

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

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Introduction to Galatians

This wonderful book is the only book Paul wrote that was not addressed to a singular church or to a singular individual. He communicated these biblical truths to a geographical region known as Galatia (modern day Turkey).

Paul passed through this area on both his first and second evangelistic trips which can be seen by reading Acts chapter 15 through chapter 20. After much teaching and preaching to these people, congregations (unknown how many) were established and thriving. After his departure false teachers entered the area and set about undermining the freedoms acquired in pure Christianity. These first-century disciples of the devil led some astray by teaching that incorporating parts of Judaism along with Christianity was the only right way.

It was to correct these false teachers and their false doctrines that Paul, guided by the Holy Ghost, penned these inspired words. The people who were converted to Christianity needed to be brought back to the purity of the gospel of Christ.

Those Judaizing teachers did not have a proper understanding of the law given by God to Moses nor did they properly understand the promise given to Abraham. The books of Galatians and Romans, along with the book of Hebrews should forever settle the matter; mixing and mingling any teaching with the doctrine of Christ will result in being out of fellowship with God and if unrepented, will condemn a soul to eternal punishment. This is true of anyone believing and following these lies.

This powerful book reveals that the emancipation from bondage of every kind will make, once and for all time, the clear relation of Christ to the law. The gospel, plus nothing else, is all that any person of any age needs to be free from sin.

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GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Deliverance; 1:4 (#1)

As the apostle Paul begins his letter to the churches of Galatia he is reminding these young Christians of the deliverance Christ has provided through His death. Galatians 1:4 reads, “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.”

Notice four specific points Paul makes concerning Christ’s deliverance:

He gave Himself “for our sins.” In both Matthew 20:28 and 1 Timothy 2:6 it states that His life was given as a “ransom.” In the verse in Matthew the word means “to release from bondage” and in 1 Timothy the means “a redemption price paid.”

The verse goes on to say, “[T]hat he might deliver us from the present evil world.” We will look at the three words, “present evil world” separately.

“Present” indicates that we need to be delivered from what is going on around us at this present time. As Christians we have been delivered from our past sins. We repented of those and were baptized for their forgiveness Acts 2:38). We do not need to be delivered from some future world. If we remain faithful our home will be in heaven (Matt 10:22; 24:13). The temptations and problems of this present world can be overcome through Christ, our Deliverer.

“Evil” is all around us. The world itself is not evil. God created it exactly as He wanted it to be (Gen 1:31). But, there is evil in the world because of the devil influence and man’s corruption (Eph 5:16). Christ can deliver us from this evil (2 Tim 4:18).

“World” can be used in at least three different ways within scripture. The earth as a sphere is one way (Ps 90:2). It can also refer to all of mankind (John 2:15). And, as the case of this verse, it can refer to the wicked influences of our world. As Christians we should have no desire to go back into the world.

It was God’s will that Jesus die for us to deliver us from “this present evil world.”

Galatians 1:4 is a gem of a verse.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Another gospel; Gal 1:6, 7 (#2)

The word “gospel” means ‘good news.’ That ‘good news’ is the fact that Jesus came to die for our sins and reconcile us to God via our obedience (Heb 5:9). The members of the churches of Christ in Galatia had obeyed the saving gospel. In verse 6 of our text Paul marveled that the Galatians could be “so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.” This verse reveals several interesting points about the gospel.

First, it is obvious that it makes a difference what we believe. Paul was astonished (marvel) that these Christians could be “removed from him that called you.” Who had called them? God had called them through the preaching of the gospel (Gal 1:8, 9). When they (or anyone) follows something other than the pure, unadulterated gospel they remove themselves from God. Since it is God who called us, (2 Tim 1:8, 9) if we leave the gospel we separate ourselves from God.

Secondly, verse 7 begins with, “Which is not another (gospel).” Any perversion or alteration to the one pure gospel is something other than the gospel by which God has called mankind. “Another gospel,” in the case of the Galatians was, teachers would say something like, go ahead and follow the New Testament, but then include some of the teachings from the Old Testament, such as, circumcision, ten commandments, etc. The moment something is added to the gospel, or as soon as something is removed from the gospel it becomes “another gospel.” A false gospel. A soul damning gospel.

God’s word is perfect (1 Cor 13:10). Mankind cannot improve upon what God has given us. We must be careful to preach, practice and promote the pure gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-4).

The plea of the churches of Christ is for mankind to accept and obey the saving gospel as revealed in the New Testament.

These two verses are gems from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The perverted gospel; 1:6-9 (#3)

The word “pervert” in Galatians 1:7 deals with the ones who were troubling the Galatians with an altered gospel. Here the word means to corrupt or to deviate. This same word is used in two other scriptures where it is translated “to turn,” which means transmute (Acts 2:20; James 4:9). The Oxford Dictionary says that transmute means to “change in form, nature or substance.”

A perverted gospel will not save souls. How do people pervert the gospel in the 21st century? In every way that is not in strict accordance with the written word. Some examples would be, but not limited to: saying one church is as good as another (Matt 16:18; Eph 4:4, 5) by saying a person can be saved without being baptized (Mark 16:16) by saying mechanical instruments of music are alright to use in worship (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).

Paul emphasized in this quartet of verses that no one has the right to change the gospel. Not any man, not an apostle of Christ, not even an angel from heaven has the right to change a single word of the gospel.

At the end of verse 8 are the words “let him be accursed.” Verse 9 ends with the same words – which is a reference to anyone who would pervert the gospel in any way. If Paul, writing through inspiration, gave no place (Gal 2:5) to false teachers of his day, what makes us think God will tolerate the false teachers of today?

We need men and women with back-bones strong enough to stand up to any and all false teachers - not just denominational or world religion false teachers, but those within the body who would pervert the simple saving truth of the gospel. This requires dedicated Bible study so we can know truth from error. We need to know the scriptures well enough to defend that with which has God has endowed His faithful followers. May God give us strength and knowledge.

Verses 6-9 are gems of Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Pleasing God or men; 1:10 (#4)

It is paramount in our spiritual lives to seek to please God. An important fact that not everyone seems to understand is that everything in religion does not please God. Being religious and being a Christian are not necessarily the same thing. Paul, the apostle, before his conversion was a very religious man. He was also very wrong. He had to be converted from his old, unauthorized religion to the one acceptable religion (Eph 4:4, 5).

As we do our best to live religious lives we need to ask ourselves, am I to please God or men? Maybe we could ask ourselves, am I pleasing God or myself? If we please men, or if we please ourselves we are not servants of Christ. The text reads, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

Maybe another good question to ask ourselves is do I neglect the soul to please the flesh? Let us make God’s will first in our lives (Matt 6:33). He will not forsake us if we make decisions to please Him (John 8:29).

Some things that will please God; having a faith that believes that God will reward those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6); making the decision to do good in this world; sharing what we have been blessed with; making sacrifices to help those who need help (Heb 13:16); asking God to bless us with those things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:22).

If we make the decision to please God and not to please men, or ourselves, we will be in a position to hear those glorious words, “well done, thou good and faithful servant...” (Matt 25:21, 23).

Paul was determined to please God. Will you make the choice?

Galatians 1:10 is a gem of a verse.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The certified gospel; 1:11 (#5)

The KJV of the Bible records these words in Gal 1:11, “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.” In our world we all understand what it means to be certified. A doctor has to be certified to practice medicine. A teacher has to be certified to teach classes. The same is true with plumbers, mechanics, A/C repairmen and truck drivers. When we want it done right we look for someone ‘certified’ to do the job. Otherwise, we might not get what we bargained for.

This is exactly the point Paul is making to the churches of Christ in Galatia. If you want salvation, stay within the ‘certified’ gospel of Christ. Our faith must not rest in the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:5). God’s power to save is in the gospel (Rom 1:16) and nowhere else.

According to Strong’s Concordance one of the definitions of the word “certify” is “to make known or to know.” In order for your beef to be ‘certified’ it has to pass many tests and qualifications before it receives the ‘certified’ stamp. When your beef is ‘certified’ you can trust it to be of a certain quality. The same is true of the ‘certified’ gospel.

If someone teaches that salvation, or justification, can be obtained at the point of faith they are teaching an uncertified gospel. Faith is necessary, but it is the first step in God’s plan for salvation, not the last, or the only step (Heb 11:6). In Hebrews 11 faith is attributed to each of the faithful giants of the Old Testament. In every case listed in Hebrews 11 faith was followed by action. By faith Abel offered (Heb 11:4), by faith Enoch was translated (11:5), by faith Noah built (11:7), by faith Abraham moved (11:8, 9), etc. Faith alone is not part of the ‘certified’ gospel.

Salvation today is found only in the ‘certified’ gospel (Gal 1:6). The ‘certified’ gospel says to believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16).

The ‘certified’ gospel in 1:11 is a gem from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The church of God; 1:13 (#6)

We can see from this powerful verse many facets of the church. It, the church, is something that can be “persecuted.” This is a word we should not pass over quickly. If the church can be “persecuted” then the church is not a material building. We cannot “go to church,” we cannot “invite people to church.” We can go to worship and we can invite people to worship and Bible study. Brick and mortar do not make a church. People make a church. The word comes from two Greek words put together, the first means “out from” (Greek=Ek), the second means “to call” (Greek=Kaleo). The “ekklesia” is the called out of the world, not some building.

The church (ekklesia) are people who have been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9). Can a person be saved without being called out of darkness? Can a person be saved without being called into the light of God’s word? If the answer is no, then it follows that a person cannot be saved without being part of the church we read about in the Bible.

A building cannot be persecuted. Yet, Paul did persecute the church in Jerusalem according to Acts 8:1, 3. Paul persecuted the church when he persecuted the disciples (Acts 9:1).

The church of God is the church of Christ. The only New Testament church God has ever authorized has Christ as the head (Eph 5:23). Christ built the church (Matt 16:18). Christ gave Himself for it (Eph 5:25). Christ cleansed and sanctified it (Eph 5:26). He is the one and only head of the church (Col 1:18).

Paul said he “persecuted the church of God and wasted it.” Yet, Jesus said in Acts 9:4 “...why persecutest thou me.” There is no contradiction in these verses. The church of God is the church of Christ (The church of God is not a reference to the modern day denomination. No denomination is ever mentioned anywhere in scriptures! Therefore, all of them are unscriptural).

Knowledge of the church of God is another gem from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The Jews' religion; 1:13, 14 (#7)

Paul makes mention of the religion he came out of, twice, in these two verses. What a wonderful example this mighty man of God is for all who want to serve God acceptably. Once he understood that he was wrong religiously, he wanted to change in order to get right with God.

Originally, the Jews had a pure religion. They followed hundreds of commandments given by God, centering around the ten commandments given on Mount Saini (Ex 20). Paul was well schooled in this religion. Verse 14 even says, "And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in my own nation..." The word "profited" means he advanced or increased. His zealotness for Moses' law gave him notoriety and honor among the Jewish religion. Then something happened to Paul. He learned better.

While persecuting the church of Christ Paul had an encounter with the risen Christ on the road going to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5). Many in our modern world misunderstand what happened next. Paul was not saved on the road to Damascus. He was told by the risen Christ to go into the city "...and it will be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). After three days of prayer and fasting a preacher came to Paul with these instructions, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

Paul finally understood that he was embracing a religion that was wrong (unauthorized) in God's sight. Many members of the churches of Christ are people, who, just like Paul, have finally understood that being religious is not enough, we must be religiously right. Many of us have given up denominationalism to get right with God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is our sincere plea that all will do so.

That is why Paul can now write, via inspiration, about "the Jews' religion." He was no longer a part of that old, unauthorized religious movement. He was now a Christian, added to the Lord's church by God Himself through obedience (Acts 2:41-47).

Galatians 1:13, 14 shine like gems for all who want to be right religiously.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Called by God's grace; 1:15, 16 (#8)

This marvelous verse begins with the words, “But when it pleased God...” The context of this verse lies within the two verses preceding it. There Paul was writing of his misguided attempt to please God in an unauthorized religion. When he realized his error, God, by His own grace, allowed Paul to be saved through baptism and obedience (Acts 22:16; Heb 5:9). We should be very much concerned with what pleases God.

We know that God is pleased with the preaching of His word (1 Cor 1:21). We also know from verse 16 that it pleased God to reveal Christ to both Jews and Gentiles through the preaching efforts of Paul.

