

The Only Thing That Matters

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Date: 13 February 2005

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[0 : 01] Alright then, Bible's open, let's go to Galatia.

It's often the case that the very beginning and the very end of Paul's letters get us right to the heart of what is going on in the meat of the epistle.

That's no different here. We're going to look tonight at verses 1 to 5 of chapter 1 as a way into the letter. Our aim tonight is to just try and grasp the big picture, the melody, if you like, the tune of Galatians so that we can, as we go through it later on in more detail, begin to grasp the real heart of the message that Paul has for this church.

So as I say, we're going to be dotting around a little bit, but it's really all summed up here in these first few verses. I want to look at it under two headings, a striking greeting and a striking summary. Verses 1 and 2 give us a striking opening greeting. A striking opening greeting from the apostle, from the messenger of Christ, that reveals to us a major clash of loyalties is at stake here.

[1 : 24] Paul's letters always begin with greetings and usually Paul's greetings are warm and encouraging. So in the Ephesian letter he greets the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

In the Philippine letter he goes on immediately to give thanks for every remembrance of them and for their lives, but not here.

None of that. Just very plain to the churches of Galatia. Often in Paul's letters there's a co-author mentioned. So in 2 Corinthians and Philippians we have Paul and Timothy, Paul's co-worker.

Or in the Thessalonians it's Paul and Timothy and Silvanus. And here we might very well expect it to be Paul and Barnabas, because as we'll see, Barnabas was Paul's co-worker in mission.

Paul's missionary journey, first time, Acts 13 and 14. But we don't have any mention of Barnabas. Only we have this anonymous referral to the brothers, the brothers who are with me.

[2 : 30] We find out why a bit later on, because in chapter 2 verse 13 we see that Barnabas is actually in the doghouse. That's why he's not mentioned. But clearly just from this greeting we can see that there's tension in the air.

Something's not right. Something is amiss between the apostle and these churches that he planted. Not long ago, verse 6 tells us. So quickly you're deserting him who called you.

Not long ago. Churches that began with great joy. Great celebration. It's about now something's gone wrong. What's going on? Who's Paul writing to?

Why is he writing? Well, there are great tomes of argument written over the location and the date of this letter. Suffice to say for us that it seems very clear to me, although it's not without difficulties, it seems very clear that this church, the churches of Galatia, form part of what we might call South Galatia.

It's the areas that we read about in Acts chapter 13 and 14. Poseidia and Iconium and Lystra. It's the areas that Paul went to on his first missionary journey with Barnabas. What are the issues?

[3 : 42] Well, the issues are to do with brewing trouble between Jewish believers and Gentile believers over the matter of what requirements Gentile believers must keep, if any, of the Old Testament law, if they're to come fully into the church of Jesus Christ.

And it was these very issues that led up to a great power, eventually, that we read about in Acts chapter 15 that took place in Jerusalem, the council of Jerusalem, when the matter was settled.

It seems clear to me that this letter must have been written before that council, before that final settlement. Otherwise, the conduct that we read about in chapter 2, verse 11, of Peter and of Barnabas being under pressure, fearing the circumcision party, acting hypocritically.

That kind of thing is just inconceivable, if the decision of Acts 15 had already been made. It's also inconceivable, I think, that in a letter like this, about these issues, if it was written after that time, Paul would have made no mention whatsoever of the Jerusalem council.

Now, there's endless argument and debate about these things, but let's just leave it at that for the meantime. Let's just say this. Paul is writing amid a brewing crisis, facing the entire worldwide church of Jesus Christ, because that's what it was.

[5 : 06] So it's a very hot letter. It's not, as some would say, passionate and angry, and therefore inconsistent. No. It is passionate.

It is angry. But it is so because the stakes are so very high. The chips are really down the future of the church and the gospel for the whole world, for the whole future.

That's at stake. And so it is a very hot letter, but it's a very carefully and very, what's the word, very deliberately argued case.

