

# Bound in the Spirit

by Steve Gallagher

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*Steve Gallagher's sermon explores Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans, emphasizing the urgency of defending the true gospel against false teachings and the importance of living by grace through faith.*

**Duration:** 56:55

**Scripture:** Acts 20:28

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Faithful Ministry"

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## Description

This sermon delves into Paul's ministry in Ephesus, highlighting his dedication, humility, and the challenges he faced. It emphasizes the importance of being compelled by the Holy Spirit in ministry, even amidst trials and uncertainties. The narrative also touches on the deep personal struggles and opposition faced in ministry, but ultimately points to the lasting impact and fruitfulness of faithful service to God.

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## Transcript

All right, last week we followed Paul as he had all these dealings with the Corinthian Church, and if you remember, he ended up in Corinth for three months, and we're going to pick up the story there. That three months was almost certainly the winter time. Well, it definitely was.

I'll tell you why I know that. First of all, three months is the amount of time that the ships quit making the journeys across the Mediterranean. But more importantly, we're going to pick up on the story here pretty soon, he's going to try to make it to Jerusalem by the Passover.

He won't actually be able to do it, but so it's during the winter of probably 5758, okay? That's where we're picking up the story, and Paul is very concerned about the Judaizers, right? We saw how much havoc they were creating in the church at Corinth, and we're going to see that the problems weren't limited to that. Now, while Paul was there in Corinth for that three months, he took that occasion to write a letter to the Galatians and also to the Romans, and I want to just say some things about these two letters. They're almost like one is the expanded version of the other.

They are very similar, but there are some differences, and I'll just mention four differences that I've noticed or thought about. The book of Romans, he is methodically laying out the tenets of the gospel. That's what he's doing in that whole epistle.

You can see how he lays a foundation and works through systematically how this Christian thing works. The book of Romans is so important for the Christian faith, but Galatians, which is kind of similar to 2 Corinthians in this way, it's more of a defense of his apostolic authority and an attack on the Judaizers who had been at work there in Galatia. Also, in Galatians, he's mostly dealing with the issue of circumcision.

In Romans, he touches on circumcision, but the bigger picture in his mind as he's writing the book of Romans is more to do with the fact that all mankind is guilty before a holy God, whether you are a Gentile or a Jew, whether you're circumcised or uncircumcised, it doesn't matter. The bigger picture is that everyone is guilty before God. Also, in the book of Romans, you get the sense that he really took his time to lay out what he was trying to say, whereas in Galatians, not just the difference in size of these two epistles, but also the atmosphere of it.

I don't know. When I read Galatians, I feel like he's hurrying from point to point, just kind of rushing through. I don't know why.

Maybe someone was about to leave on a journey up into the interior of Asia where Galatia is at. I don't know why he would have been hurried like that, but that's kind of the sense I got from it. And the fourth thing is that Galatians is a very personal letter.

These are people who he knew personally. He had led them to the Lord. He had established those churches.

You remember all the troubles and problems he went through in the four churches we know about in Galatia, but he had never been to Rome. Rome, the church there had been established by Jews who had gone back from Pentecost years before and had begun a fellowship there, and they had been out witnessing. So the church of Rome was started by other people.

It was the only church of all these different ones that we've been dealing with that Paul didn't start. All right, now let me just say a few things about the book of Galatians. It had been 10 years now, by this point, since he and Barnabas made that first journey through Galatia, but it had also been three or four years since the last time he had seen these people, which was when he took the beginning of the third journey.

Remember, he went through on land that time and finally made it all the way across to Ephesus and had been in Ephesus for two and a half years. So it had been quite a while since he had actually been in Galatia. Now, in the midst of all the trials and concerns he has for the various churches, you remember what we've dealt with the last couple of weeks, all the problems and persecution and challenges he was facing, while all that's going on, he's just arrived in Corinth or been there for a short while, whatever.

However, he gets fresh word from Galatia that the Judaizers had followed his footsteps across Galatia to these different cities and were undermining all his efforts. You know, man, just, wow, how painful is that, that the price that he paid to get those churches established and to have these false teachers following his footsteps and try to overthrow the work that the Lord had done there. Just can't imagine what Paul must have gone through.

The main themes of the book of Galatians really reflects almost the adversarial situation there. It is the true gospel versus another gospel. It is faith versus works.

It is freedom versus bondage. It is the spirit life versus the flesh life. It's grace versus law.

All of that is right there in the message of that book. And he has a lot to say about the Judaizers in those six chapters. Let me just blow through this real quick.

Chapter 1, verses 6 and 7. He said they were preaching a different gospel, distorting the true gospel. Chapter 2, verse 4. They were false brethren, snuck in to spy out their liberty, and they wanted to bring the Galatians into bondage. Verse 13, they were hypocrites.