“Separated” from his mother’s womb indicates that it had always been God’s plan to use Paul in just this fashion. Similar language is used of the mighty prophets of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah (Isa 49:1) and Jeremiah (1:5). Paul begins the letter to the Romans with, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). We often do not know where the roads of life will lead us, but God knows! He gave us the Bible to guide us through the ups and downs and confusions of this life. He watches intently to see if we will take the proper steps, navigate the proper turns, make the wise decisions of life. Our soul’s salvation depends on our choices.

Paul did not know he would be a powerful force (maybe the greatest force of the first century church) while he was persecuting the churches of Christ. But, God had plans for him. Dear friend, God has plans for you too. Will you make the same decision Paul made in the long ago? Accept God’s grace through obedience.

Many today do not think it necessary to change religions in order to be pleasing to God. Paul knew he had to give up that which does not please God (unauthorized religion) in order to embrace pure, unadulterated Christianity.

Verses 15 and 16 are true gems from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Paul meets Peter: 1:15-19 (#9)

In these five fine verses we see Paul establishing the fact that the gospel he preached did not come from man. He plainly states, “I conferred not with flesh and blood” in verse 16. In the next verse he states he did not go “up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia, and returned to Damascus.”

I have long believed that this passage parallels what we read in Acts 9 where Luke tells us of Paul’s conversion to the church of Christ. Galatians 1:15-19 fit perfectly in between verses 22 and 23 of Acts 9. Luke records, “And after that many days were fulfilled...” Those many days were the three years Paul spent in Arabia. The Bible truly is a masterpiece.

Most uneducated or easily influenced religious people are convinced Peter was the head of the early church. That he set up control in the city of Rome. I ask, where is the scripture that says so? The text plainly declares Paul went to Jerusalem to visit with Peter, not to Rome. Where is the verse that states Peter was ever in Rome?

Paul was in Rome. Acts 28:30 has him living there for two consecutive years. Luke, the inspired writer of the book of Acts, never mentions Peter being in town. We cannot let the traditions and ideas of men influence us to the point that we circumvent what the scriptures say.

When Paul journeyed to Jerusalem to visit with Peter he found a pillar in the church, not the spiritual leader of the church. Paul visited with Peter and James according to our text. We have no record of what they spoke of or anything that transpired during those 15 days. Acts 15 may shed light on something profoundly interesting. When Paul and Barnabas journeyed to Jerusalem from Antioch to speak to the apostles on behalf of the Gentile converts it was James (the Lord’s half-brother) who had the final say, not Peter (Acts 15:13).

Peter is the main character in the first half of the book of Acts. After Paul’s conversion he becomes the protagonist for the rest of that book. He was the apostle to the Gentiles.

These verses are truly gems of divine enlightenment from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

When we know better, we do better; 1:21-24 (#10)

The churches of Christ in Judea had heard of the reputation of the vicious and vile persecutor of the body of Christ. Now the rumor had reversed 180 degrees. This persecutor of the faith is now an ardent proclaimer of the faith. A gospel preacher who is now persecuted by others for spreading the good news.

We may have seen in our own time a person converted from denominationalism or one of the world religions who becomes a powerful force in spreading the gospel. Maybe these individuals have even been mocked or ridiculed for the pure, precious truth they taught. The ardent attempts of Paul to stop the fledgling church only caused the truth to spread and grow as never before (Acts 8:1). The one true faith cannot be destroyed by persecution. We all have heard the adage that all the water in the world cannot sink a ship, unless the water gets inside the ship. When we know better, we do better. We need to work to keep sin and wickedness out of the Lord's church.

When Paul knew better, he did better. A zealous and very religious man now realized he was religiously wrong. What did he do? He repented and was baptized (Acts 2:28) so the Father could add him to the one church, the one body on earth acceptable by God (Acts 2:41; 22:16; Eph 4:4, 5).

When Paul knew better and did better, what were the results? He stopped persecuting the church. He traveled, preached and taught the saving gospel of Christ. Because when he knew better, he did better, he was inspired to write about half the books of the New Testament (13 of the 27 books are attributed to his pen).

Can the church be glorified by you? Will you glorify the church in your efforts, actions, words and attitude? Paul wasted many years hindering the church of Christ. This may be why he calls himself the "chief" of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). Brethren, we should be "redeeming our time" wisely (Eph 5:16).

Doing better because we know better is a gem from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Truth keeps us from running in vain; Gal 2:1, 2 (#11)

The first two verses of this chapter connects the information of Paul's visit to Peter and James in the first chapter of this book. This is revealed by the use of the word "again" in 2:1. Paul mentions a fourteen year gap in seeing or communicating with the other apostles. He was demonstrating that his knowledge, his inspiration did not come from man, but by direction from God, via the Holy Ghost.

The reason Paul went to Jerusalem on this occasion was to resolve the question of circumcision. Some false teachers in the first century were saying, in essence, the New Testament is good, but we need to add a few things to make it better. The principle that we can learn, some twenty centuries later, is that false teaching and false teachers must be stopped.

In our modern society we often will not lift a finger or say a word to stop what we know is false. Shame on us! Paul, Barnabas and Titus (2:1) made the three hundred mile journey from Antioch to Jerusalem. We are not told how they journeyed, but suppose they were on foot. Suppose further that they walked twenty miles per day. (Having just spent some time in this part of the world, I'm thinking twenty miles per day would be pushing the envelope. Very roughed and hilly, not easily traversed). If this calculation is correct, that means a fifteen day journey, one way, to defend the truth of the gospel.

Why would this trio of travelers make such an arduous journey? Because the truth of the gospel needs to be defended. If doctrine was unimportant Paul could have stayed in Antioch. Paul took Titus with him to Jerusalem to use as an example of a devout, Gentile Christian who had not been circumcised.

Notice verse two starts with, "And I went up by revelation..." Paul was inspired by God to go to the brethren and make certain this false teaching did not persist. Everyone who obeys the gospel can be saved, but no one can add to or take away from God's plan for salvation. Otherwise, Paul would have "run or had run in vain."

When we see the gem of keeping the gospel pure we will not live "vain" lives.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

“That gospel which I preach” 2:1, 2 (#12)

The truth makes us free. John recorded Jesus saying, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). In Romans 6:18 Paul said it this way, “Being then made free from your sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” It takes the truth of the gospel to make us free.

We must be determined to continue in that same, simple, sublime gospel for our spiritual freedom. Endurance is the key to being successful. Matthew records Jesus as saying, “...but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matt 10:22). Someone has coined the word, ‘stick-to-it-iveness.’ It means that even if it gets tough, once you start, keep going.

Paul placed a great deal of emphasis on the power of the gospel. Romans 1:16 emphatically declares, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” In 1 Cor 4:15 Paul states we are “begotten” by the gospel. We are born anew by the gospel. If we are in Christ we are a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). Once we are safely in the church through obedience to the gospel we must work diligently to stay in the safety of the gospel.

There is a great dividing day coming (2 Thess 1:7-9). The two classifications mentioned in that passage are those who “know not God” (e.g. Atheists, Agnostics, heathen, etc.) and those “that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (e.g., religious people who know the gospel but refused to change their beliefs and lives in order to obey). Also, Christians who allow themselves to slip back into the beggarly elements of this world after being washed clean by the blood of Christ (2 Pet 2:20-22).

We can see the beauty of gospel steadfastness (1 Cor 15:58). Paul spent his entire Christian life presenting and defending the gospel of Christ.

It should be a treasured gem in our spiritual minds that we can and must follow that same unadulterated gospel today.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

“No, not for an hour;” 2:4, 5 (#13)

Many in the religious climate today think we, as New Testament Christians, have to be tolerant of all the sin and evil going on within organized religion. Yet, even a cursory reading of God’s word indicates the very opposite. Religious error was always condemned. Jesus Himself called the religious leaders of His day “hypocrites, blind, fools, serpents and a generation of vipers (Matt 23). Never, for even a moment, should you think you have to placate a false teacher in order to be considered “Christ-like.”

From the text in Galatians 2:4, 5 Paul says that false teachers had come to the churches of Christ in Galatia with a doctrine that would strip those Christians of their liberty in Christ. So, how did the inspired apostle handle this situation? “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

Paul says, we did not submit to this, nor did we even hesitate for a moment to disallow these false teachers. We were constant and consistent in opposition to the false teaching. We might ask, why was it so important for Paul and the others to reject and denounce these false teachers? The text tells us; “that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

If you can see through the rungs of a ladder you can see that any and every false doctrine ruins the truth of the gospel. One of the problems in our modern world is that we always want to be seen as “the good guy.” What we really need are members of the churches of Christ that have a back-bone. That have the intestinal fortitude (a fancy way of saying “guts”) to speak up in the face of error. It will not always be popular with others, but we can rest assured we are in good company when we do so, i.e., Jesus, Paul, Barnabas, Titus and others.

This little gem from Galatians is often overlooked. If Paul “gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour” we know exactly long we should tolerate error.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

False brethren; 2:1-5 (#14)

When we look at the first five verses of Galatians 2, as a passage, we see the subject of false brethren. As you all well know it takes effort, time and resources to preach and spread the pure gospel. Paul was forced to leave the field of evangelism to go to Jerusalem in order to defend the gospel which was being preached among the Gentiles, because of the false brethren (2:2).

I'm sure, as Bible students, you have noticed the large emphasis the Bible places on false teachers in the New Testament. The gospel will save us. Paul declared to the Corinthian church that the gospel saved them (1 Cor 15:1, 2). Specifically, he said that the gospel was preached to them, they received it and were standing in it, which saved them, if they would keep in memory what had been preached to them.

It was Jesus who said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt 7:15). It was the same Jesus who taught the parable of the tares (Matt 13:24-30). The tares had the appearance of the good plant, but were not good. In fact, the tares would destroy the good. You can substitute 'false teachers' in place of tares in that parable and see exactly how dangerous they are.

Later, after the church was well established, Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that false teachers were like "grievous wolves" (Acts 20:29). Near the end of the book of Romans Paul says that false teachers were to be marked and avoided (Rom 16:17). Why? Because they are deadly to the soul.

I have been told by members of the church, who have spent some time with false teachers, saying, "but they were so nice." They were "very pleasant to talk to." They seemed, "to know so much." I found them, "to be so interesting." Romans 16:17 uses the word "avoid." According to Strong's the word means; to shun, to decline, to avoid, to go out of the way." In other words, stay away from false teachers.

Adhering to this gem can help save our souls.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Paul dealt with issues; 2:1-5 (#15)

We have discussed the apostle's constant battle with false teachers in the 1st century. A careful reading of the New Testament will reveal just how much of Holy Writ involves the issues those Christians had to face.

In Paul's letters to the Corinthian church and in his letter to the Galatian churches he constantly defends the New Testament against assaults of those who wanted to add parts of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Do we have that same problem in today's church? Some might say 'no,' but facts show differently. Many modern day religious people want to keep, or hold on to, the ten commandments. Others want to use mechanical instruments of music in worship because David used them in the Old Testament. The New Testament plainly deals with trying to mix the two laws together, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col 2:14).

Today's church has issues that must be dealt with: immorality, fornication, marriage issues, homosexuality, women's role in the church, the necessity of public assembly, ad nauseam.

The most challenging obstacle in contemporary times is that many are not turning to the scriptures for direction in making decisions about Bible issues. Far too many are ruled by emotions and popular opinions rather than a "thus saith the Lord."

Ostracizing ourselves in the face of these modern issues only hurts the local church and weakens the members. We need to deal with the trend to turn worship into entertainment. We need to understand that in worship, God is the only audience. He is the one, the only one, who needs to be pleased. Placating the tendency to be more like the religious bodies around us is exactly the opposite of what God wants from us. We are a peculiar people. We need to act like it. In Gal 2:5 Paul states that they, "gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour." When issues confront the church those words need to be our battle cry.

This gem of a verse can help us solve modern issues in the church

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Pillars; 2:9 (#16)

“Pillars” as used here, means supports, or the leading men of the congregation. One writer described them as the chief men in the church. Every sound congregation of God’s people has men that could be given this same designation. We certainly have them in our congregation, and we should be thankful for them.

In the context Paul refers to three men in the Jerusalem church by name; James, Cephas (Peter) and John. Now, before we go any further, let’s make sure we know what we are talking about rather than assuming we know what we are talking about. Early in Jesus’ ministry He called Peter and Andrew to follow Him (Matt 4:18). Immediately after that He called James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother to follow Him (Matt 4:21). These four men became apostles of Jesus.

