

# Religion or Relationship

by David Legge

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*The book of Galatians teaches us that our relationship with God is by faith alone, and that a performance-based Christianity can lead to a life lived in the flesh rather than the power and dynamism of the Holy Spirit.*

**Duration:** 51:59

**Scripture:** Isaiah 64:6, Habakkuk 2:4, Luke 15:25-32, Acts 15:1, Romans 5:1, Galatians 1:6-9, Galatians 2:16, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 11:6

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Christian Liberty"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the book of Galatians, emphasizing the importance of life in the Spirit and the liberty experienced by Christians. It highlights the dangers of legalism, the significance of faith in Christ alone for salvation and sanctification, and the need to cultivate a personal relationship with God based on grace. The message challenges believers to move beyond performance-based Christianity and embrace a faith-driven life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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## Transcript

I was a bit devious in giving you the title, Life in the Spirit, because you wouldn't have a clue, really, what passage of Scripture that I'd be turning to, and I know that some of you are likely to be down into the concordances and everything, and into the commentaries and trying to find out a thing or two before I came, so I give you the title, but it is an important title because it really does, I believe, sum up the message of the book of Galatians, and so that's where we're turning. Paul's epistle to the Galatians, and we're going to read quite a sizable chunk tonight, chapters one and two, and next week, God willing, we'll look at chapters three and four, and then probably, I say probably, the third and fourth week we'll split up into chapter five and six, and we'll take a bit more time on those because those chapters in particular deal with, in great detail, life in the Spirit and the liberty that we are ought to experiencing as Christians, but Galatians chapter one, verse one then, and we'll read through to chapter two, the end. Paul, an apostle, not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches, plural, of Galatia.

Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, 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, to whom be glory forever and ever, amen. I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace unto another gospel, which is not another, but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you

than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed, anathema, eternally condemned.

As we said before, so say I now again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed. 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.

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my conversation, my way of life in time past in the Jewish religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it, and profited in the Jewish religion above my many equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and abode with him fifteen days.

But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by faith unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ.

But they have heard only that he which persecuted us in times past now preached the faith which once he destroyed, and they glorified God in me. Then fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation lest by any means I should run or had run in vain.

But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised, and that because of false brethren, unawares, who brought in, who came in privately to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage. To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But of these who seemed to be somewhat whatsoever they were, it makes no matter to me, God accepts no man's person, for they who seem to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me.

But contrarywise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles. And when James, Cephas, that is Peter, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles, but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision, and the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, in so much that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, if

thou, being a Jew, live after the manner of the Gentiles and not as do the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature are not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.

Even we believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin, God forbid, for if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor, for I through the law am dead to the law that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. It was during the early missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul that he preached the message of salvation through faith alone in Christ to the people of Galatia, and he founded, as we saw, churches, plural, in that area of Asia Minor, which was a Roman province. And if you want to read about that historic evangelistic venture, you can read it in Acts chapter 13 and 14.

But what you may not know is the Galatians, as an ethnic people group, were Gauls, G-A-U-L-S. That might sound familiar to you, it ought to, because they were the Celtic relatives of the Scotch, the Irish, the Welsh, and the Britons from Brittany in France. They were Celts, and characteristically, they were known for their generosity, but also for their restlessness, their changeable character, their inconsistencies, their impulsivenesses, and their quarrelsome nature, but like the Irish, and the Scots, and the Welsh, perhaps.

And those characteristics are reflected in this letter to the Galatians, and for one example of that, there are 15 works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians chapter 5, verse 20 and 21, and eight of those works of the flesh are sins of strife. Very interesting. But what confronts us this evening is the fact that these churches of Galatia were invaded by false teachers.

They were false teachers like those the apostles refuted in the Jerusalem Council in Acts chapter 15, and we read there in verse 1 of Acts 15 that the message that they preached was this, unless you're circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. If you're not circumcised effectively, if you don't become a Jew, you cannot be saved. You've got to understand a bit about the background of this situation.