Paul is up to his neck in this whole thing. It's involving him. It's involving his message. It's involving his whole mission. All of these things are under threat by this issue that's brewing in the church in Galatia.

Look at verse 13 of chapter 4. That describes how it used to be, how it was just a little time ago, in Acts chapter 13 and 14. If you read those chapters, you read about the joyful reception of the good news from these people.

[6 : 16] This was authentic Christian fellowship being born. Chapter 3 verse 2 says that they received the Spirit. Chapter 4 verse 6 tells us again, you receive the Spirit of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into your hearts.

Authentic Christian beginnings. But now, chapter 4 verse 16, what's gone wrong? They seem to think Paul's an enemy. Now, chapter 4 verse 9, they seem to be turning, and that word means converting, reconverting, to what Paul calls worthless paganism.

What on earth is going on? He says they're turning away from the Gospel of Christ, and they're turning away from Paul, the messenger of this Gospel. Chapter 1 verse 6, he says you're deserting it all, you're deserting Christ himself.

I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting him who called you. Very serious. Chapter 5 verse 1 that we read, shows that they're standing on the very brink of apostasy, of losing everything.

If you submit again to slavery, he says, to circumcision, you're going to lose everything. Stand firm. Or else, look what he says, verse 4, you're severed from Christ.

[7 : 35] You've fallen away from grace. Paul's shouting, rather like seeing a toddler just on the brink of crossing a road, or going off the curb, and a car coming.

He's shouting, no, stop, don't do it. It's a real crisis. It's not all lost just yet.

But it very, very nearly is, in this huge danger. That's why he's writing. And notice here, he's writing a real warning, a very, very real warning, to these believers, lest they be severed from Christ, lest they fall away.

We know Paul was a Calvinist, but he can still write real warnings. Why has this happened? How can this possibly, have come about so quickly?

Well, chapter 1, verse 7, gives us the answer, doesn't it? Some who trouble you, and want to distort, the gospel of Christ, have come in.

[8 : 42] So, Paul has gone on, and later on, other missionaries, we might call them Jewish Christian missionaries, from Jerusalem, they've come, and they've offered something more.

Something a bit better, something, something a little bit more advanced, than the basic Christianity, of the Apostle Paul. That's how we might put it.

When something like this, well, well, of course, they said, Paul is a grand fellow, he's a great evangelist, yes, he's a super chap. But remember, Paul's not so much of a teacher, is he?

He's really, he's really an evangelist, at a church plant, you can't expect that. I mean, he doesn't have the background, he, you know, he didn't train at Jerusalem, with the Jerusalem apostles, he came into the ministry, a bit late, and he's got great gifts, and we're all on the same side.

It's just that we've got, a complimentary ministry to him. In fact, you might say, we've got a supplementary ministry, to Paul. Paul's gospel was fine, for the ABC of salvation, and it got you going, and we praise the Lord for that.

[9 : 50] But, well, now you're ready for more. And we, you see, we can give you that fuller, that more authentic gospel.

We can give you, that full experience, with all the richness, of the Jewish heritage. With all the authority, of the, the Jerusalem origin, where it all began.

And once you've grasped, the wonderfully, spiritually, enriching benefits, of in this case, circumcision, and, and the food customs, the calendars of the Jews, once, once you've experienced that, you, you really will have, the full, gospel, experience.

You'll be, you'll be part of the full, or, New Testament church. That's what you need, you see. Nothing different. No, it's not different, from Paul's gospel.

Nothing less. It's just a little bit more. Just a little bit more. You see, we're in Galatia, in the first century, but we could just as well, be in Glasgow, in the 21st century, couldn't we?

[11 : 00] The, the lure of, the full gospel, or the fuller gospel, or something promising, just a bit more, a bit better, than the basic, Christian experience. That, that's been something, that has plagued, the Christian church, all, down the ages.

Still does today. It's so common, and it's so common, especially, among young, and immature, and keen, Christian believers.

