

The Galatians Letters

Parables to Help Understand the Spiritual Truth of Galatians

A Supplement to the FOCUS Galatians Study
By Mark Robinson

Week #1

The Priceless Original

In my office sits a beautiful piece of furniture. In fact, I would go so far as to say that this piece of furniture is priceless. You might see it and think otherwise. . . but you would be wrong. Because to me, the coffee table that sits alongside my desk is something that cannot be replicated, and therefore is beyond price. If a furniture salesman walked into my office today and offered me the newest, latest design of a fashionable coffee table, I would flatly refuse the offer, for the table I have is far better than any new item that comes off the production line.

What is it about that coffee table that makes it so special, you ask? I'll tell you what makes it special. It is not special because of its fine craftsmanship (though it was built well.) It is not special because it has a nice finish on the outside (though it does look nice.) It is special because of who made it . . . my father-in-law. Many of you probably do not know this, but I have never met my father-in-law. He died when I was in the sixth grade . . . before I ever knew his daughter, before I ever knew him. Though I have never seen him face to face, I know him well. I am his son. I have seen pictures, a short video tape, heard stories, met his parents, his sister, his brother, his wife and his kids. I know many things about him, but I have only one thing in my office that was his: this coffee table. He made it in wood shop class in high school, and it sits here in my office today-- a wonderful reminder of a man I know, but who I have yet to meet face to face (though one day I will see him in glory.)

With that image as a backdrop, I want to launch us on a semester long journey through the book of Galatians in this column space each week. You see, Paul writes this letter to the churches in Galatia to remind them of the incomparable value of the gospel message he shared with them on earlier visits. You see, Paul had apparently had some time to minister in Galatia, and had seen many people respond by faith to the gospel -- the life changing truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had died on the cross for their sins and that by God's gracious offer and our acceptance of that offer by faith alone (not by their works), they could experience eternal life with God in heaven. However, since Paul had left the region of Galatia, other teachers had come in and tried to pervert the truth that Paul had been teaching. Others were offering a "newer version" of the "gospel." In fact they were saying that in order for people to have their sins forgiven, they needed something more than faith in what Christ did on the cross. . . they needed to follow a list of do's and don'ts as well.

Paul responds to this line of thinking with a very direct statement, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. (Galatians 1:6-7a)" Paul then goes on to give a reason why the gospel he preached is superior to the "newer" one that was being shared by the other teachers. His reason is similar to my thinking concerning my coffee table.

Paul does not say that the gospel he shared was better because he crafted a better argument for it (though he clearly argues the merits of his gospel in the book of Romans and elsewhere.) Paul also did not say that the gospel he shared was better because it had a lot of nice looking benefits from the outside (though there are certainly wonderful benefits to humanity because of the gospel that Paul shared.) No, Paul argues that the reason why the gospel He shared was THE good news was because of who made it . . . the God of the universe. Paul goes out of His way to explain to us that the gospel he shared was really not his gospel at all . . . it was His gospel, and because of that, it was far superior than any "newer" inventions of the human mind. Listen to what Paul said in Galatians 1:11-12, "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." In other words, Paul wanted to make it exceptionally clear that he did not just make this stuff up. . . he received it from Christ Himself and He has passed it along to us so that we might also receive it by faith and have eternal life.

We need to remember that the truth that the Bible teaches is not just another set of documents, another philosophy, another theory, another religion. This is truth that is special. The reason why it is special is because it is the only Truth that has come from the God of the universe. No "newer" model of human speculation will ever trump the Truth of God as revealed in the Bible. The "new" idea today is that every religion is true and provides a path that leads to God. Paul would say otherwise. Only that which is from God is priceless and can save, and that is the unchanging truth of the gospel that was revealed to Paul by Christ Himself.

The gospel ought to be priceless to us because of who it is from. It is from Jesus Christ. And though we may never have met Him face to face, if we have placed our faith in His saving work on the cross we know Him well. We are His son or daughter. We know of His truth and have even been given His Spirit. The gospel He provides is a reminder of the God-man who we will one day meet face to face in glory.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."
Galatians 1:3-4

Week #2

One Card

I graduated from the University of Oklahoma in the spring of 1996. A lot has changed on campus since that time. Some of the changes are cosmetic, for instance, the sower statue on the south oval made his appearance after my departure. Other changes involve nomenclature, where Adams Hall became Price College and where Owen Field became the Gaylord Memorial Family Entertainment Complex (sounds more like a place where the Statler Brothers would open for Billy Ray Cyrus than a place to watch a football game doesn't it?) Other changes involve technology. During my senior year at OU nine years ago I surfed the internet for the very first time, now wireless internet connections are found all over campus and when people talk of taking their notebook to class, often it has to be plugged in, instead of written upon. Times change.

Another difference I have noticed at OU has to do with the One Card system. When I was a student, my OU I.D. card was more of a symbol of my status as a student, now the one card is a three inch vault upon which your entire life is stored. OK, so that might be an exaggeration, but consider this: on that quarter inch wide black metallic strip on the back of your card all of your bursar bill, sooner sense, meal exchange, football tickets, access to the Huffman center, date of birth, place of residence, parking tickets, etc. are all stored and made accessible with just one swipe of a university owned machine. When I was a student, the only thing our card could be swiped for was to get a meal in Couch Cafeteria. All other information was handled far less electronically. When you paid your bursar bill, you got a sticker on the back of your card that indicated that the privileges of being a full time student could be extended to you. However, many people found ways around the system. I knew of several guys who took the stickers off of other people's I.D.'s in order to play intramural sports. Without the one card technology, you could circumvent the debts of your past to play in the present. With the one card system now, however, the reader does not lie. If you owe the University anything, then your privileges as a student will be revoked, no questions asked.