We have to remember that the first Christians in the church were Jewish, and at the beginning it was assumed by them that the special character of the exclusive people, Israel, and their rites, rituals, and ceremonies would continue in this new dispensation, as it were, of messianic Judaism. But they confronted a problem, Gentile, heathen people were getting born again. They were converting to Christ, and so their original presupposition was challenged, and they were faced with a very stark question, that is, must those people being converted now from the Gentile nations, must they become Jews and observe Judaism? Or do we as Jewish Christians in the church, do we accept them as they are without them becoming Jews? And then that naturally raised the second question, that being how the Jews would relate to the Gentiles, because you must keep in mind that the Jews had strict social and dietary laws, and they didn't know how it was going to be possible for them to mingle in fellowship with those whom they felt were unclean.

Now if you're familiar with the Acts of the Apostles and the history of the early church, you will know that Peter had such a dilemma, and in Acts chapter 10 we meet Peter on a rooftop in a place called Joppa, and he's hungry, and God gives him a vision of a great sheet of cloth, and on that sheet there are all sorts of four-footed beasts, and they were unclean animals, even reptiles and insects of the ground. And the commandment comes to the apostle Peter in his vision, kill and eat. And Peter's response is, I've never had anything that is impure or unclean, and God says to Peter, do not call anything impure that I have claimed, that I have made clean.

Peter right away was able to interpret this vision from God, that God had now opened the kingdom to the Gentiles, and he was not to call them unclean. You remember the Lord Jesus gave Peter the keys to open the kingdom to the Gentiles, and in Acts chapter 10 we find that he does just that, and he is sent to Cornelius, and Cornelius comes to Christ, and it is Peter who testifies that he saw the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles just as it did the Jews at the first, at the beginning, at the day of Pentecost. But the Judaizers were convinced that the gospel did not set aside Jewish ceremonies, Jewish rites and rituals, particularly as one of circumcision, and therefore they were preaching that Gentile Christians must become Jews if they were to receive God's promise to Abraham.

Now let me just pause for a moment and make a remark. It never ceases to amaze me how knowledgeable people in the Scriptures oppose what is an obvious work of the Spirit on doctrinal ground. May I repeat that? It never ceases to amaze me how knowledgeable people oppose what is an obvious work of the Spirit on doctrinal ground.

We'll leave that because we'll touch upon it later on. But these Galatians who had received the gospel of grace through faith alone in Christ from the Apostle Paul himself embraced this teaching of the Judaizers. Now you can see how serious this was to the Apostle because he doesn't even start in his customary way that he normally opens an epistle.

He gets right in there because things are so serious and we see that to Paul this was more than mere church politicking. This was not a proverbial storm in the take up to the Apostle. Because Paul understood how the acceptance of the Galatians of this new Judaizing doctrine, how it actually undermined the very essence of the gospel of grace that is faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Now of course the question and issue at hand was should Gentiles be circumcised? And that may appear to be a distant concern for most Christians after the first century. But you're missing the point if you think that. You've got to see that the central issue is a fundamental issue and it is simply this.

This was a dispute over the basis of our relationship with God. What is the basis of our relationship with God? The gospel teaches that our standing before God is by grace a free unmerited gift through faith. In other words faith is the hand that receives that free gift from God and it is by grace through faith plus zero, nothing.

Now this is what was at stake in Galatia. Paul was at pains for them to know that it is the work of Christ on the cross plus nothing. And indeed he says that at the end of our reading in chapter 2 verse 21.

I do not frustrate the grace of God for if righteousness comes by the law then Christ is dead in vain. If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing, Paul is saying. So this issue is not some kind of peripheral issue, a secondary issue in the Christian church.

This issue goes to the very heart of the gospel that we preach. Paul says as much in his well known verses, chapter 1 and verse 6, look at it, I marvel, I am astonished that you are so soon quickly removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel he says, which is not another, for there can't be another gospel, but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you at the beginning, let him be accursed, let him be cut off, let him be eternally condemned.

