one truth or the other as if the other truth did not also exist. Both predestination and free will are true and we must believe both.

So, before Paul was born, God already knew him and called him to the ministry he later pursued. Yet it was also Paul's free choice as to whether to pursue it. In much smaller ways, the same is true of you and me and God has called us and predestined us to do things for him.

However, I believe we also have the free will to reject that calling and refuse to do what God predestined us to do. It is perhaps like a wealthy farmer who has 'predestined' his eldest son to run the farm after his death and yet, if he chooses, the son could refuse that destiny and pursue some other path.

It is important for us to ask God to help us fulfil our calling and do what he predestined us to do rather than turn away from it. However, what we must not do is just assume (as Muslims do) that anything God wants to happen will inevitably happen, regardless of what we do or don't do in response to His

will. In other words, we need to cooperate and be willing to have God's will worked out in our lives. Otherwise it may never happen, even if it had been His will for it to happen.

Some people on the more intense wing of Calvinism find the idea of God's will being thwarted or defied to be unthinkable and impossible. I cannot understand how they can hold that view since it seems self evident that His will is defied and thwarted every day of the week. If not, why would He condemn and punish disobedience? Surely disobedience would not exist if God's will was never defied.

16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood,

When Paul had his first revelation on the road to Damascus and realised who Jesus was and that he had been persecuting the Lord, he did not initially go to confer with other men about what it meant or what the true Gospel was. Paul was tutored by Jesus Himself to prepare him for the task of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Perhaps one reason why Jesus trained him individually, without earthly teachers, is because of the drastic change of direction about to occur in which Paul would be sent to the Gentiles rather than the Jews. The apostles were all Jews and would have found it difficult to tell Paul that this was to be his ministry. The very thought of going to the Gentiles was so novel Jesus had to say it to Paul Himself.

Likewise, in Acts 10:9-16 when Peter had the vision of the sheet descending from Heaven with various non-kosher animals on it, such as reptiles and birds, he had to be told three times that the complicated food restrictions of the Law of Moses were at an end. Otherwise Peter could not have absorbed it as the idea was so alien it was too shocking for him to take in.

Even after that, it took more time for it to sink in to Peter's mind that God was now offering the Gospel to the Gentile world as well, no longer just to the Jews. Likewise, I believe Jesus knew that to prepare Paul for such a radically different form of ministry it required His personal intervention or else Paul would not have been able to grasp it any better than Peter did because it was such an unthinkable idea.

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Instead of going to Jerusalem to see the other apostles after being made an apostle himself, Paul went into Arabia, probably for a period of intensive private study and solitude as he 'recalibrated' himself, and perhaps also to have more private tuition from Jesus.

He does not specify how long he spent in Arabia, but after that time he went to Damascus in Syria where he must have begun his ministry on his own, without the assistance of the 12 apostles. However, they plainly came to hear of him, due to his already existing fame plus the startling transformation of his beliefs and conduct which made him even more newsworthy.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days.

After three years, either from his conversion, or from the start of his ministry in Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem. It would seem he went primarily to confer with Peter (Cephas) the leader of the 12 apostles. He then spent 15 days getting to know Peter, explaining his own position as an apostle and perhaps teaching him some of the things he had been taught by Jesus.

The very fact that someone as important and busy as Peter was willing to clear his diary and spend 15 days with Paul proves that Peter recognised him as an apostle. He probably also saw that he had much to learn from Paul, as his comments in 2 Peter 3:15-16 suggest.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

While in Jerusalem on that visit Paul did not see the other 11 apostles, probably because they were away in other parts of Israel, or travelling through the Roman Empire, preaching the Gospel to the Jews in the land and also to the Jews in the diaspora, i.e. the Jews scattered around the world, as they still are today.

He did however see James. That was not James the brother of John who was one of the 12 apostles. It was '*James the Just*', the half-brother of Jesus Christ, one of Mary's other sons, who wrote the book of James. James the Just did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry and even thought He was insane at one point (see Mark 3:21).

He only began to believe in Him after the resurrection. However, he later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem, such that, at the great Council of Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15, James officiated as Chairman, notwithstanding that Peter was also present at the meeting. That one fact alone proves James' high status in the early Church.

It also proves that Peter was not the "Pope" because if he had been, he would have been the Chairman of the Jerusalem Council, not James the Just. So, although James the brother of Jesus was not one of the 12 apostles, he was still an apostle, in the same sense as men like Barnabas, in that they were witnesses to the resurrection and were sent to preach the Gospel.

20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)

Paul says this because not only his authority but also his honesty is being questioned in the argument with the so-called 'Judaisers'. Although they were Christians, or rather Messianic Jews, the Judaisers were hostile to Paul and willing to make accusations against him and even to lie about him in order to get their way. Therefore, unusually, Paul states, "before God", that he is not lying.

Ordinarily we could assume that without it needing to be said, but the importance of the argument and its ferocity meant he had to state this formally, as if he was giving evidence in a court, because his opponents did not accept his authority or even his integrity. That said, to be technical, what Paul said here is not an oath. It is simply a statement made "before God", by which Paul demonstrates the gravity of his words and how seriously he was taking them because it was imperative that people should believe him.

21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cili'cia. 22 And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; 23 they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me.

After his visit to Jerusalem Paul went again to Damascus and other regions of Syria, and also to Cilicia, a Roman province on the southern Mediterranean coast of what we now call Turkey. Paul did not pursue his ministry within Israel itself. He did visit Jerusalem, but did not minister in Israel, because he did not want to 'trespass' on the ministries of other men already preaching there. It was also because his primary calling was to the Gentiles.

That said, we must not make the mistake of thinking Paul did not care about or minister to Jewish people. On the contrary, as you read the book of Acts and the letters it is plain that everywhere Paul went he always began by bringing the Gospel to the Jews in that place. He usually did so by speaking at their synagogues each Sabbath, only stopping when he was thrown out or when it was time for him to move on to another city.

Therefore, although Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, he also had a tremendously passionate heart for the Jewish people, so much so that in Romans 9:3 he was willing to give up his own salvation and be lost forever if that would make it possible for the Jewish people to be saved. I stress that because many mistakenly allege that Paul was hostile to the Jews, whereas he was nothing of the sort, in fact the very opposite.

GALATIANS 2 (RSV)

1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

Because most of Paul's time was devoted to reaching the Gentile world, plus Jews living within the diaspora, it was only after 14 more years that he went back to Jerusalem for another visit. As for whether this was the same trip to Jerusalem as that which is referred to in Acts 15, when the great Council took place, we have no way of knowing for sure.

The fact that he went to Jerusalem so infrequently suggests it may have been. However, the fact that he does not refer in Galatians to the conclusions of that Council to lend support to his argument suggests this visit was not the one spoken of in Acts 15 but an earlier one.

What I mean is simply that if the Acts 15 Council had already taken place when he wrote Galatians Paul would surely have referred to it in his letter and quoted from it to prove the Jerusalem church supported him. But he didn't and that omission is hard to explain any other way than to conclude that it had not yet taken place when he wrote Galatians.

2 I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.

Paul went to Jerusalem on this occasion in response to a revelation given to him by God, the details of which are not set out for us. Paul goes to speak to the senior figures in Jerusalem, probably including some of the 12 apostles, to set out to them privately the Gospel he had been preaching for the 17 years since his conversion.

It was a mark of his humility that Paul let them scrutinise his message and say whether they thought he was preaching the genuine Gospel. I am certain that Paul had no doubts at all on that question, but he still wanted to make himself accountable and to demonstrate that he was open to correction if others felt it was needed. In doing that Paul showed real meekness which is so rare in the modern Church. We need to see this as our model.

What makes the timings of these two visits to Jerusalem confusing, i.e. this visit and the one in Acts 15, is that on both visits the controversy over the Judaisers was addressed and, both times, the leaders in Jerusalem supported Paul. However, it seems that in the earlier visit, referred to in verses 1-3 the subject was not covered in the same depth as it was in the later visit described in Acts 15 which was organised on a far bigger scale.

The controversy about whether the Law had ended kept rumbling on, even after the Jerusalem leaders sided with Paul (during the visit referred to in verses 1-3). Therefore, it became necessary in the end to convene a full scale conference of the entire Jerusalem church in Acts 15 to finally settle the argument.

In my opinion, the letter to the Galatians refers to this earlier visit to Jerusalem not the later visit of Acts 15, because it was written in between the two visits. If so, then those participating in the Acts 15 conference will have had the benefit of being able to read the letter to the Galatians. I imagine that may well have influenced some of them.

3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

In support of his overall argument about the status of the Law of Moses, Paul is saying that when he was in Jerusalem during this earlier visit (not the Acts 15 visit) the apostles and other leaders of the church did not say that Titus, his Gentile assistant, should be circumcised. The other apostles did not agree with the ‘Judaisers’, against whom Paul was battling, even at that earlier time.

The Judaisers were teaching that all Gentile converts to Christianity must also become Jews and submit to the Law of Moses which, for men, required that they be circumcised. So, Titus was a Gentile Christian, and thus had never been circumcised as an infant, but neither Paul nor the leaders in Jerusalem thought he needed to be circumcised now.

Paul did, however, have Timothy circumcised as an adult, and you might wonder why he did that and whether Paul was acting inconsistently. The answer is he wasn’t because there was a clear distinction between these two cases. Titus was a pure Gentile, with no Jewish blood at all. Timothy, however, had a Jewish mother and a Gentile father but had never been circumcised.

The reason why Paul had Timothy circumcised, but not Titus, is that Timothy, *being a Jew by physical descent*, needed to be circumcised to come within the scope of the *Abrahamic* covenant, which applied to him as a Jew but to which Titus, as a Gentile, was not a party.

This could easily become confusing. We therefore need to distinguish between the covenants God made with Abraham, the ‘Abrahamic covenant’, and the one made 430 years later with Moses. That was called the ‘Mosaic covenant’ or the ‘Law of Moses’, which are two names for the same thing. What may cause confusion is that *both* these covenants, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic, required that males be circumcised.

So, while the Mosaic covenant or Law of Moses was still in operation, males needed to be circumcised, *even as adult Gentile converts to Judaism*. However, when the Law of Moses came to an end, with Jesus’ death, that requirement ended, at least so far as the Law of Moses itself was concerned.

That is why Titus, being a pure Gentile, did not need to be circumcised, because the Law of Moses had already ended. However, Timothy, being a Jew, but one whose parents had failed to circumcise him as an infant, did need to be circumcised, but only to come within the scope of *the Abrahamic covenant, not the Law of Moses*.

The point is the Abrahamic covenant continued to operate, and is still in operation today, and it still requires Jewish males, *but not Gentiles*, to be circumcised. The Abrahamic covenant contained narrower promises from God which were made only to the Jewish people, the physical descendants of Jacob, plus other wider promises which applied to the Gentiles. God still takes very seriously the narrower promises which were made only to the Jews. He has not forgotten those or cancelled them.

Therefore, to be precise, even Timothy who was a Jew did not need to be circumcised to comply with the provisions of the Law of Moses. But he did need to be circumcised to comply with the Abrahamic covenant or else he would not be classified by God as a Jew.

Please see Genesis 17:9-11 and 14, as set out below, which show how God commanded that all Jewish males must be circumcised to be included within the Abrahamic covenant. If not, they would be “*cut off from his people*”:

“And God said to Abraham “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between you and me”.

Genesis 17:9-11 (RSV)

“Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant”

Genesis 17:14 (RSV)

As for why it matters whether God sees a person as being a Jew, the vital point which much of the Church has forgotten, is that God still has a plan and a purpose for the physical descendants of Jacob, i.e. the literal Jewish people. And I believe the time for the fulfilment of that plan is now very close indeed, as Jesus’ return cannot be far away.

Thus, it is essential to Him that they be preserved intact and identifiable as a race because, in the end, the literal nation of Israel is going to be fully restored, in all its glory, and Jesus Christ Himself is going to rule over them from Jerusalem as their King. The Jews will then be the leading people on Earth and Israel will be the leading nation.

Some people may not like that, but their disapproval of His intentions is not going to change God’s mind. Therefore, if you are one of those people who don’t like the idea of Jesus being a Jew, and indeed the King of Israel, then I suggest you repent, change your attitude, and start liking it. Get your opinions into line with God’s stated intentions.

God’s plans for the future of Israel is one reason why the Jewish race must be preserved. It also explains why Paul thought it necessary for Timothy to be circumcised to bring him within the scope of the Abrahamic covenant and the promises made to the physical descendants of Jacob, of whom he was one, but Titus was not. Therefore, there was no contradiction and Paul was not acting inconsistently.

4 But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage—

Paul means that at some point, perhaps when washing or changing, some Judaisers came in amongst Paul and his co-workers to find out which of them were circumcised. Evidently, they noticed that Titus was not and they made an issue of it. However, the leaders in Jerusalem supported Paul on this issue, not the Judaisers, and so Titus was not circumcised.

5 to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Although it would have made life much easier for Paul if he had compromised and submitted to the demands of the Judaisers, he absolutely refused to do so. His resolute stance was not simply for the sake of Titus personally, but because of the vital principle involved here and the terrible precedent which would have been set if Paul had given way to their demands and had Titus circumcised.

Had he done so it would have implied that the Law of Moses was still in operation, even for Gentiles. That would have caused all of us, even today, to imagine we are under an obligation to obey it, not only in relation to circumcision, but to all of the 613 commands. Therefore, Paul was immovable on this

issue because the truth of the Gospel was at stake and on that he could allow no fudging or compromise whatsoever.

By the way, I ought to say something here about the wider issue of “*submission*” or submitting to leaders or to other people generally. We need to look at what submission means, when it applies, and to whom, and on what sort of issues God wants us to submit to others.

This is important as there is a lot of false teaching on this issue from domineering and abusive leaders who twist the meaning of ‘submission’ to suggest it applies only to our dealings with leaders and that God wants us to do whatever they say. Those who give this false teaching do so in order to get their own way and put themselves in power over people.

When the Bible speaks of submitting to others *it does not mean being blindly obedient* or abdicating your responsibility to decide for yourself about issues of theology, morals or practice. Moreover, the submission the Bible advocates is *not just to leaders, but to everyone*. What we are commanded to do is to make ourselves easy to be with, easy to get along with, and easy to manage.

So, if someone has been given the task of organising the church picnic outing and is running around trying to arrange lifts, or sort out the food, then just fit in. Don’t argue with them. Don’t be contrary, fussy or awkward. Just willingly obey the little requests or instructions given to you so as to make life easier for everyone else. That is what submission means.

What it does *not* mean is subjugating yourself such that you have to obey the leaders of the church on matters of *doctrine* or significant issues of practice or *morals* about which your conscience or your interpretation of Scripture leads you to a different view. If that is the case, or if you see misconduct or impropriety in the life of a leader, *then do not submit to them*.

In such circumstances you need to ask direct questions, answer back, argue forcefully and, if necessary, refuse to budge an inch. We see Paul doing exactly this in his dealings with the Judaisers but also in the way he rebuked Peter, Barnabas and others when he felt they were wrong on doctrine.

Therefore, if anyone directs you to a verse in the New Testament which urges you to submit to leaders, remember that *it is not talking about important matters of doctrine*. Neither is it requiring you to overlook or excuse *misconduct* or *dishonesty* on the part of a leader.

It is about making yourself easy to work with and not being an argumentative, curmudgeonly type of person who won’t take advice or cooperate or give way on small issues to preserve the peace. It is not about slavish submission to leaders. Indeed, that must be so since we are effectively commanded to submit to *everyone*, not just to leaders, as we see here:

*“I urge you to be subject to such men **and to every fellow worker and labourer.**”*

1 Corinthians 16:16 (RSV)

*“and be subject **to one another** in the fear of Christ”*

Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)

Plainly, if we are all to submit to *everyone* it cannot mean on issues of doctrine or where there is misconduct. Firstly, that would go against our duty to decide for ourselves what is true, what the Bible says, and whom we can trust. But, secondly, it would also be absurd and unmanageable as it would produce chaos. How can we all simultaneously obey each other?

But, more to the point, we are often commanded elsewhere to “*contend earnestly for the faith*” and to listen carefully to all teaching and challenge each other where there is error, deception or wrongdoing. That is a vital duty and we can never delegate the exercise of our own conscience and discernment to any other man, no matter how eminent he might be.

In short, therefore, the kind of submission the Bible teaches is, for example, that if a 16 year old boy has been put in charge of the projector for the song lyrics and he wants you to move your seat so he can get a better position then willingly cooperate with him and submit to his requests. It has nothing to do with status, authority or seniority. It is about acting reasonably and not making yourself into a nuisance to others.

Therefore, do submit to a leader, or to anyone, if they want to correct you or offer you advice. Listen willingly and be teachable and thank them for their help. But do not submit to a leader, however famous, if he teaches error or is dishonest or greedy for money, or domineering, or abusive, or engages in an immoral lifestyle.

I hope that clarifies the position. Please refer to my Book 8 for more detail about the proper role and authority of leaders, and how God wants us to relate to leaders and also how He wants leaders to conduct themselves.

6 And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me;

Paul already knew the Law of Moses was at an end, such that circumcision was no longer required for Gentile converts. Therefore, he did not require the instruction or backing of the leaders of the Jerusalem church in order to make that pronouncement.

Having been personally tutored by Jesus, he had no doubt at all as to the rightness of his position. Thus, even if the 12 apostles themselves had all unanimously disagreed with him on this crucial issue, he would have held his ground and stood alone if need be. That would have been his duty.

7 but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles),

Thankfully, it was not necessary for Paul to stand alone because the leaders of the Jerusalem church agreed with him, not with the Judaizers. Those leaders saw very clearly that God had called Paul to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles and they endorsed that publicly.

We see in verses 7 and 8 that Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel to the ‘circumcised’, which is a shorthand expression to refer to the Jewish people. It simply means that Peter had been given primary responsibility for bringing the Gospel to the Jews whereas Paul was primarily responsible for bringing it to the Gentiles.

9 and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised;

Therefore, when the leaders in Jerusalem (on the earlier visit referred to in verses 1-3) heard Paul’s Gospel message, and had confirmed its accuracy, they publicly gave their approval to Paul and his

ministry. Paul is claiming their support here in this letter to the Galatians, in which he is dealing with the same controversy over the issues of Paul going to the Gentiles and also of the current status of the Law of Moses.

He wants to make it clear he was not a maverick pursuing some illegitimate ministry of his own but that he had the endorsement of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. Of course, had they not given him their endorsement he would still have continued anyway, because Jesus had personally told him to. But the point is they did endorse him. Paul wants the churches in Galacia to know he had that endorsement because his opponents were falsely alleging that he did not have it.

So, the Jerusalem church not only approved of Paul and his ministry, but did so warmly and enthusiastically and gave him *“the right hand of fellowship”*. Paul means they became his friends, approved of the content of his message, and agreed that he had been called to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.

10 only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do.