Isn't that right? Troubles, you see, who come along, and erode the assurance, that we have, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And offer more, to draw us into the, the real group, the advanced, Christian, experience group.

I remember, when I was, at university, in halls of residence, and there was a girl, in the halls, who had been converted, quite recently, and was coming on, greatly in the faith. She's having a bit, of a struggling time, and she'd gone to chat, to this other chap, who was a Christian, in the hall.

And I heard, that what he'd been saying, to her was this, well you see, the reason that you're struggling, is because, you haven't yet been baptized, in a river outside. And if you could get baptized, in the river Don, that would be really, what God wants you to do.

[12 : 16] And things would be much better. Well I tell you, the only experience you get, from being baptized, in a river in Scotland, is an experience, of being frozen to death. You see, what he was saying was, well, there's just a little bit more.

Well, yes you're a new believer, but tell me this, have you yet experienced, the full experience, of the Holy Spirit? Ah, you see, that's why, you're not experiencing, the power in your life, that you want.

You need that, you see, and then, you'll really belong. Or this, ah yes, of course we recognize you, as a real believer, a real Christian, but, but you have to admit, you're not really, yet, in true communion, with the mother church, are you?

What you need to do, is submit to Rome, come into the fold, of, the true, global, Catholic church, and then you'll really, be a proper Christian.

You see? And that's why Paul, you see, is so passionate, so urgent, so angry, in this letter, he says, no! To add, anything to my gospel, even one whit, is to take, everything away from it.

[13 : 43] It's to subtract, everything, from the grace of God. That's why he says, in chapter 5, verse 4, you'll be severed, from Christ. Yes! It's to fall away, from grace, to do that, not to advance in it.

In chapter 2, verse 21, he says, that means, to say that Christ, died for no purpose. No purpose. For nothing. Sure, it can't be that serious.

Surely not. What, I mean, what possible difference, can, a few little things like this, make? A few innocent customs, a few, helpful insights, from other traditions. I mean, at Presbytery, the other night, we were being asked to applaud, because the church, had set aside an area, for icons, so that they could have, friends from the Russian, Orthodox Church, coming in, and doing things.

I can't say anything, about the fact that, the Russian Orthodox Church, systematically persecutes, Christians all over Russia, and all over, the ex-Soviet Republic, those who love the Lord Jesus.

Well, Paul doesn't agree, you see, that this sort of thing, doesn't matter. Now, that he's mistaken, as, we have to say, many modern scholars, think he is. Or are we mistaken?

[15 : 01] No, Paul's striking, opening greetings, show that there's something wrong. And it shows us, that the very gospel itself, is at stake. And that's why, he's willing to wade in, in such a tough way, with this church, that he loves.

It's even clearer, when we turn to verses 3 to 5, when we see a striking, opening summary, striking summary, of the apostolic message, about Christ, where he, he summarizes the meaning, and the implications, of Christ's work.

And he reveals that, a huge clash, of eternal proportions, is at stake. The very future of the gospel, is on the line. Now you see, this is so difficult for us, because we live in a world, of relativism, of tolerance.

These really are the twin gods, of our society today, isn't that right? We just, find it so hard, to believe that, battle lines like this, need to be drawn anywhere. It's also demeaning, it's, it's also wrong.

Why can't we all just, get along? Why can't we all just, bury the hatchet? Why, why can't we all just, live together, in one happy family? Well that's precisely, what Paul is wanting, the Galatians 2 do? But you can't do that, by abandoning the truth.

[16:18] You can only do that, by cherishing, the truth of the gospel. Paul says, no, unless we fight, to preserve, the truth of the gospel, the gospel, that unites, all together, in Christ, by virtue of their, of their justification, by virtue of their acceptance, with God alone, then everything is lost.

Acceptance with God, you see, is through the gospel, of Christ alone. And so, your acceptance, of one another, must be through, the gospel of Christ alone.