Verse 14, they weren't straightforward about the truth of the gospel. Chapter 3, verse 1, they had bewitched the Galatians. Chapter 4, verse 17, they eagerly sought the Galatians to shut them out from God so that they would follow them.

Chapter 5, verse 7, they hindered the Galatians from obeying the truth. Verse 10, they were disturbing the Galatians. Verse 12, they were troubling the Galatians.

Chapter 6, verse 12, they desired to make a good show in the flesh, in other words, outwardly, but they didn't want to be persecuted. And verse 13, they didn't keep the law themselves, but they wanted to boast in the flesh to the Galatians. So Paul is nailing them.

I mean, he's, in his own style of writing, he is exposing what these men were really all about. Now what the Judaizers were saying about Paul was, first of all, that he was not an apostle. Same thing they were saying to the Corinthians, that he really did not have any apostolic authority, you know, that they, the believers there should only go to the disciples and to the elders of the church in Jerusalem, you know, trying to bring them back into that Jewish, I don't know, Judaism, really.

And that the emphasis, his emphasis on grace broke down the moral barriers and made a way to, that would lead people into licentious living. And there was some truth to that, that if you went too far in that direction, that that's where it could take you, and, you know, we talked about that before. The book of Galatians can be divided up into three basic sections, you know, split pretty evenly.

Chapter 1 and verse, I mean, in chapter 2, he uses his own story to establish his teaching. Chapters 3 and 4, he's attacking the false teaching of the Judaizers. And chapters 5 and 6, he's trying to explain, establish the right understanding of what grace is.

Grace does not lead to licentiousness, not God's grace. You know, maybe a perversion of it will lead to licentiousness, but the grace that Paul taught will not lead you to licentiousness, instead it will lead you to Jesus Christ. It reminds me of that Thursday night meeting we had last week where Bill brought up that we're saved by faith, not by works, and then Jeff, not even, I don't think you were thinking anything of what he said, but you just felt a burden to tell the men in the program that their great need is to put their minds on Jesus Christ, to focus on Him.

That is what faith is, is to have that real connection with the Lord. And that's a perfect explanation of what it means to live by faith. But anyway, they were saying that, I mean, Paul was saying that it's that relationship to Jesus Christ that brings us into the spirit-led life, and that is the answer to victorious living, not the ceremonial law system of the Pharisee-ism and so on.

Let me read a couple of quotes here. Coney Berenhausen said, Paul wrote to the Galatians an epistle which begins with an abruptness and severity, showing his sense of the urgency of the occasion and the greatness of the danger. It is also frequently characterized by a tone of sadness, such as would naturally be felt by a man of such warm affection when he had heard that those whom he loved were forsaking his

cause and believing the lies of his enemies.

In this letter, his principal object is to show that the doctrine of the Judaizers did in fact destroy the very essence of Christianity and reduced it from an inward and spiritual life to an outward and ceremonial system. You know, that says it right there. That's what Paul was trying to establish in chapters 5 and 6. We're not talking about Christians have the right to a lawless life.

That's not the point. The point is to go into a spirit-led life. And by the way, the laws that Judaism laid on people were nothing compared to the challenges of living a spiritual inward life.

Because then it isn't just a few outward things you do. Now it's every thought. It's your motives.

Everything that goes on inside you is right there to be seen and dealt with. So really the reality is that the spirit-led life is much more demanding. But of course, when you have the Spirit of God, then you're empowered to live it.

Anyway, here's what Farrar says. Already these men, the Judaizers, had spoiled Paul's best work and troubled his happy disciples at Antioch and at Corinth. They let Paul bear the brunt of all the dangers and labors while they snuck in his absence into the folds which he had constructed in order to trouble his sheep with their petty formalisms and artificial orthodoxies, to endanger the whole future of Christianity by trying to turn it from the freedom of a universal gospel into the bondage of a Judaic law, to construct a hedge which, except at the cost of a cutting in the flesh, should exclude the noblest of the Gentiles while it admitted the vilest of the Jews.

You know, in other words, what he's saying is just because you were circumcised, it means that you supposedly are right with God no matter how you're living your life, whereas someone who may not be circumcised but is really pressing into the Lord with a sincere heart is considered by them to be vile. It just shows how backwards they were in their thinking. Anyway, he finishes by saying, accordingly, hot with righteous anger, he wrote the epistle to the Galatians.

And if you read it with that in mind, you see how Paul is fired up when he wrote the book of Galatians because of these liars and what they were doing. All right, now, as I said, the book of Romans is almost like an expanded version of Galatians. It just goes into much more detail.

He lays out his premises much more clearly and systematically. Let me just step back for a second, though. Paul's plan, as I've already mentioned before, was that he was going to take this collection that he had been gathering from the different churches back to the Church of Jerusalem to help the impoverished saints there, and then he was going to make it to Rome.