Indeed, the level of agreement between Paul and the leaders in Jerusalem was so complete the only suggestion they gave him was to urge him to remember the poor, by which they meant the poor in Jerusalem, who were suffering hardship at that time. However, even on that point, Paul confirms he was already aware of it and was eager to help even without being reminded.

Paul needed to emphasise that he had the approval of all these very senior men because his opponents were wrongly alleging that he did not have it. Of course, if this debate was occurring today, Paul could simply refer the Galatians to Peter’s website or Facebook account to prove the position, but in the first century Paul had to rely on letters and on giving them his solemn word on this issue.

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

There was then a regrettable incident in Antioch, which was actually one of the churches in Galatia, to which Paul is now sending this letter. It became necessary for Paul to openly disagree with Peter and to rebuke him publicly because of the way he had been influenced and intimidated by the Judaisers.

12 For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Some of the Judaisers had come to the area falsely claiming to speak on the authority of James the Just, Jesus’ half-brother who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. These misguided men then created agitation in the church at Antioch, where Peter was visiting at that time, and Peter had wrongly given in to their pressure.

Therefore, Peter began to eat separately from the Gentiles simply because the Judaisers said he should. In fact, given that the Law of Moses was at an end, including the food restrictions, there was no need for Peter to eat separately from Gentiles and it was wrong of him to buckle to their pressure. Peter knew this better than anyone since it was to him that God gave the vision in Acts 10 confirming that the food laws had ended.

13 And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity.

Paul does not mean here that Peter was lying, but rather that he was compromising or being ‘two-faced’ in order to avoid hassle from the Judaisers. On seeing Peter’s example, as he began to eat separately from the Gentile Christians, the Jewish Christians in Antioch, began to do likewise. Therefore they too began to practise segregation within the church in Antioch, whereby Jewish and Gentile Christians would eat separately. Indeed, even Barnabas, Paul’s devoted companion was taken in by this error and gave way to the Judaisers.

In fairness to Peter and the other Jewish Christians, segregating themselves was only what they had always done as Jews before they had become Christians. It had always been the policy to eat separately from Gentiles, not only to avoid foods forbidden by the Law of Moses, or that had been offered to idols, but also to avoid eating with Gentiles at all. The Gentiles themselves were regarded as unclean and thus it was considered a defiling act for a Jew to eat with them.

So, Peter and Barnabas were only doing what they were familiar with, having done it all their lives, and its very familiarity must have been a factor in why they were taken in by this error. Peter had found it extremely difficult to grasp the enormity of the change that had occurred. That was why God had to give Peter the vision three times in Acts chapter 10 of the sheet descending from Heaven with various reptiles and birds upon it, and telling him that these were now alright for him to eat.

The very idea of that had been so unthinkable to Peter, as a devout Jew, that God knew he had to be given that shocking message repeatedly in order to be able to absorb it. It is not so surprising therefore, when the Judaisers came telling Peter and the other Jews that they should go back to normal and eat separately from the Gentile Christians, that they would submit to this false teaching. It would seem very comfortable and was like returning to an old familiar habit.

Paul’s point is that Peter, of all people, after the vision he had had, should have known better and should not have submitted to this pressure. Consequently, Paul had to rebuke Peter, and he had to do it publicly, because the issue at stake was so crucial to the future of the Church.

Therefore, for the sake of the Gospel, and also for the sake of all of us Gentile Christians in the 20 centuries since this occurred, Paul made a very lonely and uncomfortable stand. Confronting Peter publicly took real courage and we should admire him for it.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Here, in verse 14, Paul summarises the rebuke he gave to Peter. He was saying that if Peter could live like a Gentile and eat with them when the Judaisers were not watching, how could he act so hypocritically as to revert to the usual Jewish practice of eating separately whenever the Judaisers were around? Paul’s point is that deep down, Peter knew he was doing wrong. But he caved in because he felt intimidated by this aggressive pressure group.

However, how many of us can point the finger at Peter or Barnabas in this regard given that we too face many pressures today to compromise with the standards of the secular world so as to have an easier life and avoid criticism? Ask yourself how much you have spoken out publicly against homosexuality, Islam, transgenderism, abortion, feminism, etc. Or, like most 21st century Christians, have you made it your policy to keep your head down and say nothing?

We should all be speaking out, loud and clear, on all these issues and many others too, but most of us aren't. Therefore, let us be slow to point the finger at Peter or at anyone. Nevertheless, not from any attitude of superiority or judgementalism, but because the issue at stake was so crucial, Paul knew he had to rebuke Peter, and to do it publicly, to prevent others being led astray.

15 We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,

In verse 15 Paul is addressing Christians who are Jews by birth, i.e. what we would now call Messianic Jews. When he refers to "*Gentile sinners*" Paul is using the normal Jewish expression for Gentiles. It does not mean Gentiles are more sinful than Jews. It is simply a figure of speech with which Paul, as a Jew himself, was very familiar, even though it sounds strange to our Gentile ears in the 21st century.

16 yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.

Now, in verse 16, we come to a vital theological point. It is that the Gospel is not based upon obeying the Law of Moses, or any other law, but is a matter of faith. So, whether we are a Jewish Christian or a Gentile Christian the position is the same. We are saved by putting our faith in Jesus Christ and in what He did for us on the cross, not by trying to observe the Law of Moses or any other set of rules.

That is what Paul means by "*works of the law*". He is saying that no amount of observance of the Law of Moses can ever save us, whether we are a Jew or a Gentile. Paul goes into much greater detail on this point in chapters 3 to 5 of his letter to the Romans.

For the avoidance of doubt, it was never the case that anybody could ever be saved by observing the Law, no matter how hard they tried, because it is simply not possible to obey it all. No one other than Jesus has ever obeyed it perfectly. The problem is that only 100% obedience at every moment of your entire life could entitle you to be declared righteous under the Law of Moses.

Anything less than that would make you a lawbreaker and would mean you are a sinner, not righteous. That's why no one has ever been saved by trying to keep the Law. In other words, salvation has always been by faith, not only now in the New Testament era, but always, throughout the entire Old Testament era. We shall look at that further below, but please also refer to Romans for why salvation is, and always has been, on the basis of faith, not works.

17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!

To understand verse 17 we must realise that the purpose of the Law of Moses is not, and never was, to make us righteous. One of the primary purposes of the Law of Moses was actually to reveal to us that we are sinners because, if there was no such law it would be much harder for us to see our own sin. But where there is a law, and we can see the ways in which we are transgressing against it, our own sinfulness is more clearly revealed to us.

That is one major reason why the Law of Moses was given, because unless we first realise we are sinners we will not see any need to repent. And that is a crucial need because repentance is the vital first step we need to take in order to believe the Gospel and put our trust in Jesus Christ alone to save us.

However, Paul is saying that although the Law was given to expose our sinfulness, that does not mean the Law is to blame for our sin, any more than a thermometer is to blame for you having a fever. The thermometer, like the Law of Moses, simply shows what is wrong with you, but they are not what caused you to be sick or sinful.

18 But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor.

So, the principal purpose of the Law of Moses was to show we are sinners or, to be more precise, that we are transgressors, which is the technical word for someone who is in breach of a specific law or rule. Thus, the larger and more detailed the law becomes, the greater and more frequent are our transgressions.

That then makes them easier to see and harder to deny. Therefore, if the Law of Moses was reinstated and you tried again to observe it, as Paul unsuccessfully tried to do before he became a Christian, you would only fail miserably and demonstrate that you are in fact a transgressor.

19 For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God.

The effect of the Law in Paul's own life was simply to prove, beyond all doubt, that he was a sinful man and a transgressor and totally incapable of keeping it. It revealed that he was dead in his sins, and completely incapable of saving himself by observing the Law or by trying to obtain righteousness by any other such means.

The Law of Moses therefore did not save him, or bring him to life, but it did show he was dead in his sins, which was a vital first step in realising he needed Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross to save us.

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul says he has been "*crucified with Christ*". By that he means his sin nature or 'old man', has been put to death, or revealed as being dead, and therefore useless to Paul in seeking to acquire righteousness or salvation.

Therefore, when Paul says "*it is no longer I who live*", he realises he cannot achieve salvation by his own observance of any law, rules, traditions or practices whatsoever, but only by putting his trust in Jesus Christ and by allowing his life to become a channel or vehicle through which Jesus Christ can operate.

He has grasped that the only way he can be saved is by putting his faith entirely in the Gospel and trusting in Jesus Christ and in what He did on the cross. The only righteousness any Christian has is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that has been transferred or imputed to him.

We have no righteousness of our own and cannot acquire any for ourselves by observing the Law of Moses or any other set of rules. It can be done only by believing the Gospel and allowing the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be transferred to us as a free gift, not as something we have earned for ourselves.

Paul means the life he now lives in his flesh (by which in this particular case he means his physical body, not his sinful nature), must therefore be lived on the basis of faith. That involves putting his trust

in Jesus Christ day by day and relying entirely upon Him for salvation. It can not be done by observing laws, rules or traditions as so many people misguidedly attempt to do even today.

21 I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

Again, Paul underscores the point that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone and in Christ alone, not by reliance upon any form of law. To suggest otherwise would be to nullify or cancel out the grace of God. That means the free gift or undeserved favour which God has given to us in allowing us to receive salvation freely by having our sins forgiven and by Him treating us as having had all the righteousness of Jesus Christ transferred to us.

A very wealthy man might choose, as a free gift, to cancel out our bank overdraft. That equates to forgiveness, but it would only take our account balance up to zero. It would not make us wealthy. But he could also then give us a duplicate bank card for his own bank account, in which he has an infinitely large amount of money. That would represent Jesus transferring His own righteousness to us.

So, God's forgiveness cancels out our sin, but we need more than that to be saved. We also need Jesus' own righteousness to be transferred to us, or '*credited to our account*', in order for God to view us as being not only sinless, but also righteous, and thus worthy to be in his presence.

The point is that both of these aspects of salvation, i.e. being forgiven and being made righteous, are achieved on the basis of grace, through faith, i.e. undeserved favour, as a free gift, not by works or by observance of any law or rules.

If salvation could be obtained in those ways it would mean Jesus Christ died for no purpose in the sense that His death on the cross on our behalf was not necessary because we could have instead saved ourselves by observing the Law of Moses or some other law. To think in such terms is blasphemous. It despises what Jesus did for us on the cross and implies we can save ourselves by our own effort rather than receiving the free gift He is offering to us in the Gospel.

GALATIANS 3 (RSV)

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

Paul again becomes very blunt in his tone as he describes the Galatians as not merely mistaken, but foolish. He then goes further and states they are *'bewitched'* which many assume to be a mere figure of speech or exaggeration for effect. I don't think so. I believe Paul is being absolutely literal in stating they have come under the power of witchcraft.

He means they have allowed themselves to be put under the control of others, which is what witchcraft is all about. Witchcraft is essentially about mind control. It is a means of influencing, controlling or intimidating other people to make them do what you want rather than leave them free to make their own decisions.

That is what our governments use to control people, with the help of a corrupt media plus corrupt institutions like universities, hospitals, police and courts. How else could they have got millions of people to believe the Covid hoax, wear masks, abandon their elderly relatives, hide indoors in fear, and take dangerous untested jabs if those people had not been subjected to a form of mass hypnosis and mind control?

God is strongly opposed to witchcraft because it is the very opposite of what He does, whereby He gives us all free will, which He takes extremely seriously and will not override, even when we choose an evil path. By contrast, witchcraft is all about overriding people's free will. That is its very purpose. Those who practise it crave to be in control of others.

Indeed, one sees that with left wing "woke" people who can't bear to be contradicted and will aggressively silence anyone who won't obey them. They don't seek to debate with you and to win the argument with superior logic and evidence. Their method is to stop you from saying anything at all and to ban you from social media or from being able to speak at public venues. We call it the "cancel culture" because their goal is to be the only voice that can be heard and to make it as if you didn't exist if you won't submit to their opinions.

Paul is saying that by abandoning his teaching and falling for the false teaching of the Judaisers, the Galatians have let themselves be put back under the Law of Moses. In doing that, the Galatians showed signs that their minds were being controlled by others. At its most basic level this can be done by deception, peer pressure, ridicule and intimidation. But at a more sinister level it can also involve the use of demonic power to make it easier to control the other person or group.

The fact that so many of the Galatians were so quickly taken in by this false teaching strongly suggests that mind control was being used against them. So, it is not a figure of speech. Paul means it literally because he believed that was exactly what was happening.

2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Paul now reminds them of what happened when they were first converted which, for many of them, was through his own personal ministry. He points out that they received the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by the fact that they operated in spiritual gifts, in particular to speak in tongues and to prophesy. He

points out that all of this, quite obviously, was the result of their believing with faith, not of having observed the Law of Moses or any other set of rules.

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

Paul calls upon them to realise that they are also meant to continue their Christian walk by operating in faith, not by trying to observe the Law. Indeed, any attempt to achieve righteousness by observing the Law is ‘fleshly’ or ‘a work of the flesh’ as it is done through our flesh or ‘old man’, rather than our spirit or ‘new man’.

Paul continues to scold the Galatians so bluntly because he regards them as his own children, having established their churches and led many of them to faith. His point is they began well, with a proper understanding of the Gospel, as he explained it to them, but now they are foolishly operating in this carnal way by accepting the misguided teaching of the Judaisers and trying to observe the Law.

4 Did you experience so many things in vain?—if it really is in vain.

What then does Paul mean by the words “*in vain*”? I do not think he is saying these Galatian Christians who have been misled into trying to observe the Law are therefore no longer saved. They are simply misguided and will not therefore be capable of operating in the way God wants them to or of growing into mature, balanced, effective disciples.

In particular, they will be far less capable of sharing the genuine Gospel with others if, in their confused minds, it has been contaminated with this false teaching which under emphasises or even denies the role of faith and of God’s grace. This error can very easily put a person onto a ‘hamster wheel’ of futile activity whereby they keep on trying to “*be a good person*”, wrongly imagining that can save them.

5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Paul asks them whether, when they receive the Holy Spirit, or when miracles of healing occur, it is because of their faith or because they have tried to observe the Law. The obvious answer to this rhetorical question is that it is by our hearing with faith.

By the way, Paul was not merely using a figure of speech when he spoke of miracles. He meant literally what he said. In the first century church it was entirely normal for people to be healed of sickness and delivered from demons, both of which practices have been largely abandoned in the modern Church, at least in the West.

That is not because God no longer wants these things to happen but because our churches are so saturated in unbelief, ignorance and wrong teaching it is almost impossible for anyone to operate in these ministries today. Even if they wanted to, they would not be allowed and would be shouted down or told to leave. (Please see my Book 7 for more detail.)

6 Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

Paul now quotes from Genesis 15:6, to which he also refers in his more detailed explanation in Romans 4:3. The point Paul is making is that even Abraham was saved by faith, not by works. Abraham was saved when he simply trusted God’s promise that he would have a son by Sarai, through whom the

whole world would be blessed, and whose descendants would be so numerous they would be like the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky.

In other words, just as righteousness is credited to us as a free gift when we believe the Gospel, so also it was credited, or given, to Abraham when he believed God's promise, not by his observing any law or living up to any standard of behaviour.

7 So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

That is why it is faith alone which saves us, not observance of the Law of Moses or of any other set of denominational rules. Therefore, it is those people who simply believe the Gospel and put their trust in Jesus Christ to save them who are now the heirs to the promises made to Abraham.

By that I mean the wider promises made to the whole Gentile world, not the narrower promises, in particular about the land of Israel, which were only made to the Jews, i.e. Abraham's physical descendants through Isaac and Jacob.

So, in the broader sense, but not the narrower, we too are now Abraham's sons and we are heirs to the promises made to him. But this only applies if we have faith, just as he had, not by observing the Law of Moses which came 430 years after Abraham had already been saved on the basis of faith.

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

God knew from eternity past that He would save both Jews and Gentiles on the basis of faith alone, not by law or works of any kind. So Abraham was a 'type', i.e. a prefiguring illustration, of both Jew and Gentile. He was the first Jew, but he was also a Gentile, which is what he had always been up to that point when he believed God's promises to him. The point is that faith is now, and always was, the only means of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. In that regard, nothing has changed.

9 So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Paul means it is those who have faith, i.e. those who simply believe the Gospel and put their trust in Jesus Christ and in what He did for us on the cross, who are now blessed in the sense that they are the beneficiaries of the wider promises made to Abraham.

That is how God operates all the time, both then and now, here and there, for them and us. It is not by observing the Law of Moses or any other equivalent set of rules which your denomination may have developed or that you might create for yourself.

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them."

Anyone who seeks to obtain God's blessing by observing the Law of Moses is making a profound mistake and actually bringing themselves under His curse. That is a startling statement, but it makes perfect sense when you understand the basis upon which the Law was given which is that we must perfectly obey all of it, and at all times. If not, we will actually come under God's curse rather than His blessing.

So, it is not enough to obey some of the Law on some occasions, which is the best any of us can hope to do. If we break any part of it God considers us to be a lawbreaker as if we had broken all of it, just as if your wife had a necklace with 613 links it would be broken and useless if even one of those links was broken.

She would not need to break all of them, or even many of them, to regard the entire necklace as broken. She would simply say “I have broken my necklace” without specifying how many links were broken. It would not really matter, as the necklace would be useless if even one break was to occur.

In verse 10 Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, and if we then look at Deuteronomy 28:15-68 we see in grisly detail all the curses that God said would come upon anyone who does not obey the commands set out in the Law of Moses. It is not wise to voluntarily place ourselves under the Law and oblige ourselves to obey it in every tiny detail and at all times given that we are inevitably going to fail *and incur God's curse*, not His blessing, when we do.

11 Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for “He who through faith is righteous shall live”;

Now Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4, a verse which he also quotes in Romans. It was this profound statement which inspired Martin Luther to leave the Roman Catholic church and to spark the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. He had been a Catholic priest, pursuing a dead religion of works which gives no assurance of salvation to anyone, not even to the Pope.

I mean that quite literally. Catholicism teaches that you can't be assured of what will happen to you when you die because it depends on so many things, including what sins you have committed, whether you have been to mass, or confession or bought 'indulgences' such as Luther saw Tetzel selling and which sickened him. At the very least they assume that most people go to “purgatory” when they die to spend a period of time there having their sins burned away before they are “worthy” to go on to Heaven.

Of course, there is no such place as purgatory and it is never mentioned in the Bible, but that doesn't prevent them teaching it, even though it is totally inconsistent with the Gospel by which our sins are paid for by Jesus' death on the cross, not by us spending months, years or even centuries in the flames of purgatory.

But then Luther's eyes were opened and he realised that we are saved by believing the Gospel and by nothing else. That means by putting our trust in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross, not by any of the various unbiblical and extra biblical things the Catholic church was promoting in place of the Gospel, all of which they had either invented themselves or imported from paganism.

Luther then believed the Gospel and was saved, and he knew it, and felt assured of salvation for the first time in his life. He then left the Catholic church, ceased to be a priest and set about telling the whole of Europe about the Gospel. This resulted in millions of people leaving Catholicism and being saved including thousands of priests and nuns – one of whom he married.