That is how serious an issue this was for Paul. Now it should be no surprise to you that the book of Galatians played a major role in church history on several occasions. Not least, most notably perhaps the 16th century reformation when Martin Luther relied heavily on the book of Galatians to attack the Roman Catholic understanding of salvation.

Now do not ever say that the Roman Catholic Church does not believe that we get salvation through the death of Christ, it does. But what they do is they add to the death of Christ, Christ and the cross and Luther through this epistle and the epistle to the Romans who some people believe Galatians is like a sketch for the finished picture of the epistle of Romans, which is correct, they're both on the theme of justification by faith. Well Luther used this wonderful six chapters to confine and pull down the great bulwark that was Catholicism.

John Wesley was converted listening to the reading of the preface of Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Galatians at the Moravian Chapel in Aldersgate Street, London and it was at that point, listening to the truths of this book that he says, my heart was strangely warmed. I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation. Now I haven't heard an amen yet, but most born again believers would say amen to everything that I've said up to now.

We are with Paul and his desire to counteract a works based salvation and so we should be. We should reject any message that is Christ plus anything else. But here's the danger, we can miss the essence of Paul's argument.

It wasn't just an argument about the initial message that we receive in evangelism and preach as we spread the gospel. But Paul's message in essence was the basis on which we first come to God and the basis upon which we keep coming to God. Please this is vital, remember that the Galatians were already born again, Paul had led them to Christ and so I think the book of Galatians is not primarily to do with an initial reception of the gospel at salvation, but more it teaches us as believers as it taught the Galatians that we can operate on a performance based acceptance with God.

Christ plus, Christ plus my performance, Christ plus my good works, Christ plus the meetings, Christ plus the sacraments, Christ plus keeping away from bad things, Christ plus doing good things. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying because I'm standing firmly on the authority of the word of God. Both are forms of legalism.

That is believing that you need something more than Christ to be saved and also believing that you need to do more to keep saved and to keep in good tick as we would say here in Ulster with Almighty God. Both are forms of legalism and both I believe are what Paul is writing against in his epistle. Now, you may not have a legalistic view on salvation and I would hope you wouldn't, but what we're saying is that you may not have a legalistic view of salvation, but you may well have a legalistic view of sanctification and what I mean by that is that you're living your Christian life by a list of written rules or for that matter unwritten

rules and you're performing these things to gain God's blessing and acceptance with God and Paul writes in this epistle that that is not biblical Christianity.

That is legalism and legalism was a problem, a serious problem in Paul's day and it is a serious problem I believe today and it always will be a serious problem and it is serious not only because it distorts the gospel as we preach it to unbelievers, but for Christians it always results in a life lived in the flesh, a life lived in the energy of the flesh rather than the power and the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. For the Christian it means that the burden of responsibility is upon me and my behavior rather than God's enabling grace that I draw on by faith. It's the difference between trying harder as a Christian and trusting him, very simply.

It's the difference between being led by the Holy Spirit or being driven by the flesh, whether it is our own flesh or others flesh. I want to ask you, which version of sanctification have you adopted? I'm pretty sure that most of you here tonight have adopted the biblical view of salvation, that it's not Christ plus, it's Christ alone. But what about sanctification? Is your sanctification, in other words, is the way you're living your Christian life performance based? Now this is important and here's another reason why it's important.

It is not people who are half-hearted about the Christian life who get this wrong. It's not folk who are spiritually lazy who struggle with legalism, rather it's those who are highly motivated to serve the Lord who fall into this trap. They gauge their spirituality based on their outward exterior practices of what they think is Christianity.

And the great tragedy is that they're doing this with a motivation to connect with God. And they're trying to connect with God on the level of performance and that always ends in disappointment. Here's the reason why.

That is the one place that God cannot be found. And this is a widespread problem, particularly in the conservative wing of evangelicalism. I wonder, is it a problem for you? Do you ever say, I don't want to try anymore? Have you ever said that as a Christian? Do you not feel that you measure up to the standard, whatever the standard might be? Perhaps do you say to yourself, I can't rise to others' expectations of me.