The reason why I go into this story with such detail is that I believe that many of us struggle with feeling as though our lives are equipped with a quarter inch black metallic strip down the back of our souls. Since we know that God possesses "one card technology," and that our past lives contain many debts that we will never be able to pay back, we assume that when God swipes our souls through His eternal knowledge, He will deny us many of the privileges of being a Christian. We may have come to grips with the fact that God's grace might be sufficient to save us to eternal life, but we may struggle with the notion that we have become disqualified for many of the privileges of a real relationship with God because of our past mistakes. You may fear that when God swipes your life, He will remember that Friday night back in 2001 when you made a bad choice in a dating relationship. You may fear that when God swipes your soul,

He will remember the eating disorder that you have struggled with for years. You may fear that when God swipes your metallic strip through His reader that He will remember your past and will forbid you from the “good stuff” of the Christian life today.

Do you struggle with this? Have you ever muttered, “How could a holy God use a sinner like me?” If you have struggled with these thoughts, then you need to open your Bible to the book of Galatians and camp in chapter one verses 13-24. It is here that Paul recounts the story of His life. Paul’s life is the perfect canvas on which God’s grace can be painted in a way each of us can understand. If Paul’s life were swiped through the one card system, it would show that he once violently opposed the church of Jesus Christ. There was a time when he stood by at the murder of Christians for their faith, and he played an active part in the systematic persecution and attempt to eliminate the early church from the face of the planet in the first century. These were some large debts that Paul amassed in his early life. If we did not know the rest of the story, we might assume that someone with such a sordid past could never be used by God in any significant way in the present, but Paul’s life tells us otherwise. Not only did God extend to Paul all the privileges of being a Christian, He also used Paul to do more publicly for Him than any other man recorded in the New Testament besides Jesus Christ! No one wrote more New Testament books, no one ministered in more countries, no one planted more churches, disciplined more people or saw God do more than the apostle Paul did. Paul’s life reminds us that God does indeed use sinful people to accomplish His great purposes. Praise God for this truth.

However, I want something to be real clear here. God does know about Paul’s past sins. Paul has not fooled God about his past life by placing covering over his inability with a “sticker” of religious piety and hope that God does not catch the mistake. Remember, our God does indeed have the one card technology. The fact that the details of Paul’s life are written out in God’s Word makes that very clear to us. What is truly amazing and gracious about our God is not that He uses us to do great things, but that He uses us to do great things knowing who we are and what we’ve done. The one who knows us most intimately, loves us most deeply and wants to use us most significantly. In a sense, all the debts we have accumulated over time in our sinfulness have been paid in full on our heavenly account. This is what the grace of God does for us . . . it is God's supernatural provision for us that we do not deserve and cannot repay. Knowing our sin, God made payment for us, so that He might live His life through us on this earth. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!

Week #3

Risen, not Retired

According to the most recent census bureau statistics, if I am average I will live 77.2 years. According to the Social Security Administration, I can gain full retirement benefits at age 67. Some quick math tells me that I could have ten years of retirement before death. Ten years! That means that if I started my retirement the day that "Forrest Gump" was released in theaters, I would be dead today (on average). Since that does not seem like that long of a period of time, I begin to wonder what I would want my retirement days to look like. Immediately, my American culture kicks on its movie projector in my mind and plays a short propaganda piece about life in retirement. In this piece, I am wearing a bad Hawaiian shirt, sipping lemonade, living in Florida in a place called Del Boca Vista, and driving a golf cart to the cafeteria where we have breakfast for dinner. Of course, this film is a caricature of retired life, but it hints at a notion many of us believe about retirement -- that retirement is the season of life where we have completed all the work we are going to do, and we simply sit back and watch as time passes us by.

Now, I have a few years, Lord willing, before retirement even becomes an option for me, but if I am not careful, I will let retirement thinking impact my theology for today. You see, I believe many of us suffer from a deficient view of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Sure, we recognize and remember the life that Jesus lived here on the earth. We tell His stories in our Sunday schools and reenact them around holiday seasons. While Jesus was on the earth, He did many great works. His crowning work while He was on this earth was His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. Through this mighty act, He paid the penalty for our sins and defeated Satan and death. We all know these truths, and celebrate them. However, what happened next is what has us confused. In Acts 1:9, after spending about 40 days with His disciples after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven. For many of us, this is where our view of Christ is deficient. Many of us assume that at this point, Jesus retired. Now we might never use that terminology, but that is what we are practically thinking. We assume that Jesus had done all the work that He wanted done, so He retired into heaven where He could relax at the right hand of God and simply watch the world pass Him by. This view of the retired Christ could not be further from the truth.

In reality, Jesus has risen, not retired. He is just as much alive and at work today as ever. Romans 6:10 tells us that the life that Jesus now lives, He lives to God. Jesus is still alive! John 14:12 tells us that Jesus still had things that He wanted done on the earth, and that these works were "greater" than the things that the disciples had seen Jesus do on the earth. So, if Jesus is still alive, and He still has things that He wants to have done on the earth, how will He accomplish His purposes? In a practical way, How is He risen and not retired? In what way will

the works that He has for today be “greater” than the miracles He worked while He was on the earth?

The answer to this question is found in Galatians 2:20. In this beautiful verse, Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The Holy Spirit through Paul gives us a picture of how it is that Christ will accomplish His work on the earth today. Christ wants to live His resurrected life through us! When Jesus lived His life on the earth, He was in one physical body that roamed the hills of Palestine. Now that He is resurrected from the dead, He has a new Body. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us that every believer in Jesus Christ is a part of the new Body of Christ. When Christ was on the earth, He was located in just one geographic area with a limited scope of relationships. Now that He is risen, with the Body of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, He now is at work literally all over the globe . . . from Jerusalem to Jersey and from Norman to Katmandu. This truly is a great work.

Think about this for a minute. Jesus has work that He wants done and He has extended us an offer to be a part of that by faith. Part of the work that Christ wants done is to pull us out of the dark despair and destruction of sin in our lives. Another part of what Christ wants done is to encourage other believers in their faith. Another part of what Christ wants done is to take the gospel to those who have never heard. In each area, all of us can experience Christ’s resurrection life and power working in and through us as we respond by faith to God’s leading in our lives. Though I may have viewed Him as passively watching our lives in the past, Galatians 2:20 reminds me of His present work. Remember He is risen, not retired.