And on that basis, you mustn't, add anything else. You can't add anything else. As a condition, of your accepting, other Christians. That's why, when we gather, around the Lord's table, we make the point, of saying that, this is not our table, this congregation, or our denomination, it's the Lord's table.

And all, who truly love, the Lord Jesus Christ, are welcome, to eat at his table, with us. That's the gospel. I couldn't do that, if I was a Roman Catholic priest.

I couldn't say that. Not in full communion, with us. Come sit at our table, unless you add these things, to the gospel. The yoke of Rome.

[17:41] In Galatia, you see, if the apostle Peter, can't eat with a Gentile believer, unless that believer, is circumcised, unless that believer, takes upon themselves, the yoke of Judaism, then everything's lost.

Isn't that right? Some of you here, I know, have experienced that, very close to home.

Some of you, I know, come from, close brethren backgrounds, and you know, what I'm talking about. You know, the great pain, and the division, that's happened in, in families, even.

You refuse to eat together, because, you're not, one of us, any longer. The gospel alone, is not enough.

It's got to be the gospel, and, our way of doing things. I know, some of you here, suffer great pain, because of that. That, you see, destroys the gospel.

[18:39] And that's why, Paul's so ferocious, in his opposition here. Look at his summary, of the gospel, in verses 3 to 5. The whole letter, in a way, is here. It's Christ alone, it's faith alone, it's the new creation alone.

That's what freedom is. Look at verse 4. He speaks about, Christ's work for us. He gave himself, for our sins. That's Christ, for our justification.

Christ, beginning our new life. But, and, as well as that, it's Christ's work, in us. To deliver us, from this present evil age.

That's Christ, for our sanctification, for our ongoing walk, with him. Christ, for our past, and Christ, for our present, and our future.

Forever. Christ, for the life of the age to come, which has begun in us now. Paul, you see, is the apostle, of the new creation. He makes it so clear here. Verse 1, he's not from men, from this present evil age.

[19:41] He's not a religious teacher. He's a herald, from another world, from the new creation. That's where his commission came from. What's his message?

It's a message, that brings you, out of this present evil age, into the new creation. A message, that delivers, from the past, through Christ's work, on the cross, through Christ's death, for sin.

A message, which brings us, into the new age, through Christ's, risen life, in us, by his spirit.

Galatians 2.20. So, part of the old age, you are no longer.

And that's God's, great purpose. Do you see verse 5? It's his will, that the gospel is about, eternal realities. It's according to the will of God, to whom be glory, forever, and ever.

God's plan, is to glorify himself, by recreating the cosmos, through Christ. That's, what his plan is. That's what his will is. And that's the only thing, that counts.

[20:48] That's why, at the end of the letter, in chapter 6, verse 15, we read almost the same thing. Neither circumcision, counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. That's the only thing, that counts.

And that's what the gospels, all about. It's not about, making this world, a better place. It's about rescue, from this miserable, sin-stained world, into the hope, of the glory, of the new creation. That's what the gospel is. It's not about politics. It's not about social campaigns. It's not about peace marches. It's not about, chains to rid the world of debt.

There may be a place, for these things, but that's not the gospel. And doing those things, is not the mission, of the church. God's bringing about, a new creation, the new heavens, and the new earth. And the gospel, is that that new creation, has begun. Now. The coming of Jesus Christ. Look at chapter 4, verse 4, and verse 6, that we read earlier.

[21 : 55] Paul's saying, you see that the gospel, has begun in history, in the fullness of the time, when Christ came, the fullness of the time, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those, under the law.

The new age, began in history, at that time. But the new age, also began, in our experience. Verse 6, when we believed, and we received, the Holy Spirit.

Because your sons, God sent the spirit, of his son, into our hearts. So as Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 5, if anyone is in Christ, behold, new creation.

It's begun. It's there. It's now. That's why, in verse 3, of chapter 3, he says, you began with the spirit. And all the way, through chapter 5, and chapter 6, he says, so go on with the spirit, walk in the spirit, keep in step, with the spirit, and ultimately, chapter 6, verse 8, you will reap, eternal life, from the spirit.