Perhaps the biggest mental blockage for anyone who has been attracted by legalism is that the Gospel is so amazingly simple it seems too good to be true. The idea that we can simply repent of our sins and believe in who Jesus is and put our trust in what He did for us on the cross, by dying in our place and taking the wrath of God upon Himself, seems too easy.

People feel an urge to add something to the Gospel to make it a bit harder, whether it be by observing the Law of Moses, or denominational traditions, or just being a ‘good person’, however they might define that. There is something in our flesh which craves to justify ourselves. People want to feel they are at least contributing something to their own salvation so they look for some way to earn some righteousness for themselves rather than simply accept a free gift.

However, what Paul is saying here, and what has actually always been the case, is that salvation is “by grace, through faith”, (see Ephesians 2:8-9). It is not achieved by doing good works, (see Titus 3:5), or “being a good person”, or by being “more good than bad,” or by observing any set of rules.

The Law of Moses, though perfect, was never about grace or faith. It served an entirely different purpose than the Gospel. No man was ever saved by the Law, just as nobody was ever healed of fever by a thermometer, because the Law was not made to save us, but to show us how sinful we are.

12 but the law does not rest on faith, for “He who does them shall live by them.”

Here Paul is quoting from Leviticus 18:5 to underscore his point that the Law of Moses is not, and never was, about faith. It required obedience to God’s commands and failure to do so amounted to transgression, which brought God’s curse.

Admittedly, obedience to the Law of Moses would bring God’s blessing, but it never brought salvation, whereby we are forgiven and made righteous in God’s eyes so we can go to Heaven. That was always received as a free gift by grace through faith, never by observance of the Law, even when it was in operation.

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree”—

Here Paul makes a shocking statement in that he describes the Law of Moses as a curse. One might ask how he could possibly say that, given that he says elsewhere the Law is perfect. Paul means the actual effect of the Law throughout Jewish history, has been to bring the Jews under God’s judgment, and His curse, as per Deuteronomy 28:15-68 and Leviticus 26:14-39.

Both chapters say a wide range of curses would be sent upon the Jewish people if they disobeyed the Law. Given that nobody except Jesus ever managed to obey it fully, it makes sense why Paul would consider that being under the Law is a curse in itself, as it would inevitably result in failure and, therefore, in our being cursed. How can anyone read these stark words from Paul and yet continue to think we are still under the Law and bound to obey it?

However, Paul is also quoting from Deuteronomy 21:22-23 about how anyone who is hung upon a tree is under God’s curse. In Hebrew, the word ‘tree’ also means any large wooden beam, such as the cross was. So it would be correct in the Hebrew language to say Jesus was hung upon a tree, because the cross was a ‘tree’, in Jewish terms, as it was made of two large beams of wood.

The point is that when Jesus was nailed onto the cross and hung up to die on it He was, quite literally, under God’s curse so much so that, in God’s eyes, He actually “*became a curse for us*”. Paul means Jesus was so closely identified with our sin that God the Father and the Holy Spirit regarded Him as not only being cursed but that *He Himself was a curse*.

In fact, that very verse in Deuteronomy was specifically written to refer to Him and to the sacrifice He would later make. It means that Jesus Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law of Moses. That means He set us free from the impossible burden of observing its provisions.

So, Jesus' death on the cross was not 'only' to pay for our sin but also to set us free from all curses, including the curse of being under the Law and also the curses which flow from disobeying it.

14 that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

There are a number of different aspects of the promise made to Abraham, either promises about the land of Israel which apply narrowly to the Jews or, wider promises affecting the whole Gentile world. The wider promises are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ himself and the beneficiaries are anybody anywhere who is willing to repent and believe the Gospel.

It is through Jesus Christ that God's promise to bless the whole world through Abraham's 'seed' or 'offspring' is fulfilled. The word translated 'seed' or 'offspring' below at verse 16 was singular and referred to Jesus Himself as opposed to the entire Jewish race. Paul's point is the promises made under the Abrahamic covenant that we Gentiles might also receive God's blessing were based on faith not on observing laws

15 To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man's will, or adds to it, once it has been ratified.

Paul now begins to give an analogy in the next few verses. He likens the Abrahamic covenant, or the promise made to Abraham, to a man's will and shows that the Law of Moses, which came later in time, did not annul or cancel out the promises made to Abraham. Those promises still apply and affect not only the glorious future of the Jews and the nation of Israel but also our salvation as Gentiles.

16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many; but, referring to one, "And to your offspring," which is Christ.

In one sense the promises made to Abraham in regard to his seed or offspring are fulfilled in Jesus Christ Himself, rather than by the whole Jewish race, although the Jews are also a blessing to us all. Jesus single-handedly made it possible for the whole Gentile world to have the opportunity to be saved and to come under God's blessing rather than His wrath, provided each individual chooses to repent and believe i.e. put their faith in Him.

17 This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

Therefore, the Law of Moses, also known as the "Mosaic Covenant", which was given 430 years after the promise to Abraham, does not cancel out that promise under which we Gentiles are included as beneficiaries. The Abrahamic Covenant, from which we benefit, continued even after the Mosaic Covenant (Law of Moses) was made and it still continues now even after the Law of Moses has ended. So, neither the making of the Mosaic Covenant, nor its ending, did anything to alter the Abrahamic Covenant or the blessings it provides.

The covenants which God made with Adam, Noah and David, plus the New Covenant and also the "land covenant" concerning the land of Israel itself, are permanent and unconditional. That means God

will fulfil all of them regardless of what any of us do or fail to do. Likewise, the Abrahamic covenant is also *permanent and unconditional*, and will never be cancelled.

That is where the Mosaic covenant or Law of Moses is unique, amongst God's covenants in that it is both *temporary and conditional*. That is to say it *does* depend on what we do, i.e. whether we obey or disobey it, and it was always scheduled to come to an end when Jesus died for us.

The permanent and unconditional Abrahamic covenant is also *unilateral*. That means that God was the only party upon whom the covenant depended and the only party making promises. Therefore, it will inevitably be fulfilled. That is to say God will keep His promise, even if we don't do anything, because the Abrahamic Covenant does not depend on us, or what we do, or even upon the Jews. It depends only on God's faithfulness to keep His promises. Therefore, the Jews will inevitably receive their land eternally and we Gentiles will be blessed (if we have faith). Nothing can prevent or hinder that.

By the way, the reason the Abrahamic covenant doesn't require any further obedience by Abraham or by us is that when God made the covenant with him, *Abraham had already done what God had required of him*. Abraham had already believed God's promise and, in particular, he had been willing to sacrifice his (adult) son Isaac.

When Abraham did that God was satisfied that he had faith and did not require any further conditions to be met by Abraham. So God went right ahead and made the covenant *on His own*, cutting the animal in half and walking between the parts (as was the ancient custom for making a covenant) and God did all this by Himself while Abraham lay asleep.

18 For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Paul is now making a distinction between something we earn, and to which we are therefore entitled by law, as of right, and, on the other hand, something given to us as a gift in accordance with a promise. So, for example if we go to work for 40 hours we are entitled, by contract, to our pay for the work we have done.

But that is not the basis upon which the Abrahamic covenant operates. The inheritance coming to every genuine believer in Jesus Christ is a free gift which we could never earn and which was given to us by grace, through faith, not by works.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary.

Paul now looks at why God made the Law of Moses, given that it cannot save us. The answer is that the Law made it even more obvious that we are sinners because it creates more opportunities for us to break God's commands. For example, when Adam was in the garden at the very beginning the only 'law' to which he was subject was that he must not eat of the fruit of one particular tree. That was all there was to it.

That was Adam's only opportunity to 'transgress', i.e. to break a specific known law. However, to sin is a broader concept and means to fall short of God's perfect standards. We can sin, in the sense of not being as good as Jesus, even where there is no law. The trouble is that "falling short" of God's perfect standard is harder to see and easier to deny.

So, God gave the Law of Moses to reveal to us undeniably that we are transgressors and fully deserving of His wrath. That is necessary because until we believe that, and realise we are hopelessly lost and facing His judgment, we will see no need to repent of our sin, because we won't even see that we are sinning.

Until we realise the “bad news”, about our sinfulness and God's intention to judge us for that sin, the “good news” of the Gospel will not make any sense and we will not be motivated to respond to it. That is the condition of our own 21st century generation which does not consider itself sinful, feels no shame, and sees no need for the Gospel.

Paul's last point is that the Law of Moses was given by angels with Moses being the intermediary between God and the Jewish people. This contrasts with all the other covenants which were made directly by God Himself, not via angels as intermediaries.

20 Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one.

Accordingly, although the Law of Moses was given via angels, the Abrahamic covenant was made by God Himself, in fact by the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. He appeared to Abraham in bodily form in a pre-appearance, 2000 years before His incarnation as Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was the Son of God Himself who ‘cut’ the covenant with Abraham by dividing an animal in two and then walking between the two pieces of the carcass, which was how a covenant used to be made.

Abraham was put into a deep sleep while God did all of this and so it was only the Son of God, not Abraham, who walked between the pieces of the animal carcass. The legal significance of that was that it means the Abrahamic covenant was ‘*unilateral*’, as we have seen. That is to say Abraham was a party to it as a recipient or beneficiary, but not a contributor, so it was *made by God alone*.

Consequently, the fulfilment of the promises which God made under that covenant depends only on God, not on Abraham or us or anyone else. So, the Abrahamic covenant had two parties, and countless beneficiaries, but there was only one ‘*promising party*’, upon whose faithfulness it depended, namely God Himself. That means the Abrahamic covenant does not depend on any works on our part but is freely available to anyone who simply has faith.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

Paul now addresses the mistaken idea that the Law is somehow “against” the promise made to Abraham or inconsistent with it in some way. His clear answer is that it is not. It is simply that the Law, though perfect for what it was intended to achieve, is not, and never was, a means by which we could be saved, or “made alive” as he puts it.

Neither is it a means by which anyone can ever be made righteous because that can only be achieved by the Gospel. In other words, the Law cannot achieve that which only faith can achieve. That means faith in the promise, in Abraham's case, and faith in the Gospel in our case. A helpful verse which further confirms this is in Philippians:

“and to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that depends on faith.”

Philippians 3:9

Of all people, Paul was the most qualified to make that statement about the inadequacy of our own self-righteousness, and the futility of seeking to achieve righteousness for ourselves. Just before that verse, he had written this passage in which he sets out his exemplary track record, which is far above what any of us have ever done, and yet he now realises that all his own righteousness is worth nothing and is of no use to him in being saved:

*“Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness, under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as **refuse**, in order that I may gain Christ”*

Philippians 3:4-8 (RSV)

Even before his conversion, Paul was already a remarkable man, and his zeal to observe the Law of Moses was exceptional. Yet it achieved nothing, even for him, and in the end he realised it was worthless. In fact, in the original Greek, the word Paul used in Philippians 3:8 which, in the RSV, is politely translated as ‘refuse’, or as ‘dung’ in the KJV, actually means **human excrement**.

That blunt expression in the original Greek tells us how worthless our own self-righteousness is in God’s eyes. All the Law can do is show you that you are not righteous and that you therefore need to be saved. It cannot actually make you righteous because nobody except Jesus has ever been able to obey it perfectly in every way and at all times. That is the only way it could declare you to be righteous, because only perfect sinlessness is acceptable to God and that requires perfect observance of the Law.

But that could only occur if you had not inherited Adam’s sin nature which, sadly, we all have. So, perfect though it is, the Law cannot save you no matter how hard you might try to observe parts of it from time to time.

22 But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

The Bible effectively classifies everything we ever do as sin, because the definition of *sin*, as opposed to *transgression*, which means to break a specific law or command, is simply to fall short of God’s perfect standard. The problem is we fall short all the time. Even if we were to try very hard to love our neighbour as we love ourself and to avoid idolatry or adultery etc, the reality is we would never do any of that *as well as Jesus would*.

In that sense, we would have fallen short of God’s perfect standard, and still be sinning, even if we were trying our best to do good and *even if we had not broken any rules*. Therefore, even if we were to try to achieve righteousness by not transgressing, and even if we somehow avoided breaking any known rules, we would still be classified as sinners, in the sense of falling short of God’s standards of utter perfection.

Of course, God knew all along that this was the position and always would be the position. That is why He constructed a means of salvation which is all about faith, i.e believing and trusting, rather than observing any law or achieving any standard of righteousness.

Only a Gospel based on faith will save people like you and me, who are not clever, talented or perfect and who can't do amazing things. We need something simple enough for us to understand and easy enough to do or it would be of no use to us.

Therefore, just as has always been the case, in Abraham's day and also in ours, the promise is made to those simple, humble people who have faith, not to imaginary people who are perfect and sinless. Only they can receive what is promised, not those who make a futile attempt to obey any kind of law.

23 Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. 24 So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian;

In these three verses Paul uses an analogy and presents the Law as a "custodian" or as a "schoolmaster", as the King James version puts it. Actually, the Greek word used is *'pedagogue'* which would be better translated as 'nanny' or 'childminder', because the role of a pedagogue in a wealthy home was to supervise the children of the family, take them to school, make them do their homework and go in the bath and so forth.

The pedagogue was himself a slave or employee of the family and did that job until the children of the family came of age and became adults so they no longer required the services of a childminder or nanny. Paul's point is the Law of Moses kept the Jewish people "*under restraint*" until Jesus Christ fulfilled His ministry and died on the cross such that the "New Covenant" and the Gospel came into operation.

Therefore, now that we have the Gospel, we no longer require the Law of Moses. Or, to use Paul's analogy, we no longer need a nanny or childminder but can act and make decisions for ourselves as adults.

Moreover, as we shall see later in this letter, the Law of Moses and the New Covenant, which Jeremiah spoke of, *cannot be in existence at the same time*. They are mutually exclusive. The point therefore is that the Law of Moses was temporary. It had to be or it could not be replaced by the New Covenant, which was essential or the Gospel could not begin to operate. So, the Law was only intended to operate for a specified time period and that period ended when Jesus died.

At that point, the Law of Moses had served its purpose and was no longer required and the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah came into operation. In fact, it wasn't only that the Law was no longer needed. It was actually a *hindrance or obstacle* and needed to end in order that the New Covenant could begin and so that Jesus could then begin to operate in His new ministry as our High Priest and intercessor. That is what He has been doing for the last 2000 years.

It is vital to realise therefore that those two covenants, the Mosaic and the New, were mutually exclusive and could not operate at the same time so the Mosaic Covenant (the Law of Moses) had to go so that the New Covenant could begin. I explain all this quite thoroughly in my article "*Has the Law of Moses ended?*" which is freely available on my website and I recommend it as it is such a badly misunderstood topic which is very rarely preached on.

26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Now that the Gospel has been revealed, it is possible for all of us, including Gentiles, to be saved and thus to become *'sons of God'*. Moreover, as we shall see in chapter 4, we are also 'adopted' as sons, which means to be recognised as adult children, who are old enough to make decisions and to do the father's will without any childminder to supervise us.

One of the things that baptism in water symbolises, at least for a Jew, is that we come out from under the Law of Moses and *'put on Christ'* as if He was a garment. This is a reference to the *'robe of righteousness'* which every Christian is given, by faith, at his conversion, when he is justified or made righteous. That is to say the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed or transferred to us as if we were given His robe to put on.

Therefore, if we are wearing that metaphorical robe of righteousness, in the sense of relying on the righteousness of Jesus Christ rather than our own, there is no longer any place for the Law of Moses, even assuming we were capable of obeying it anyway, which nobody ever was.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This is a very badly misunderstood verse. A depressingly large number of people have taken it to mean the Jewish race no longer have any special significance or purpose and that God no longer has any role for Israel. This is linked to the misguided idea known as *'replacement theology'* which teaches that the Church has replaced Israel and that all the promises made to Abraham which previously applied to the Jews, now apply to the Church instead and not to the Jews. **That is completely wrong.**

Please refer to my audio series on Israel in which I address this false teaching of replacement theology and prove from Scripture that God *has not, and never will*, abandon, forget or replace the Jewish people or break any of His promises to them. Therefore, contrary to what many people wrongly think, *we in the Church are not Israel* and never will be. Neither have we replaced Israel.

What is meant by verse 28 is simply that everyone must now be *saved in the same way* and there is only one way, namely the Gospel. Whether we are Jewish or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, the only way we can be saved is to repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross and to trust in Him and in nothing else for our salvation. It is as simple as that.

Paul is *not saying* the Jewish race has ceased, or no longer has any role or special place in God's plans for the future of the world. God's plans for the Jews have not changed at all and will never change. Jesus will therefore return and become the King of Israel, i.e. the literal nation of Israel and, from the literal city of Jerusalem, He will rule over the literal descendants of Jacob. None of it is figurative, metaphorical or "spiritual". It will all literally happen, exactly as prophesied. Moreover, it will happen to Israel, to the Jews, not to the Church.

If anyone wants to argue otherwise and to say Paul means that in God's eyes there are no longer any Jews, then they will need to apply the same logic to men and women. One does not hear any advocate of replacement theology saying there are no longer any women or that women no longer have any purpose. Yet, if you are to say that Paul means there are no longer any Jews then you must also interpret verse 28 as saying there are no longer any women. Otherwise, you would be being deliberately inconsistent in your interpretation, which amounts to deception.

When we read the Bible we must take it in context, and accept and believe all of it. We must also apply it consistently, not merely pick and choose which parts we want to accept and which parts we want to ignore. So, the correct meaning is that whether we are Jew or Gentile, a man or a woman, a free man or a slave, we are all saved by faith and only by faith, not by observing the Law of Moses or any other set of rules. That is all it means – nothing more. **Nobody has replaced the Jews and nobody ever will.**

29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

If you put your faith in Jesus Christ and are saved, then you become one of Abraham's 'offspring', i.e. in the wider sense, not in the sense of being a literal physical descendant of Jacob. That means that you and I, even if we are Gentiles, are eligible to share in the inheritance promised by faith to those who are saved.

We are now entitled to regard ourselves as heirs of that promise, i.e. the heirs of Abraham, and also of Jesus Christ Himself. This is a wonderful theme, upon which Paul elaborates further in Ephesians chapter 1 and elsewhere.

GALATIANS 4 (RSV)

1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; 2 but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.

Paul now moves on to make another analogy about a child, growing up in his father's house and seeing his wealthy father going about his business and managing his estate. That child is, in one sense, no better off than a slave because even though he is the heir to the whole estate and will one day own and manage his father's entire business, at the moment he is just a child and has no power or authority.

He therefore has to do exactly as he is told rather than being free to judge situations for himself and make his own decisions in the way he will do when he comes of age and enters fully into his inheritance.

Paul is seeking to show the difference between, on the one hand, living under the Law of Moses, which specifies exactly what we must do, with 613 very precise commandments and, on the other hand, the 'Law of Christ', which treats us as adults who can be expected to do God's will by applying His various principles to each of the many situations we face.