Week #4

Perspective Precedes Practice

Your perspective shapes your practice. To say it another way, what you believe affects what you do. Don't believe me? Then stroll with me down memory lane, journeying back three and a half years to December 1999. Imagine that back in December 1999, you picked up a copy of the Daily Oklahoman newspaper and looked at the articles that graced the front page. Do you remember what those articles were about? I'll give you a clue. . . it is only 3 letters long, yet spawned a forest full of books, pamphlets and survival guides. That 's right, you remember! It was Y2K, and that little computer glitch was rumored to be the end of human civilization as we know it. Because some mainframe computers would suddenly be confronted with the year '00, many felt that suddenly terrible and temporarily irreversible consequences were going to claim our world. That's right, at midnight, January 1, 2000, it was widely reported that the doors to prison cells would spring wide open . . . that suddenly there would be no drinking water . . . that food production would cease . . . that planes would crash into mountainsides . . . dogs and cats, living together . . . to put it shortly, it was going to be anarchy! These were stories reported on newscasts, written about in magazines, and talked about over coffee. These were the topics of countless books and survival guides. This was the message that was heralded to the public.

So what did you do about it? What kinds of preparation did you make? I know what we did . . . jack squat. Well actually, we did buy a couple of extra bottles of water and some canned goods, but basically we did nothing. Why? Because deep down our perspective was that nothing was really going to happen. Think about it. . . if we really believed that the prisons were going to empty, that hospitals were going to be worthless, that planes were going to crash, I think we would have prepared better than a couple of bottles of Ozarka and some green beans. I mean really. If the pokey would have emptied and a slew of hardened criminals appeared at my door, all I could have done was offer them a bottle of water . . . well I could have offered three of them bottles of water, the rest would have had to settle for some green beans! Because my perspective was that nothing was going to happen, my practice was to do nothing.

I was thinking about this principle today as I read Galatians 3:1-4. I think that if you would have asked Paul to summarize in one sentence the truth he was conveying in Galatians 3:1-4, it was that your perspective precedes your practice. You see many people in Galatia had come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, trusting in His death on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. When it came to their salvation, the Galatians had a firm perspective that focused on the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and a salvation that was offered by God's grace and embraced solely by their faith in Him. Because that was their perspective, it had led them to place their faith in Christ alone for their salvation. However, these same Galatians, through the influence of some false teachers, had begun to have a different perspective on their sanctification (how they were

going to grow in their relationship with God after becoming a Christian.) They had formed a perspective of sanctification that was rooted not in the work of Christ, but on their own adherence to the lists of dos and don'ts that were outlined in the Jewish Old Testament Law. Because of that, they were trying to live out the law complete with observance of festivals, circumcision, dietary restrictions, and a strong ethical standard. This makes sense. . . because that was their perspective, that was their practice. But Paul wanted to make sure that they realized that their perspective was wrong, so he wrote to them in Galatians 3:1-4 to try to expose their wrong thinking and give them a new perspective on what it takes to grow in your relationship with God. He said, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain -- if indeed it was in vain?"

As we have seen previously in Galatians, Paul wanted the Galatians to know that their thinking was all wrong. Just as we experience salvation through faith in Christ's saving work on the cross, we also experience sanctification through faith in Christ's ongoing work in and through our lives! Indeed, Galatians 2:20 reminds us that Christ is not retired from the work He was called to, He is still at it . . . living out His resurrection life through believers who have and are trusting Him by faith. We get to experience Christ within. That is the way we enter into a relationship with Him, and that is the way we grow. In both cases, it is all about Christ. That ought to be our perspective of the Christian life.

But that perspective is not always the case for us. Like the Galatians, we can get "bewitched (literally hypnotized)" by the swaying chain of personal achievement, devotion, emotion, or effort. We begin to shift our perspective from Him and what He is doing through us to us and what we try to do for Him. We try to grow in our relationship with God in our own strength. We make bold statements, make long lists of what we should and shouldn't do, overextend ourselves in involvement in Christian activities . . . and why? Sometimes, I think we do this (subconsciously) because we believe that by doing all these things, God will like us better. Since that is our perspective, that is our practice.

But look at the subtle, yet powerful difference in the perspective that Paul promotes in Galatians 3. His perspective on sanctification is focused on Christ and what He has done and is doing. He sees the living Christ at work in His life, shining forth His righteousness through the earthen vessel of the believer's life. He trusts that Christ is alive and well at work in his life and then appropriates His power through the Spirit by faith. Instead of simply gritting his teeth and saying, "I WILL STOP GETTING DRUNK!" Paul says by faith, "Jesus, You are present with me and You have given me the power of Your Spirit. Your word tells me that we are not to get drunk with wine, therefore I take by faith that this is the way to go, that Your Spirit within me desires to not get drunk, and that Your Spirit has

all the power to make this a reality in my life." Paul, like us, realized the futility of making another set of well intended promises to God that were rooted in his own power. He realized that His only hope was through the power that dwelt within Him, and he wanted to live in that power by faith. Since that was his perspective, that was his practice. This may seem like a subtle difference -- as the desired action is the same -- but it is a life-changing one.

How about you? Are you stuck in your relationship with God right now? Has your spiritual life been filled with "God, I will never again . . ." statements that you always fail to live up to? If so, maybe you, like the Galatians need a change in perspective. Maybe you are thinking that our own good works are the way we grow in our relationship with God. Maybe we all need to remember that our sanctification, like our salvation, is about His work and grace that we get to experience by faith.

Week #5

Growing Up

In many ways, I feel as though my journey into manhood took a big leap forward on June 12, 2004. In a few brief moments and on the basis of one decision, I felt as though I were telling the boy in me to pipe down, as I walked tall toward adulthood. Though I am not of Jewish descent, and though 30 years old is a bit past the normal age, I had a bar mitzvah of sorts that day . . . in the power tools aisle of Lowe's Home Improvement Center in Norman, Oklahoma. You see, after 30 years of life, eight years of marriage, four years of home ownership, three years of handheld pruning hedges, and two summers of downed branches out of our sweet gum trees, I was finally going to put away my childish toys I had called tools, and graduate to a manly sized cutting device. That's right, you guessed it. On June 12, 2004 I bought a chainsaw . . . and boy am I glad I did.