Have you lost your peace? Have you lost your security? Have you lost your joy in the Lord? I'll tell you, preachers can tell looking down at most of the congregations that I preach to. Anyway, maybe it's just me. Maybe it's what I do to people.

I don't know. But there's not much joy about it. Not much joy about it.

In Galatians 4, 15, Paul diagnoses this symptomatic problem of a performance-based Christianity. One translation puts it in chapter 4, verse 15, very graphically. What has happened to all your joy? What has happened to all your joy? Now, listen to me tonight.

A performance-based Christianity, whether it's salvation or sanctification, will sap you of every drop of joy that you ever had. S. Lewis Johnson put it like this, Legalism wrenches the joy of the Lord from the Christian believer. And with the joy of the Lord goes his power.

That's right, isn't it? Doesn't the Word of God say that the joy of the Lord is our strength? So if we don't have the joy, we'll not have the power. And that power, he goes on to say, is vital for worship and vibrant service. Nothing is left but a cramped, somber, dull, and listless profession.

The truth is betrayed, and the glorious name of the Lord becomes a synonym for a gloomy killjoy. The Christian under law is a miserable parody of the real thing. Is this a problem? Am I missing the mark tonight? I don't think I am because the Holy Spirit has inspired this book, which infers to us that this will be a continual problem.

In a mission I was taking recently, I had a great conversation with a couple who were, I believe, under conviction, and I believe may well come through for the Lord. But I was asked a very interesting question by the girl in the marriage. She asked me, she said, if I become a Christian, do I have to change? Now, she didn't mean, do I have to repent of my sin? That's not what she meant.

And after talking to her for a while, I realized that that wasn't what she was getting at. I think what she was getting at was, without saying it, do I have to become as miserable as all those Christians? That is the perception that some have, rightly or wrongly. But listen, if you are operating on a performance-based level of a Christianity, you will have that problem, whether you admit it or not.

And it's widespread. In 2002, George Barna Research Group was asked by a Christian organization in America to poll Christians nationwide in the U.S. to find out how widespread legalism was as a problem in the American church. And one out of the six survey questions and statements that was made was this.

Listen carefully. The Christian life is well summed up as trying to do what God commands. That was the statement.

The Christian life is well summed up as trying to do what God commands. How would you respond to that statement? How would you answer a question like that? Is that what the Christian life is all about? Doing your best and trying hard to keep God's commandments? Now, if you answer affirmative, yes, you're in the majority. For 57% agreed that strongly they agreed that Christianity was well summed up as trying to do what God commands.

25% said they somewhat agreed. And you put those two together and you get a total of 82% were in agreement that the Christian life is summed up as trying to do what God commands. The only problem with that statement is that it's wrong.

It's a performance-based statement. It's more about doing than about being. Its emphasis is on a striving to avoid sin and do good things to compensate for sin.

And it's not about what true Christianity is. Now, if you want a definition of what salvation and eternal life is, there's no better one than the Lord Jesus gave. When he said, this is eternal life.

This is eternal life. That you might know the only true God. That you might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Now, some of you, I'm sure, think I'm spilling herbs. Was Paul splitting herbs? Did Paul think this was such a serious issue that he pronounced an anathema, a curse on anyone who got on the wrong side of this split hair? A better definition of Christianity is this. It is a personal faith-based, faith-based, not performance, faith-based relationship with God the Father.

Through abiding in his Son, Jesus Christ, and walking in loving obedience to his Word, through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. I don't think you'll get any better than that. Listen carefully.

It is a personal faith-based relationship with God the Father. Through abiding in his Son, Jesus Christ, and walking in loving obedience to his Word, through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. It is pursuing an intimate, personal relationship with God.

So, the emphasis is not on rules. The emphasis is on relationship. And that is why chapter 3 and verse 11 is a key verse.