Let me give an example to illustrate this. The Law of Moses required the Jewish people to tithe, i.e. to give one tenth of their income, plus certain other specific gifts and offerings which were clearly defined. This money was used to support the tribe of Levi, plus the priesthood and for the upkeep of the Temple – NOT to support local synagogues or rabbis. *Thus, it was not a model or precedent for tithing to one's local church.*

Therefore, under the Law of Moses they knew exactly what they had to do and there was no discretion or freedom to decide how much to give to or whom to give it to. In stark contrast to this, in the New Testament, in what we might call the Law of Christ, we are simply told to be '*generous*' and we are not told how much to give or when or even who to give it to.

It is left entirely up to us to decide. Therefore, the definition of the word '*generous*' and also the decision as to who to give our money to, is left up to us *to work out for ourselves* in our own particular circumstances, based on prayer, study of God's Word, the promptings of the Holy Spirit and our own conscience.

In some ways it was less complicated to apply the Law of Moses which specified exactly what it required of us than it is for us now to examine our own finances and all our other circumstances and obligations and to work out who to give to and how much we should give in order to be "*generous*". It requires a lot more thought and maturity than it takes to simply follow instructions to the letter as the Jews had to do when the Law was in operation.

By the way, to digress for a moment, there is absolutely no verse anywhere in the New Testament which tells us, even indirectly, that we should tithe our income to our local church. It isn't just that there aren't many verses which tell us to do that. *There aren't any.* I challenge you to find even one. You won't be able to.

Anyone therefore who teaches tithing to the local church is either inventing it out of nowhere or is inappropriately applying the Old Testament practice from the Law of Moses as a precedent and then "*adjusting*" that a little to make it apply to local churches.

But, as we have seen, the tithing under the Law of Moses *was never to local synagogues*. It went to the tribe of Levi, the Temple and the priests. The rabbis in each synagogue all supported themselves, as Paul did, by doing part time jobs, such as tent making. Therefore, any leader who tells you that God wants you to tithe to the local church is either lying to you, or has been lied to himself, or is confused about what the Bible says.

I recall an incident when the leader of a church I had been attending for a few weeks came to visit me at my law firm. He then told me that I should be tithing the profits of my law firm to his church! He picked on the wrong chap however because I simply asked “*Where in the New Testament do you get that from?*” He stuttered and stammered for a while, trying to dodge the question but I asked again and said “*Can you show me even one verse in the New Testament which tells us to tithe to our local church?*”

At that point he realised the game was up and that he hadn’t got even a single verse to base this teaching on. But, to my surprise, he wasn’t the slightest bit embarrassed or apologetic. He just said, quite brazenly, “*But if we didn’t teach tithing how would the church get money?*” I was taken aback by his brass faced reply and didn’t return to that church.

This is not unique to him though. No other leader will be able to point you to any verse which supports tithing in general or tithing to the local church in particular. The New Testament never tells you to do either. The practice is based solely on tradition and is motivated by the desire of local church leaders to get money to pay for salaries and the upkeep of the church building – neither of which would be needed at all if we met in homes and had unpaid local elders as the early Church did until the 4th century.

Let me give another example of the difference between being on the one hand a child (under the Law of Moses) and on the other hand an adult son who has been recognised as a man by his father and is therefore free to decide things for himself (the Law of Christ). Imagine you are an apprentice gas engineer working with a boss who is a qualified gas engineer, and who is training you over a period of say five years.

During your apprenticeship your boss will give you very exact instructions, for example saying he wants you to fit a particular type of boiler into someone’s house and to do it in a particular way, telling you exactly how it should be fitted, what checks should be done and what safety procedures you should go through to comply with the gas regulations. Your boss will tell you at each step of the way exactly how to do his will.

However, several years later when you are a fully qualified gas engineer, that same boss would simply say “Go to 12 Acacia Avenue, speak to the customer, and fit a boiler which would be appropriate for that house.” He would no longer need, or want, to tell you exactly what to do or how to do it.

Now that you have ‘come of age’ he trusts you to know what to do for yourself by looking at the circumstances taking into account all your training and the many instructions he gave to you over the years plus the various principles by which he operates his business such as integrity, client care, safety standards and so on.

Another example would be a brand-new student nurse who has just begun her training and is now giving pain relief to a sick patient under the close supervision of a senior nurse. During her time of training that student nurse will be told exactly what kind of drugs to give, in what quantities, and in what frequencies and also how exactly to do it, whether by tablets or injection or via a drip or some other

means. The student nurse will be given no discretion and would make no decisions of her own but would simply follow orders to the letter.

However, some years later, when she is fully qualified, a senior nurse or doctor might simply tell her to “*give appropriate pain relief*”, and leave it entirely up to her to decide what that is and how to achieve it, for anything from a patient who has had a minor operation and needs little or nothing, through to one who is in the final stages of a terminal illness and needs large doses of morphine.

The point of these analogies and examples is they help to illustrate how, while the Law of Moses was in operation, it told the Jewish people exactly what to do. However, now that it is no longer operating, and we are subject instead to the Law of Christ, or the Law of Liberty, we are treated as adults in the sense that God provides us with general guiding principles in Scripture, together with our inbuilt conscience and also the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

He expects us to use all of these resources appropriately, and in proper balance, in each of the situations we face in order to make decisions about how to serve Him and what we should and should not do in the particular circumstances we are dealing with.

That is why Paul’s analogy speaks in terms of the Law of Moses being appropriate for a child, who needs to be directed and kept within strict limits. But now the freedom of the Law of Christ is available for a Christian who is then treated as an adult and capable of applying God’s principles and making decisions for himself.

3 So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe.

This phrase, “*elemental spirits of the universe*”, is very difficult to define because nobody, so far as I can see in my research, has any definite knowledge of what it means. There are various theories and suggestions as to what Paul is referring to but, the truth is it is a phrase which meant something at the time to his audience but which has dropped out of usage.

One idea is that it refers to the basic principles or elementary schooling, as where we might refer to “*learning your ABC*” or your alphabet when you are at infant school and are learning to read. If so, Paul would mean that the Law of Moses was only suitable for those who are immature, which would accord with what he has just been saying about being a child who is no better than a slave.

Therefore, Paul’s meaning would be to appeal to us not to *go back* to something we used to have when we were young and immature but which is no longer right for us now. Alternatively, it may be he is referring to *literal spirits, presumably demons*, which would seek to deceive us and enslave us by enticing us to put ourselves back under the bondage of the Law when we need not be under it.

I have to say I am not certain exactly what Paul means by the phrase. But what I do know is that he is urging us not to put ourselves back under the Law of Moses. That is what matters and it is, ultimately, all we need to know here. Just don’t do it, regardless of the exact meaning of the phrase he used. Its general meaning and application is crystal clear even if the origin of the Greek words isn’t.

It reminds me of an American lady whose husband got a job in the UK and so her children went to the same school as ours. One day she went to a parents’ evening to discuss one of her children and the teacher said, with a beaming smile, “*I’m really chuffed with his progress this year.*” The mother said “*Well, I have no idea what ‘chuffed’ means but I get the impression that it’s good.*”

I think we can take the same approach here with Paul's obscure Greek phrase and interpret it in line with the arguments he has been pursuing consistently in the letter so far.

4 But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

Unlike all of the other covenants God made, the Law of Moses was temporary. It lasted from the time it was given to Moses after the Exodus from Egypt, through to the death of Jesus on the cross. That whole period is known as a '*dispensation*' and there have been a number of these since the Creation, and then onwards to the end, each of which reflect changes in the way God has dealt with us. The dispensations are:

a) From the Creation to the Fall

This was an age of innocence in which the only 'law' was not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. Yet, Adam and Eve still failed to obey it, thereby bringing sin into the world and passing their new 'sin nature' on to all of us.

b) From the Fall to the Flood

This was prior to the establishment of the Jewish race and therefore God dealt directly with the whole human race, not just through one nation. But it ended in the Flood as a judgment on the whole human race, other than Noah and his family, due to the extreme wickedness of the people. (Our own generation now closely resembles them in terms of depravity.)

c) From the Flood to Abraham

During this time the world was repopulated, at the end of which God took a Gentile man called Abram whose faith and obedience greatly impressed Him and promised to make a new nation from him, i.e. the Jewish people, through which He would bless the whole world.

d) From the promise being made to Abraham to the giving of the Law to Moses

During this period, Abraham's family grew (very slowly at first) but then multiplied after they went to Egypt because of the famine. While there they grew rapidly in numbers and became a nation, so much so that the Egyptians saw them as a threat and enslaved them. In the end, God set the people free through His servant Moses and they went into the wilderness where God detained them for 40 years until everyone over the age of 20 at the time of the Exodus was allowed to die off (except for Joshua and Caleb). It was while they were in the wilderness that the Law of Moses was given.

e) From the giving of the Law of Moses through to the death of Jesus when the Law ended

This period lasted over 1500 years and took in almost the whole Old Testament era, i.e. after Moses was given the Law. Bear in mind it was just a couple of decades after the death of Jesus that Paul was writing his letter to the Galatians.

f) From the beginning of the Church age until the rapture

The Church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts and will end at the Rapture. The Rapture is when the Church will be removed in an instant leaving the way clear for the rise of the antichrist who will bring in a terrible time of persecution of both Jews and newly converted Christians during 'the Tribulation'. At the same time, God will also pour out His wrath on the unbelievers.

g) From the rapture until the return of Christ, or the 'Second Coming'

During this period the Tribulation will occur. Yet, despite the antichrist's persecution, plus the outpouring of God's wrath on unbelievers, many people will be saved although most of them will

be martyred. These believers will not be part of the Church but they will be saved and the Bible calls them “Tribulation saints”.

h) From the return of Christ to the end of the Millennium

At His return Jesus will destroy the antichrist and his armies and set up His long-awaited Kingdom on Earth as the King of Israel sitting on David’s throne and ruling over the whole Earth from Jerusalem. This reign will last for 1000 years and is therefore referred to as ‘the Millennium’ after which God will burn up the surface of this Earth and recreate it as a new Earth together with a new Heaven.

i) From the creation of the new Earth and onwards for eternity

When this occurs, God the Father Himself will come to dwell upon this Earth, and also bring down Heaven itself onto the Earth to form the ‘New Jerusalem’ in which God the Father will come and live for eternity on this renewed Earth.

So, we can now look at the Law of Moses within its place in that sequence of events and dispensations in God’s 6000 year dealings with mankind – so far. The Law of Moses was only for a limited period of time albeit a long one from our perspective. It lasted about 1500 years which is over a quarter of the entire time this world has existed. That fact helps to explain why Peter found its ending so hard to grasp and, later, why the ‘Judaisers’ were so resistant to Paul’s teaching that it had ended.

At any rate, when the time came, God the Father sent the Son of God into our world as a human being, Jesus Christ, not only to save the whole world from sin and God’s judgment, but also to set the Jewish people free from the Law of Moses. Note that Paul says Jesus was “*born under the Law*”, meaning it was in operation while He was alive on the Earth. But the crucial point is it ceased to operate after His death.

5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Jesus’ death served many purposes and brought many benefits, including setting the Jewish people free from the burden of the obligation to obey the Law of Moses. Although the Law was perfect, and had a God-given purpose, it was impossible to obey it. That being so, it only ever increased the guilt of the Jewish people and had no power to save them. Therefore, it was necessary to set them free from that burden.

However, there was another purpose to be served by ending the Law and that was so that the Jewish people, and also we Gentiles, could be *adopted as sons of God*. To explain ‘*adoption*’ we need to return to an earlier theme about how a child grows up in his father’s house, watching him run his business and his estates, but having no part to play in any of that because, although he is a son, he is only a child.

We also need to distinguish between our modern-day definition of adoption, whereby a couple adopts a child who is not their own, and what Paul is speaking about here. Paul is referring to what the Romans did when a man’s *own son* came of age. His father would publicly put a robe upon him, a *toga virilis*, to let the whole community know he now regarded his son as an adult, not a child, and that he was now ready to take part in the family business and to make commercial decisions which he, the father, would honour.

So, in the Roman world of the first century, adoption was something you did *with your own children*, not someone else's children. It was the means by which you publicly recognised them as being of age and altered their status by conferring authority upon them.

Therefore, while the Jewish people were under the Law of Moses they were like the children of a rich man who have not yet grown up and therefore cannot inherit or be treated as adult heirs. However, both Jews and Gentiles can now be 'heirs' and be treated as adults and as people who stand to benefit from the promise made to Abraham not only in our earthly lives now but also, even more so, in the Kingdom of God when it fully comes.

So, returning for a moment to the analogy about the pedagogue or childminder who looks after us while we are children, imagine how our father would feel if at the age of 21 or 30, or even 40, despite the fact that he has 'adopted' us and given us a role within the family business we are still asking our old childminder or nanny what we must do and seeking detailed instructions about brushing our teeth and when to go to bed or have a bath?

The father would be ashamed, not pleased, and would urge that adult child of his to act as an adult and to feel free to make decisions for himself within the father's business. These would need of course to be made in accordance with the will of the father in the same manner and style that he has seen his father making decisions in the business. Nonetheless, they would be decisions of his own that are freely made.

6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Paul returns now to the theme of the difference between the sons of a wealthy man and the slaves or servants who work in his household. It is only his sons who are entitled to call him 'Abba' or father. The servants of the household would have to call him Sir or Master or Mr and could not use that intimate title which is only able to be used by his own children.

By the way, the Hebrew word 'Abba' is not only used by small children but also by older children and even adults. Indeed, even Jesus used that word when speaking to His Father. So it was like a combination of both Daddy and Dad.

7 So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

So, the essential point is when we are saved and become a Christian there is an extraordinary change of status by which we come to be regarded as God's sons and heirs, not merely as His servants. That intimate relationship is very profound and has huge implications not only for the present, but also for the future.

A relationship between a father and a son is not just about obeying the detailed instructions the father has given. It is about becoming like the father in the sense that we grow to have his character qualities and learn the same principles by which he operates so that we, as free agents, willingly choose to put those into operation.

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods;

Paul now rebukes the Galatians, most of whom were Gentiles, and he begins by referring to how they used to be in bondage to idolatry and to the worship of idols and gods which were actually just demons.

We know that because Isaiah tells us that all those who worship such idols and gods are only worshipping demons.

9 but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Please refer to verse 3 above for a discussion on the meaning of the obscure Greek phrase translated as “*elemental spirits*”. Paul’s point is that, having been set free from idolatry and the worship of false gods which were only demons, he is exasperated and appalled that they are now turning back in the sense of putting themselves under the Law of Moses, or parts of it.

There are people who make an idol out of the Law of Moses, or some other form of legalism, for all sorts of reasons, and give it the devotion they are meant to give to God Himself. Ironically, in doing so, they are ignoring the express instructions, given by Paul and others, that we are not under the Law and that God does not want us to act or speak as if we were.

10 You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years!

Here Paul is referring to the fact that some of the Galatians were now observing Jewish feast days and special months and years which are referred to in the Law of Moses and which it required the Jews to observe. However, now that the Law of Moses has ended, *neither we, nor even the Jews, are under any obligation to observe those Jewish feast days.*

That is not to say there is anything wrong with a Jewish person doing so, if he *voluntarily* chooses to. That is absolutely fine. In fact, there is nothing wrong with a Gentile voluntarily taking part in such Jewish feast days, or *voluntarily* choosing to celebrate those days himself, even where there are no Jewish people involved.

The problem is where a person begins to think he is *obligated* to observe those Jewish feast days and, even worse, where he imagines the reason he must do so is because he is under the Law of Moses and that it requires such observance. Even worse than that is where he:

- a) imagines it will enable him to earn righteousness for himself.
- b) becomes proud of his observance
- c) imagines it makes him superior to others who are not observant
- d) tries to push it on others and to tell them it is what God wants them to do
- e) condemns others and makes them feel guilty for not doing as he does – as indeed happened to me only the other day as I was working on this commentary and got involved in an online debate on Facebook about the Jewish feasts and the Sabbath. I said we are not under any duty to observe them. In reply to that, an enraged lady told me that I am “*a disciple of Satan*”, i.e. simply for saying the Law has ended. That is how angry these people can get.

When a person does any of that he has moved into legalism and has placed a burden upon himself which God does not want him to have. Even worse, he is trying to place it on others. It is, in any event, entirely futile, because he will never succeed. Indeed, one of the purposes of Jesus’ death on the cross was to remove that burden from all of us and to set us free from the Law.

11 I am afraid I have labored over you in vain.

As an indication of how seriously Paul takes the error of the Judaisers, which some of the Galatians are now accepting and imitating, he goes so far as to say he is afraid as to whether his work with them may have been in vain.

I am unsure how far Paul's anxiety goes and whether he is only afraid they will become ineffective, unproductive disciples who are incapable of passing on to other people a true presentation of the Gospel, or whether he is even concerned as to the possibility of them losing their own salvation.

As for whether that can happen, please refer to the chapters on assurance versus perseverance in my Book 1, in which I discuss that issue in detail. I have also done audio talks on it.

12 Brethren, I beseech you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong;

Ironically, in order to reach the Gentile Galatians with the Gospel, Paul, though a Jew, lived and acted amongst them as if he was a Gentile. Now they, despite being Gentiles, have been persuaded to act like Jews and to observe the Law of Moses which, to add further irony, not even the Jews are obliged to observe.

Note also that Paul actually urges people to be like him. At first sight that might not seem so remarkable, but it is actually a very bold statement, and certainly one I would be wary of making, given that I do not regard myself as a model Christian. Therefore, I would not urge people to be like me but to be like Jesus, or at least like Paul. But Paul urged people to be like him and he was right to do so.

The point is that, due to the enormity of his knowledge, and also to the exceptional quality of his character, of which he was fully aware, Paul really was a model Christian, which none of us are. We need to bear that in mind when deciding how much weight to give to what he says.

13 you know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first;

This short verse actually has major implications which may not be obvious at first sight. Paul states, quite undeniably, that he had a "bodily ailment". In itself that is not a remarkable thing to say but it is when you consider there are many people who believe no Christian should ever be ill and that if they are ill it is due to some sin or fault on their part.

Let me be clear, *I do not in any way deny that God heals people* and that we can pray for healing, not only in the first century but now in the 21st century. Nevertheless, this verse proves that such prayer does not always work. If it did always work then it would have worked for Paul on this occasion. We can be sure that both he and the people around him in his team, plus the churches he was ministering to, would have prayed for him to be healed. But he plainly wasn't healed.

The point is worth dwelling upon because some people in churches today go too far in relation to divine healing and speak as if such healing was inevitable and that its absence automatically proves that there must be some fault or sin on the sick person's part. They are just as mistaken as those who do not believe anyone can ever be healed by God's intervention in response to a prayer of faith.

14 and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

Paul's illness, whatever it may have been, was not some trivial matter. It cannot have been because his ailment was not only a problem for Paul but was bad enough to have been a 'trial' to everyone around

him. So, we are not speaking of Paul having had a cold. It was something significant and visible to everyone.