Stand firm, go on, live out that life now, the life which has begun, of the new creation, which will finally come, at the end.

[23 : 12] And that's why, Paul's imperatives, why his commands, in Galatians, that come in chapter 5, are to go on, walking in the spirit, to stand firm. chapter 5, verse 16, stand firm, and walk in the spirit, in your individual lives, in your battle, against the flesh, the obedient, walk in the spirit.

And in your corporate lives, walk in the unity, of the spirit, you're all one, in Christ Jesus, he says in 328. Walk in that unity, of the spirit's fellowship.

That's the gospel, the gospel of the age to come, but it's begun now. The coming of the Holy Spirit, when you believe. And what you've got to do, is live out that reality, now.

There can't be any going back. Don't you see, a new creation, has begun. That's why he says, that going back, is not just astonishing.

I'm astonished, chapter 1, verse 6, that you're so quickly, deserting. It's not just astonishing, but chapter 3, verse 1, it's much more serious, it's foolish. Oh foolish Galatians. Worse, it's madness, who's bewitched you.

[24 : 30] Worse still, it's disloyalty. It's not just deserting, the gospel, he says. Chapter 1, verse 6, you're deserting, him who called you. You're deserting, Christ himself.

In other words, to go back, from what has already begun, is to reject, Christ, and everything he stands for. You're scorning his death, he died for no purpose.

You're cutting yourself off, totally from him. And that is the really shocking issue, you see, in Galatians. What Paul is saying, is that you can, you can claim to be Christian, but you can destroy the gospel itself, by your actions.

By your failure to live out, the consequences, of the message of the gospel. You see, chapter 2, verse 14, about Peter and Barnabas, their conduct was not in step, with the truth of the gospel. And that's why, Paul had to front up to him. Because what Peter was doing, what Barnabas was doing, was wrecking the faith. Destroying the gospel. Very shocking, isn't it, that you can, claim to have the orthodox faith, but you can destroy the gospel, by what you add, to the free grace of Christ, in reality.

[25 : 58] Where, you really put the emphasis, in the way you behave. Where a fellowship, really puts the emphasis, and what it really makes important.

And Paul says, by doing that, you're adding to the gospel, and therefore destroying it. And that's deadly serious. Friends, that's what's, so weakened and destroyed, the witness of the church, in so many places, down the ages.

So often, there's been a, a shocking, sectarian spirit, over truly secondary issues, truly trivial things. But, when secondary things, and trivial things, which are legitimate differences, we always have them, of course.

But when those things, are raised up to the level, of being the, the only thing, that really counts, in this church, we destroy the gospel. Might be on the one extreme, well, you make such an issue, of gifts of the spirit, of speaking in tongues, or whatever it might be, that that really becomes, the only thing that's important.

Or it might be, in another way, that being truly reformed, in your theology, oh, is so important, that you destroy the gospel.

[27 : 26] Because you will not tolerate, somebody who just can't, dot every I, and cross every T, of whatever it is, that makes you tick. Might be that, well, the really important thing, in this church, is that we are, pre, post, a, millennial, dispensational, whatever it might be.

And that's what's really important. And we laugh, but this is what happens, in the church of Jesus Christ. And it destroys, the gospel, of freedom.

And Paul says, no, the only thing, that really counts, is the new creation. And the freedom, of the new creation.

It's a sad truth, that the conduct, of churches, and of individual believers, can, and has, very often, destroyed, the gospel, for others.

Just think of the fallout, that there is, after, a Christian leader, has maybe deserted, the truth, in their own life, or, has fallen into scandal.

[28 : 37] I've, seen that happen. I've seen the fallout. So have you. The striking thing here, is that the Galatians, themselves, almost certainly, had no inkling at all, that this is what was going on.

This is what they were doing. They thought, they were advancing. They thought, that they were getting, deeper in, to the life of faith, that they were getting, more spiritual. And Paul says, no, you're going back, to slavery.