And we look at it in more detail, perhaps, next week in Galatians. But that no man is justified by the law, chapter 3, 11, in the sight of God. It is evident.

It is clear. The just shall live by faith. Now, if you have a marginal reference or study Bible, you will see that that is an Old Testament quotation.

And it's taken from Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 4, which reads the same. The just or the righteous shall live by his faith. Now, Paul quotes this twice in the New Testament.

And if you give him the book of Hebrews, he quotes it three times. He first quotes it in the book of Romans, which is a missionary book justifying why we should take the gospel to the whole earth. Because it's the power of God unto salvation to everyone, to the Jew and to the Gentile.

And his emphasis in the book of Romans is upon the first two words in that statement, the just, the righteous. And the whole book is about how you are righteous and justified in the eyes of God therefore being justified, chapter 5, verse 1, by faith, with peace with God. So the emphasis in Romans is in the first two words, the just, the righteous.

Now, we go to the book of Hebrews and the emphasis is on the, and this is in the Greek language, the emphasis is on the last two words, the just or the righteous shall live by faith. And you know the emphasis in the book of Hebrews on faith, particularly chapter 11. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

But the book of Galatians, the emphasis is on the middle two words, the just, the righteous shall live by faith. In other words, how do we know the victorious, joyous Christian experience that God intended? Well, it will not come through obeying rules and regulations. It will not come through legalism.

It will not come by adding anything to faith. But it will come simply by living in unadulterated faith that comes by grace in Jesus Christ. Now, this is revolutionary.

I read a book not that long ago by a man called Ronald Dunn. He wrote a book, Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something. And this book was entitled, Don't Just Sit There, Have Faith.

It's a wonderful book. And he opens this book on faith with a story entitled, The House That Grace Built. And I'm just going to read it to you.

It's profound. It's an allegory depicting the Christian life from salvation through sanctification. Now, listen carefully.

He says, salvation is like a house built beside a broad and busy highway. Like everyone else, I was born on that highway and was spending my life following it to its destination. At first, the trip had been exciting and almost effortless, the constant flow of the crowd carrying me along.

But the farther down the road I got, the more difficult things became. My original joy had dissipated and I noticed that my fellow travelers rarely laughed anymore and their occasional smiles seemed forced. The backpack I had been issued at the beginning of my journey had grown heavier each day and I was now permanently stooped from its weight.

Worst of all, I had been overtaken lately by an unexplainable fear of reaching the end of the highway. One day, my attention was drawn suddenly to the side of the highway to a magnificently constructed house. Over its narrow front doors, a sign silently announced in bold red letters, whosoever will may enter and find rest.

I don't know how I knew it, but I realized that if I could reach the inside of this beautiful house, I would be saved from the highway and its destination. Pushing my way through the mass of indifferent travelers, I broke clear of the crowd and ran up the steps to the front door, but it was locked. Perhaps it's only stuck, I thought, and tried again.

It refused to open. I was confused. Why would someone put up a sign inviting people in and then lock the door to keep them out? Not knowing what else to do, I refused to return to the highway.

I pounded on the door and shouted for someone inside to open and tried to pick the lock, but it was useless. Suddenly, a voice spoke my name, and I spun around. It was the builder of the house, and he placed in my hand a key on which was carved one word, faith.

Turning back to the door, I inserted the key in the lock, twisted it, and heard a reassuring click. The door swung open, and I stepped across the threshold. Immediately, the backpack fell from my shoulders.

My back began to straighten like a wilting flower reaching for the sunlight, and from deep within me, my soul breathed a sigh of relief as an extraordinary sense of peace and well-being wrapped itself around me. The builder of the house welcomed me to my new home, explaining that everything in the house was now mine to enjoy. This was the house that grace had built, and faith was the key.

Surveying my new surroundings, I saw that the house of salvation was a house with many rooms, and I was only in the foyer. Across the way was a door marked, Answered Prayer. Next to it was another that said, Daily Victory, and next to it, Every Need Supplied.