15 What has become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

Verse 15 has caused many to suggest that Paul's ailment was probably something to do with his eyes and that he had some infection or other condition which made him unsightly and/or which made his eyesight poor such that he struggled to read and write.

We have no way of knowing, but one clue to which people have pointed, rightly or wrongly, is that in Galatians 6:11, Paul refers to how large his hand-writing is. That might perhaps indicate that he wrote with large letters because he had difficulty seeing. Personally, I doubt that.

However, we shall never know. But one thing we do know is this bodily ailment was not the "thorn in the flesh" or "messenger of Satan" which was "sent to buffet" Paul which we read about in 2 Corinthians 12:7. That was no illness, but a senior demon whose task was to obstruct and harass Paul continually.

God actually wanted Paul to have to endure that harassment so as not to become conceited about the enormous revelation he had been given. So, Paul did have an illness, at least on that occasion, which proves he was not immune to such problems. *But that is not what his thorn in the flesh was about.*

16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

I can identify with this question which Paul asks. I too have found, as has every leader or Bible teacher who loves the truth and who does not compromise over it, that the quickest way to make enemies is simply to tell the truth. Telling lies to people, whether about the Bible or anything else, will rarely cause them to hate you, or even to fall out with you. Indeed, you would probably gain more followers.

Yet, telling the truth about what the Bible says and, above all, about people's sin, is virtually guaranteed to whip up antagonism and opposition, just as Paul found in his dealings with the Judaisers. Paul would have made fewer enemies if he had said there was no God. But, by faithfully teaching the truth about the Law of Moses and about our freedom, and about the Gospel generally, he stirred up a hornets' nest everywhere he went

17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

In this verse Paul is referring back to Galatians 2:12 and 3:1 and to the activities of the Judaisers, whom he deplors. He refers to the tactic they used, which is used by most false teachers, namely to flatter people so as to win them over, but not with any honest motive. Instead, those who flatter us always do so because they want something for themselves, never for us.

In this case, they wanted to promote their own point of view and to enlarge their group or clique within the churches. They were not advocating observance of the Law in order to help other people but only to build themselves up, make themselves seem clever and to appear superior to other 'ordinary' Christians.

They wanted to be looked up to and *'made much of'*, and so they were not preaching in the sincere heartfelt way Paul was. His only objectives were to promote the true Gospel and benefit the people he was serving, not to benefit himself.

18 For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you.

Of course, Paul is not against hospitality or honouring God's servants. He is entirely in favour of both those things, but only where it is done with the right motive, not to advance one's own position, gain promotion or impress people.

19 My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! 20 I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

At various points in the letter so far Paul has adopted a scolding tone with the people in Galatia and shown how exasperated he is about their foolishness and unfaithfulness. However, he now adopts a different tone, like that of a father with a young child whom he loves but who has been making serious errors.

Paul means that rather than writing letters, which inevitably have to include harsh statements, he wishes he could get alongside them in person and let them see in his face how much he cares for them and hear in his tone of voice how dear they are to him. He would like to appeal to them via their emotions, not solely by logic and accurate teaching.

The old-fashioned word, 'travail', which comes from French, means work or labour. So Paul means in verse 19 that he sees the Galatians as if they were a baby to which he is giving birth, i.e. that he is 'in labour' with them. That is how it is with any genuine leader. His concern and anxiety are not about himself but about those whom he is trying to help.

Therefore, when Paul becomes exasperated with them it is not out of any desire for control, which so many false leaders want, but from a genuine shepherd's heart which cares only for the welfare of the flock. Thus, he is willing to endure insults, unpopularity and opposition to prevent them going astray and believing a false gospel.

21 Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law?

When Paul speaks of these people having a 'desire' to be under the Law, he is not exaggerating. People who argue that we are under the Law and must abide by it are not doing so because they truly believe that, after careful study of the Bible. Very often they say it because it is what they want to be the case.

They actually have *a desire to be under the Law*, because observing rules, especially doing so publicly, with a lot of show, and bullying others into doing the same, appeals to people's pride and to their flesh nature generally. But Paul is now saying to such people that they do not understand the Law or what they are letting themselves in for if they volunteer to be put back under it.

Of all the people in the first century, whether they were believing Jews who accepted Christ or unbelieving Jews who rejected Him, there was probably no other man who was more highly qualified academically to teach about the Law of Moses than Paul. He was like an Oxford professor who, even as a young man, had stood out as head and shoulders over all his fellow students.

On top of that, before he ever became a Christian, Paul had probably observed the Law better than any other man. Therefore, in being taught about it now in this letter to the Galatians you are hearing from a man who is possibly more qualified to speak about the Law than any man who has ever lived, including Moses himself.

Bearing that in mind, consider this next analogy which Paul gives to explain the vital difference between the covenants God made with Abraham and Moses. It concerns Abraham's first two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. They were born respectively to Hagar the slave, who was Sarah's maid, and to Sarah herself, a free woman. These two women are then put forward as 'types' with Hagar *representing* the Law of Moses and Sarah the promise made to Abraham, i.e. the Abrahamic Covenant.

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman.

Paul reminds the Galatians that the first son, Ishmael, who would never have been born if Abraham had fully trusted and obeyed God, was the son of a slave woman. However, his second son, Isaac, who was the son of the promise, was the son of a free woman.

23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise.

The reason Paul refers to Ishmael as having been born "*according to the flesh*" is that Ishmael's conception came about because of the impulsive idea Sarah had when she found she could not conceive. She urged Abraham to sleep with her maid so they could hurry things along and cause the long-awaited child to appear.

Thus, Ishmael's birth was brought about by the will of man, rather than the will of God. It was due to what Abraham and Sarah, in their impatience and dwindling faith, thought would be a good idea. In other words, Ishmael's birth came about because Abraham and Sarah were striving to *make it happen*, rather than by waiting patiently for God to do what He had promised He would.

In case anyone thinks I am criticising Abraham or Sarah, I hasten to add that when I was running a law firm I created many 'Ishmaels' of my own in business ideas or advertising campaigns or recruitment drives which I went ahead with on my own initiative, thinking them to be good ideas, when God had never told me to do those things.

Inevitably, therefore, those particular projects fizzled out or failed and became a problem to me later on, just as the descendants of Ishmael, namely the Arabs, became a massive headache for the Jewish people. So, I learned a painful lesson from my own mistakes and the Jewish people are still learning from the consequences of Abraham's mistake as they deal with Hamas, Hezbollah and various other groups of Arabs attacking them from Gaza, Lebanon and elsewhere.

24 Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

Paul refers to the account of these two women, Hagar and Sarah, who represent these two covenants, as being an allegory. The slave woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai, the place where the Law of Moses was given whereas, as we shall see below, Sarah represents the New Jerusalem which has been promised. (NB It will finally come at the end of the Millennium when God renews the whole Earth,

and Heaven itself descends onto the Earth and God the Father will live there forever in the New Jerusalem.)

By the way, Paul does not mean that the original account set out in the book of Genesis is not literally true. It absolutely is true. What he means is that the *true story* of what happened to them *also* serves as a useful illustration and helps us to see the differences between these two covenants.

25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

Interestingly, in Paul's allegory, although Hagar is the mother of Ishmael, from whom came the entire Arab race, Paul presents Hagar as corresponding to the Jerusalem of the first century before it was destroyed by the Romans in the year A.D. 70.

In Paul's allegory Hagar therefore represents those unbelieving Jews who were clinging to the Law of Moses and who did not believe in Jesus Christ or put their trust in the Gospel. Accordingly, he portrays the Jerusalem of his day as being in slavery, just as Hagar was, except that their slavery is to the Law, which is a burden so heavy they cannot carry it.

26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

Paul now refers to the Jerusalem which is above, i.e. the New Jerusalem which is going to descend onto the Earth at the end, after the Millennial Kingdom is over. He presents this as corresponding to Sarah, the mother of the Jewish people, who were born according to the promise.

In Paul's allegory therefore Hagar represents slavery to the Law whereas Sarah represents the freedom that comes from the promise God made to Abraham and from salvation that is based entirely upon faith and does not carry with it any obligation to obey the Law of Moses.

***27 For it is written,
"Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and shout, you who are not in travail;
for the children of the desolate one are many more
than the children of her that is married."***

In this verse, Paul is directly quoting Isaiah 54:1. The reference to the barren woman means Sarah, who was unable to conceive for 24 years (even after the promise was made, let alone before). However, like the woman in Isaiah 54:1 she ends up having more descendants than the married woman who is referred to in this verse.

Paul's point is that the blessings which eventually came to Sarah were immensely greater, as a result of living in faith, than anything anyone can manufacture for themselves by trying to observe the Law.

28 Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Now Paul's allegory moves on and the comparison he makes is between Isaac, the genuine child of the promise, and Ishmael who was not born according to the promise and was merely a work of the flesh. Paul means that when we now believe the Gospel and put our faith in Jesus Christ then we too, like Isaac, are children of promise rather than a work of the flesh, which is what we would be if we were to put ourselves under the Law of Moses and attempt to earn righteousness for ourselves.

29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now.

In Genesis 21:9 we see Ishmael, who is 13 years older, bullying Isaac. The RSV uses the word ‘playing’ with Isaac but the actual meaning is that Ishmael was pushing him around or persecuting him, just as the Arab people have attempted to do to the Jews ever since.

By the way, don’t ever believe what you see in the media about the Jews persecuting the “Palestinians”, who are in fact just ordinary Arabs, not a separate race or nation. And don’t listen to what they say about Israel pursuing “*genocide*” against those Arabs. It is all a lie and the very opposite is actually true.

It is the Arabs who continually attack Israel, as they did in 1948, 1967, 1973 and in countless other smaller battles, including the attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah in 2023. Moreover, the Koran itself tells all Muslims explicitly that they must *attack and wipe out every Jew in the world*. What is that other than genocide? But that campaign of slaughter is directed *against* the Jews, not pursued *by them*.

However, the point being made here in verse 29 is that the one born according to the flesh represents those who wish to be under the Law and to place others under the Law. Such a person then persecutes the true child of the promise, who was born according to the Spirit.

This corresponds to what has always happened and is still happening today. When did you ever see a genuine Christian persecuting a false one? Or when did you ever see a Christian who believes in liberty and the Law of Christ persecuting one who promotes legalism and the Law of Moses?

It has never happened that way round, either at the time of Ishmael and Isaac, or in Paul’s day or in our own day. Always it is those who operate according to the flesh who seek to dominate others and take freedom away, never the other way round.

30 But what does the scripture say? “Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

Here Paul is quoting from Genesis 21:10 where Abraham’s wife, Sarah, urged him to send Hagar away so as to protect her own son Isaac, the child of the promise, and the true heir of Abraham. Although God had a plan for Hagar, for her son Ishmael, and also for the Arab race, they were not and never will be the ones who inherit the benefits of the promise made to Abraham, unless of course they become Christians.

In that case, like any other Gentile, Christian Arabs can benefit from the wider aspects of the promise made to Abraham, i.e. everything promised to Gentiles, *but not what was promised exclusively to the Jews*. Ishmael and Hagar had to be cast out, because they did not represent the promise and the benefits of the promise did not flow through them.

31 So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Paul concludes this allegory by stating that all Jews and Gentiles who believe the Gospel are the ‘children’ of Sarah, the free woman. She is the one through whom the promise flowed, i.e. into Isaac, then Jacob and then on into all believing Jews and now, to all believing Gentiles. But the benefits of that promise are only to be had by faith, not by observing the Law of Moses or any modern-day variation thereof.

GALATIANS 5 (RSV)

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Paul is saying that, if you are a Christian, Jesus Christ has already set you free from many things, including the Law of Moses. Therefore, you already have your freedom and the only way you can lose it is to voluntarily place yourself, needlessly, and contrary to God's will, back under that burden. Indeed, note the strength of the language Paul uses, speaking of the Law of Moses as a "yoke of slavery", which is hardly a polite expression to use about it.

A yoke is what is placed on cattle when they are used to pull a plough or cart. Paul selects that stark phrase deliberately to signify that the Law is a very heavy burden, in fact so heavy as to justify his use of the word 'slavery'. However, unlike with cattle, that yoke cannot be placed around your neck against your will, but only by your choice, whereby you willingly make yourself a slave again after having been set free.

It is so obvious that this is a bad idea that one wonders why anyone would voluntarily choose to put themselves under that burden when they don't have to. It would be as if Peter was to turn around and walk back to his prison cell after the angel had released him. Yet, just as in Paul's day, multitudes do choose to put on that yoke and, despite everything the Bible says, they still imagine God approves of them for doing so.

Paul is about to speak about circumcision in the following verses. However, when he spoke of a "yoke of slavery" in this verse, he was not only referring to the physical act of circumcision in itself. That minor operation, painful though it may be, is only painful temporarily and, from then on, has little or no significance and can hardly be described as either a 'yoke' or 'slavery'.

Accordingly, we can be sure it is to the Law of Moses as a whole that Paul is referring. He is using circumcision as a shorthand expression to represent the whole Law of Moses, not just circumcision itself. Indeed, we see that expression used in that way in other passages too.

2 Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

Paul now makes another bold statement, which is that if you "receive circumcision", by which he means if you place yourself under the Law of Moses, then "*Christ will be of no advantage to you*". Paul means we each have a clear choice to make between two completely incompatible systems which cannot function together.

We can either have Christ and the freedom He brings, through the imputed righteousness He gives to us as a free gift, by grace, in response to our faith. Or we can have the Law of Moses. The point is we cannot have both. Therefore, if you put yourself under the Law of Moses, or any equivalent set of rules, whether denominational traditions or some other rules for living you have invented for yourself, you will inevitably fail.

Jesus Christ will give His grace and blessing to those who put their trust in Him and in what He did for them on the cross, but not to those who persist in trying to observe the Law of Moses, which has ended, or any equivalent set of man-made rules or traditions.

So, if you want the benefit of God's grace and blessing and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to live the Christian life, then come to God on His terms, not your own that you have invented for yourself or that some other person or group has misguidedly suggested to you.

I would not go so far as to say Paul is suggesting that a confused Christian who puts themselves under the Law of Moses after having been saved would then lose his salvation. I am not saying that and I don't think Paul is saying that.

But what he is saying is that if you do put yourself under the Law of Moses you cannot expect to receive God's help in observing it, since He has not commanded you to observe it. On the contrary, He has told you explicitly that it has ended and that He does not want you to observe it or to put yourself under it.

3 I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law.

This is a really key point, which those who like to put themselves under the Law of Moses never seem to grasp. It is that if you 'receive circumcision', by which Paul means not only the literal act of being circumcised, but also the decision to place yourself under the Law, then you must keep *the whole Law*. So, merely to observe the requirement to be circumcised, which is just one of the 613 commands, is useless if you do not also keep, at all times, all of the other 612 commands.

That is why it is inevitable that we will fail if we try to keep the Law of Moses, because it is so vast, so complicated, and so difficult, no one except Jesus has ever managed to keep it. Therefore, you cannot just pick and choose which parts of the Law of Moses you want to keep and ignore all the rest.

And yet that is the approach taken by every person I have ever known who has advocated things like Sabbath observance, keeping the Jewish feasts or generally acting as if they were a Jew. Every one of them has always zoomed in on some particular rule or command they claim to obey and that they say everyone else should obey. But I have never yet met any person who is attempting to observe all of the 613 commands.

That is probably because they already know they can't do it. Indeed, some of the commands cannot now be kept, ever since the year A.D. 70, when the Temple was destroyed. The point is many of the 613 commands relate to things that can only be done in the Temple which we are no longer able to do, even if we wanted to.

What is more, if a person says they want to observe Sabbath one has to ask:

- a) What exactly do they mean by Sabbath? That is to say when exactly does it start and end? So, if they say it's Sunday, or even Saturday, that is not correct. The biblical Sabbath runs from *sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday* but that is not what most people go by when they try to observe the Sabbath, as we see in the film 'Chariots of Fire', when Eric Liddell refuses to run in the Olympics on a Sunday.
- b) What exactly are they allowed or not allowed to do on Sabbath? Again, you may find they have their own definitions and rules which may or may not match what the Law of Moses actually says about what constitutes "work". Again, the example of Eric Liddell is relevant here since running in the Olympics cannot conceivably be classed as work, especially in the 1920s when all athletes

were unpaid amateurs. He just thought it was work, based solely on his own opinion and denominational traditions. But he was wrong.

- c) Where do they get the idea that we should not have fun or play games or sport or go to pubs or the cinema on the Sabbath? Quite apart from getting the day wrong by calling Sunday the Sabbath, there are many people, in particular some Presbyterian churches, which have declared that fun, sports and pleasure are also forbidden on the Sabbath. Yet, the Bible never says that.

It only forbade *work* and even that was narrowly defined to mean doing real work, i.e. your job or heavy duty housework etc, not enjoying yourself. (By the way, it does not mean switching the light on or off either, which some Jews mistakenly believe constitutes work, such that they get a Gentile, a “Sabbath Goy”, to do it for them.)

Having fun or doing sport is not work. Indeed, it is the very opposite of work. Yet there are many who have widened the definition of ‘work’ to include such things. Or they have said that the Sabbath rules do not only forbid work but also anything which isn’t about worship or church attendance or Bible study. But none of that is in the Bible.

Of course, when they do that, they are just inventing man made rules and adding them to the Law, just as the Pharisees did when they developed the ‘oral law’, which Jesus refused to obey. I think He would similarly have refused to obey the Pharisees if they had told Him He was not allowed to play tennis or football or go to the cinema on the Sabbath – or if they had told Him He was not allowed to switch on an electric light on or press a button in a lift (elevator).

Therefore, even if we focus on that one command out of the 613, just Sabbath observance alone, you may find the person isn’t actually complying with the exact requirements of the Law of Moses. Therefore, despite making a big issue out of Sabbath observance, they might actually be failing to keep it properly – in which case, as we have seen, they are a lawbreaker.

4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

We need to be clear whether Paul is saying that a person who seeks to rely upon the Law of Moses would lose their salvation or simply that they would lose the grace of God which gives us the power to live the Christian life successfully. The words “*severed from Christ*” are alarming and must be taken seriously, whatever their exact meaning may be.

Therefore, I want to be very careful in talking about them, so as not to mislead anyone. However, taking together the whole letter to the Galatians and everything else the Bible says, my conclusion is Paul is saying that if, having genuinely become a Christian, you then go on to add the Law of Moses, that would *not* cause you to lose your salvation. It would however cause you to become an ineffective, unproductive, unfruitful Christian.

However, if you were to go on to tell unsaved people that they must observe the Law of Moses, you would be giving them a false gospel. If you did that, it is quite possible *they* would not be saved, even if you yourself did not lose your own salvation as a result of your foolish decision to put yourself back under the Law.