We also know that James, the apostle, was killed by Herod in Acts 12:2. In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas were given “the right hand of fellowship” at some point after James, the apostle, was killed (possibly 6-9 years between these two chapters). The James referred to in 2:9 is the Lord’s half-brother, not the apostle. Notice Galatians 1:19 “James the Lord’s brother.” It is that same James mentioned here in verse 9. With a little study and research we can know what we are talking about instead of assuming we know.

A pillar is a main support of something. What made these three men “pillars” in the church? They were “pillars” because they were present when they were needed. Because they spoke when the Lord needed them to speak. Acts 2:14 has Peter, with the eleven, speaking out (preaching). Acts 15:13-21 has both James and Peter speaking out in defense of the new Gentile converts.

Having “pillars” is a great need in today’s church. One writer said that men today need to turn their pillows into pillars. We need women who will be great “pillars” of example in training to other women (Titus 3:2-5). If godly wives would encourage their husbands to be “pillars” we would have more “pillars” in the church.

This gem should not be passed over.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The right hand of fellowship; 2:9 (#17)

This gem of a verse has the men described as “pillars” of the church extending the “right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas concerning the conversion of the Gentiles during that first evangelistic trip which occurred, as recorded by Luke, in Acts 13 and 14.

The “right hand of fellowship” means having common ground, or common direction. We have fellowship with those who walk in the same path we walk in, that obey the same laws we obey. We have fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

This fascinating verse of scripture, combined with the truths recorded in Acts 15 reveals something of vital importance to the New Testament Christian. Acts 15:4 says, “And when they (Paul and Barnabas, added, jb) were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.”

This should give us an amazing visual of the scene there in Jerusalem. This is often called “the Jerusalem council” or some other such name. It is important to note, as Bible students, that mankind does not have the ability, the option, to pass judgment on what God has revealed. The Holy Ghost separated Barnabas and Paul for this work (Acts 13:2). The church, elders, apostles in Jerusalem were not deciding what was right. God had already established what was right. They were deciding if they were going to follow God.

Churches (both denominational and churches of Christ) will sometimes get together to make decisions on what they will do or follow. Recent changes in the Catholic church and the Methodist church are glaring examples. At times a church of Christ might gather together and make the decision to forgo the Lord’s supper each week. They might decide to add instrumental music to worship, etc.

We cannot extend the “right hand of fellowship” to those who are altering or changing God’s word and God’s will. The “right hand of fellowship” goes out to all who “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

The “right hand of fellowship” is truly a gem of a place to be.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Grace: 2:9 (#18)

The mighty apostle Paul began this letter to the churches of Galatia with the concept of grace (1:3) and he will end it with grace (6:18). Here, in chapter 2, the pillars of the church in Jerusalem understood (perceived) that God had blessed these men with opportunity to spread the saving gospel to the Gentiles.

This knowledge reveals several things to the Bible student. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were not ready to include the Gentiles in the church. They had to overcome their prejudice, just like many today have to. There is simply no room in the church for prejudice. Acts 17:26 begins with these words, “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...”

It also teaches that even the church leaders needed to be ready to learn and to grow in knowledge. James, Cephas and John could still learn some things. Acts 15 shows opposition to allowing Gentiles full fellowship in the church. God had authorized the preaching, but the people had to be taught (convinced) that all people who obeyed the gospel (believe, repent, confess, be baptized) were in full fellowship with God, and should be in full fellowship with the brethren.

Paul, Barnabas and many others had been given a divine blessing, a favor (grace) to share the good news with people who had been neglected. The gospel is for all. Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...” (Matt 28:19). As recorded in Mark He said, “...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15). If we follow the chronology in the book of Acts we see this was not done between Acts 2 and Acts 13. Some think this was a neglected command for 12 years, or maybe more, in the early church.

James, Cephas and John now understood it was the grace of God that allowed the gospel to go to the whole world.

May we hear the same clarion call.

The gem of perceived grace.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Hypocrisy in religion; 2:9-18 (#19)

Hypocrisy in modern religion is a real and serious problem. A person who is a hypocrite pretends to be one thing when they are not, or is a person who pretends to stand for a belief, when in fact, they do not. No one likes a hypocrite, especially a religious hypocrite.

In the rather long reading of Galatians 2:9-18 I would like to make two quick points. The first point deals with Peter's hypocrisy. Paul confronted Peter "to the face" because he was acting one way when he was with the Gentiles Christians and a different way when the Jewish Christians were present, which can be seen in verses 11 and 12. That is the epitome of hypocrisy. If we are a member of the church of Christ we are required to conduct ourselves like a Christian at all times.

We represent our God, our Savior and our local congregation every moment we are out in the world. People need to be able to see "Christ in you" (Col 1:27) in all your actions, reactions and deeds. Please do not play a hypocrite. It does more than simply tarnish your name, it affects the cause of Christ.

The second point in this article deals with the wording of verse 16. Notice that the verse begins with these words, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ..." (KJV). We are not justified by a faith "in" Christ (even the devils believe and tremble) James 2:19 (cf Lk 8:28). The Christian faith requires more than faith, it requires obedience.

Verse 16 has the same wording near the end of the verse, "...that we might be justified by the faith of Christ..." Not simply believing "in" Christ, as the denominational world might teach, but an obedience to His divine plan for our salvation.

We will deal with Christ being in the Christian and the Christian being in Christ in a future article. For now, just be cautious of any Bible translation which teaches faith "in" Christ rather than faith "of" Christ in this passage. Your choice of which translation you use is your single most important step in properly understanding God's will for your soul.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Living unto God; 2:19 (# 20)

What are you living for? Paul declares that he is living for God. Some people live for money. Some people live for pleasure. Some people live for family. The greatest reason for living is to live for God.

In living “unto God” Paul had to change a great many things in his life. He knew he had to bring his body into subjection (1 Cor 9:27) so he would not be guilty of teaching one way and living another.

Another truth in living “unto God” is the willingness to forgive ourselves. We once lived as pagans or heathens. Either we were in the world or we were caught up in some man-made religion. We are not those people any more. When we became Christians, we are new creatures (2 Cor 5:17) living lives “unto God.” Therefore, we must be willing to forget those things which are in our past (Phil 3:13, 14) and live the new life “unto God.”

In this passage Paul said he is “dead to the law,” which is a reference to the Old Testament law of Moses. For most New Testament Christians, we could make the analogy of being dead to a sinful life rather than a life controlled by Judaism.

Many people make the decision to quit drinking, smoking, cursing, carousing, stealing and other actions with no influence from the church of Christ. Deciding to make this decision will make their lives better, but will not save their souls. It takes obedience and dedication for one’s soul to be saved.

In a very real sense “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28) because God allows it for us. This passage means we are all dependent on God for life and strength. This is the first step in understanding our dependency on God. We all are alive because of God’s good will and infinite grace, but all do not live for God, or “unto God.”

Paul had to become alive to God’s commands and so do we. Paul had to be baptized in order to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). That act of obedience made it possible for him to say he lived “unto God.”

This verse is a true gem from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Examples of living “unto God” 2:19 (# 21)

To live “unto God” a person needs to live by the word of God (Matt 4:4). Unless someone is a psychopath or a sociopath we already live by some code of moral conduct. We might call it a common, moral decency. The real test comes when we must decide to live by God’s commands or reject them to our own peril.

Like Jesus said to His disciples we need to learn to die (deny) to self (Matt 16:24-26). This simply means we must deny the desires for riches above our worldly pleasure that will lead us away from proper conduct and cause us to not live a life “unto God.”

Like the Pharisees we need to give up traditions that keep us from living “unto God” (Mk 7:8, 9). Many of the traditions of the Pharisees circumvented or superseded the commands of God. Modern churches have numerous traditions that are neither harmful nor offensive to God. If a tradition keeps people from worshiping acceptably it needs to be discarded.

Like the rich, young ruler we need to die to riches (Mk 10:21) or maybe better said, we need to die to the desire for riches that are place above our service to living “unto God.” Jesus said to this rich, young ruler, “One thing thou lackest.” Imagine lacking just “one thing!” Imagine lacking “one thing” and then that “one thing” is something that you cannot take with you when you die anyway!

Like Felix we may need to die to convenience (Acts 24:25). We all desire to be in control of our lives, to do things when it is convenient for us. The problem is that we never know when our time on this earth is up. We cannot know when the time of Christ’s return is set. Therefore, today “is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).

To live “unto God” we must be added to the church that belongs to Christ (Acts 2:47). To live “unto God” we must present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1, 2).

This gem in Galatians will cause us to shine in a world of darkness.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

If Christ be in you; 2:20 (#22)

In order for a person to be saved two things must be true. These two things are facts which are applicable to every responsible human.

First, every saved person must be in Christ.

Second, Christ must be in every saved person.

We shall observe a few of the traits of a person being in Christ. A person is in Christ when they have been baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Gal 3:27). A person is in Christ when they become a new creature (2 Cor 5:17, new man, Eph 4:24). A person in Christ will have a working faith (Gal 5:6; also see James 2:18, 20, 22, 24, 26). A simple academic belief in Christ will not put a person in Christ. A person in Christ becomes an heir of God through Christ (Gal 4:7).

Next, we shall observe a few traits of Christ being in a person. The Bible plainly declares that all three members of the godhead dwell in a Christian (Rom 8:9, 10; 2 Cor 6:16). For some reason only the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is steeped with controversy. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on Christ being in the saved person. Paul says “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith...” (Eph 3:17). In Colossians 1:27 Paul is writing of God’s wonderful plan to include the Gentiles in His plan of salvation the verse ends with these inspired words, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Since Christ dwells in the saved person by faith, it is imperative to understand (never lose sight of the fact) that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). A saved person’s faith is only pleasing to God if it is based on the word of God.

A Christian dwells in Christ and a Christian has Christ dwelling in him/her. We will have more to say on this subject in a future article, but for now, remember, if Christ is in you and you are in Christ people should be able to see it in your actions. Let people see Christ living in you.

Galatians 2:20 is a gem of a verse.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Frustrating God's grace; 2:21 (#23)

The beginning of this verse reads, "I do not frustrate the grace of God..." (KJV). The rest of this verse plainly declares the superiority of Christianity over the old, defunct Jewish religion.

Paul is stressing the importance of staying in the safe moorings of Christianity. Leaving that one, safe, authorized religion will "frustrate" God's grace. Christ died for one church (Eph 4:4, 5) He straightforwardly taught that He would build only one church (Matt 16:18). The one church (kingdom, v 19) would belong to Him.

If Paul is warning against frustrating the grace of God, then it follows that it is possible to make God's grace void (frustrated) in our lives. The grace we enjoy is God's gift to mankind. Christ died in our place, in our stead. It is recorded in Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." God offers it to all of mankind, but not all of us will accept it on His terms. We all want grace, but we want it when it is convenient for us.

People today can frustrate the grace of God by the misuse of scriptures. Many are banking their eternal souls on "faith only" being enough to enter heaven. A cursory reading of James 2 will show his type of thinking to be false. Any time it is stated that something biblical "only" will save a soul is misleading and will frustrate God's grace.

God established a plan for our salvation. Specific steps have to be followed before God will add you to the church His son died to establish (Acts 2:37, 38, 41, 47).

We make void God's grace when we do not see a need for that grace. Many think that because they are a good moral person they have no need of God's grace. In this short, six chapter book of Galatians, Paul will bring up grace seven different times. God's grace is vital for our salvation. Let us be thankful for that grace.

Never be guilty of frustrating God's blessed grace.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

O Foolish Galatians; 3:1, 2 (#24)

What is your spiritual standing? If you are honest with yourself you know where you stand in God's sight, according to the Bible. Do not judge yourself by your own feelings or your own emotions; judge yourself by what the scriptures say. The scriptures (the word of God) will judge us in the last day, not our feelings or emotions (Jn 12:48). That is why it is so vitally important to study the Bible. To know what it says and then follow the teachings. It is God's plan to save us from this wicked world (Acts 2:40).

The people who had been converted to Christianity in the churches of Christ scattered all across the region of Galatia (Gal 1:2) and were children of God because of their conversion. They had repented and become Christians through obedience. They were children of God by faith (Gal 3:26). They were in Christ because they had been baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27). That made them "the sons of God" according to Gal 4:6.

But, something changed. Paul uses the word "foolish" and even says that they were "bewitched" a word that means "to be misled" according to Strong's. This particular word is used nowhere else in the New Testament. The Galatian Christians had started out strong, but were being misled about the spiritual direction.

This is the same spiritual condition we see so often in our modern world. Christians allowing false teachers to influence them away from the pure, unadulterated doctrine of Christ.