The row of doors, each promising some spiritual blessing, stretched endlessly throughout the house. The discovery of those other rooms puzzled me, for I failed to mention that the foyer in which I stood was jammed with people. It seemed that everyone who entered the house stopped in the foyer, never advancing beyond it, as though the foyer were the entire building.

This was little better than the highway. Couldn't they see that there was more to the house of salvation than the foyer? Surely the builder intended every room to be occupied. Hadn't he said that everything in the house was ours to enjoy? I, for one, had no desire to spend my life standing in the foyer.

This was my father's house. I was his child, and all he possessed was mine. So I went to the door marked, Answered Prayer, and I grabbed the knob, twisted.

It was locked. I went to the next door, and the next, and the next. All were locked, but this time I didn't try to pick the lock or knock down the door.

I remembered my encounter at the front door and knew I had to have a key. Although I had been in the house only a short time, I had somehow managed to accumulate a large number of keys rummaging through my collection. I selected one tagged, Doing Your Best, and tried it.

It didn't fit, nor did the key, Religious Activity. The key of Sincerity proved useless. Next, I tried the key of Tithing.

I was getting desperate, but it was as powerless as the others. I was beginning to understand why the foyer was so crowded. Then I heard a familiar voice that was the builder of the house.

Child, he said, do you remember the key I gave you to enter my house? Yes, I remember. What was it, he said. Why, it was the key of Faith, I answered.

The key of Faith, he said, is the master key that unlocks every door in the house. Ronald Dunn says, that was the greatest discovery of my life. Faith is the master key of the Christian life.

From start to finish, salvation is by grace through faith operation. Everything we get in the Christian life, we get by grace through faith. God's grace makes it available.

Faith accepts it. Grace is God's hand giving. Faith is man's hand receiving.

Faith possesses what grace provides. Grace is God's part. Faith is man's part.

And it is our positive response to God's gracious offer. And Ronald Dunn concludes by saying, everything God demands of man can be summed up in one word, Faith. Look at chapter 3 in verse 2 and 3. We'll not stray into this tonight, for we'll be looking at it next week.

This only would I learn of you, Paul says. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish having begun in the Spirit? Are you now made perfect by the flesh? And the answer is no. Now, I have a burden on my heart, and I believe it's from God.

Because I believe that many believers, particularly those who are acutely desirous to obey the Word of God by every jot and tittle, many of them have never learned, or if they once learned it, have forgotten what it is to live by grace through faith in the Spirit. Have you? I think the greatest story of grace, perhaps, is the story of the prodigal. Would you turn with me to it for a moment? We're not going to read the story of the prodigal, because I'm sure most of you know it so well.

But what I want to read is the story that is part of the punchline that most of us stop reading at. It's the story of the elder brother. Verse 22 of Luke chapter 15.

The son that was lost has come home to the father. Verse 22. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring here the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Your brother is come.

Your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him safe and sound. And he was angry. And would not go in.

Therefore came his father out and treated him. And he answered his father, Lo, these many years do I serve you, neither transgressed I at any time your commandment. And yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.

But as soon as this your son was come, which has devoured your living with harlots, you kill for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, art ever with me. And all that I have is yours.

It was meet that we should make merry and be glad for this. Your brother was dead and is alive again and was lost, but is found. Now listen carefully.

We'll touch on this when we come to Paul's teaching on adoption as sons and daughters of God later on in this epistle. But here's a very, very stark lesson that most of us have missed in the parable of the prodigal son. The elder brother never learned to relate to his father as his father.

He said, I obeyed all your commandment. Never disobeyed you once. That's legalism.

He viewed God as a legislator, one whom he had to obey for fear, perhaps of judgment or displeasure. But he never learned to relate to him as a father. And that's what a lot of Christians have as their Christianity.

I'm telling you now, I had it. Religion. And at times I can lapse into it.

Religion and not relationship. What do you have? And listen, it doesn't just affect how we relate to God. It affects how we relate to others.