So, at the very least, this controversy about the current status and effect of the Law of Moses has relevance to the nature of the gospel we preach to others and whether that gospel message is accurate and thus able to save them. That is a heavy responsibility and it is one of the reasons why we need to take this issue so very seriously.

However, let us return to the narrower issue. What about a genuine Christian who has heard and responded to the true Gospel and has been saved but then misguidedly adds to his Christian life the belief that he must observe parts of the Law of Moses? My understanding is Paul is **not** saying that such a person would lose their salvation.

However, I think he is saying they would become unable to pass on to unsaved people a true and accurate presentation of the Gospel. If so, that is a terrible state of affairs, which helps to explain why Paul is standing his ground so adamantly about this controversy. Therefore, even if your own salvation has already been obtained, and even if we assume it is not in danger, *other people's salvation is at stake*.

So, we must be very careful as to what we say and do, especially when sharing the Gospel. However, the implications of the phrase "severed from Christ" are much wider than solely the issue of our own personal salvation, or even other people's salvation.

It also has relevance to the wider question of whether or not, in your walk as a disciple, you have the benefit of the grace of God and thus whether you are effective and fruitful, because, as we saw, Law and grace do not mix and cannot operate together.

This has profound implications for the degree to which we can be salt and light to our fellow men. That can only be done by grace, through faith, not in the flesh. It also has an impact on the extent to which we will be rewarded, or not, at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Please see my Book 4 which deals with this judgment, at which only saved believers will be judged (not unbelievers, who go to the Great White Throne Judgment). God can only reward things done in faith, and in accordance with His will, not those done in the flesh, or on the basis of our own man-made traditions and practices, especially when those are contrary to His express instructions.

5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness.

This verse could create confusion if we misunderstand it because we have already stated that the complete righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed or transferred to us at the moment of conversion. Therefore, if that has happened and we already have all of Christ's righteousness why does Paul speak in terms of us needing to "*wait for the hope of righteousness*"?

To explain this we need to realise that 'salvation' is spoken of in the Bible in three senses, or you could say in three tenses. Those are *justification, sanctification and glorification*, and each one of these is referred to as 'salvation' or as being 'saved'. I look at these three tenses in close detail at the end of my Book 1. However let us also address it briefly here.

The first stage or event is where we are converted and the complete righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us in a single second. This is known as '*justification*' because the words 'just' and 'righteous' have the same meaning. This is a legal transaction whereby, in God's eyes, He treats us as having been forgiven and made righteous.

Then He need not any longer view us as objects of wrath or pour out His punishment upon us for our sin, and we will go to Heaven when we die. So, this is the ‘past tense’ of salvation and enables us to say “*I have been saved*”. Justification is vital but it is, nevertheless, only the first stage in the full process of salvation.

The second stage or ‘present tense’ of salvation is ‘*sanctification*’. This does not occur in a single moment but is a lifelong process of growing and maturing in our actual behaviour and attitudes. It has to do with the way we live our lives and how we treat others, so as to be more like Christ and less carnal in the way we act and also how we react to things. Often our reactions when under pressure are the most accurate measure of our level of maturity. So, when we speak of sanctification we therefore say we “*are being saved*” because it is ongoing and is a “work in progress”.

The third stage or ‘future tense’ of salvation is ‘*glorification*’. This happens in a single moment, after we die, when our very sin nature is removed from us. Then we become sinless and perfect in actual fact, not only in the legal sense, as when we are justified. So, it is primarily to this third stage, or future tense, of salvation that Paul is referring in this verse when he speaks of the ‘*hope*’ of *righteousness*.

He means his hope that when he dies his sin nature or old man will be removed from him and he will then actually be perfect and sinless. This will occur not only technically or legally, in terms of how God views him, but actually and tangibly, in all his actions and thoughts. Then he will have a sinless nature and an incorruptible resurrection body which will never age or die. So when we speak of glorification we would say “*I will be saved*”.

When Paul uses the word *hope* in this context he is not speaking as we sometimes do when we say we hope it will not rain this afternoon. Paul doesn’t mean anything limp or tepid like that. He means a bold, confident expectation based upon God’s promises and to which he is looking forward with eager anticipation. The biblical concept of hope is a solid thing, upon which we must resolutely set our minds, not some wishy-washy aspiration, for which we have no firm basis.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.

In verse 6 Paul is referring to *actual circumcision*, not as a metaphor for the whole Law, but the literal physical act of circumcision itself. He means that if we are a Christian it makes no difference whether we are physically circumcised or not. That is, if we are a Gentile, there is nothing to be gained from being circumcised and we have no obligation to do so.

That means the command to be circumcised, as contained within the Law of Moses, no longer applies, because the entire Law of Moses has ended. Therefore, a Gentile who becomes a Christian does not need to be circumcised because he does not need to comply with *any* part of the Law, not just what it says about circumcision. Neither does that Gentile Christian need to become a Jew. He can remain a Gentile.

However, to be really clear about this, when a baby boy is born into a *Jewish* family, i.e. where the parents are *physical descendants of Jacob*, (even if they have accepted Jesus as the Messiah), then *they do need to circumcise their child*. However, when they do so, it is not to comply with the Law of Moses, because that has ended for the Jews just as much as it has for the Gentiles.

It must be done to comply with the Abrahamic covenant. That has not ended and is still fully in operation. The point is the Abrahamic Covenant also requires circumcision, *but only for Jews*, i.e. the literal physical descendants of Jacob, not for Gentiles who become Christians.

7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Verse 7 matches my own observation of how, even today, it is only at some point after their conversion that Christians become interested in the Law of Moses and start to imagine they have to comply with it. People tend to begin well, i.e. when they are converted they do so based on faith alone, with no mention of the Law of Moses, and that issue usually only arises later.

Also, when people do make this error and become fixated with the Law of Moses, they always do it because they have listened to another person. They never get the idea from reading the Bible – because it isn't there. So, the Gentile Christians in Galatia had begun well and had understood the Gospel correctly, but someone had then come along and misled them with wrong teaching.

In their case it was the Judaisers, or 'circumcision party', who had done this. Today this specific form of legalism, whereby people are told they need to observe parts of the Law of Moses, tends to come mostly from misguided Gentile Christians who have developed an interest in the Jewish people but who then make the mistake of thinking they need to operate as if they were Jews. I call them 'wannabe Jews'.

They hanker after being Jewish and put on an outward show to pretend to themselves that they are. I always find such play acting rather sad and even pathetic. Instead, we should all just be what God made us, whether we are a Jew or a Gentile, and be happy to be that. It is usually from people like that that this form of legalism tends to arise. It is a kind of 'disease' which you can only catch from other people who already have it.

Having said all that, the problem of legalism is by no means confined only to this specific form of error that Paul is dealing with in the letter to the Galatians. Therefore, the same general points need to be made in regard to any other form of legalism we might misguidedly get ourselves into. Again, when that arises, it is always due to listening to other people who are themselves trapped in legalism.

You cannot get legalism from the Bible because it isn't there to be found, except in the behaviour of the Pharisees – but Jesus always condemns that, so that is hardly a basis for us to copy their example. The most common source of legalism today is *denominational tradition*, whereby people think, even unconsciously, that they need to uphold the traditions of their own denomination, whatever those may be. It is a kind of tribal allegiance, like loyalty to your football team.

Therefore, they absorb from an early age the assumption that they need to do certain things and behave in certain ways, even where those are not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. Indeed, in many instances, those things are specifically criticised or even forbidden in the Bible. But people do not notice that, even if they read the Bible, because they are blinded to what they read by the denominational traditions which are embedded in their own minds.

These fixed ideas have become so entrenched that they cannot recognise them as unbiblical even when such practices are explicitly criticised in the Bible. The most obvious example of this is Roman Catholicism. It is filled with doctrines and practices that are *not* in the Bible, or are even forbidden by it, and it also lacks many things which *are* in the Bible.

However, the vast majority of Catholics never read the Bible at all so they are totally unaware of these contradictions. But even if they do read some little bits of the Bible, or hear carefully selected extracts being read at mass, they are blinded and unable to see the many places where Catholic doctrine and practice is criticised, contradicted and shown to be false. It just passes them by.

However, before we become complacent or judgemental, let us remember that a lot of man made ideas are also to be found in Reformed churches and indeed in most other denominations too. So, there is no place for complacency or for imagining that only the Roman Catholic church has these errors.

8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

Again, Paul confirms that this misguided legalism, whereby people think they can gain some kind of righteousness or become ‘proper Christians’ by observing the Law of Moses *does not come from God*. It is a completely man-made teaching which contradicts the Gospel and the Bible. Again, one has to ask how can Paul make it any clearer that this is a false teaching?

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The word ‘leaven’, or yeast, is used in the Bible as a metaphor for sin but also for false teaching. That is why Jesus warned people to “*beware the leaven of the Pharisees*” by which he meant their false and misguided ideas and teachings.

Just as a small pinch of leaven or yeast spreads throughout an entire loaf, so too falsehood and false doctrines spread like wildfire through a church and then on into other churches until the false teaching becomes more widely believed than the truth and is clung to with greater vehemence.

10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.

Paul is not just expressing confidence that the Galatians will accept his teaching. He is also indicating that they *should*, because his view on this matter is *the only correct view*. It is an unpopular stance today to suggest your own belief is the only truth and that some other belief is therefore not true. Our generation has been told that all things are relative, and there are no absolute truths.

Therefore, it is now frowned upon to state that a particular view or teaching is *the* truth, or the *only* truth. That is seen as bigoted. Yet, that is exactly what Paul is doing in this letter. He is saying quite explicitly that he is right and the Judaisers or circumcision party are wrong.

It is not merely a matter of degree, such that Paul and his opponents are both partly right and partly wrong and they can “learn from each other”. Paul isn’t beating about the bush or being modest. He means *he is entirely right and they are entirely wrong* on this controversy and he says so in this direct manner because what is at stake here is so crucially important there is no scope for being mealy-mouthed about it.

Paul is also saying that those Judaisers who are preaching this false gospel will come under God’s judgment for doing so. Judgment is another of the things our apostate generation does not like to talk about. However, the truth is that at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is the judgment for believers (or at the Great White Throne judgment which is for the unsaved), we will all be judged. That includes preachers, pastors, leaders and Bible teachers. On that day we will all be held accountable for the accuracy or inaccuracy of our teaching.

That is why, as James says, “*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness*” (James 3:1). Therefore, whenever we teach others about the Bible, *or even express opinions online*, we ought to tremble with the fear of the LORD and to remember we will one day be judged for the accuracy or inaccuracy of what we say *and whether we studied carefully before saying it* or just blundered in and expressed our opinions carelessly without having any real knowledge or understanding.

I try to take that very seriously in everything I say and write, and I strongly advise you to do the same, not only when preaching in church but also when saying things on social media or just when discussing issues with people. In short, *be careful what you say*. God is listening, taking notes and recording everything you say, as well as monitoring the *tone and manner* in which you say it.

Therefore, do not allow yourself to engage in the online equivalent of “road rage” whereby people insult or mock each other. At the very least it is a poor witness to the unsaved. Indeed, I had occasion to raise this issue of online etiquette the other day in a prophecy group to which I belong on Facebook. I pointed out to the group that I was concerned at the number of times a person’s post or comment on some issue was met with remarks like “*lol*” or with laughing emojis, indicating ridicule of that point of view.

God does not want us to ridicule people or laugh at their religious beliefs, even if they are clearly wrong. On the contrary, the more wrong they are, the more courteous we should be in response. In fact, some go even further and explicitly insult and abuse people, despite the fact that it is meant to be a group for *Christians to discuss the Bible!*

If you are one of the people who do this I would urge you very strongly to stop. By all means disagree with people and contradict them. But never abuse or insult anyone or engage in sarcasm, mockery or “point scoring”. It makes me wince to see Christians doing that and it must upset God even more strongly.

11 But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the stumbling block of the cross has been removed.

Verse 11 is a little bit confusing at first sight and needs to be explained. To support their case, some of the Judaisers were spreading a false rumour that Paul supported their position and was ‘preaching circumcision’, which of course he wasn’t. Remember that in those days before websites and Facebook it wasn’t easy to quickly crush a false allegation.

So the Judaisers were able to convince people for quite a while before their lies could be corrected. Therefore, Paul’s point is that if it was true that he was doing that, why would he still be persecuted by the Judaisers? In other words, Paul is denying that he preaches circumcision for Gentiles because, *if he did, the Judaisers would not be persecuting him.*

Paul’s point in the second part of verse 11 is that the cross, which is the most crucial part of the true Gospel message, is a ‘*stumbling block*’ to many people. They become confused and “*trip over it*” because it goes against the grain of everything that makes sense to them in life. The average person’s automatic assumption is they are saved by “being a good person” or “doing good deeds” or “*being more good than bad*”.

If you speak to people on door-to-door evangelism as I have done hundreds of times, you will know they almost all come out with expressions like those if you ask them what they must do to get to Heaven.

Therefore, the true Gospel, which is based on putting our faith in Jesus Christ and *relying only on what He did for us on the cross* by dying in our place, and taking our sin upon Himself, makes no sense to people.

It seems too good to be true. Indeed, it seems impossible, unfair, or even absurd. They instinctively feel they must do something to earn or deserve their own salvation for themselves, or at least to contribute something to it, and the only way to ‘deserve it’ is by being good or obeying some kind of law. That kind of error is what Paul means by a ‘stumbling block’, which is something which causes you to fall.

Paul means that if we were to add circumcision or any other part of the Law of Moses to the Gospel message, to the effect that we must do something *in addition to believing the Gospel*, then we would be cancelling out the message of the cross. In other words, if we bring in any form of legalism, we are negating what the cross was all about. We might not realise that, but it is the effect of adding any kind of legalistic requirement to the Gospel.

12 I wish those who unsettle you would mutilate themselves!

Paul shows how very strongly he feels about this issue of legalism because he says he wishes those teaching this kind of falsehood about the Law of Moses in general, and circumcision in particular, would go ahead and ‘mutilate’ themselves. That has been translated politely in the RSV but Paul is really saying that instead of just getting themselves circumcised they should do the whole job and be castrated.

I hasten to add that Paul is not saying this is what he literally wants to happen. He is using ‘hyperbole’, i.e. exaggeration for effect, to make his point. But we need to take from this how strongly Paul feels about it. This is no mere academic argument. It is a life or death issue affecting people’s eternal life, not just this present life, and so it is hard to think of anything more serious.

13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.

The central message of Paul’s letter to the Galatians is that we are called to liberty, as opposed to legalism, which is the attempt to earn righteousness based on the observance of some kind of law. Vital though that point is, it needs to be balanced against the risk of falling into the opposite error of ‘licence’, from which we get the words ‘licentious’ and ‘licentiousness’.

Licence involves doing whatever you want, whenever you want, and satisfying your own carnal, fleshly, sinful desires rather than voluntarily controlling yourself and doing what is right. We have been given the gift of liberty but, as with any other God-given gift, it must not be misused.

We have a responsibility for how we use our liberty and will be held accountable for that freedom and for what we do with it. Although we are free, we must not use that freedom as an opportunity to indulge ourselves. In other words, although we have been set free from the Law, that does not mean we are free to sin or that we can sin without consequence.

Far from it, everything we do will one day be judged regardless of whether we are, or are not, under the Law. Therefore, God wants each of us to use our freedom responsibly and unselfishly and to eagerly do the things He would approve of and to willingly refrain from anything He would disapprove of.

So, although we are not under the Law of Moses, we are still subject to the ‘Law of Christ’, as Paul puts it, or to “the perfect law, the law of liberty” also known as “the Royal Law” as James puts it. (See James 1:25 and James 2:8) These expressions are all interchangeable and mean the same.

14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

As we saw earlier in the analogies I gave about the different ways in which unqualified and qualified gas engineers or nurses would be expected to operate, the ‘Law of Christ’, or the ‘Law of liberty’, or the ‘Royal Law’, to which we are now subject, treats you as an adult.

It expects you to control yourself and to voluntarily choose, by your own free will, to do God’s will rather than your own, to serve His purposes rather than yours, and to implement all of His principles, as set out in Scripture, knowing when to apply one and when to apply another.

However, we need to avoid another widespread error which is to wrongly suppose that the Sermon on the Mount which Jesus gave in Matthew chapters 5-7 *is* the Royal Law or Law of Christ, as referred to above. ***It isn’t.*** What Jesus was doing in the Sermon on the Mount was simply giving His commentary on the meaning and application of the Law of Moses, *which was, at that time, still fully in operation.* So, He was speaking about the Law of Moses and how, at that time, it should be implemented.

Some people wrongly think that in His teachings in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was setting out the new Law of Christ or Royal Law by which we must now live instead of observing the Law of Moses. That is not the case. *The Sermon on the Mount is about the Law of Moses and how to properly interpret it.*

Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount actually extends the definition of words like adultery and murder and makes the Law of Moses even harder to obey than it already was. Jesus takes the commands given in the Law of Moses and explains them even more strictly so we can see how much further and wider they go than people thought.

For example, we might imagine we are fulfilling the Law concerning adultery because we are not committing adultery in the literal physical sense. Yet, Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that even to look upon a woman lustfully is adultery.

Likewise, Jesus revealed that, under the Law, as it then stood, even to insult someone is equivalent to murder in the sense that we are damaging or destroying another person. Therefore He showed that people were breaking the Law of Moses far more than they realised.

So, although we are now under the Law of Christ or Law of liberty or Royal Law, however you prefer to put it, that is not what He is referring to in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount was primarily applicable to the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, during which the Law of Moses was still in operation. Therefore, to understand the Law of Christ, to which we are now subject, we need to look elsewhere in the New Testament, in which various other commands and explanations are given to us.

Accordingly, a Christian is called to a life of freedom, which means freedom from everything, including the Law, sin, self, the flesh, legalism and any other hangup or obstruction. But that does not mean it is alright for us to do whatever we want and to please ourselves without regard to God’s will or the needs of others.

Therefore, in one sense the ending of the Law has set us free from the need to comply with all sorts of rules and regulations. So, to that extent, things have been simplified. However, it is also true to say, in another sense, that things have been made more complicated. Now we are treated as adults, or as qualified gas engineers or nurses, as in my analogy.

Therefore, we have to use all of our wisdom, maturity, self-control and self-discipline to freely choose to do that which is right in all the circumstances, based on a thorough knowledge of God's Word, our own conscience and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In one sense, it is simpler just to try to follow a set of rigid rules, even if we are bound to fail, than to anticipate what God would want us to do in any given situation and then implement it.

15 But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

In verse 15 Paul is referring to what happens when people operate according to their own sinful natures, doing what their flesh desires, rather than operating in accordance with the Law of Christ. We shall see below many of the things done by carnal Christians who operate according to the flesh.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Instead of doing those things which come naturally to us, because they are the desires of our flesh and the sinful habit patterns we have formed, we need now to “*walk by the Spirit*”, by which Paul means the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, a Christian must be open to listen to and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

He speaks to us through our conscience and also brings back to our minds those parts of the Scriptures which we have studied, though of course *not the passages we have never read*. The Holy Spirit will not do the entire job for us. He wants us to make the effort to learn *the whole Bible* and to take it very seriously by meditating upon it and memorising as much as we can.