Last Monday afternoon, for instance, I was particularly thankful for the chainsaw I now possessed. You see, behind the shed in our backyard had grown four very ugly "trees." You have probably heard of the phrase, "Someone got hit with the ugly stick" and thought it was just a figure of speech. These four trees in my backyard showed me otherwise. These were the trees from which the ugly sticks were pulled, and I wanted them gone. So, I grabbed my trusty chainsaw, crawled behind the shed and got to work. In about ten short minutes, all four trees were down and now resting in the middle of my backyard. Not owning a truck in which I could transport these branches to the city compost center, I let these branches lay there for a few days until I would have the chance to get rid of them. When I looked out at these branches on Wednesday afternoon, I saw that a change had come over them since their removal on Monday. You see, on Monday afternoon, they were ugly, but they were green. On Wednesday night, all the leaves had turned brown. Having been cut away from their roots, the trees had lost their ability to grow, nourish, and flourish, and therefore, their life came to a halt.

This is a common fact of plant life. Anyone who has taken seventh grade life science can attest to that, but it helps to prove a very significant point . . . separated from the root, the plant will cease to grow. Jesus knew this, and He made a very significant spiritual parallel about it during His ministry on earth. In John 15:4-5 He says, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me, you can do nothing." Jesus is stating a not so common fact here about the spiritual life. Sure, anyone who has attended a seventh grade Sunday School class can articulate His statement, but what does He really mean when He says that separated from Him, we can do nothing. When exploring what this statement means, we get great insight from Galatians 3:10-14.

In Galatians 3, Paul is writing to warn the Galatian Christians of a potentially deadly approach to their spiritual lives. Paul wanted the Galatians to know that the way they were approaching their relationship with God was leaving them separated from the “vine of Christ,” and therefore their spiritual lives were withering like the browned branches from the ugly sticks in my backyard. In fact, Paul will go so far as to inform the Galatians that the way they were living out their Christian lives was “cursed.” What was it that they were doing that was causing so many problems in their spiritual lives? Were they living defiant sinful lives, shaking their fists at God and running in the opposite direction of His Truth? Well, certainly this kind of behavior would have stunted their spiritual growth as well, but that was not the problem of the Galatians. No, the Galatians wanted to grow closer to God and were doing a lot of religious things and attending a lot of religious ceremonies to try to make that happen. The Galatians problem was not that they were doing a bunch of bad things, it was that they were relying on a bunch of “good” things done in their own strength to live out their Christian lives. It is this behavior pattern that Paul tells them in Galatians 3:10 is cursed, when He says, “For as many as rely on the works of the law are under a curse.”

What Paul is saying here in these verses is that we have no ability to grow, nourish, and flourish in our relationship with God apart from being connected to His great provision. Galatians 3:14 tells us what the source of God’s life giving vine is in our lives today and how we can remain connected to it. In this verse Paul says, “in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” In this verse we see that being connected to Christ means having the life giving, fruit producing power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, and the way in which we remain connected to that power source is by faith. Just as becoming a Christian meant recognizing our sinfulness and relying on the provision of God in Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sins, so growing as a Christian means recognizing that “apart from Me (Jesus) we can do nothing” and then relying on the provision of the Holy Spirit in our lives to empower us to walk forward in faith in the direction of holiness.

Do you feel as though your relationship with God looks like a dying brown leafed branch? Do you want desperately to grow in your relationship with God, but no matter how hard you try, you still feel disconnected from His blessing in your life? If so, then maybe you have fallen victim to the mindset of the Galatians. Maybe you have tried very hard to pursue God in your own strength. If that is the case, then let the words of Galatians 3:10-14 speak to your soul and remind you to reconnect by faith to the life giving power of the Spirit in your life. Recognize your need, then rely on His provision to do in us what we cannot do on our own.

Week #6

Law vs. Grace

It is 6:45 am and the alarm started blaring. For some strange reason, my alarm clock got set to a classical music station some six months ago, and I never changed it. So there it is. . . almost seven bells in the morning . . . and I am listening to Chopin at extremely loud decibels. The alarm brought me out of a deep slumber and into that middle ground between consciousness and vitality where judgments are impaired and where "more sleep needed" is the reigning montra. You know these moments. It is where you begin intense negotiations within your brain about what you did and did not have to do before work/class/etc. When you went to bed the night before, the plan was to get up early, resod the yard, study for a couple of hours, pay some bills, have a quiet time, and do some grocery shopping . . . all before making it to your 9 am class on time. That is the plan the night before. But when the alarm goes off, the negotiations begin. "I really don't need to shower this morning. I'll just wear a hat to class and wear deoderant," you reason to yourself. "Breakfast? What a waste of time. You don't need that," the bargaining continues. "Sure I can sleep another twenty minutes." So what do you do? You hit the snooze bar. Then, seven minutes later, you hit it again. It is amazing how you can continue this dance for almost an hour. And this was the situation I found myself in. 6:45, Chopin in stereo, snooze bar under finger. What's a guy to do?

It is upon further review of this too often repeated scenario that one can understand a fundamental principle of an alarm clock: The alarm clock cannot get me out of bed . . . it can only tell me that I am getting ready to oversleep. Think about it. If I set my alarm for 6:45, the blaring alarm tells me only that it is now 6:45 and that I am now sleeping too long having exceeded my planned sleeping time if I do not get up right now. That is what an alarm clock does. It simply informs me of the time, yet is powerless to get me up and moving. If I am to actually get out of bed and start my day, something must happen on the inside of me that decides to listen to the warning of the alarm and heed its call.