To refuse the truth of God's word is to be self-condemned (2 Thess 2:12). To enter into Christianity and then be "bewitched" out of that safe spiritual stance is far worse according to 2 Peter 2:20-22.

At one point these Galatian brethren had been so well taught that they could see Jesus' crucifixion in their minds (3:1). Now, because of false teachers they are classified as "O foolish Galatians."

These words are fair warning to all people who want to stand spiritually correct before God. That makes these verses from chapter 3 'Gems from Galatians.'

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The Spirit; 3:1-5 (#25)

If you were to take the time read the five verses of our text you would see that Paul asks five (maybe 6) questions, one in each verse. The purpose of the questions is trying to get the Galatian brethren to examine their spiritual lives and see if they could determine what was causing them to drift away from the truth.

Jesus said in John 3:5, “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Born of water is a reference to baptism. Being born of the Spirit is a reference to a life led by, directed by the word of God (Rom 10:17). Paul was teaching on the same subject in Romans 8:1 where he records, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

The Holy Ghost (Spirit) is a blessing in the New Testament era. This blessing was not available under the law Moses gave (John 7:39). Jesus promised His apostles the miraculous guidance of the Holy Ghost (Spirit) the night of His arrest (John 16:7-13). There is a lot of controversy in modern times about the Holy Ghost and miracles. There should not be any such controversy. Verified miracles are not being performed today. I will personally visit any hospital or any graveyard with anyone who claims to have such powers!

The Spirit, which is mentioned in Galatians 3:1-5, is the Spirit of truth. The Galatians had received that Spirit, but if they did not continue in that Spirit they were walking in vain (v 4). Paul will declare in chapter 5 of this book, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (5:25).

These five questions posed to the Galatians were given as warnings about straying from the truth. If we allow false teachers or false teaching to draw us away from the truth of the Spirit we cannot garner the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25).

This set of questions is a gem to help keep us on track.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Suffering for nothing: 3:4 (#26)

All people suffer for one reason or another. It may come from a poor choice on our part. It may come as a result of the choice of another individual that we have to suffer for. It may be the result of disease or unhealthy condition. We may suffer for no reason of our own doing. But, the truth is, we will suffer while on this earth. Even Jesus suffered at the hands of the religious leaders of His day (Matt 16:21).

Paul warns the Galatian brethren, via a pointed question, “Have ye suffered so many things in vain?” After their conversion to Christianity these Galatians had suffered because of the changed life they were now living and their commitment to the Lord. This same type of suffering happens to every truly changed convert to pure Christianity (2 Tm 3:12).

Very early in His ministry Jesus taught that His disciples would suffer. Near the beginning of what we commonly call His “sermon on the mount” Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matt 5:11). Many times people will mock or ridicule Christians for living a different life than those of the world. This verse teaches that if people “say all manner of evil against you” it should be a false statement. Live the right kind of life and that when the accusations come, let them be fabricated attacks on your Christian personality, rather than points of facts on a hypocritical lifestyle.

The mighty apostle Paul was to suffer “great things” (Acts 9:16) for the cause of Christ. We know that he did, indeed, suffer many things in his dedicated life for the cause of Christ. Even so, he never wavered in his determination and dedication of service to the church and to Christ. His suffering was not ‘for nothing.’ The glory of heaven is worth anything we might endure of this earth.

We will have more to say on suffering in future articles. Gal 3:4 is truly a gem from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Suffering for good; 3:4 (#27)

Suffering for good seems to be a paradox. The truth is that we suffer to make something better at every turn in our lives. We often voluntarily suffer hunger so that we might lose weight. We might suffer the temporary pain of a surgery to remove a bigger problem and have better health. Many parents will suffer with less so their children can have more. Many of our forefathers suffered unimaginable hardships to bring this great nation into existence. The staunch brethren involved in the restoration movement of the 16th and 17th centuries were Herculean in their efforts to restore pure, unadulterated Christianity.

They often suffered physical harm and verbal threats for nothing more than teaching what the Bible teaches. It would have been easy for them to compromise to saving truth. They could have avoided suffering by softening the Bible's position on sin and salvation. They would not do it. They suffered for the good of the gospel. They suffered for the advancement of the cause of Christ. They studied and they taught and they debated in order to overthrow the damnable denominational dogmas of the day, often having their very lives threatened because they stood in defense of the gospel.

We, today, stand on the shoulders of these mighty men and women who were willing to suffer for good, so the Lord's one, true church could flourish in this great land. Yet, the question is asked, what are we willing to suffer for? What hardships are we willing to endure for the cause of Christ? In comparison to those who have gone on before us we do not suffer at all. If the weather is not to our suiting we will stay home? Our forefathers walked to services, rode horseback to services, got there any way they could. If the temperature in the building is not to our liking, will we stay home? What if we have no heat or no air conditioning in our buildings, will we stay home; what if the pews are not comfortable or are not padded, will we stay home?

Our small sacrifices are nothing compared to the glories of heaven which await all who put service and sacrifice first in this life.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Suffering in vain; 3:4 (#28)

In an attempt to keep the Galatian Christians moving in the proper direction, religiously speaking, Paul posed a question for them to ponder, “Have ye suffered so many things in vain.” We might paraphrase these words by asking, “Have you started down the right road, spiritually speaking, but have been sidetracked by lies and misinformation?”

Can we trust in something like our own morality for salvation? Can we take pride in thinking we are better than some of the people around us, morally speaking? The person we often refer to as the rich, young ruler (Mark 10:17-20) was a man who thought his moral conduct was all he needed to get a stamp of approval on his life.

Jesus taught him that morality was not enough. If the young man wanted to be a disciple of Jesus he was told to “take up the cross, and follow me” (Mk 10:21). This expression was one that Jesus used repeatedly. His followers had to be willing to “deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23). These verses are obviously not to be taken literally, but are designed to show the principle of sacrifice and service that every disciple must be willing to make. We bear the burden of living a different life than those around us. We resist the temptations of this world rather than giving into them. We strive to be the best example we can be to family, friends and members of the body.

If we suffer these small, insignificant sacrifices in this life our suffering will not be in vain. The glory that awaits us is far beyond anything we can imagine with our finite, mortal minds. The inspired apostle said it best, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). The suffering we might endure now cannot compete with the resplendent magnificence of what the future holds for the faithful Christian.

What a gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Abraham's faith; 3:6 (#29)

A case could be made that Abraham was the greatest Bible character in the Old Testament. He is often referred to as the 'father of the faithful.' The book of Genesis records that Abraham (Abram) "believed in the Lord" (Gen 15:6). Paul declared the same words in Romans 4:3 and again in our text in Galatians.

There must be a reason to refer to his belief so many times in scripture. Abraham was given promises from God. God made demands of Abraham and he immediately obeyed those commands. A real belief in God will always cause the believer to do something. It will cause the believer to obey the divine directives.

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Our love is demonstrated in our obedience to the precepts written in His word. Some will say that they love Jesus, but refuse to obey His commands. We do not show we love God with lip service. Jesus said in the same chapter of John, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings..." (John 14:24).

How can a person who says they believe, but will not repent of their sins say that they love Jesus? He said, "I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Obedience is keeping His commandment. The same is true of a person who refuses to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16). Obeying Christ means being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). It should be obvious to all intelligent readers that a baby, or even a young child, cannot obey or repent. Therefore, babies and young children are not subjects for scriptural baptism.

Faithful Abraham is a fine example of a faith that moves us to obey. We will have more to say on the subject of Abraham in the future. For now let us strive to put ourselves in the position of hearing the Lord say to us on that last day, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant..." (Matt 25:21).

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The children of Abraham; 3:6-8 (#30)

The middle verse of our text reads, “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” The scriptures place a great deal of emphasis on being Abraham’s children. Abraham lived a long time ago. Why should we in the 21st century be concerned about being Abraham’s children?

In Genesis 12:1-3 we see God give some promises to Abraham (Abram). God was going to make Abraham a great nation (v 2). God also promised that “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (v 3). The gospel is universal salvation offered to mankind through the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ. Abraham was in the lineage of Christ as written by both Matthew (Matt 1:1, 2) and Luke (Lk 3:34).

The seed of Abraham was Christ (Gal 3:16) which we will be discussed when we get to verse 16. To be a child of Abraham means to be a faithful and obedient follower of God. Galatians 3:26 reads, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

The inference is we must have sufficient faith in Christ that it will cause us to obey His teachings. Galatians 3:27 is very specific about how a person gets into Christ. This is not a matter of opinion or personal preference. It is not a matter that is open for debate. The scripture plainly said, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Without baptism for the remission of sins you have not put on Christ. Peter wrote, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us...” 1 Pet 3:21).

Abraham is a wonderful example of what it takes to be pleasing to God. Obey His commands. Abraham demonstrated His love for God when he obeyed Him. We believe God when we obey Him. Jesus posed a question in Luke 6:46, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

Abraham is honored in every major religion on earth today; Jews, Christians and even Muslims. Abraham is a gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

All nations blessed in Abraham; 3:8-13 (#31)

Our text begins with a very powerful statement concerning our father, Abraham, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8).

The specific blessing referred to in this verse is the direct family lineage from Abraham to Jesus Christ. The very first verse of the New Testament reads, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1).

Abraham’s faith is highlighted in his obedience. He did not just believe in God, he obeyed His instructions. That is what real faith is. Hebrews chapter 11 is often referred to as “faith’s hall of fame.” In the section of that chapter which deals with Abraham it is recorded that he left his home country because God told him to (Heb 11:8). Verses 8 and 9 of Hebrews 11 says he “sojourned” in a foreign land. Verse 17 says he was willing to offer up his son, Isaac, as a demonstration of his obedience to God. In fact, the text has his sacrifice in the past tense. Even though Abraham never actually sacrificed his son, he was so determined to please God that it is stated as if he had already committed the act.

To follow the example of “faithful Abraham” (Gal 3:9) we need to have an obedient faith. Faithfulness requires obeying from the heart (the Bible’s heart is the mind, where we think (Prov 23:7). Faithfulness has nothing to do with our emotions or religious traditions. It has everything to do with the scriptures which God has “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).

The gospel is for all. Anyone, in any place, can be saved from their past sins through obedience to the scriptures. The Bible plainly teaches that the church promised by Christ was established on that first Pentecost after His resurrection in Jerusalem. Any religious organization established at a different time, or in a different place, cannot be the church Jesus died for.

A knowledge of the blessing brought through Abraham is another gem from Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Seed, not seeds; 3:16 (#32)

The text before us at this time is one of the most profound and misunderstood passages in the Bible. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

This is a reference to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17, 18. The singularness (seed, not seeds) of God’s promise is of great significance. God’s plan for the salvation of all men (all nations) would be brought forth through the unbroken lineage of Abraham’s seed. Matthew 1:17 records that 42 generations passed from Abraham to Christ. God knew what He was doing. We might lose track of things, God does not!

Most of us cannot track our family’s heritage back more than three or four generations. God kept His promise to Abraham firmly focused and unwavering for 42 generations. When God promises something, you can know, assuredly, it will come to pass.

Jesus promised to build His church. After Peter’s confession that He is the Christ, Jesus said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). As God promised to Abraham the blessings would come through his ‘seed’ (singular), Jesus promised to build His church (singular).

When we see a world filled with hundreds and thousands of different kinds of churches today, all teaching something different, we can know this is not the product of Christ’s promise. God had a specific plan, a specific promise to Abraham’s descendants. Christ has a specific plan for His followers; to follow the unadulterated scriptures without addition or subtraction. His church (singular) was established in Acts 2 in the city of Jerusalem.

If the church you are a part of was not established at that time and in that place you are not part of the church of the Bible. The saved are added, by God, to the church (Acts 2:47). You cannot join it, He adds you through obedience (Acts 2:38).

This singular gem is evidence of God’s promises to mankind.

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Christ, our mediator; 3:19, 20 (#33)

Mediators are very important in many aspects in our modern life. Mediators are often used to resolve various kinds of conflict in workplace environments, in purchasing real estate, in court proceedings and many other applications.

The Bible definition of mediator (as given by Vine's) is "one who mediates between two parties with a view to producing peace." Try as we might, as Christians we often slip into sin. It might be because of temptation, or maybe we are not strong enough to resist peer pressure, or maybe we are disillusioned by a false teacher. The devil is good at what he does.