You see, when you understand grace in essence, how God accepts us unconditionally upon the act of our faith, it gives us the ability to receive brothers and sisters in Christ because they have believed in the same Savior as we have. But the elder brother couldn't do that. Look at verse 30.

He says, your son has come. He doesn't say my brother. He says, your son has wasted his inheritance on harlots.

Your son. He was a haughty separatist. He was.

Look at verse 28. They're all making merry. They're having a celebration.

They're throwing a party because of the grace of the father in receiving the prodigal son. And this boy is angry and would not go in. This is a revolutionary message.

We will find out in subsequent weeks that it is the core message of the New Testament. And it is the core theme of the Gospels. And listen, you will never understand the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ unless you understand what grace is.

And I rejoice in him that he was never standoffish. Ever was he. He never had a holier than thou attitude.

Never. It was the outcasts, the downcasts, the lepers, the prostitutes, the tax collectors. Those were the ones he made a beeline for.

And it was those, the Pharisees, who were a good bunch of people who wanted to revive the Jewish Torah, but had all the letter and none of the spirit. Those were the ones he vehemently opposed. And I will be asking in the weeks that lie ahead, if you can handle it, what camp do we find ourselves in? When sin came to the garden in Genesis 3, man's relationship with God was broken.

You go to chapter 4 and you see just after man's relationship with God was broken, man's relationship with his fellow man breaks down. And legalism is sin and that's exactly what it does. It affects our relationship with God and it affects our relationship with brothers and sisters.

And here's the reason why. When we think that we have to perform to gain acceptance with God, do you know what happens? We require others to perform to gain acceptance with us. When we think we have to perform to gain acceptance with God, we think others must perform to gain acceptance with us.

Now, Peter felt pressure in this regard from the legalist Judaizers in Galatia. And without going into too much detail, I want you to notice what happened here. Some visitors came from Jerusalem sent by James and Peter who was accustomed to eating.

Remember that Peter who had the vision? Think if you had a vision from God, it would make a difference. He had a vision from God. Don't call unclean what I've cleansed.

And yet Peter, because he was looking over his shoulder at what these folk from Jerusalem would think, he would not eat with the Gentiles in Galatia. And Paul had to come and he faced him. And he rebuked him.

Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say. Peter was not a Judaizer. And Peter was not preaching heresy.

He wasn't. He wasn't preaching Christ and Christ and performance. Christ in your works.

Christ in circumcision. Christ in ritual. No.

But I'll tell you what he was guilty of. He was guilty of not living consistently with the message of grace that he did preach. And Paul felt that was serious enough to rebuke him.

Peter had preached grace, but he didn't offer it to his brothers and sisters from the Gentile world. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say. Because it's considered.

It is dangerous when we create environments where we can claim to believe something and yet comfortably bypass practicing it in our behavior. That is dangerous. Now let me ask you, how are you living? Are you trying to do what God commands? Or are you trying to do what others command? Or are you living in a personal relationship, a faith-based relationship with God as your Father through abiding in Jesus Christ His Son and walking in loving obedience? We're not bending obedience now.

We'll see that later on. We have liberty in the Spirit, but not license. It's not a license to sin.

But righteous living doesn't come from law. It comes through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. It's life in the Spirit.

Let me close with this story. The famous Boston preacher, Dr. A.J. Gordon, visited the World's Fair in Chicago. And in the distance, he saw a man robed in bright, gaudy, oriental clothing who appeared to be

laboriously turning the crank of a pump and thereby making a mighty flow of water come out.

Gordon was so impressed by the man's energy as he pumped the water and his smooth motions and his obvious physical conditioning that he was intrigued and he went nearer and he was pumping a tremendous amount of water. Drawing closer, Gordon was surprised to discover that the man was actually made of wood. Instead of turning the crank and making the water flow, the flow of water was actually turning the crank and thereby making him go.

That's life in the Spirit. Not cranking up something, but allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through you.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/gK5JqnLoLtc.mp4>

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