Now, let's contrast that with another scenario. Imagine that you are sleeping in your bed and you need to get up at 6:45. So, at 6:44, a good friend of yours comes into your room and grabs you by the arm. "Get up," your friend tells you. "You need to get moving and start your day. Your plan is to get moving by 6:45 am!" So, with the coaxing of your friend, and his initiative in your life, you get out of bed and then your friend meets you with toothpaste on a toothbrush and the water running in the sink. "Here you go, brush away," he says with a smile. Then after brushing your teeth, you see that your friend has the water running in the shower and breakfast on the table. With his prompting, facilitating and provision, you are able to get up, and get going, starting your day as you had intended all along. What a great friend!

There is a stark contrast between these two situations, isn't there? One tells us we are late, the other makes provision for our being on time. One tells us where we are in need (to get out of bed) then asks us to do it ourselves, while the other recognizes we are in need and then makes the effort needed to have the need met. Notice that the goal of both of them is the same, and that both of them are totally valuable assets, but they take two different approaches. The first example is a depiction of law. The second illustration, a picture of grace.

Romans 6:14 tells us, "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." This means that the Christian life is lot more like the second illustration than it is like the first. For we live under grace, not the law. But what does that mean?

Well, the law is like an alarm clock. It is not a bad thing. In fact it is a great thing. But it can never make us on time, it can just show us when we are late. As we saw earlier, if we are to get up, something has to happen in our hearts to make us get out of bed and not just "hit the snooze" for seven more minutes of sleep. The law is like that. It tells us when we are entering into sin (Thou shalt not commit murder, lie, steal, covet, commit adultery, etc.) Jesus unpacked the real meaning of the law in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5 when he showed the world that to truly keep the law, you must not only keep it externally, but internally as well. It is not enough to not commit adultery in the flesh, Jesus says, but we must not commit adultery in our heart by not lusting after someone who is not our spouse. By defining the true meaning of the law, Jesus was telling us that we cannot keep the law perfectly. Therefore we are in great need. The purpose of the law was to show us our need. But it is powerless to make us perfectly do everything right. That is why Paul describe the law in Romans 3:20 by saying, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight (Read: This Law "alarm" cannot get us out of bed); for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin (Read: It can only show us that we are going to be late.)." So for the Christian, the Law of God and His commandments to us show us that we cannot fully fulfill it on our own. It shows us that we are in need. The sum total of the Christian life is not a "keeping of the rules," though there are rules that apply. The rules of the Christian life show us that we cannot do it all on our own. That we are in need of a new way. The way of Grace.

And the way of Grace is what Christ ushers in. That is why it is said that we are not under law, but under grace. But what does it mean to be under grace? It looks a lot like the second illustration of the friend who gets us up. You see, knowing that the real issue with our standing before God was an internal and not merely an external issue, Jesus came and completely fulfilled the Law. He lived the perfect life. And now He stands in a gracious offer to us. He does not merely give us an alarm clock and tell us to get up on time. He stands there with us, waking us up through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, showing us the way. Then He does not abandon us, but sets us out for works that He has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10.) In a sense, He puts the "toothpaste on our brush." He "turns

the water on for our shower." He prepares the works that we would walk in them. This is the grace of God. Sometimes we think of grace in the wrong way. We think that the grace of God is just His dismissing of our error with no provision for it. We think that in our previous illustrations, the grace of God would be demonstrated by a phone call telling us that even though we have slept through our 9:30 class for the tenth time in eleven weeks, it is "OK, don't worry about it." We think that God simply dismisses our sin, with no regard for it. But this is not the grace that God gives. God does not simply dismiss our sin (that would be in direct opposition to His holiness), He makes provision for it. He sent Christ to fulfill the Law, live the perfect life, die in our place and prepare a resurrection life for us to live. This is the amazing grace of God that He offers us. . . And He offers it since we now do not live under Law but under grace. This means that the key to the Christian life is dependence on the gracious provision of God, not on our ability to keep the "alarm clocks" of the law (Romans 3:28). In a very real and eternal way, our "Friend" graciously provides for our needs with His limitless resources to make it possible for us to walk in the works He has prepared for us. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

"But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." Galatians 3:23-24

Week #7

An Heir of the King

Lisa Marie Presley. Now there is a name you probably didn't expect to see as you started reading this column. But what an interesting case study in sociology she is. As the daughter of the legendary King of Rock, Elvis Presley, the ex-wife of the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, Lisa Marie is a queen twice over. But all her marriages and failed relationships are not the part of her life that I want to focus on here. Also, we will not be talking about her musical career which tried to resurrect a couple of years ago. What I want to talk about is her inheritance. It is quite a story . . . have you heard it?

Lisa Marie Presley was the daughter of Elvis, and when Elvis died, he made Lisa Marie the sole heir of his estate. At the time, the estate was worth only \$5 million, but over the past thirty years since Elvis's death, the estate has grown to a value of over \$150 million with the sale of greatest hits albums and tours of Graceland (Elvis's home in Memphis). That is some serious change! But there is something even more interesting to me about Lisa Marie's inheritance than the large value of it. What is interesting to me about her inheritance is that it was given with a time delay on it. Lisa Marie was only nine years old when Elvis died, and the entire estate and its sizeable sum would not be hers until her twenty-fifth birthday. Think of that. . . she had to wait 16 years to become the owner of the estate. She was always the heir, but she did not receive the riches until she turned 25. Until that time, the estate would be under managers who would take care of things until her time came. Can you imagine what that would be like?

Well, the way many of us think about the Christian life, we certainly can imagine this scenario . . . in fact, we think we live it everyday. Many people believe that as Christians we are heirs to a great inheritance that we cannot yet partake of. It is being "held" for us until either Christ returns or we die and go to be with Him. Until that time, many feel that they are simply an heir awaiting a promise. Now, when it comes to our ultimate glorification, the ridding of our sin nature and the taking on of a new Body in the presence of God, this would be a correct statement. Those things will not be realized until the end . . . but that is not the sum total of the inheritance and blessing that God has given us. God has blessed us not just with a promise for the future, but also with a provision for today! As believers in Jesus Christ, we do not have a time delay on the fortune that has been granted to us.