How wonderful would it be to have someone who could go before God and mediate for us? Someone who could explain to the Father the weakness of the flesh and the temptation humans go through? The only being that has ever existed as both human and God is our Lord, Jesus Christ. He knows the divine side and He knows the human side. He is the one, perfect mediator between God the Father and mankind. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

What a blessing it is to have a member of the godhead mediating for us. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, "...he is the mediator of a better covenant" (Heb 8:6). In Hebrews 9:15 it is recorded, "...he is the mediator of the new testament," and in Hebrews 12:24, "And to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant..."

How can we put Christ 'on retainer' to be guaranteed He is our mediator when we need Him? By doing His will. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). It was Jesus who said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16). Who would expect Jesus to step up for them in times of need, if we will not do as He commands now?

We need someone to "go to bat" for us. The risen Christ is uniquely qualified to do just that. Will you put yourself in position to gain His help by obedience and faithful living?

It is a 'gem' to know we have a mediator of such magnitude.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Our schoolmaster; 3:24 (#34)

The Bible is the most valuable book in the world. We, as Christians, read and study our New Testaments far more than we do our Old Testaments. This is not shocking to anyone reading this article. We need to know what the New Testament says and then follow what it says for salvation. Romans 1:16 reads, in part, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation...” In our era salvation comes from obeying the gospel of Christ (Heb 5:9).

Understanding how to be saved in our day does not take away from the tremendous value of the Old Testament scriptures. In Galatians 3:21-24 Paul uses the word “law” five times. Each time he is referring to the law God gave Moses to give to the Hebrew people. That old law is not for us, it was for them. But, we can learn a great deal from the old law to teach us what God expects from us under the new law.

The KJV of Galatians 2:24 reads, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” There have been many colorful illustrations over the years to try and explain the word “schoolmaster” in this verse. Possibly the best way to grasp the full meaning is to see an educational system designed for an end. The Law of Moses, if properly understood, will lead a person to the sacrificial “Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36).

Some of the Christians in the area of Galatia were struggling with false teachers who wanted to incorporate parts of the old law into the new law. The old law was nailed to the cross (Col 2:14), which Jesus declared He had come to fulfill (Matt 5:17). We are not under any part of the Law of Moses today. Yes, that clearly means we are not under the “10 commandments,” as some still mistakenly teach.

The “schoolmaster,” the system of divine education, specifically designed to introduce the Messiah, will lead us to Christ (Heb 1:1, 2).

This gem sparkles with the clarity of godly wisdom.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Children of God; 3:26, 27 (#35)

The text reads, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” The most important aspect of sound Bible study is to know the context. That means to know who is doing the writing and to whom they are writing. When Paul pens “ye are all the children of God” he is referring to the Christians in the churches of Galatia scattered throughout that region. (Gal 1:2).

They became Christians by being baptized into Christ. In a world full of religious confusion the scriptures are crystal clear on baptism. Jesus, Himself, said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved... (Mark 16:16). When Peter was asked by those religious people in Jerusalem what they had to do to be saved he answered, “Repent and be baptized every one of you... (Acts 2:38).

Baptism is not an outward sign of an inward feeling; it is not to join a religious group; it is not to please or appease another human being; it is how we have our past sins washed away (Acts 22:16). It is how we come in contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-5). It was in His death that He shed His life-giving blood. In Revelation 1:5 the verse ends with these inspired words from John’s pen, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.”

Since it is true that “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (v 27) then the converse must also be true. If a person has not been baptized into Christ then they have not put on Christ. Salvation has been freely offered for all of mankind. We have an obligation to be obedient to the teachings of the scriptures if we expect to have a home with God when the affairs of this life are over. We simply cannot expect that if we never put on Christ in baptism.

This gem from Galatians reminds all who read it to get our lives in proper order while time and opportunity still present themselves.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Heirs of promise; 3:28, 29 (#36)

We all have received an inheritance or are in line to receive an inheritance. Typically, the inheritance can be something like a piece of jewelry or maybe a parcel of land. Some have inherited various amounts of money or other family commodities. These easily understood principles of inheritance will give us the knowledge to properly grasp the significance of Paul's statement in verse 29.

Inheritance typically flows within the family framework. The legacy written of in verse 29 stems from God's promise to Abraham and all faithful followers of that principle. This chapter (Gal 3)) is replete with promises of the endowment of faithful people following in Abraham's able footsteps (cf 3:6, 7, 16).

In article #32 we looked at the singleness of the promise. Not to 'seeds' but rather to 'seed,' singular. When we see a world filled with hundreds and thousands of different kinds of churches today, all teaching something different, we can know this is not the product of Christ's promise. God had a specific plan, a specific promise to Abraham's descendants. Christ has a specific plan for His followers; to follow the unadulterated scriptures without addition or subtraction. His church (singular, He promised and built only one church) was established in Acts 2 in the city of Jerusalem.

Any religious body that was not established at that time (Acts 2) and in that place (the city of Jerusalem) cannot be the church we read about in the Bible.

Many people look forward with great anticipation to receiving an earthly inheritance. If a person wants the divine inheritance that the apostle Paul writes of in Galatians 3, they must be a faithful follower (like Abraham) of God's teachings in the New Testament.

Jesus taught us how to receive the promised inheritance. Read carefully His words; "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:21). "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (Jn 14:24).

The promise of an eternal inheritance shines as bright as a gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Conditional inheritance; 3:29 (#37)

As in any legal transaction certain conditions, or requirements, must be met in order to be granted the inheritance. We shall see what the Bible has to say about spiritual stipulations for inheritance.

The very first requirement is that we must belong to Christ. Verse 29 begins with, “And if ye be Christ’s...” This means we belong to Christ. In order to belong to Christ we must have faith (Gal 3:26). The faith we have in Christ will lead us to repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). Repentance is an acknowledgement of wrong doing or wrong thinking and a firm desire to stop the sin. It means to change directions or to change the mind.

Another stipulation of belonging to Christ is to confess Him (Matt 10:32). There will come a day in which we are going to want Jesus to speak up for us. If we do not confess Him now, on earth, He will not acknowledge us when we need Him most (Matt 10:33). The condition of confession is extraordinarily simple. We say what the Ethiopian said in Acts 8:37, “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

In order to belong to Christ we must be baptized into Christ for the remission of our past sins. In Acts 22:16 the preacher Ananias said, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

To belong to Christ we must be part of His body. He promised to build only one church (Matt 16:18, 19). He shed His blood to purchase that one church (Acts 20:28). The Lord added to that one church all who were being saved (Acts 2:47). Any religious body that teaches that you can be saved in any church outside the body of Christ is teaching error. I challenge anyone to find a single denominational church mentioned anywhere in the scriptures. They are not in the Bible because Jesus never authorized any of them. His one church is mentioned in Romans 16:16, “The churches of Christ salute you.”

If you do not meet the conditions then you are not an heir to the inheritance. This gem of knowledge was written for the benefit of our salvation

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The fullness of time; 4:4 (#38)

Our text begins with these profound words, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (KJV). This simply means that God had determined “the time” when preparation was fully in place for the Messiah to enter the world.

The context seems to carry the idea of the development of the Hebrew people to be able to welcome God’s great gift to mankind, His Son. Ephesians 1:10 begins with, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times...” As students we should look at “dispensations” as the various divisions of the Bible. The first 2,500 years of human history are referred to as the Patriarchal dispensation. A time when God dealt directly with the heads of the individual families. The second dispensation is classified as the Law of Moses, which lasted about 1,500 years. God gave Moses the laws which the Hebrew people were required to live under.

That 4,000 year period leads mankind to the “fulness of the times” or the last dispensation. The old law was nailed to the cross (Col 2:14). It was taken out of the way to make room for the new law of Christ.

The “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Eph 1:10) simply refers to the last dispensation. God waited until all things were ideal for the advancement of the saving gospel. His divine timing is wondrous to behold. Notice how His arrangement made the advancement of the saving gospel effective: 1. The Romans had provided a quality road system to travel on. They also provided a universal law under which their citizens enjoyed unparalleled protection. 2. The Roman army was ubiquitous and powerful. That made for generally peaceful travel on land and on the seas. 3. The Greeks had provided a universal language to simplify the proclamation of the gospel. 4. The Babylonian captivity had provided the synagogues which were used by the early disciples as a starting point to teach the Jews the gospel. 5. Never before had the world been so ready for the gospel of salvation to be spread.

To see this gem of perfect timing in the history of mankind strengthens our faith.

JB

Known of God; 4:8, 9 (#39)

Even if we did not have the Bible, we would still know there is a God. The wonderful creation reveals His divine presence and masterful hand are in all that we see. The precision and order of all things in the universe divulge the Creator. The human body is a marvel of skillful design. We certainly did not happen by accident.

However, knowing there is a God and knowing God are not the same thing. We can know there is a president of these great United States, but that is different than actually knowing the president.

The beginning of verse 9 in our text reads, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God...” The text is an encouragement to those who have come out of the sinful world to become members of Christ’s church to not go back into the beggarly elements from which they escaped.

What a marvelous honor it is to be known of God as one of His faithful, obedient children (Heb 5:9). This privilege not only gives an open avenue of prayer to the Father (Jn 9:31), but it also gives us the hope of eternal life with Him (Titus 1:2).

Dear friends, God knows us. He knows what we need (Matt 6:32). He knows what is in us (Jn 2:25). He knows if we are striving our very best to live a righteous life. He knows if we put personal desires before our service to Him.

The person that loves God is also the person who will obey God (Jn 14:15). We cannot give lips-service to God and then not do what He says. Jesus put it in these words, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Jn 15:14).

Galatians 4:8, 9 are gems that remind us that we love God because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19).

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Am I your enemy? 4:16 (#40)

The text reads, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” Oftentimes, we do not want to be told the truth when that truth interferes with our worldly life-style. We want to do what we want to do, no matter what the scripture tells us is right.

The book of Galatians reveals that some of the members of the church in that city were being “foolish” (3:1). The same verse says that some of them were not obeying the truth. Some of them were even being dissuaded from the one true faith by “another gospel: which is not another...” (1:6, 7).

Do faithful members of the church of Christ become your enemy because they teach the uncompromising truth of God’s word? Does the concerned Christian become your enemy when they might point out your lack of regular attendance in worship services? (Heb 10:24-26). What about that person who questions your example before other people? That is not an enemy. That is a friend concerned about your eternal life, when they teach you of the one, true church Jesus died to establish?

The church needs more people who have the confidence and strength to help those wandering on the darkened path of sin. We need more people who are willing to stand up and speak up.

John, the baptizer, understood this. He told Herod the truth about his adulterous relationship. Herod did not like it and removed John’s head, but the truth needed to be stated. What did Jesus have to say about the type of man John was? “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist...” (Matt 11:11).

We should never be afraid of telling the truth. It may not always be appreciated. It may fall on deaf ears, but it will always do us good to support, defend and speak the truth. It is the truth that shall make you free (Jn 8:32).

Truth speakers are not your enemy, they are fighting for your soul.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

To tell the truth; 4:16 (#41)

There are times when telling the truth will offend. Obviously, some people would rather be lied to than to hear the truth. In matters of religion this goes far beyond pacification. It is life (eternal) or death (eternal).

When Paul penned this letter to those churches in Galatia he was writing to people who had already changed their lives and became Christians through obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:38). He wanted them to remain in the only safe place on earth at the time, (the church of Christ) or at any time since.

They did not need to be taught about the one and only church, there was only one church in existence in the first century. They did not need to be taught about the necessity of baptism, there were all baptized believers. They did not need to be taught about the unscripturalness of instruments of music in worship, instruments were not used in any church of Christ.

However, they did need to be reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:33 where He said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness..." We all have things we want to do, things that are wholesome and good, in and of themselves. But, if those activities take us away from our service to God they become unwholesome. God does not want to keep us from fun, He wants us to demonstrate putting Him first in our lives. If you are told to put God first will you become offend by the truth?

The truth is that we are taught by Jesus to deny ourselves (Matt 16:24). Denying ourselves displays our willingness to please God before pleasing ourselves. This indication provides all those observing us first-hand evidence that we have put God first in our lives. To tell the truth, the more we put God first and the more we deny self the better it feels and the easier it is to do.

Never allow someone who is encouraging you to be a better person, a better Christian, to become your enemy.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

“Until Christ be formed in you;” 4:19 (#42)

Paul was writing to baptized members of the churches of Christ in Galatia. Yet, his desire was for Christ to be formed in those Christians. What does this mean? Paul’s words are powerful in content and in context.