You're going back, to the miserable things, of this world. You're going back, to unbelief, and paganism. And they were shocked. They thought, the very opposite.

And that's a danger, you see, of false teaching, that adds to the gospel. It's great, it disguises. Dresses itself up, as the most, true of the truth.

How on earth? Why? How could these people, be so easily duped? How could they be, so easily taken in? We're going to see, as we go through the letter, that there are, a number of things.

[29 : 40] These teachers, were very impressive. They were very plausible. They were very attractive. Four things, at least. We'll see, as we come through the letter.

They came with, very, sound, and impressive, ecclesiastical, credentials. They came from Jerusalem, from the establishment. These are the apostles, who were with Jesus, properly, you know.

That's what the teachers, would have said. They're not against, Paul, of course, but, we represent, a higher authority, than Paul, than his, rather simple gospel.

Friends, that is a very, powerful, lure. It's very often, the lure of, the church of Rome today. We see people, constantly, don't we, in the news, going across to Rome.

Well, there's all the history, there's the tradition, there's all the finery, there's all the cutoff, there's all of that. It's very magnificent, very attractive. And you're feeling, you lack assurance yourself.

[30 : 44] All I have, is just this Bible, in front of me. Very attractive. And that's why, Paul gives, such a strict, defense of himself, in the first two chapters, of Galatians, in his own ministry.

Not from man. Not from the apostles, in Jerusalem. But from God himself. Secondly, they came with, apparently, very, very sound, theological credentials, you see.

They come with, the full weight, of the Old Testament, faith behind them. Faith of Abraham, and of Moses. Oh yes. And remember, our Lord Jesus said, salvation is of the Jews.

Mm-hmm. The Bible's on our side, you see. We've got, the whole story. We've got Moses, we've got Abraham. That's very powerful too, isn't it?

Especially for new believers. When people come with, very impressive, knowledge, and use of the Bible. One reason, why the first thing, new believers need to do, is to get to know, the Bible properly themselves.

[31 : 44] Because the Bible, can be misused. And Paul's defense, in chapters three and four, of this letter, are that in fact, that is exactly, what the false teachers, were doing. They were misusing the Bible, and misunderstanding it.

It's not them, who are the truth, of the Old Testament. It's Paul's gospel. We'll see that. And they came with, apparently, very sound, and good motives.

Well, we want to fully, integrate, the Gentiles, into the people of God, into the chosen people of God, into God's true Israel.

Again, that's very, very powerful, isn't it? We want to have, and give you, the true, New Testament, Christian experience. Isn't that right? That's why Paul, has to expose them, that their motives, weren't good.

Chapter 6, verse 13. They just want to boast, in your flesh. In fact, they just want to avoid, persecution for the cross. All very impressive, you see. Perhaps, most of all, most of all, they came with, a supremely seductive, and attractive promise.

[32 : 54] Why do people, still, throughout Christian churches, why do they seek, after something more? Something more, than just the basic gospel, that you began with. Something, some power, some experience, some secret, whatever it is.

Why is it, why is it, that you and I, attempted for that? The answer is, because, the Christian life, is hard. Because, it's a struggle.

That's why. Because, the law in Christ, the life of the new creation, has already come to us, now, by the Holy Spirit, there's still, and not yet, in the Christian experience.

So, like this morning, the Holy Spirit, is in us, yes, but it's not, the end of the story. That's why, chapter 5, verse 5, is such a crucial verse. What's the Holy Spirit, Spirit's ministry?

What is, what is his work, within the believer? Chapter 5, verse 5, through the Spirit, we wait, for the hope, of righteousness.

[33 : 57] The eternal life, that we shall reap, chapter 6, verse 8, the one who sows, the Spirit, will reap, from the Spirit, eternal life, but not, yet, not yet.

Wonderful, as life is, in the Holy Spirit, in Christ, there are struggles, aren't there? Because, we're still in bodies, of flesh, we're still in bodies, that belong to this evil age.