What do I mean? For further explanation, look at Galatians 4:1-7 as it says, "Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He

might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

In that passage, Paul tells the Galatians that there once was a time before the birth of Jesus Christ, when God's people were like Lisa Marie . . . heirs who had received a promise, but it was a promise with a time contingency on it. When the appropriate time came, the promise would be fulfilled and all their hopes would be realized. The amazing thing that Paul tells them is this: That waiting period is over! It is now time to experience the joy and blessing of all that God has for you. This "fullness of time" that Paul refers to is the coming of Christ, His death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. Because of those things, the time has now come for the people of God to be released from the deadness of the Law and set loose to the freedom that is found through a living relationship with the risen Christ. Indeed if you have placed your faith in Christ's death on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins, you have suddenly been named a "son or daughter" of Almighty God!

So what is this great blessing that we do not have to wait for . . . what is it that we get to inherit now without a further waiting period. These verses tell us: We get to experience now the incredible blessing of the coming of God's Holy Spirit into our hearts. This is something we get to experience right now if we have trusted in Christ. The Spirit marks us as God's children, is given as a deposit for future redemption of our bodies, intercedes for us before God our deepest needs and desires as we pray, and gives us the power and provision to live the life that God has called us to. I don't know about you, but I would rather have that forevermore than the rights to "Jailhouse Rock" any day.

So be encouraged, the blessing begins now! Because you are a child of the King of Kings, we get to partake of His Grace in this Land. Not sometime in the future, but right now through the blessing of the giving of His Spirit.

Week #8

From Sand to Sod

If the United States of America were a house, where would the basement be? Geographically speaking, the basement to our great nation is found at a place called Badwater Basin located within the fiery cauldron of Death Valley, California. At over 200 feet below sea level, Badwater Basin is the lowest point in North America. I am not really sure why they call it Badwater Basin, for in this basin there is certainly no water -- good, bad, or otherwise. In fact, when I visited Badwater Basin ten years ago, I did not find much of anything except scorched earth and cracked, salt encrusted red dirt that ran on for miles. It was here at this point that I realized how Death Valley got its name -- nothing could grow there . . . the conditions were just too harsh. However, just about fifteen miles from Badwater Basin, in the same Death Valley, lies 7,000 yards of perfectly manicured, brilliantly green grass surrounded by trees and other vegetation. That's right. In the middle of Death Valley lies Furnace Creek Golf Course. As I saw the sign marking the entrance to Furnace Creek Country Club, my mind immediately was drawn to what would have inspired someone to build this golf course in the middle of the wasteland. It must cost a fortune to water this course and keep it open for use. These thoughts ran through my head because it was rather obvious to me that Furnace Creek was not the product of merely natural means. There had to be intelligent and powerful intervention into natural affairs to have sod replace sand across the valley floor. Without significant intervention from the golf course designers and greens keepers, these fairways would soon look like the scorched earth of Badwater Basin. From a quick survey of the surrounding landscape, that much was clear.

I was thinking of this image as I read Galatians 4:21-31 this past week. In these verses Paul remembers back to a miraculous work of God in the lives of Old Testament heroes Abraham and Sarah. You see, Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 when they conceived and had their first child together, whom they named Isaac. Due to their old age, it is rather obvious that Isaac's birth was not the product of merely natural means. There had to be intelligent and powerful intervention into natural affairs to bring a boy from her barrenness. Without significant intervention from the Designer of the universe, her womb would have remained barren and Sarah would have remained childless. From a quick survey of Genesis 12-22, that much is clear.

But what does this have to do with our lives? Why does Paul go to the great lengths of recounting this story of God's intervention in the lives of Abraham and Sarah to the people of Galatia, and why has God decided to keep this account alive for us to read in His Holy Scriptures? I think the reason why God wants us to read and remember this story is because it is a great picture of a deep reality in our own lives. What Paul wants us to know is that apart from the work of Jesus Christ in our lives, we have no more of an ability to live a truly righteous, God-pleasing life than Death Valley has an ability to naturally produce a golf

course or Sarah's barren womb had the ability to produce a child in her old age. In all three cases, it was going to take some significant intervention to produce the desired result. . . and what Galatians 4:27 promises us is that there is great hope in the "hopeless" situations in our lives.

In this verse, Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 when he says, "Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband." Against the backdrop of the story of Sarah's barren womb, Paul reminds the Galatians that out of her "hopeless" situation, God provided a child. This should have been encouraging news to the Galatians, and it should be encouraging news to us as well. As believers in Jesus Christ, each of us no doubt has struggled with feelings of hopelessness in our life. There has probably been at least one particular sin issue which has enslaved us and tied us down to the point that we feel as though there is no hope to ever see any kind of victory in that area of our lives. Maybe it is a struggle with pornography, an eating disorder, drug abuse, homosexual desires, or some other struggle. When it comes to these areas, we may feel as though we have no hope. As we try to see victory in this area, we may feel like a barren woman trying to have a child at age 89. No matter how hard we try, there is no sign of success. Out of this condition of barrenness, Galatians 4:27 gives us hope. It reminds us that God is powerful enough to give children to the barren, and He is powerful enough to empower us to victory in the struggles of our lives. He does this by making us His children and giving us the inheritance of the Holy Spirit in our lives to give us the desire and the strength to obey Him, even in the hardest areas of our lives. In order to tap into this power, He asks us to recognize our weakness and trust in His ways and provisions for our life today. When we do that, a harvest of His fruit will overshadow our flesh. In that moment, His strength will cover our weakness as moment by moment, we walk by faith in Him.

Week #9

Waiting for a Trip to the Kingdom

July 4, 1987. What were you doing on that day? Were you playing with friends? Watching fireworks fill the sky at the local city park? Eating watermelon at the family picnic? What were you doing on that day? I will tell you what I was doing . . . I was waiting in line – all day long.

“What would cause someone to wait in line all day on a holiday,” you might ask. I’ll tell you . . . Mickey Mouse. That’s right. A five foot tall stuffed rat and his goofy friend had convinced my family that it was worth the wait to see his Magic Kingdom on the birthday of our great nation.