Notice he calls these brethren “little children.” This indicates a close, family type connection to them. He, personally, went to this area on all three of his evangelistic journeys. He labored in converting the people and establishing the congregations that would continue to worship God, through Jesus Christ, long after he left the area.

It was this family bond that caused him to write the words, “of whom I travail in birth...” When life is formed it takes time for proper development. After birth it takes more time for the human body to mature. When a child is born into this world it comes forth with pain (travail). As a child grows it often causes additional pain to the parents as that child develops and learns right from wrong.

Paul saw this exact process occurring in the Galatian Christians. No one can expect to be fully mature in their Christianity from the start of their spiritual journey. On the other hand, spiritual growth is a natural and proper expectation moving toward maturity in Christ. If a child does not grow we know that something is wrong. If a child is not growing we seek professional help.

Paul was worried that the progress of their spiritual maturity was being slowed or even derailed by the lack of Christ being formed in them. If we allow Christ to be formed in us we will grow in such areas as joy, peace, kindness and patience (cf Gal 5:22, 23). Jesus was a living example of how these and other attributes should be formed in us.

The necessity of Christ being formed in us is another gem from the book of Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

An allegory is given: 4:22-31 (#43)

In this rather long reading inspiration gives us an illustrative perspective of the two covenants under consideration. Galatians 4:24 reads “Which things are an allegory (symbolic, NKJ): for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.”

It seems that one of the more difficult perspectives for some to grasp in Bible study is the difference between the Old Testament law and the present-day law found in the New Testament. Oftentimes people will want to carry over some aspects of what God gave specifically to the nation of Israel and bind them on Christians. For example; circumcision, worshipping on the Sabbath day and the ‘ten commandments’ given to Moses to give to the nation of Israel, etc.

An allegory is a description of one thing under the image of another, typically used to reveal a hidden or obscure meaning. In our text, the allegory of the two covenants is written under the image of two mothers and their two sons.

This is a marvelous section of scripture because we have the allegory given and then the divine explanation of what the allegory means.

To be as brief as possible, the two sons (Ishmael and Isaac) represent fleshly Israel and Christians, respectively. Hagar represents the old covenant, while Sarah represents the new. Isaac was the son of promise, while Ishmael was not.

The old law given to Moses was for one nation (Israel), the new covenant is for all nations (Matt 28:18, 19). The old covenant required the continual sacrifice of animals, the new covenant has the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). The old covenant did not remove the nation’s sins, it just rolled those sins forward one year at a time (Heb 10:3), in the new covenant sin is remembered no more for the baptized believers (Heb 8:12). The old covenant was to be taken out of the way (Col 2:14), the new covenant is designed to remain (2 Cor 3:11).

To understand this allegory is to embrace this gem from inspiration. Live free under the new law, do not live captive under the old law.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Children of promise; 4:28 (#44)

We have briefly looked at the allegory located near the end of Galatians 4 (see #43). The significance of this allegory is far too important to pass over lightly. It shows, in a microcosm, the grand plan of salvation God had in His mind since the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

In Genesis 3:15 we see, for the first time in print, the promise of God to save mankind. The Messiah would be from the seed of woman. Every human has come from the seed of woman, so we will need to narrow the scope down. Thankfully, the book of Genesis does just that.

God chose the patriarch Abraham, from all the people on earth, specifically to be a special blessing for “all families of the earth” (Gen 12:1-3). The lineage of the Messiah is not without drama. Just like any quality novel or movie there is a time that it seems impossible for the wanted, good outcome to be possible.

It was through Abraham’s seed that the world was to be blessed, but his wife Sarah, was barren. Many years passed without the desired child to fulfill the promise. What did Sarah do? She, like so many today, started ‘helping God’ with His plan. She basically said, ‘Ok, we will do this my way instead of Your way.’ Friends, that approach never works out well.

What Sarah did was to give Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate wife. From this union came Ishmael. But, this was Sarah’s plan, not God’s plan. The world was to be blessed through Abraham and his true wife, Sarah. That is what the allegory is all about. God had a plan for our salvation. As humans we cannot decide what is right, we need to do what the scriptures say is right. God’s plan is the only plan that will save our souls.

In the due course of time Sarah had Isaac. The promise of God was intact. This promise would pass through time all the way down to Joseph and Mary (Matt 1:1, 15). God always keeps His promises. What a gem!

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Christ has made us free; 5:1 (#45)

“Christ hath made us free” from what? The last part of that verse reads, “...and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” The context of this passage has specific reference to parts of the old law of Moses being imposed on New Testament Christians. Some of the converted Jews (along with some false teachers who were wanting to influence those new Christians) wanted to hold onto traditions and ordinances from the religion they had left behind.

The application should be obvious to every Christian who has come out of any denomination or world religion to be religiously correct in God’s sight. Countless millions have given up false religions to embrace pure, unadulterated Christianity. Many of us were taught error under the guise of what we now know to be Pseudo-religion.

I urge you to open your Bibles and examine them closely. You will not find a hyphenated religion anywhere in the Bible. For example, you will not find a Baptist-Christian, a Methodist-Christian, a Catholic-Christian, a Pentecostal-Christian or any other man-made religion connected to Christianity. The reason for this is very simple, there were no denominations in existence when Peter, Paul, Jude or any other inspired man wrote. The denominational world is unscriptural in every aspect of its existence.

This means that we can be free from man-made doctrines. The rules and regulations of men are a yoke upon the necks of religious people (Acts 15:10). Casting aside these man-made yokes will free up our minds to focus on what the word of God actually says. It will allow us to focus on being spiritually correct rather than just being spiritual.

Christ has made us free from the burden of sin (Rom 6:18). That is the good news. Baptism washes away our past sins (1 Pet 3:21). Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32). Freedom is available to all who are willing to be obedient (Heb 5:9). The opportunity of having freedom came with a great price. It cost Jesus His life so that we can have religious freedom.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Stand fast in the liberty; 5:1 (#46)

Galatians 5:1 begins with some very powerful wording; “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...” In a world full of trials, tribulations, troubles and temptations the Christians need to learn to “stand fast” in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Paul was encouraging these God-fearing, Bible believing people of Galatia to hold on tight to what they knew as truth. Just like it is today, some false teachers were going to try to lead them astray. They might try to add something to the word of God, or just as damning, to take something away from His word.

Almost three thousand years ago Solomon emboldened the faithful to “Buy the truth, and sell it not...” (Prov 23:23). As the text states, biblical truth allows for liberties unavailable in the religious world. All denominations and world religions have some additional book, some other standard to live by besides the Bible. They use handbooks, a creed, a catechism or dozens of other books written by various men and women that must be followed, according to their false doctrines.

Jesus, Himself, said “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48). We need to “stand fast” in the word of God. We need to learn it and obey it. That information which is contained in the 27 books that make up the New Testament will be what judges us all in the last day.

We are all going to stand for something. Why not “stand fast” in the inspired word of God? Why not let it change your life for the better? Why not let the knowledge of God’s word improve every aspect of your life? It will and it has for countless millions over the years. Why not enjoy the liberty that comes from standing fast in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Knowledge of that blessed liberty is a true gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Are you hindered? 5:7 (#47)

Galatians 5:7 ends with these powerful words, posed as a question, "...who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" The pure, unadulterated gospel stands between the sinner and salvation. It was Jesus who said we must know the truth in order to be made free from sin (John 8:32).

Without knowledge of the truth it is impossible to obtain eternal salvation, but knowledge alone will not save us. We have to obey what is written. A person could memorize large portions of the scriptures and still miss out on salvation if they do not obey the teachings of the Bible (Heb 5:9). Peter said it best in 1 Peter 1:22, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth..."

The verse we are using as a text begins with these four words, "Ye did run well..." These Christians had a good start. They were successful in pulling themselves out of the sinful world through obedience. But, now it appears there was some type of hindrance in their Christian race.

In the 21st century we see many things hindering Christians that would never be so in days gone by. Can you imagine such things as business hindering Christians from worship or Bible study in the previous generations? How about family, weather, pleasures, friends, etc? No, not a chance. Worship and service to God would not be hindered by such mundane occurrences.

God does not want soft, wishy-washy Christians, blown about by every insignificant aggregate. You, as a Christian, have started the most significant race of your life; finish strong. The goal is well worth the effort.

If you are not a Christian, who or what is hindering you? Your soul is worth more than anything and everything this world has to offer. Jesus posed a pair of passionate questions in Mark 8:36, 37; "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Never sell yourself short. You are worth more than the whole world and everything in it to God.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Is the cross offensive? 5:11 (#48)

The last few words of Galatians 5:11 read, “(T)hen is the offence of the cross ceased.” Many in our day wear a cross of gold or silver around their necks. They are often beautifully created and very ornate in design. A simple and elegant fashion accessory. Some will wear these crosses as a sign or symbol of honoring Christ. Others will wear the cross simply because of the adorning beauty of the jewelry.

I do not know if the modern cross, used as jewelry, is an ingenious marketing scam or something else, but it is not the image or information we glean from scriptures. The cross of Christ was offensive. The apostle Paul wrote, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1Cor 1:23).

The cross is not a fashion accessory, it is the place where God, the Father, offered the greatest gift to mankind, His only begotten Son (Rom 6:23). The cross was the place Christ’s greatest love was shown (Jn 15:13). The cross is the place where God’s greatest mercy and grace were demonstrated. The mighty apostle Paul said it best, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor 9:15).

First century, and other early Christians, would have never used a cross to signify their belief. It was considered a shame to be on the cross by the Jewish mind (Heb 12:2). It was considered foolishness to the rest of the people. Yet, somehow, it has become something very different in the modern world.

Wearing a cross does not make you a Christian. It does not make you closer to Christ. Jesus never told anyone to wear a cross. What He did say was, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Lk 9:23). Becoming a Christian through obedience honors Christ. Living a Christian life sets the example for others to follow the path to salvation.

What a marvelous gem it is to properly understand the cross of Christ.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The cross; 5:11 (#49)

The Savior of mankind voluntarily died on the cross at Calvary. His death on that cross made reconciliation possible for mankind. To reconcile means to restore friendly relations. Sin separated us from God (Isa 59:1, 2). We needed something monumental to be done on our behalf to have God friendly with us again because of our sin. That colossal task fell upon Jesus, of Nazareth.

In Ephesians 2:16 it is recorded, “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” It is profoundly important to notice the “one” in that text. In a world of tens of thousands of different religious organizations we see scriptures teach there is but one body. If religious people would only see what is right in front of their eyes.

It is not a religion of your choice. It is not a religion of which building is closest to my house. It is not a religion of who is teaching what I want to hear. It is not a religion of who makes me feel good about where I am now. It has always been the “one” church Jesus died to establish (Matt 16:18). In that passage Jesus plainly declared “I will build my church” (Emphasis added, jb). These words are used in the singular. Ephesians 4:4 says, “There is one body” and Colossians 1:18 records, “And he is the head of the body, the church...” (Col 1:24).

Therefore, God reconciles mankind to Himself through the church. This means that the sinner must become a member of the church spoken of in the scriptures to be reconciled back to God. This is what makes the church so very important for us. When we understand what God wants from us we will obey for our own good. When we obey He adds us to the church established in Jerusalem as seen in Acts 2:47. There is no salvation in a man-made religion. None. Not in any of them. Jesus went to the cross by purchasing the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

The sacrificial cross shines like a gem for all mankind to see.

JOB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Liberty; 5:13 (#50)

In America we love to talk about our liberty, and we should. Countless millions of brave men and women have put their lives on the line, ever since 1775, to ensure we continue to enjoy the liberties and freedoms we have in this great country. I know that same spirit will continue because of the good mothers and fathers who are teaching their children that freedom is not free. Liberty only comes through the sacrifice of good, honest people.

The beginning of Galatians 5:13 reads, “For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty...” The calling Paul writes of here is not a call of a nation to war. It is not the call of care or concern within a family. It is the call to service of the members of the church of Christ. The first time the gospel was preached, in its entirety, was in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection. Peter declared that the saving gospel was for those Jews and proselytes in Jerusalem that day and for those “...that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). Dear reader, that is you. The gospel calls you today to the liberty which is in Christ Jesus.

Liberty from the sin that is so heavy in our lives. Freedom from the guilt of sins which burden us. Do your own sins weigh you down? It does not have to be that way. Listen to the encouragement Paul offers, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom 6:17, 18).