He is then better placed to draw the most appropriate parts of the Scriptures to our memory in any given situation and to help us to see what principle is most applicable in those circumstances and what we should and should not do.

So, although we have liberty, the expectation is that we will willingly use that liberty to allow, and actually invite, the Holy Spirit to guide us, convict us, and prompt us wherever He considers it necessary to keep us on the ‘narrow path’ and prevent us from indulging ourselves or operating “in the flesh”.

17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.

Everything your flesh craves for and all the sins it longs to commit are the opposite of the things the Holy Spirit wants us to do. That said, although the Holy Spirit does want to lead us and guide us, He does not want to take control of us or to force us to do God's will. Indeed, He absolutely refuses to do so.

The entire Law of Christ is based on the principle of freedom and of choosing voluntarily to do God's will and to listen willingly to the voice of the Holy Spirit. That is an alien concept to most of us and goes against all our instincts as well as being contrary to all our experience of life, which is why so many prefer a set of rules and regulations.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

Observe how explicitly Paul says in verse 18 that **you are not under the law**. Yet, somehow, people read this verse and miss those words or do not see their meaning. The point is we face an “either or” situation. We can either be led by the Holy Spirit **or** be under the Law of Moses but we can’t be both because *being led by the Holy Spirit is inconsistent with being under the Law*.

The very word ‘led’ implies a willingness to voluntarily submit ourselves to the will of the Holy Spirit and to follow Him, as a matter of choice, not to observe a set of rules as a matter of obligation. Therefore, there is no contradiction between saying one is seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit and also saying, at the same time, that one is not under the Law of Moses.

On the contrary, it would be a contradiction to say otherwise. Indeed, one of the many goals of the Holy Spirit is to enable us to fulfil the Law of Christ or Law of Liberty and to become effective disciples who voluntarily listen to His voice, stay on the narrow path, and seek to grow in character.

19 Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,

Paul now begins to list many of the works of the flesh so we can be clear what he is referring to. By ‘fornication’ he means all forms of sexual activity prior to or outside of marriage. However, in accordance with the guidance given to us by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, this would also include sins we commit in our minds where we simply think about such sexual sin, not only where we literally carry it out.

‘Impurity’ is broader and would include all forms of crudity, lewdness, off-colour jokes and stories, as well as pornography and improper sexual thoughts generally.

Licentiousness means doing your own thing and indulging in whatever you want to do whenever you want and with whomever you want, without regard to what God wants. Therefore you could say licentiousness is the abuse of liberty by choosing to use our freedom as an opportunity to binge and indulge ourselves, whether it be with sex, drink, drugs, hobbies or whatever else rather than exercise self-control and restraint.

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit,

By ‘idolatry’ Paul does not only mean the worship of literal idols and statues but also anything that we allow to have greater importance to us than God Himself. You could make an idol out of your job or your ambitions or even your football team. Perhaps the biggest one of all is money, a god which many people idolise.

We must keep our hearts free of the love of money, which is a root of all kinds of evil, but also of the love of any other person or thing which would seek to take first place in our hearts instead of God. If you want to know whether you are guilty of this, start taking note of what you spend your time thinking about, dreaming of or focusing upon. If it is not God and His Word then that thing is possibly an idol to you.

As for ‘sorcery’ Paul means the practice of witchcraft, in particular the use of drugs as part of that. At its heart, all witchcraft is essentially about controlling, dominating or manipulating other people and drugs are frequently used as part of that process.

One only has to look in any large bookshop at the section on witchcraft to see how many books speak of potions and charms and other means of putting spells on people and controlling them. You will be surprised how many such books there are. But there is only one form of control that is acceptable to God and that is self-control. To seek to control, manipulate or dominate any other person is wrong and is a form of witchcraft.

‘Enmity’, ‘strife’ ‘jealousy’, ‘anger’, ‘selfishness’ and ‘envy’ from verse 21, refer to the conflict and antagonism between people and the struggle to be in first place and to have control over others that one sees so often in churches. Instead of forgiveness, humility, forbearance and the desire to serve each other there is this ugly competitiveness whereby people seek to grab things for themselves and to promote themselves and their ministries at the expense of others, even within churches.

The answer to each of these last six things is for us to be content with who we are, with what we have and what talents we have been given. We should rejoice when others do well, or advance in the church, and positively want them to do well and pray they would do so.

That may sound obvious but it is not what generally happens. Many churches are damaged or even destroyed by personal rivalry, envy and insecurity as people strive to be prominent and to prevent others doing better than them or having what they do not have. Such attitudes grieve God’s heart and yet most people don’t see anything wrong in it. It doesn’t feel like sin to them, perhaps because it is so normal and widespread.

By ‘dissension’ Paul means disagreements and arguments that lead to discord and which can be very damaging within a church or even within a workplace or family. Of course, we must “*contend earnestly for the faith*” and stand up for sound doctrine, but what we must not do is to become argumentative, prickly, contrary people who stir up arguments and fall out over trivial or peripheral issues that we ought not to fall out with people about.

That is not so easy to avoid in these strange days when it feels like we are living in an insane asylum, given the weird beliefs that so many unbelievers have, many of which are creeping into churches. Yet, so far as we can, we need to try to “*live at peace with all men*” and only argue over things that *need to be argued over*, not mere opinions on unimportant issues and personal preferences.

By ‘*party spirit*’ Paul is referring firstly to the cliques that form in churches, whereby people find they are not part of the ‘in crowd’ and are excluded from conversations and from decision-making. Paul also means the tendency to attach ourselves to certain groups we support, or to certain Bible teachers, while feeling contempt for others whose opinions are different.

Of course, he is not referring to the divisions that need to be made over vital matters of doctrine, as where Paul himself makes a huge issue of the Law of Moses in his letter to the Galatians. He means those divisions which occur inappropriately and unnecessarily over trivia or matters of mere personality.

21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

‘*Drunkenness*’ does not mean having a drink, but having too much to drink, such that the person loses their inhibitions and has less control of themselves. When that condition is reached the person is much more likely to give in to temptation and to sin in other ways in addition to the sin of drunkenness itself.

By 'carousing' Paul means sexual sin and excess of the kind likely to arise when people are drunk. One sees it today with the 'clubbing' culture where people drink long into the night and inhibitions break down.

But what does Paul mean by saying those who do such things "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God*". Does he mean they will not be saved, or that they will lose their salvation if they already have it? Or, does he mean they could remain saved but will inherit nothing within the Kingdom of God?

We can benefit by cross referring what Paul says here with the book of James, which gives a counterbalancing explanation of what is meant by 'faith' and 'works' and how our works do not save us, but do provide evidence that we have genuine saving faith.

See James 2:14-26. What James says can really help to remove the confusion that arises when 'salvation by faith alone' is discussed. So, we know that faith does not consist of works. However, to paraphrase the famous saying, *although salvation is by faith alone, the faith that saves, or 'saving faith' is never alone.*

That is to say if faith is genuine, it is always accompanied by good works of some kind just as a fire, though it does not consist of smoke, is always accompanied by smoke. Therefore, although we all know fire is not smoke, the usual evidence that there is a fire is that we can see smoke.

The safest policy when looking at verse 21 is to be very cautious and to assume the worst. If a person is doing these things which Paul calls '*the works of the flesh*', it is at least strong evidence that the person does not have saving faith and thus is not saved.

Alternatively, it suggests that if they ever were saved they have possibly fallen away and no longer are saved, such that they will not go to Heaven when they die but will suffer eternal judgment as an unsaved person.

I would very much like to believe that Paul means something less than that and that the person will only lose some aspect of their reward or inheritance, but I would be wary of simply assuming that in the absence of clear proof that that is what he means.

See also the letter to the Hebrews, part of which I believe deals with this topic of falling away and losing one's salvation. Others disagree, but that is what I believe is meant within the letter to the Hebrews. Therefore, I would read this verse in the light of what is said in Hebrews and tremble at the various warnings that are given, not to unbelievers but to Christians.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

Paul now gives a very different list of the types of behaviour seen in the life of a person who is led by the Holy Spirit. Paul chooses to use the word 'fruit' when describing these because they are not gifts or talents that are given to us, but fruit grown within us, as if we were an orchard which the Holy Spirit is cultivating.

These are things which can never be produced in us by observing the Law of Moses, because the Law is not designed to produce good character but only to expose our lack of it.

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Our battle against our own sinful flesh nature is so important, and the intensity with which it must be fought is so great, Paul uses a powerful metaphor to address it. He speaks of those who belong to Christ as having “*crucified the flesh*”. Crucifying the flesh is not a one-off event but *an ongoing lifelong process*. Therefore, we can divide this crucifixion into stages or tenses.

In one sense, we were crucified with Christ at our conversion, the fact of which is then symbolised in our baptism in water. One of the things water baptism is meant to signify is the death of our flesh and everything it stands for. Therefore, as we go down into the waters of baptism we are symbolically putting our old man to death, i.e. crucifying the flesh. But as we rise up from the waters of baptism it signifies that we are rising to a new life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

From that point on, however, this crucifixion of our own flesh has to continue remorselessly until the day we die. That is because our old man is a determined enemy and keeps getting back down off the cross. Sometimes we allow our old man to do so and willingly involve it in our decision-making. Being realistic, our task is to keep on, day after day, nailing our old man back on to the cross and crucifying it again and again.

We achieve this by denying ourselves the things we crave, for example by fasting, but in particular by refusing to participate in sin, even though our flesh may long to do so. Apostle Peter speaks of this at 1 Peter 2:11 (b) when he says “*abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul*”.

So, we can speak in the past tense of our baptism, and what was proclaimed and achieved there. However, the crucifixion of our flesh must also continue in the present tense as we go on, day by day, denying ourselves, refusing to participate in sin and proclaiming that we have crucified our old man. I speak about this process in greater detail in my Book 7.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

When I was a young believer I heard people speaking of the need to “*walk by the Spirit*”. But it frustrated me because it was never explained. So it always seemed to me to be something mysterious, super spiritual and beyond my grasp. I did not understand what was meant by it and had no idea how to do it. I have since learned it is actually quite a simple concept, albeit hard to put into practice.

What it really means is to live in a humble, sincere, repentant, tender-hearted, receptive relationship with God whereby we saturate ourselves in God’s Word, studying it, meditating on it, memorising it, and being determined to put it into practice. It is to such obedient, earnest people that the Holy Spirit will speak – usually by reminding them at key moments of something they have read in the Bible.

But the Holy Spirit can only do that *if you do actually read the Bible*. You can’t be reminded of what you have never known. We must therefore be determined to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. But the crucial point is the Holy Spirit will primarily prompt us via our reading of the Bible. He will cause particular verses to jump out at us or to be brought back to our memory.

Alternatively, He will speak to us through our conscience, such that He convicts us, or even grieves us, if He sees we are going the wrong way or entering into sin. Then, by listening willingly and earnestly to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to our conscience, we can be brought back to godly living, and encouraged to return to the narrow path whenever we wander away from it.

But the problem is this requires us to be teachable and tender-hearted towards God and not to harden our hearts as Pharaoh did in Egypt. The main way we harden our hearts is not by major acts of rebellion, but by the hundreds of small decisions we make, day by day, *not to listen* to our conscience, or to the Holy Spirit's promptings, or *not to obey* what we already know the Bible says on a particular issue.

There will be countless times where we know, deep down, what we should do but we choose, out of selfishness, laziness, or cowardice, to ignore that and do what we know to be wrong. Each time we do that we harden our own heart to a small extent until, eventually, our heart becomes so leathery and calloused that our conscience has ceased to function at all. Then we can no longer hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, even if we want to.

That is a very dangerous position to get into, and from which very few people ever escape, because if your capacity to hear the Holy Spirit's promptings has ceased how can you repent and begin again? You would be like an aircraft flying in low cloud, towards mountains, without radar and without any radio contact with air traffic control, such that there is nothing to warn you or prevent a crash.

26 Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

You might imagine there would be no need to make any of these three statements in verse 26, given that this letter is written to Christians. However, it would be naïve to think Christians do not behave in these ways. Not only in Galatia, but in most of our churches today, we see all of these things being done. Moreover, these types of carnal behaviour are common not only amongst church members, but also amongst leaders.

In fact, in many churches today, it is the leaders who are the most conceited, competitive and envious and who cause the most problems. The remedy for each of these three things is to humble ourselves. We must recognise pride in ourselves and willingly address it by deliberately choosing to do the things our pride least wants to do.

So, instead of puffing ourselves up and seeking for prominence, we need to encourage others and build them up. Instead of envying others and wanting what they have (and also wishing they did not have it) we must be glad when others have gifts and talents that we don't have and encourage them to use and develop those gifts.

Also, instead of fighting with each other and jockeying for position, we must want the best for each other and see the Church for what it is, not only locally, but as a whole. That means the whole body of Christ from the day of Pentecost right through to the Rapture, i.e. *the Church*, with a capital C. Our duty as individual Christians, just like the cells of the human body, is to help and benefit the body as a whole and also each of the parts of that body.

We can best do that by supporting and encouraging each other in our respective ministries. Also, when I speak of encouraging others, I do not only mean leaders, but every member of our church, without exception. They all have ministries, roles, gifts and talents and they are all important. It grieves God when we compete with each other or knock others down so we can appear to be more prominent or more successful than them.

Again, one might assume there would be no need to say any of this and that such things would never happen, but sadly they do. Therefore, we need to be realistic and recognise that these things are going on in churches and tackle them, *especially in ourselves*.

The key point is that the place to begin tackling these wrong attitudes and sinful behaviour patterns is always in ourselves, not others. Therefore, even if you are the first one in your church to humble yourself, or even if you are the only one and no one follows your example, it is still right to do so and it will still please God.

Perhaps the best place to begin is by praying for others in our local church and asking God to raise them up, equip them, help them in their ministries and use them to benefit the church. Such a prayer is entirely in accordance with God's will, because it is not selfish. Indeed, it doesn't involve you at all. Therefore, it is exactly the kind of prayer we can fully expect Him to answer.

It is also something which will bring no attention or thanks to you, because you'll be doing it all in private, without telling anyone. Thus, it is a perfect way of humbling yourself because, instead of being all about you, it is all about others.

Of course, in seeking to avoid conflict, promote harmony and advance the interests of others in the church, we are not speaking about dealing with major issues of doctrine which require us to take a public stand so as to contend earnestly for the faith and oppose false teaching. Over such things as those we must be resolute and bold.

I mean the minor differences of opinion and other petty matters and personality clashes which cause so much discord in churches and which could be largely avoided if we were to humble ourselves. Be like Paul who we can be certain would not have insisted on his choice of toppings if someone was ringing to order a pizza. He would have just gone along with whatever the others wanted to order. Yet he would fight to the end to stand up for true doctrine.

GALATIANS 6 (ESV)

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

When others in the church fall into sin or are foolish in their behaviour or mistaken in their beliefs then, if we are more mature than them, and if they will allow it, we must seek to restore them. That means to help, encourage, advise, correct and even warn them so as to keep them on the narrow path, or to bring them back to it if they have wandered from it.

But all of this must be done in a gentle, humble way, without any hypocrisy and without any assumption of superiority on our part. That is important not only to cause others to be more willing to listen to us, but also because there is great danger in pride and in presuming you could never fall into the same sins that others have fallen into.

Rather than make that arrogant assumption, you should “*keep watch on yourself*”. We should all consider it entirely possible that we could fall into temptation or let God down in some way. The surest way to end up falling into sin like this is to assume it could not happen to you.

Conversely, the best way to avoid falling into sin is to cultivate ‘*the fear of the Lord*’. That means we should have reverence and awe for God, but also to literally fear Him and *His impending judgment*. We need to reflect now on the prospect of standing before Him in judgment when everything we have ever done, said or thought, will be laid bare and assessed, quite possibly publicly.

This will be done in order to decide what reward we should be given, if any. It is also to decide what position, if any, we should be appointed to in the Millennial Kingdom, i.e. the 1000 year reign of Christ on the Earth after His return. Focusing on all of that and being sobered by it will be very effective in preventing you falling into sin.

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

Here Paul boils down the Law of Christ into another pithy phrase, “*bear one another's burdens*”. This is an instruction which, if you tried to express it in terms of the Law of Moses, would have to be very long and detailed. But, as with the analogy I used of a qualified gas engineer or nurse, this short command about helping others is perfectly adequate and is consistent with God treating us as adults who are capable of applying His principles to our circumstances in appropriate ways when the need arises.

If you are sharp eyed, you might spot what appears to be a contradiction between verse two and verse five below, because in verse two we are asked to bear one another's burdens, but in verse five we are told that each of us will have to bear his own load. Actually, there is no contradiction. The Greek word used here in verse two is ‘*baros*’ whereas the Greek word used in verse five below is ‘*phortion*’.

They both refer to a weight or a load, but *baros* has the implication in this context of a very heavy load or a crushing burden. Those are the burdens we must help other people to carry. However, *phortion*, in this context refers to a light burden, such as a knapsack, which each of us do have to carry for ourselves.

3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Our sinful flesh nature has a craving for self-importance and to impress others and be noticed. Therefore, the Law of Moses, when it is misused, promotes an attitude of pride whereby we imagine ourselves better than other people and to have done something to deserve salvation.

However, the Gospel, provided it is the real Gospel, not a false version of it, does not provide any basis for us to think highly of ourselves. That is because we do not contribute anything to our salvation other than a willingness to recognise our sin, to repent of it, and to put our trust in Jesus Christ to save us.

We all come to the Gospel message as equals, in fact as beggars, if you are willing to hear it. That is to say we are all like tramps coming to a soup kitchen. Therefore evangelism, i.e. sharing the Gospel, is really just one tramp telling another tramp where the soup kitchen is.

I am reminded of how when I was a police constable on foot patrol during the winter, I would go up onto the roof of Sainsbury's supermarket which had its own bakery and hot air vents coming out onto the roof by which you could stand and get warm. Standing alongside me at those air vents were tramps who also wanted to get warm.

So, I was a police officer and they were tramps, but we had exactly the same need and exactly the same way to meet it, by coming to the air vents. It is just the same with our need for the Gospel. Therefore, we must never fall into the trap of imagining ourselves to be better than others, or more deserving, or that we could do anything to earn our salvation by any kind of good works.

Obviously, it is right that we should do good works. Indeed, one of the very reasons why God made us was so that we could do good works: "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" Ephesians 2:10 (RSV).

As apostle John makes clear, our obedience or disobedience to God's commands is what demonstrates whether we are genuine Christians or false ones: "*And by this may we be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments*" John 2:3 (RSV).

Although both of the above points are important and absolutely true, the crucial point Paul is making in Galatians is that good works, though they are required by God, and though they help to prove our genuineness, *are not the means by which we can be saved or a means of acquiring righteousness.*

4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.