At least, I am. In fact, looking at you, you all are too. And, chapter 5, verse 17, tells us very clearly, that the desires, of the flesh, are against, the desires, of the Spirit.

And so, if the Spirit, is in our body, of flesh, there's going to be, struggle, isn't there? It's going to be hard. It's going to be a battle. And people get battle weary.

Don't you get battle weary? Don't you get, weary, battling, with your body, of flesh? Hard enough, waging the battle, of the bulge, never mind the battle, with the flesh. We all face struggles, don't we?

[35 : 02] We've got pressures within. The flesh, and its desires. And chapter 5, is all about that. They're real, and they're present. And that is just, what the keen, earnest, determined, new Christian, feels so keenly.

Isn't that right? So many failures, in my life. So disappointed, in myself. So little progress. Oh, I'm getting nowhere. Almost driving, to despair.

Haven't you felt like that? Maybe I'm not a proper Christian, after all. Maybe, maybe I'm missing something. Maybe there's something else. Well, let me speak to you about this.

You see? We all have struggles within, many of us have many struggles without. There's the real hardship, and for some, there's persecution, for those who are of the flesh.

The world's scorn, the world's derision, sometimes worse. Seems that there were, Jewish, zealots in Jerusalem, stirring up trouble, and, the Christian Jews, in Jerusalem, in the church, there were being persecuted.

[36 : 09] There was great pressure, pressure to perform, to bring peace. How wonderfully attractive, then, when somebody comes along, with a message, and says, this will bring the end, of all your struggles.

All your struggles, without and within, will be met, by this, new, advanced, gospel teaching. No more struggle, with sin, you see, do you want to be really holy?

Well, here, listen to this. This is what you need. This is what you need, for that full orb, experience of holiness. You just need to live, according to the law, you see, like the Jews. That's how to be holy, that's why God gave the law, to make his people holy, isn't that right?

That's how to bridle, the passions of the flesh. Let me just explain to you, seven steps, to perfect sanctification, through the law. Here it was, the Jewish Torah, the way of Moses, but it can be anything, anything at all, from the old order, from the flesh, from the present age, any religious system, anything, added to the gospel of Jesus.

Special laws, special knowledge, special experiences, whatever it is, to give you victory, over sin. The reality, friends, the reality, is that these things, offer no victory, at all, over sin.

[37 : 31] They just help us, to pretend away sin, to make sin, seem as though, it's manageable, by a few rituals. All that's doing, is pretending, that sin is much, much less serious, than it is. All it is, is a cop out, from the reality, of a life, of ongoing, crucifying the flesh, by walking, in the spirit.

But it's so attractive, isn't it? So also, the promise, of no more struggles, without, no more persecution, no more non-acceptance, ah, just a little compromise, with the establishment, you see, and, well they'll accept you, there'll be no more scorn, just a little cop, painful for a few days, and then, joy.

Once you've shown, you're really back, in the establishment again, well, if you like, nobody's going to object, to having that, Christ thing as well, and having that on the side, but, come on, play the game, don't rock the boat, that's what really matters.

Isn't that what, so many of us face? At work, or, school, or the university, just, just don't make, the gospel of Christ, the main thing. Just add this little thing, to show that you're really, one of us after all.

And you've done that, everything's lost. That's what Paul's saying. A very strong pull, in the ecclesiastical establishment, see it, with evangelicals, and church structures, just give a little bit.

[39 : 05] I mean, for the wider good, of the church at large, it'll really be important. Just, just, just make that little cut, just add those little things, those little badges of loyalty, that show that really, you're part of the establishment.

Friends, I've seen it. You go that way, and it's all lost. Just a little time, there's no gospel at all. And Paul says, no, no, no, don't buy it.

All these people want to do, is boast about your flesh. They just want to say, oh, they're in our group now. All they want to do, is avoid the inevitable, persecution, for the cross of Christ.