We should be so thankful that Jesus came to call sinners from the fires of hell. The promise is for you and for those who are afar off. Salvation is available if you answer the call of liberty through obedience. He sacrificed it all so you can have the opportunity of liberty from sin and condemnation. Embrace this divine gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

A call for service and love; 5:13, 14 (#51)

The false teachers who were spreading lies and half-truths in the churches of Christ in Galatia were having a negative impact on Christianity in that area. To combat and correct this problem Paul wrote to the members of those churches to serve one another in love (v 13) and treating your neighbor as you would want to be treated (v 14).

A person should understand that the love that God has already demonstrated for us: (1) by having a plan for our eternal salvation (Matt 25:34); (2) by offering His only-begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins (Jn 1:29); (3) by giving us a simple to read and easily understandable guide book (2 Tim 3:15). This should cause us to want to draw closer to Him in our appreciation.

As we seek a deeper connection with God through love, it will automatically generate a higher level of love toward our fellow man. How would it be possible to say we love God and then not love His creation, mankind? The principle of loving thy neighbor was commanded when the law was given to Moses for the Hebrew people (Lev 19:18). Jesus made it a point to teach that this is attribute which is essential in every age.

Jesus reminds them to love God with all their heart, soul and mind. Then in Mark 12:31 He continues, “And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

These brethren in Galatia were facing some difficult times within the church. How did Paul tell them to deal with these problems and situations? By loving God and loving each other even more. If a brother or sister falls, lift them up. If they stumble, walk beside them and support them until they can once again walk on their own.

The shining gem of these verses is that we are all in this together. Let love and service grow.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Walk in the Spirit; 5:16 (#52)

The text reads, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” I am sure we all can agree that walking is healthy. It improves almost every aspect of our physical being. The walk Paul mentions here is a spiritual walk to improve our chances of being victorious in our daily war with the devil over our souls.

When we go for a walk physically we have a goal in mind. It might be to make it around the block. Maybe our goal is to walk an entire mile. Maybe it is to walk for thirty minutes, or some other such goal. The spiritual walk in the Spirit is no different, it requires us setting a goal. Maybe your goal is short term; to be better today than you were yesterday. That is a wonderful goal. Maybe your goal is long term; to make it to paradise and then one day on to heaven (Lk 23:43; Rev 21:1). No greater goal exists than that.

If these spiritual goals are something you desire then two things must be part of your “walking” preparation: 1. You must be willing to make the effort. 2. You must have the proper direction (2 Cor 5:7).

Think of the effort a baby exerts trying to walk. They will stand and then fall. Step and then fall. Two steps and then fall, yet never giving up. Always trying harder and harder to walk. The same effort is needed in your spiritual walk. You are going to fall. Do not stay down, get up and try again, just like that baby does (2 Pet 3:18).

When you finally learn to walk as a baby you need a direction. The baby might walk from the chair to momma. It might walk from momma to daddy, always with joy on its face and laughter in its heart. The baby has purpose and direction. That is the Christian’s walk in the Spirit.

With this article we mark 52 consecutive weeks (a full year) of “gems” that we have mined from the tremendous treasure trove known as the book of Galatians.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Walking in the Spirit; 5:16, 17 (#53)

Lots of people in our world claim to be walking in the Spirit. By this they imply they have a religious direction or connection. Anyone with the power of observation can easily detect that this most often is not the case. Many may desire or even claim to have a spiritual connection, but actions speak louder than words.

There is an easy three-step litmus test to see if a person is actually walking in the Spirit or just wishing (claiming) they walked in the Spirit.

First, those who are walking in the Spirit are walking in the faith. If we live a life of giving in to our fleshly lusts we are not living by the Spirit. This battle goes on within every child of God. If we want to win this battle we will do what God wants of us. That is what walking in the faith means. Not just having faith. Even the devils have that (James 2:19). The Spirit has left us one and only one faith to follow (James 1:21).

Second, those who walk in the Spirit walk in fellowship or in agreement with God and also with all those who follow God in truth (Gal 2:9; Heb 10:24). You cannot be in fellowship with God and His people if you do not fellowship with them. You cannot be in fellowship with God and His people if you fellowship those that live in error or in the rejection of His truth (Eph 5:11).

Third, those who walk in the Spirit walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). Jesus said that He is “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). A religious person may fool themselves into believing they are walking correctly. They may even fool others for a while. But, when their lives and faith are compared to the scriptures they fail the test.

Walking in the Spirit means doing it God’s way. Doing it God’s way means knowing and following what the Bible says implicitly. No variations, no exceptions, no additions. As Paul points out, the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Fruit of the Spirit; 5:22, 23 (#54)

In this interesting passage of scripture we find nine characteristics of “the fruit of the Spirit.” Let us begin with something obvious, which is not observed by many dealing with this subject. Notice that the word “fruit” is singular. This text is often misquoted and misapplied.

When a person studies “the fruit of the Spirit” we might hear them say something like I am okay with the fruit of the Spirit in my love, but I need more of the fruit of the Spirit in my peace, as if these are two different fruits. These are not two different fruits, but parts of the same fruit.

Think of the “fruit of the Spirit” as you would an orange. When you peel an orange and then take a section of it out to eat you have a section of the orange. If you take all the sections of the orange apart you will have several sections (let’s say you have nine orange sections). In order to have that original orange put back together you would have to re-unite those sections to make the orange whole.

Think of the “fruit of the Spirit” in the same way. If you have love you do not have the “fruit of the Spirit,” but only a section of it. If you have joy and peace they are not the “fruit of the Spirit,” but two more sections of the whole. When we fit all nine sections together then we have the “fruit of the Spirit” as God intended for His children.

The well-rounded child of God will water, nurture, till, prune and fertilize the “fruit of the Spirit” until all nine sections are full and vibrant. A single fruit to God’s glory.

Paul places the “fruit of the Spirit” in contrast to the “works of the flesh.” Cultivating the “fruit” will help us to overcome the seventeen sins listed that will destroy us forever. Spiritual fruit will have a satisfying taste in our lives now and the harvest that will last forever. This gem is tasteful.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Overtaken in a fault; 6:1 (#55)

The question is often asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The answer is yes, without a doubt. This is actually a direct quote from Cain who was speaking to God after he killed Abel, his brother (Gen 4:9).

In our text Paul commands the members of the churches of Christ in Galatia to watch over, care for and restore the brethren who have been overtaken in a fault. I am going to say the same thing in different words. If a brother or sister gets caught up in some sin, we, the body of Christ, will be there to help them.

In the church we have a special responsibility to the members. As baptized believers we know what it means to come out of the world and devote ourselves to living differently than we once did. Differently than the world does. We know better than anyone how hard it can be at times. That is one of the wonderful characteristics of the churches of Christ. We are part of a support system that is available 24/7.

When we get caught up in sin the faithful brothers or sisters will make every effort to aid and assist the fallen to get back on their feet. Make no mistake about it, brotherly love does not condone sin. If a church did condone sin they would be operating in opposition to God’s will. The text speaks of restoring the one who has fallen, not condoning the sin. The church’s duty is to restore the fallen to a right relationship with God.

The well-known military slogan is, “No man left behind.” The slogan is almost as old as war itself. What we seem to forget, at times in the modern church, is that we are at war. The battle is with Satan and the war is being fought for your soul. When a spiritually minded brother or sister wants to help you who have been “overtaken” in sin, let them help. Understand that they are doing what the Bible tells them to do. They are portraying in their actions what it means to be their brother’s keeper.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Bear ye one another's burdens; 6:2 (#56)

Verse 2 of this chapter ties in perfectly with the previous verse as it is pertaining to restoring a member who has been “overtaken in a fault.” No matter who we are, this life is going to get us down from time to time. The burdens may come from several different sources, such as our own physical bodies and the problems they often present. It might be emotional because of our close connection to others. Or another of the vast possibilities of the burdens we might encounter.

According to the prophet Isaiah, Christ came into this world to make our burdens lighter, easier to handle. Isaiah 53:4, 5 reads, “Surely, he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

All of us realize that a burden can be carried with less effort by two (Rom 15:1). Not only is the weight of the burden shared, but the simple encouragement of having someone involved in handling the burden with you is up-lifting. How can we know if a person needs help in carrying their burden? We can either know them so well that we see the struggle and volunteer to help them in their time of need. Or, the person struggling has the good sense to ask for help.

Everyone struggles with burdens. No one wants to see you fall under the load. Have the courage to ask for help (1 Thess 5:14). Not only will asking for help benefit you as you grapple with the burden, but the one you ask will be blessed as they help you through the fight. There are good, Christian men and women who want to help you bear the load of your struggle. They want to be a benefit to you, they want to see you overcome the problem and, in the process, glorify God in their efforts.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Fulfil the law of Christ; 6:2 (#57)

The text reads, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” How can we fulfil the law of Christ by bearing the burdens of others? The simple answer is that we can help lift their load. We can make the lives of others just a little easier. This can and should be true of our family and friends, but more specifically, it should be especially true within the Lord’s church.

We can fulfil the law of Christ by helping our brethren understand their own personal faithfulness in service to the Lord. If you do not attend services or Bible studies it is a source of concern for every other member of the congregation. If you are late for a service you cause concern for those who see you are missing. Questions will pass through the minds of the faithful already in attendance. Are you going to come to worship? Is their illness or car trouble you are dealing with? Do you need help? Or, maybe a half dozen other questions about your seat being empty. If we are consistently absent from work we can expect to be unemployed. If we are always late for work we can expect disciplinary action against us. Lift the burden on others and fulfil the law of Christ.

There is an inherit burden on the song leaders and the Bible class teachers. It is a powerful and awesome responsibility to lead in such a way. We should be involved in the song service. We should follow the lead of the leader. That is lifting a burden and fulfilling the law of Christ. The same is true of being prepared for Bible class. We expect our teachers to be prepared to teach the class. They have the expectation of the students to have a working understanding of the passages so the word of God can be discussed with intelligence and maturity. That is lifting a burden and fulfilling the law of Christ.

In this gem of a passage Paul is writing to those brethren in Galatia to do their part in making the church stronger. To make their own spiritual lives stronger. To fulfil the law of Christ.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Him that is taught; 6:6 (#58)

The person who teaches the Bible has a responsibility and an obligation to do so with respect, reverence and the highest regard possible. In addition to that fact, this verse teaches that the one who is taught also has an obligation. Notice the wording, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” The NKJ takes the word “communicate” out and inserts the word “share.” (Some think it has the obligation to support, even financially, those who teach.)

Paul is teaching that the converted person has a commitment to those who teach the truth. Part of that duty to the teacher is to respect the sacrifices the teacher has made to prepare themselves to sow the seed of the kingdom (Matt 13:3ff). Please do not misunderstand the point here. Paul is not advocating for some who might ‘call’ themselves a teacher to be supported. Far too many in our world will read what someone else has written and claim to be a Bible teacher. That is not teaching, that is plagiarism.

Many dedicated individuals in the Lord’s church sacrifice time, pleasure, sleep and comfort to learn the Bible and then prepare themselves to share it in an understandable, digestible way (2 Tim 2:2). Those people need to be supported. This verse shows the importance of the word being taught (1 Cor 4:17).

It cannot be overly stressed how important Bible teaching and Bible learning is. Knowledge of God’s word coupled with doing what the word says will make it possible to have our souls saved (James 1:21). If we are taught the word and then chose to follow the word we are sanctified (Jn 17:17). If a teacher teaches and a student learns then they are built up (Acts 20:32). If we are troubled in our personal lives and a teacher takes us to the Bible for understanding we can be comforted (1 Thess 4:18).

This gem of a verse is showing the student the importance of the sound, faithful, dedicated teacher. May their tribe increase.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

God is not mocked; 6:7 (#59)

This powerful verse reads, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” To be deceived means to be misled or diluted. Satan has been misleading humans from the beginning of our existence (Gen 3). He is described as the one who has deceived the whole world (Rev 12:9). His job in your life is to convince you that sin is not sinful. That, somehow, you will not be personally held accountable for your own sins. That is a dangerous and diabolical deception.

When we mock God it does not have to be some outlandish, public display of mockery on our part. We mock God when we are tempted to commit a sinful act, an act that we know is wrong, and we shrug our shoulders and do it anyway. That is mocking God. Or, maybe when we are confronted with a bad decision on our part and we simply smile and then do the deed anyway. That is mocking God. God is not deceived, He knows our thoughts and our intents.