Now, we realized that our day would be filled with waiting when we first arrived at the amusement park. For those of you who have never been to Disneyworld in Orlando, Florida, let me paint you the scene. Once you have parked your car and paid for your entry into the park, you must wait to board a large paddle wheel boat which will take you across the large pond that separates the parking lot from the theme park. So, after paying our admission, we stood in line to board the boat that would take us to “paradise.” The lake was too large to swim and no road went around it. If you wanted to go to the park, you had to get on the boat. So we waited.

For the entire book of Galatians, Paul has been reminding the Galatians of their inability to grow in their relationship with God on the back of their own religious fervor or good deeds. God is a holy God and humanity is separated from Him because of our sin. In a sense, our fallen, fleshly nature creates a large pond which separates us from God, and we are unable to swim across in our own strength, and no other road exists by which we can drive around our sin to get to the other side. Now, when someone becomes a Christian, they trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross to make full payment for their sins. When this happens, in a sense, their admission to heaven and fellowship with God is purchased, they leave their old life parked behind them, and they await voyage into eternity where they will struggle with sin no longer and rejoice in the presence of the Lord in His Kingdom forever. This is the promise for our future, the hope awaiting us on the other side, but what about life today? As redeemed people, we know we are fully forgiven and fully accepted by God, yet we still struggle mightily with sin in our lives right now. So we wait.

In Galatians 5:5, God gives us a beautiful promise concerning the Christian life. This verse says, “For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.” This verse pictures the Christian life as a time of waiting for righteousness to be manifest in our lives. But how long do we have to wait? The answer to this question is really three-fold. In one sense, we are declared righteous in God’s eyes at the moment of our first trusting in Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 points this out when it says that “He (God) made Him who knew

no sin (Jesus) to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In a moment, our sin was exchanged for Christ’s righteousness and our lives became “hidden in Christ” (Colossians 3:3). According to this verse, the waiting for righteousness stops at the moment one trusts in Christ.

A second sense of our need to wait for righteousness is seen at the point of our death and entry into eternity. For those who have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, death marks a transition into a new life with a new body which no longer struggles with sin and temptation. In this sense, all creation groans waiting for the promise of salvation to be fully realized in all our lives as Romans 8:18 says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” According to this understanding, we wait for righteousness until we die and are ushered into eternity.

So one way in which we wait for righteousness is realized at the point of salvation, and another sense is realized at the moment of translation into eternity, but I believe there is a third sense in which we wait for the hope of righteousness. This sense is spoken of throughout the book of Galatians. In Galatians 1:4 it says, “(the Lord Jesus Christ) who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age . . .” In Galatians 2:20 it says this, “. . . it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me . . .” In Galatians 4:19 it says this, “. . . Christ is formed in you.” In a real way, the Christian life is a life of waiting for Christ to produce His righteousness in us, now as we live out our Christian lives. But what does that really mean? How should we wait for the hope of righteousness in this life?

We get instruction concerning this in the first parts of Galatians 5:5. In this verse, Paul reminds the Galatians and us that we are to live out our Christian life by faith. As he has told us all along, the way in which we should wait for Christ’s righteousness in our life is to put our faith in the precious promises of God. To say it another way, we are to believe what we are hearing from God in His Word (Galatians 3:5). When we do this, the Holy Spirit of God (yes, the same Spirit which has the power to raise Jesus from the dead – Romans 6:4) will empower us to righteous living today. Sure, we will not live in sinless perfection in this life, but as we trust in God, He gives us victories moment by moment, which serve as righteous reminders of what is awaiting us on the other side.

So, through Jesus Christ, our admission has been purchased into the Kingdom. As we live out our lives now, though, we wait our voyage into righteousness. One day this will fully be realized and we will struggle with sin no more. One day, we will cross the pond of our flesh for good, and because of that we have great hope. In the meantime, however, we put our faith in God, moment by moment. For the Holy Spirit can produce for us the power of “paradise” in our life today. Therefore, let us wait . . . and let us wait with hope.

Week #10

Train Truths

Have you ever ridden on a train? If you haven't, the chances are pretty good that something you own has. Living in Norman, where the train tracks dissect the town (and stop traffic), I am reminded frequently of just how many trains move through town each day. . . and this is just one train track, in one city! Most of the time, I am a pretty patient man. However, there is one time when I will frequently lose my patience. That's right, you guessed it. I often lose my patience when I get stuck in traffic on Robinson St. by a train. What makes these trains especially annoying is that they are long . . . real long. The average train takes about 5 minutes to pass you going 40 or 50 miles an hour. That is a long train. So when a train passes, you have some time to think. Because of that, let me offer up some food for thought to help us in our walks with God the next time you find yourself waiting at the train tracks and losing your patience.

As you sit there with the flashing red lights, and the black and white wooden arms in your face, look at the train itself, and notice two key things.

1. The train is long, because the power for the train is not in the box car, but in the locomotive which pulls them along.
2. The tracks have already been laid, so the direction is already mapped out.

These are simple facts and you notice them quickly. Still 4 minutes 'til the train is completely passed . . . this is not food for thought. It isn't even an appetizer! Have patience. . .

When it comes to our walk with God, these two key facts of train travel are invaluable reminders to us of how the Christian life works. Galatians 5:17 states the condition of our spiritual lives very well when it says, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." As humans, we have a part of us, the flesh, which longs to only please itself and wants to lead us into sin. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been given something else, the Holy Spirit, which always desires to glorify and obey God. Since both of these are present in the life of the believer, there is tension and struggle. Sound familiar to your spiritual life? There are things you are tempted by, and you know what God wants you to do, and you feel torn between them. If you can relate to that and let's be honest, we all can then that passing train has two reminders for you as it relates to advancing beyond this dilemma of Spirit vs. Flesh and into God honoring living. In Galatians 5, Paul gives us two commands as to living out the Christian life. They sound similar, but have two distinct ideas in mind.

First, Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16 to, "Walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." This verse points to the fact that believers have been given a tremendous power source for overcoming sin in their life. The Holy Spirit which is present in the life of a believer in Christ has the power to pull the believer through temptation without falling. Like a box car, believers in Christ are powerless on their own to go anywhere, but when that box car is attached to the locomotive, they can go lots of places . . . at high speeds! When the believer is attached to the locomotive power of the Holy Spirit in their life, they can fly past temptation towards God honoring living because the power the Spirit provides. As believers in Christ, we need to continuously be seeking dependence on the Holy Spirit for all that we do in this life. It is our power source that transforms our lives and allows us to see growth in our spiritual lives.

Second, Paul tells us in Galatians 5:25, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." This may sound like the first command to walk in the Spirit's power, but the command to "keep in step with the Spirit" is different. Here the idea is to live in the same way, or to "follow in the footsteps" of someone else. The idea here is that when we are living our lives under the Spirit's power, we will be heading down the tracks of God's will. Do you want to live your life in the middle of God's will? If you do, then the answer for you is to be dependent on the Holy Spirit, because when you do, you are sure to head down the same path that the Holy Spirit is on . . . the path that always leads to glorifying God in the middle of His will. Train tracks have been laid long before the train runs over them, but they have been laid with a particular direction and purpose in mind so that every time a car runs over their tracks, it leads to the same destination. In the same way, when we live a life of dependence on the Spirit, our lives will always flow in the same direction as the Spirit and that direction will always be in the middle of God's will to the end of glorifying Him.

So think about that the next time you get stuck by the train while it goes by on Robinson, Main, or Lindsey St. Instead of losing your patience, be reminded of the provision of God for us as we seek to live out our Christian life. Attach yourself to the locomotive power of the Holy Spirit in your life by being dependent upon Him and then watch as you speed off down the tracks of God's will with a life that is glorifying to Him. If you do that, you may find that instead of losing your patience you may actually gain it . . . along with love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Week #11

Seinfeld Theology

Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer. Four names that you are bound to remember if you have watched any television in the past ten years. These four characters made up the foundation of the popular sit com, "Seinfeld." For the better part of a decade, these four amazed people week after week with their shallow, heartless behavior and quick-witted one-liners. I still remember as the series was winding down to conclusion, magazine columnists and TV Guide critics began to ask the question, "How will this series end?" The show had been virtually about nothing for 8 years. How do you conclude nothing? We all found out the answer when the show's finale aired a few years ago. Did you see it?

The story line for the conclusion was simple. Our fearless foursome boarded a plane to head to California, when it had to make an emergency landing in a small town. Stranded there, the quartet walked about town when they saw a helpless man being robbed by two armed criminals. Instead of going over and helping this man, Jerry and the gang sat on the opposite curb and poked fun at the man's misfortune. All was laughs and giggles until they were arrested for breaking the "Good Samaritan" law they had failed to help a person in need when they could have easily done so. Yada, yada, yada . . . the series concludes with Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer going to prison convicted of the crime . . . not only because of their one time cruelty but from a lifetime of selfish behavior.

So why is it that I filled up so much space recounting this television show? The reason why is that I think deep down, all of us have a little Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer in us. We are more interested in our own personal gain and posture than in the welfare of others. The Bible calls this part of us "the flesh," and it runs out of control in each of our lives far too often. In a real sense, the selfish monologues of Jerry and the neurotic self absorption of George are simply pictorial displays of the flesh running wild and unchecked. We can relate. That is probably why we laugh at it. Most of the time, we have thought the way they act. But in the Body of Christ, it is not supposed to be that way.

We saw in Galatians 5 last week that all believers have been equipped with the Holy Spirit . . . a powerful locomotive that runs us contrary to the flesh and always in the direction of glorifying God. As such, if we are relying on the Holy Spirit to empower us to Christ honoring living, there are certain things that God wants to do through us. Galatians 6 tells us that one of those things is to help other brothers and sisters in Christ to find the right path again when they start wandering off down the slippery slope of sin.

Look at what Paul says in Galatians 6:1-2, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

To say what Paul said in a different way, go back to the imagery of the Seinfeld cast watching the mugging in the small town. There will be times in our Christian lives, as we live in close community with other believers, that we will see one of our friends helplessly being attacked by sin in their life. The particulars will look differently from situation to situation, but the reality is always the same. We will see a brother in Christ seemingly held hostage by internet pornography. We will see a sister in Christ helplessly held in the bonds of eating disorders. We will see another believer drifting away into bitterness because of a root of unforgiveness in their life. Each of these situations bears amazing resemblance to our friend staring down the barrel of sin's gun and giving over everything they hold dear to appease its unruly commands. When this happens in the life of one close to us, what are we to do? Well, we are not to sit idly by like Seinfeld. We are to get involved. Galatians 6:1 tells us as much. We are to go gently into their life and encourage them that the direction they are heading is the wrong one. This can be a difficult conversation, but it is necessary. And you know what? Most of the time, when this kind of intervention is done gently, according to truth, and in love, that person will eventually be so grateful for the help.

Most people don't want to live their life looking down the barrel of sin's gun. Thankfully because of Christ we don't have to. When we go in to encourage a brother or sister caught in sin, it is not to live their life for them or to try to convince them of something they do not want to do. Because of Christ's redeeming act on the cross, and the current life of Christ flowing through the life of a believer, when we confront sin in a believer's life, we are really just reminding them that they are doing something they deep down don't want to do. Remember Galatians 5:16 tells us that if we walk by the Spirit, we will "in no way" carry out the desires of the flesh. There is great hope. We need to remind each other of that. With reliance on Christ's work and the Spirit's power, all of us can be restored to the mission God has for us.

So, are we guilty of breaking the "Good Samaritan" law? Galatians 6:2 tells us that if we bear one another's burden, we will be fulfilling the law of Christ. Are we reaching out to help our friends in need, or are we sitting idly by as sin holds them hostage by gunpoint. God does not want our lives to be about nothing. He has placed us in community to help us do something significant together.