But no, the only thing that counts, is the new creation. The only thing that counts, is the age to come. Paul says, the gospel is about eternity.

It's about the future. It's about glory, forever and ever. It's not about, present, acceptance, and peace, and satisfaction, in all things.

[40 : 10] It has begun now, yes. If it's, if it's yours in Christ, if the Holy Spirit is in you, you've got it all. You've come from the old age, to the new. He says, you're sons, you're no longer slaves.

You've got it. You're in the age of the Spirit, and you've got it, but you're still an heir. There's still a future. There's a not yet. And life now, is a life of eagerly awaiting, that final consummation.

Waiting, through the Spirit, by faith. That is, the life of the Holy Spirit. That is the Spirit-filled life. The Spirit-filled life, is the fight of faith. Isn't that right?

Isn't that your experience? Of course it is. A Christian life, a fight. And if you don't grasp that, if you don't understand that, you will inevitably end, in despair, in depression, in a desire to give up.

And you will be in danger, of falling prey, to all kinds, of seductive offers. You're experiencing defeat, and disappointment. Well, you've made a good start, but, you need a little bit more.

[41 : 30] And then you're into, two-tier Christianity. You've added, another requirement, for full entry, and full experience, of the Kingdom of God.

But no, you haven't. What you've done, is you've destroyed, the Gospel of Grace alone. And you've enslaved yourself, to this present evil age, in all its ways.

No, says Paul, the only true freedom, is the way of the cross. You died to sin, you were crucified, with Christ. And you go on, dying to sin. That's the life, of Christ, in you, by the Spirit.

And if, the life that's in you, is the life of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, then it must be, a life of struggle. Because the Spirit, wars against the flesh.

And your body, is still a body of flesh. But that struggle, friends, is evidence, of the new creation, at work in you. It's evidence, of what has begun, and what will, at the last day, give you eternal life, Paul says, if you don't give up.

[42 : 40] If you don't give up. And that's why, in his letter, he says, stand firm. Stand firm. And we're going to see, as we go through Galatians, just how relevant, that is today.

But just as we close tonight, let me ask you this. Are you struggling? Are you struggling, struggling within, despairing maybe, at your own lack of holiness, your lack of progress, your lack of peace?

Are you tempted, by the seduction, of things that would offer you, an end to all of these struggles?

Are you tempted, perhaps with, persecutions, and things without?

Tempted to add, a little bit of, acceptable religion, to your faith? Maybe it's your family, they're not Christians, they, want you to be, just a little bit, less fanatical.

Look, you can have a wee bit, of that religion, but not too much. Don't let it wreck, your career. Are you tempted, by that? Maybe it's more, maybe for some of you.

[43 : 43] It's the great testing, of a spouse, another family member, who's forcing you, to choose between Christ, and then. Paul says, stand firm.

That way, doesn't take you to freedom, that way, takes you to slavery. God's will, is unstoppable. His purpose, is for a new creation.

And that's the only thing, that counts. And you've begun, with the spirit of Christ, and you go on, in the spirit of Christ, and you will reap, eternal life, from him, by his grace alone.

So don't give up. Don't look back. Stand firm. The stakes are very, very high. They couldn't be higher. Don't risk slavery.

Think of it. Slavery. Don't risk, losing Christ, altogether. By seeking, more than Christ, and his cross.

[44 : 43] That's the gospel, that saves you, right to the end. From the beginning, in the middle, and until the day of Christ. It's the gospel, of the grace, of God, in Christ, alone.

There is no more, than that. If you have Christ, you have his spirit, in your heart, you have it all.

That's the message, of Galatians.

Paul says, stand firm. The gospel, of Christ, the gospel, of grace, is the only thing, that counts. The gospel, of the new creation. Don't turn back.

Don't add, anything else. Don't listen, to anything, that offers you more. Because all it does, is utterly destroy, everything you have.

Stand firm. It's the only thing, that counts. Well, let's pray. Thank you.