Instead of examining others and comparing ourselves to them, favourably or otherwise, we should simply examine *ourselves* and test the extent to which *we* are truthful, faithful, obedient disciples who are remaining on the narrow path.

What other people are, though important when assessing their teaching and whether they can be trusted, is much less important than assessing whether we ourselves are being faithful to God's Word and obeying His commands.

If a disciple is faithful and is growing in maturity and godliness and fruit is being produced in his life then, as the NKJV puts it, he will "*have rejoicing in himself.*" That is to say, if that applies to us, we will be able to rejoice and give thanks for what God is producing in us and how He is changing us, though not to congratulate ourselves or to "*boast*" as the ESV puts it.

5 For each will have to bear his own load.

See the comments made above at verse two. The ‘load’ spoken of here is a light burden, like a small knapsack which we all have to carry for ourselves. It is not a crushing one of the type that requires the help of others in bearing the load.

6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.

This refers to giving financial support to those who *have to leave home* to preach the Gospel and teach the Bible. To such men we should be generous and supportive to enable them to operate their travelling ministries. However, this verse and others like it are frequently misused or misapplied to suggest the members of a local church should give financially to pay the salary of a *local elder or pastor*. Actually, if you look at the book of Acts and all of the letters of the New Testament, we never see any such thing taught or practised.

What we do see is that financial support is given to missionaries, i.e. *to those who are sent*, and who are therefore far away from their hometown and unable to get a job. For such people, it is right and proper that they be supported financially, at least initially, because there is no other way, practically speaking, for them to earn a living.

However, for local elders who *stay within the local church*, there is no need for them to be financially supported, or to become full-time pastors, and the New Testament does not present any examples of such a practice to us. Admittedly, the things I’m saying here are not to be found within verse six, and so we need to look at the whole of the rest of the New Testament.

However, if we do that we will see that what was done in the first century Church was very different from what we now see in the vast majority of churches, where we have a paid full-time pastor who does most of the work of the church, including most of the preaching and teaching. Very often he also does most of the worship leading, administration, decision-making and pretty much everything else too.

But, quite apart from the financial abuse that can lead to, as the people are put under pressure to fund it all, it is not good for most of the work of a local church to be done by one man, or even by a small group of men who are paid to be full-time. It is far better for the work to be spread out and shared on an unpaid basis by all the members of the local church.

It is also the case, depressingly often, that relying on a church to pay his wages, his mortgage and his pension contributions can make a man feel very insecure and threatened. He is then likely to seek to defend himself from real or imagined threats to his position and that can result in a good man turning into a paranoid, manipulative, dominating leader who abuses his people.

What we see practised in the New Testament is *house churches*, by which I mean small local churches which met in people’s homes, or in barns or outbuildings or school rooms or the like. What they did not do was meet in large expensive purpose-built church buildings of the type we know now.

Those are modelled on the pagan temples the Romans used and would be completely unfamiliar to the first century Church. Such big buildings only came in from the fourth century onwards, after Emperor Constantine claimed to become a Christian and effectively took over the churches, bringing in alongside him hordes of unsaved pagans.

They took over the former pagan temples as meeting places for the churches and the whole model for church changed and became hierarchical, dominating and abusive with leaders starting to call themselves “*priests*” and seeing themselves as “*clergy*” and as being above the ordinary people. When this happened most of the real Christians, having no wish to be part of a church led by the Emperor, left and continued to meet in homes as they had always done, and led by unpaid local elders.

Indeed, they continued to do so ever since and were persecuted to the death by the Roman Catholic Church, which is what Constantine’s syncretistic church turned into. I go into more detail about this in my Book 3 and also in Book 8, and I would refer you to those for further study, and also the audio teaching I did within the series on Book 3 on the origins and errors of the Roman Catholic church.

7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Here Paul describes a law which is just as unavoidable as the law of gravity. What he means is that whatever we do in our lives, whether good or bad, right or wrong, will inevitably come back to us, either as a reward or judgment. That will assuredly happen because God is determined to cause it to happen. It may not happen immediately, but at some point, sooner or later, it will definitely happen.

As an ultimate long stop, it will happen at the Judgment Seat, after we are resurrected, when we shall all reap a harvest of whatever it was that we did in our lives from conversion onwards – because of course everything we did before then is washed away and is neither rewarded nor punished.

Even the pagan world has noticed this and they have a word for it which comes from Hinduism. They call it ‘*karma*’. Of course, they have no idea *who* really causes this to happen or why disaster eventually comes upon the wicked. However they do know, having observed it consistently over many centuries, that it is the case.

I hasten to add that what Paul is speaking of here has *nothing to do with karma or Hinduism*. This “*law of sowing and reaping*” is an entirely biblical concept and is an aspect of God’s judgment. It is God who is doing it, not “the universe” or Hindu gods or any New Age nonsense of that sort.

That being so, if we have any sense at all, we will be mindful of this law and be guided by it in our day-to-day actions. We will then take care to ‘sow’ the right kind of things, which will produce God’s blessing, rather than the wrong kind of things which will bring His judgment upon us. I go into this more fully in my Book 5 which is about biblical wisdom and I would refer you to that.

8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Anyone who ‘sows’ to his own flesh, which means living sinfully and doing those things our carnal nature craves to do, will surely end up ‘reaping’ a very unpleasant harvest as God’s judgment comes upon them, not only in the next world but also in this life.

Conversely, if we sow to the Spirit, which means doing all those things which God’s Word requires of us, which our conscience dictates, and which the Holy Spirit prompts us to do, then we shall reap a wonderful harvest of rewards as God pours out His blessing upon us for a life well lived.

9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

There are no absolute guarantees that these blessings will come to us in the short term, or even in this lifetime, because some of us will be called to martyrdom or will die early for other reasons. If so, such people will have to wait until the next life, after the resurrection, before they reap the reward. But one thing is categorically certain and that is that those rewards will be given to those who merit them.

There is no doubt about it because God's Word is utterly reliable. Therefore, as Paul puts it, we must not lose heart or 'grow weary' of doing good because God will not fail to notice anything we do, however small, even if no one else notices it. That being so, we must be highly motivated to do what is right.

10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

What Paul is doing here in verse 10 is rather like what Jesus did when He condensed the Law of Moses into a sentence. In a sense, Paul is taking the whole 'Law of Christ' and reducing it to this single sentence, which covers just about everything. But, as discussed earlier, note how much freedom and flexibility this very broad instruction gives us, as 'grown-ups', to decide for ourselves whom to help and when, where, and how to help them.

That freedom gives us dignity and room to exercise our own discretion, but it is still a *duty*, and we will all be judged according to what we do and don't do with that freedom. So, we are free to decide *how* to help others, and *whom* to give to. But the duty to give generously to help our fellow men is still there, *especially within the Church*, which is what Paul means by '*the household of faith*'.

Remember also that, although we are being treated as adults, and given the freedom to apply the principles of God's Word to our circumstances when deciding when and how to help others, this is still a *command*, not a *suggestion*, and needs to be seen as such.

I stress that because, if we are not careful in applying the freedom we have been given, there is a danger of becoming complacent and imagining that simply because we are not under the Law of Moses, that means we do not have to obey God or pay attention to any of the other commands He has given to us. That would be a huge mistake.

By the way, my personal view, and my advice to you, is not to give any financial support to Muslims or to Muslim countries, not even when there are famines or earthquakes. Islam is a vicious, wicked religion of violence and perversion and I do not want to do anything or give anything to support it or its followers.

The key point to grasp is that Islam is spread by two main methods – military conquest and immigration and with both of these methods their policy is to put the native non Muslim population into a status known as '*dhimmitude*'. This means that such non Muslims can be permitted to live only on condition that they pay money to Muslims. Otherwise, they are to be slaughtered.

The Koran clearly teaches this and it has been practised since the 7th century as the Muslims have taken over and oppressed 57 countries so far with many more well on the way to being taken over – including the UK and USA! If you don't know that then please wake up now, open your eyes, and see Islam for what it really is.

Therefore, do not willingly put yourself into a position of self-imposed dhimmitude, voluntarily paying money to a group of people whose express aim, as set out explicitly in the Koran, is to *forcibly enslave you*. Have the common sense to give your money elsewhere and do not submit to woke propaganda which tells you it is '*bigoted to criticise Islam*' or that dreadfully woke word, "*Islamophobic*". All of that kind of talk is lies which are intended to get you to surrender to Islam without a fight.

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

Most of the time, Paul's letters were dictated by him as he paced about his room, speaking out loud to his secretary who wrote down all that he said, word for word. However, as we see here, there were times when he would reach over and take the papyrus and the quill in his own hand and write something for himself in his own handwriting.

It is likely this is what Paul was doing here, writing out verse 11, or perhaps some of the other verses, by himself. He would do so to authenticate the letter and to prove it really did come from him and was not a forgery. Alternatively, it may possibly be that the whole letter of Galatians, or a large proportion of it, was written in Paul's own handwriting.

Either way, Paul mentions the 'large letters' with which he writes, which may perhaps be an indication that he was short-sighted. It may also be that it was due to the possible eye condition or eye infection he may have been suffering from, to which we referred earlier. However, we just don't know and it would be wrong to be dogmatic about such things where the Bible does not give us any answers.

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

Paul is now again referring to the Judaisers, or circumcision party, who were seeking to bully and pressurise Christians in Galatia to observe the Law of Moses. Paul's first point is that such people do what they do because they want to appear impressive or to be 'a cut above' others in the sense they have something more, or something better, than the rest of us. They want us to believe that until we become like them and adopt their practices and beliefs we are not 'proper Christians' or are not acceptable to God.

Paul's second point is that some of those who accept the teachings of these legalists are doing so because they want to avoid being persecuted by the Romans. What I mean is that Judaism had been declared to be an acceptable religion which the Emperor allowed. It was therefore called *religio licita*, meaning it was legal.

But Christianity had not been declared to be acceptable and therefore was often persecuted as it was classified as an illegal religion or *religio illicita*. Therefore, in many cases Messianic believers retreated back into Judaism to save their own skin, because that prevented them being persecuted.

Therefore, this issue of observing the Law of Moses had a wider relevance than many of us realise because such observance could enable you to claim that you were classified as a Jew, not as a Christian and thus avoid punishment or even death. On this point please also refer to the letter to the Hebrews, which deals with the problem of Jewish Christians abandoning Christianity and reverting to Judaism under pressure of persecution from the Emperor.

So, remember that some of the people who were endorsing the Law of Moses were doing so just to save their own lives, not because they necessarily believed it to be in operation. However, in all things, not just on this issue of the Law, we must always hold on to our freedom of conscience and of belief. Therefore, we must never alter our theology in order to avoid persecution of any kind, or to avoid being disapproved of by others in the churches, and not even to save our lives.

It is at the very heart of the Gospel message, and of how God wants the Church to operate, that we must have complete liberty to decide for ourselves what the truth is. This must be based on our own diligent reading of the Bible. We must never allow the threat of persecution or any hierarchical, authoritarian leadership or denominational tradition or bossy, ‘clergy minded’ leaders to make us comply with their views.

Whenever any teaching is presented to us or when we present any teaching to others it must always be done with calm, gentle, reasoned persuasion, based on Scripture, with the authorities or verses upon which we are meant to rely clearly set out, not with any kind of pressure, coercion, manipulation or ‘guilt tripping’.

As we see in Acts 17:11, where Luke praises the people of Berea for checking carefully even the preaching and teaching of apostle Paul, we each have a duty to search the Scriptures for ourselves and to decide for ourselves what we believe. Therefore, we must never blindly accept the teachings of any man no matter how impressive he may sound and no matter what credentials he may have.

13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

Ironically, even the Judaisers, who sought to make everybody else observe the Law of Moses, did not keep it themselves. They would pick and choose which parts of it they were going to keep, and when they would and would not keep it. Yet, somehow, they still regarded themselves as keeping the Law.

Paul also reinforces the point that when others try to make you come under their teaching or accept their authority, or submit yourselves to them and to their ideas, they are simply indulging the flesh. They are using you as a way of boosting their own self-importance by bragging about how many people have come under their authority or are following their ideas and therefore how important they are as leaders.

Such an approach is all about pride and arrogance and the puffing up of self. Therefore, we must avoid such attitudes like the plague when we see them in others and, even more importantly, avoid exhibiting such attitudes ourselves.

Anyone who wishes to teach the Bible or to lead in a local church, or to have any other position within a church, must do so with a gentle, humble, respectful tone. We must also be mindful at all times of the freedom that other Christians have been given by God, which we must never restrict, abuse, or trample upon in order to pursue our own ministries.

14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Paul’s position is he will not boast of anything except the cross, by which he means the achievements of Jesus Christ on the cross, rather than any achievements of his own. Not only are the achievements of Jesus infinitely greater than our own, the point is there is no purpose in any of us boasting at all about

ourselves because the rewards or rebukes given out at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and which will stand for all time, will be given by Jesus Christ Himself, not by us.

Therefore, boasting now about ourselves is not only futile, but positively harmful. It will possibly even result in any reward we might have been given for our achievements being reduced or cancelled on the basis that the pleasure of our own boasting will be deemed to be our reward. Therefore no further reward might be given.

See my Book 4 on the Judgment Seat of Christ for more detail on how the judgment of Christians will be conducted and the criteria Jesus will use in judging us. Once you reflect upon those it becomes apparent why boasting is not only pointless but counter-productive.

15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Whether we are circumcised or not makes no difference to the issue of salvation or of being a valid, effective, acceptable disciple of Jesus Christ. Circumcision under the Law of Moses is not needed any more.

Therefore, the only people who now need to be circumcised are Jews, i.e. the physical descendants of Jacob, not Christians. But, even then, that is only so they can comply with the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant, which also requires circumcision, but only for Jews, not Gentiles.

So, the Judaisers were demanding that Christians do something which God was not requiring of them. Neither is He requiring it of us. What really counts is whether or not we are born-again. That is the point at which a person's sins are forgiven and they receive, or have transferred to them, all the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Paul refers to such a person, from that moment, as '*a new creation*', by which he means everything has changed for them and they have been born again, so as to begin again with a new life in Jesus Christ based on faith and His righteousness rather than their own. This concept is also referred to by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians when he says: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come.*".

16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Paul now speaks a blessing over all who operate in this way, by following the true Gospel which is based on faith, not works. In saying that he is referring to the Church because, as we know, this letter is being sent to a group of Gentile churches in Galatia. They are the group he is talking to and talking about.

However, he then refers in addition to "*the Israel of God*". Now Paul is talking about Jews, but by that expression he does not mean all Jews. He means *the authentic 'remnant' within the Jewish people* who are not only Jews, but also believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. They are, therefore, complete Jews or completed Jews, in the sense that they have realised who their Messiah is and have accepted Him.

There is a lot of controversy over this verse because a lot of people, most of whom embrace 'replacement theology', think that Paul is actually referring here to the Church. They mean that in the sense of the Church having replaced Israel. The answer to that idea is very clear. **The Church has not replaced Israel and never will.**

Indeed, Paul is not even referring to the Church here when he uses the phrase “*and upon the Israel of God*”. There are many instances in the New Testament where Israel is referred to and in every case it **always literally means Israel, never the Church**.

Note also the structure of the sentence in verse 16. Paul speaks a blessing upon “*those who walk by this rule*”, by which he means Christians, but he then says “**and**” *upon the Israel of God*. That clearly indicates he is distinguishing the ‘*Israel of God*’ from the Church, not equating them with it.

Part of the confusion over verse 16 as to whether Paul is talking about the Church or believing Jews comes from the little Greek word *kai* which usually means ‘*and*’ but can also mean ‘*even*’ or ‘*namely*’ or ‘*i.e.*’ or ‘*that is to say*’. By the way, I should mention that the English word ‘*even*’ when used in this context is a very old fashioned word which has dropped out of the language.

It was still used in the 18th century so you will see it in books by the likes of Jane Austen but not in modern books. The only other place you will see it is in one or two translations of Galatians 6:16. But they only do that because this more obscure alternative meaning of the word ‘*kai*’ as ‘*even*’ or ‘*namely*’ suits their purposes and helps them to argue that the Church has replaced Israel.

However, I believe the correct translation in this verse is to render *kai* in its usual meaning as ‘*and*’, which indeed the vast majority of Bible translations do. In that way the verse fits with the whole of the rest of the New Testament which clearly differentiates between Israel and the Church and never equates them or suggests that Israel has been replaced by the Church.

Therefore, the simple ‘*and*’ between the two groups being spoken of clearly differentiates them, meaning “the Church **and** the Israel of God” (i.e. saved, believing Jews). So the ‘*and*’ tells us that the two groups are different and distinct from each other, not one and the same.

However, if *kai* is translated as ‘*even*’ (in its old antiquated definition) then a very different meaning emerges – and one which suits the purposes of those who, for their own reasons, believe the Church has replaced Israel. So now the sentence would read “*And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even (or that is to say) upon the Israel of God*”, meaning that they (the Church) *are* the Israel of God. It would be as if it had said in reference to the Church “*namely the Israel of God*”.

If it is translated that way (which it should not be) the verse would now mean that this first group, i.e. the Church is being referred to as if it is the Israel of God, rather than being distinguished from it. But that is a terrible mistake of both grammar and doctrine and I deplore it.

We could therefore save ourselves a lot of trouble and avoid a lot of the false teaching known as ‘*replacement theology*’ if we followed this simple rule that, in the Bible, *Israel is Israel and the Church is the Church*. **God never uses the word ‘Israel’ to refer to the Church**.

It is possible you have not yet come across such misguided teaching in your own local church, or perhaps it is there but you have not noticed it. However, you would do well to watch out for it from now on, because it is not only false in itself, but also leads you into many other errors and falsehoods. Accordingly, we must reject any idea that God has “*finished with Israel*” or “*no longer has any purpose or plans for Israel*”.

That is all false misguided theology which originated with the Roman Catholic church and was kept by some of the reformers in the 16th century – except of course that they changed it so the group which had

replaced Israel was now the Protestant church instead of the Catholic church! Please refer to my audio series on Israel for more detail on the grievous error of replacement theology and the many problems it causes.

17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

Paul had suffered much at the hands of the Judaisers, not only in terms of insults, criticisms and false accusations but also physical persecution. It was because of them he was literally run out of town when he was in Thessalonica, such that he had to flee to Berea, which we read of in Acts 17:1-10. Therefore, one can imagine the strength of feeling with which he longingly asks that no further trouble be given to him. It was no mere figure of speech.

When he refers to the marks of Jesus on his body I think he is referring to the many literal marks and scars that were upon him as a result of the beatings, floggings, stonings, shipwrecks and other hardships and deprivations he had to face and he sets these out in a grim list at 2 Corinthians 11:24-28.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Despite all the strong words he has had to give over such crucial issues of doctrine, and, in particular, the abrupt way in which he opened it, Paul ends this vitally important letter in the same gracious manner that he ends all his other letters, by speaking a warm blessing upon the Galatians.