What makes us think that we can sow one thing and reap something different? The natural law of sowing and reaping is used repeatedly in scriptures as examples of this law always being true. In the book of Job, Eliphaz says, “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (Job 4:8). Hosea wrote, “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind...” (Hosea 8:7). That Old Testament prophet was writing about the sins of Israel. The application is the same for us.

Do not live your life going after sin. You will not like the results. It is a fact that we always reap more than we sow. If we sow a kernel of corn it grows into a stalk with one or more ears of corn. The average number of kernels on an ear of corn is about eight hundred. Sow one, get eight hundred. If we sow sin we will reap multiplied anguish and misery. This gem is here to help us focus on never mocking God in our decisions.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Whatever a man soweth; 6:7, 8 (#60)

Every reasonable person should understand their spiritual responsibility as a member of Christ's church. We are all sowing something all the time. It is a fair question for each of us to ask ourselves, what am I sowing? According to Galatians 6:8 Paul, writing through inspiration, tells us there are only two choices. We are either sowing to the flesh or we are sowing to the Spirit.

This concept is easily grasped. If we sow grass seed we will get grass. If we sow tomato seeds we will get tomatoes. This principle has been in place since the beginning of time. (Gen 1:11, 12).

Sowing to the flesh takes on many forms. Paul has listed 17 specific "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21. Sometimes we might think that as long as I am not involved in adultery or fornication (v 19) or idolatry or witchcraft (v 20) I am not sowing to the flesh. Immediately after Paul writes of envyings, murders, drunkenness and revellings he inserts "and such like" (v 21). Sowing to the flesh is not limited to those 17 sins listed.

We cannot sow discord in the congregation and expect peace. We cannot sow neglect or hatred in the congregation and expect love. We cannot sow envy and expect joy. God expects better than that from us. He deserves better than that from us.

"[B]ut he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (v 8). After a believer has repented and been baptized they are added by God to the Lord's church (Acts 2:37-47). That is being begotten by the Spirit. We want to walk after the Spirit (Rom 8:1). We want to walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7). We want to walk worthy (Eph 4:1). We want to walk by the same rule (Phil 3:16).

Eternal life is our goal. We can obtain that goal if we will sow to the Spirit daily. It is good for us to keep in mind that the choice is ours. Whatever type of seed we sow is the harvest we will reap.

Oh, what a gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The right hand of fellowship; 2:9 (#61)

This gem of a verse has the men described as “pillars” of the church extending the “right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas concerning the conversion of the Gentiles during that first evangelistic trip which occurred, as recorded by Luke, in Acts 13 and 14.

The “right hand of fellowship” means having common ground, or common direction. We have fellowship with those who walk in the same path we walk in, that obey the same laws we obey. We have fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

This fascinating verse of scripture, combined with the truths recorded in Acts 15 reveals something of vital importance to the New Testament Christian. Acts 15:4 says, “And when they (Paul and Barnabas, added, jb) were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.”

This should give us an amazing visual of the scene there in Jerusalem. This is often called “the Jerusalem council” or some other such name. It is important to note, as Bible students, that mankind does not have the ability, the option, to pass judgment on what God has revealed. The Holy Ghost separated Barnabas and Paul for this work (Acts 13:2). The church, elders, apostles in Jerusalem were not deciding what was right. God had already established what was right. They were deciding if they were going to follow God.

Churches (both denominational and churches of Christ) will sometimes get together to make decisions on what they will do or follow. Recent changes in the Catholic church and the Methodist church are glaring examples. At times a church of Christ might gather together and make the decision to forgo the Lord’s supper each week. They might decide to add instrumental music to worship, etc.

We cannot extend the “right hand of fellowship” to those who are altering or changing God’s word and God’s will. The “right hand of fellowship” goes out to all who “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

The “right hand of fellowship” is truly a gem of a place to be.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

“Be not weary...” 6:9 (#62)

At one time or another we all have been physically weary from our efforts. There is nothing wrong with this type of weariness. Even Jesus was physically weary from time to time (John 4:6). However, this verse is specifically pertaining to weariness in our “well doing.”

Paul was warning those Christians in the churches of Christ in Galatia to not be tired of doing right. Doing those things that are right do not always come automatically. Doing right is intentional on our part. We are going to do right because God expects it of His children. We are going to do right because our Savior deserves proper conduct from His disciples. We are going to do right because our family and friends need that type of example. Your brethren need you to do right so they might have positive edification in their struggle to “be not weary.”

It is imperative that we know right from wrong in order to do “well.” This emphasizes the importance of our own, personal Bible study. Organized Bible studies are a true blessing and should not be missed by any serious Christian. But, one or two Bible classes per week simply are not enough to gain a real understanding of God’s desires for the lives of New Testament Christians.

Paramount for the Christian is to realize we live a life to serve, not to be served. Paul wrote in verse 2 of this chapter, “Bear ye one another’s burdens...” It is a very rare thing, in deed, to be discouraged when we are serving the needs of others. We minister to those who are in need and they benefit by our efforts. But it is commonly manifested that the one doing the ministering gets just as much (if not more) benefit from the effort.

“Be not weary in well doing” is a promise that we will have our reward “in due season.” Serve now and do a tremendous amount of good for those who need you. Serve now and secure for yourself eternal rewards for your “well doing.” As Paul said, “Be not weary in well doing.”

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Opportunities to do good; 6:10 (#63)

One of the great blessings of this verse (a real gem) is that it causes, or at least should cause us to pay attention to the opportunities that surrounds us on a daily basis. The opportunities mentioned in this verse are closely connected to not being weary in well doing of the previous verse.

Opportunities abound, but we often fail to recognize them, or maybe simply ignore them. How many times have we looked back on a situation and said to ourselves, ‘I should have taken advantage of that opportunity.’ Inspiration reveals two classes of people we are to “do good unto.” Interestingly, the Holy Ghost left no one out in this divine imperative. Christians are to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” That covers everyone in the world.

We can do some good with offering food, shelter and clothing to the needy. We generally do a good job with these material aids in the churches of Christ. But a person who is hungry will be hungry again. A person in need of clothing will eventually be in need of clothing again. The best, most important commodity we can offer is the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Taking care of the physical needs of a person and then leaving them without the good news that Jesus died for their sins is an effort that comes woefully short of any example we find in the New Testament.

Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb for mankind (John 1:29). He said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved... (Mark 16:16). Jesus called for people to repent, which means to change their minds about sin (Luke 13:3).

You “do good” when you share the good news. You “do good” when you edify and support your brethren. You “do good” when you help and encourage the sick and shut-ins. You “do good” when you defend the pure, unadulterated gospel. Let us practice to “be kind one to another...” (Eph 4:32). Remember, James wrote, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Glory in the cross; 6:14 (#64)

Humans glory in a plethora of possessions and accomplishments. Worldly minded people might glory in their house, car, hair, education, good looks or bank account. Some religious people glory in how beautiful their building is or maybe in a large attendance. Some might glory in their traditions or how elegant their preacher might speak. Paul writes, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Following the pattern set forth by the great apostle Paul we can boast, or glory in the cross of Christ. It was through the cross that we have reconciliation with God (Eph 2:16). Our sins had separated us from God. The sacrifice on the cross allowed the compulsory bridge to be established over the gap between us and God (Isa 59:1, 2). Our peace with God is made through the cross of Christ. In Colossians 1:20 Paul writes, “And having made peace through the blood of his cross...” Later, in that same book he wrote, “Blotting out the handwriting of the ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col 2:14).

We can and should glory in the liberty we enjoy as Christians. His death on the cross was horribly cruel, but necessary for our salvation. We can glory in that willingness on His part. His death on the cross was the fulfillment of prophecy written approximately seven hundred years prior (Isa 53). It was no accident He was crucified on that cruel cross. It was God’s plan for your soul. That is why we can glory in the cross. God does not want a single person to go to hell. Not only has He given us a guide book (the Bible) to navigate this low land of sin and sorrow, He has already paid the price for our entrance into heaven. What was the price? The cross.

God’s love was demonstrated in the cross (John 3:16). Christ’s love was proven in the cross (Gal 2:20). Glory in this gem.

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

Walking according to the rule; 6:16 (#65)

Everything we do has rules that must be followed. Traffic laws must be obeyed; we are obligated to follow workplace rules for safety and conduct. There are rules established in your household that are expected to be observed. Rules are important because they establish a framework to help ensure order and fairness. The same is true in the Lord's church. We have rules to follow.

We are obligated to follow the rules to enter into the church. Once we hear and understand the good news of salvation afforded by Christ's sacrifice, we must believe that message (Rom 10:17). Following that one rule is insufficient for salvation, we also must repent of our past sins (Luke 13:3). After our repentance the rules say we must confess our belief in Jesus Christ (Rom 10:10). If are willing to do that then we must be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38). If we follow those rules God will add us to His Son's church (Acts 2:47). Those are the rules. I did not make the rules, God did.

The verse reads, "And as many as walk according to this rule..." It is a fair question to ask, "What rule?" Context is the most important aspect of understanding a passage of the Bible and the context requires the reader to look at the end of the previous verse 15. It ends with the words, "a new creature." The result of following the rules as stated in the previous paragraph makes one "a new creature." Our "walk" is conditional. If we respect the rules we have a chance at eternal life. This opportunity will be controlled by our "walk." A word that means our manner of life.

We must walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7). We must walk circumspectly (Eph 5:16). We must walk worthy of our vocation (Eph 4:1). Our rule book is God's word, the Bible. Jesus taught in John 12:48, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The Israel of God; 6:16 (#66)

Our news is filled with references of the nation of Israel. The Israeli Army is engaged with the Hamas, the terrorist organization based in Palestine. At the time of this writing Israel is also engaged in a violent conflict with Iran. How does the modern nation of Israel compare to the biblical concept of Israel. The simple answer to that question is that it does not compare in any fashion.

Jacob's name was changed to Israel by God in Genesis 32:28. The Hebrew people were called by Jacob's new name (Israel) shortly thereafter. Later, after the nation was divided, the northern tribes were known as Israel and southern tribes were known as Judah. The name Israel was restored to the Hebrew people when the modern nation was created after World War II. It should be obvious that what we see on our news has nothing whatsoever to do with ancient Israel or what Paul is referring to in our text.

The "Israel of God" in verse 16 is not the Israel of the Old Testament. God rejected that fleshly nation because they rejected and murdered their own Messiah through the agency of the Roman government. The nation of Israel today, in the Middle East, is nothing more than a political country formed by the hands of men in 1948.

The Israel of God which Paul is referencing is not a political entity. It is the church of Christ (Rom 16:16). It is the church Jesus promised to build (Matt 16:16-18). It is the church that Paul writes this amazing letter to the region of Galatia in the first century.

Earlier in our study of this wonderful book of Galatians we noted Paul's statement in chapter 3, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then ye are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26-29).

JB

GEMS FROM GALATIANS

The marks of the Lord Jesus Christ; 6:17, 18 (#67)

The apostle Paul draws this sensational and spectacular epistle to an end by referencing “the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This mighty man is, no doubt, referring to the many “marks” his physical body suffered from the persecutions he suffered, mostly at the hands of the Jews. At one point in Acts 14, in the city of Lystra (modern day Turkey) he was stoned so severely that he was left for dead (Acts 14:19, 20). In addition to this horrific event Paul was also beaten in Philippi (Acts 16:23) and in Jerusalem (Acts 21:32) where they intended to beat him to death. Imagine the “marks” that were left on his body from these attacks.

It is not likely that those kinds of physical “marks” or harm will come on us. But there are “marks” of a different type that should leave “marks” on us. I am referring to such “marks” as humility, loyalty, devotion and dedication. These are the type of “marks” every Christian should display.

We will list six additional “marks” that need to be exhibited in our lives. Some “marks” that show our attitude and reveal our identity as belonging to Jesus Christ much like Paul’s physical “marks” identified him.

Do you have the “mark” of worship? Do people identify you as one who will be going to worship each Sunday? Do your neighbors know your patterns and expect you to go every Sunday? Jesus worshiped regularly (Lk 4:16) and so should his followers (Acts 20:7). The “mark” of teaching should identify His followers. The last words of our Lord, as recorded in the book of Matthew, are words demanding His followers be teachers (Matt 28:18-20). Other “marks” we would rightfully wear would be an attitude of love (Jn 15:12), prayer (Lk 18:1), obedience (Heb 5:8, 9) and sacrifice (Rom 12:1). “Marks” so evident in our lives that people can see them in us.

Paul began this remarkable letter with “Grace be to you” and he ends it with “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen” A wonderful “gem” of a letter written for our learning and understanding.

JB