And it seems that he wanted Rome to become a new center of his operations, just like Ephesus had been for those two and a half years, and before that it was Syrian Antioch. Now he wanted Rome to be the center of a new campaign for the West, as they would consider it, and he was going to get to Spain and just all the different areas around Rome. So apparently he wrote the epistle to the Romans was just kind of a stopgap.

I'm going to write out what the gospel is, so you will have this. I'm going to be there, and I'm going to see you, although I don't understand this. It must have been unclear in his mind, because he knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him, as we'll get to here in a minute.

He knew he had already been forewarned that he was going to be arrested and imprisoned, but yet somehow he still had this passion, this burden to get to Rome, and he believed he was going to make it there. But I don't think he figured out how exactly that was going to work out. But anyway, so that was what his plan was, was to, at least for now, he could get this epistle to the Roman believers so that they would get a correct view of what the gospel was, because he probably figured, well, if the Judaizers have followed me to all these other cities, it's only a matter of time before they make it to Rome.

And so that's what he was doing. Martin Lloyd-Jones said this, to remind ourselves of the condition of ancient Rome, all we need to do is to read what Paul himself says in the first chapter. It is as terrible a picture of moral degradation as has ever been drawn.

Now, can I just tell you, this was written, what, in the 50s? Martin Lloyd-Jones? Things have gotten a little bad since then, Martin. You know, I don't know if you can see what's happening down here, but it's not too good. Anyway, and it is out of that kind of atmosphere that these people have come together as Christians, and it is to them that the apostle writes this letter.

There is only one explanation for their change, and it's found in 116. Paul writes, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Nothing else could have produced Christians in the Roman Empire.

And it's the same today, right? Nothing else but the power of God through the gospel can produce the changed lives that are commonplace for us here at Pure Life Ministries. All right, so the Book of Romans is Paul's longest and most systematic epistle, and it's really more a comprehensive exposition of the gospel than it is a letter. You know, it really isn't very personal.

It's just much more formal, really. Now I can't go through Romans. I had really thought that I would try to go through it, you know, with my remaining time, but it just occurred to me if I tried to do that, it would just be superficial.

You know, how do you cover the Book of Romans in half an hour? So rather than do that, I'm going to be even briefer because I want to get into chapter 20 and get back in the flow of the story. I would only be telling you stuff you already know, and there's no reason to waste time doing that. But just as a very, very simple outline, the first eight chapters, Paul is primarily laying out what I already said, that the entire human race is guilty, and the Jewish rituals are not going to bring you into a saving relationship.

And this, you know, argument of his reaches its pinnacle in chapter 8, that wonderful, marvelous Romans 8, where he, you know, is basically expressing the benefits of that saving relationship. Chapters 9 through 11, he's talking about the question of the Jews. What is going to happen to God's people? These have been God's people way back since Abraham.

You know, what's going to happen to them? I'm sure many people wondered about that. And so he's basically saying in those three chapters, listen, God has a plan, and when it is the proper time, he is going to enact that plan, and he's going to bring them back in. He's going to graft them back in.

What a glorious thing. What a glorious God, really. He's going to bring them back, and we are going to see it in our day, I believe.

And then the final chapters, 12 through 16, are just practical exhortations about living the Christian life. All right, so let's pick up the story again in chapter 20. I'll start with verse 3, and there, in Corinth, he spent

three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

Okay, you know, let me just read what Ramsey wrote here, because he really gives a good explanation. Paul's intention must have been to take a pilgrim ship carrying Achaean and Asian Jews to the Passover. So, in other words, what he's saying is the Passover is coming up, and Jews from all over the Roman Empire will start making that pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Okay, so all these ships that would be heading that way at this time in the spring, as the shipping channels are opened up again, they're going to be loaded with Jews coming from everywhere to get back to Jerusalem for the Passover. Let me continue reading what he says here. With a shipload of hostile Jews, it would be easy to find an opportunity to murder Paul.

He therefore abandoned the proposed voyage and sailed for Macedonia, where he easily arrived in time to celebrate the Passover in Philippi. So he went to Philippi, his beloved Philippians, who never gave him any grief, you know, and never gave him any problems, just total support. So he was able to spend, I think it was a week or whatever, with them and, you know, celebrate the Passover with them, and then he had to move on.

Let's pick up the story, verse 4. And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, okay, Berea, Thessalonia, Thessalonica, and Gaius of Derbe and Timothy, who was from Lystra, so those are Galatian guys, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. So in other words, what he's doing is he's hand-choosing different leaders of these various churches for what reason? To carry the collections of their respective churches to the Jerusalem church. So there would be no question about anything underhanded going on, you know, that they would have their own representative take that money to Jerusalem.

And, but, you know, interestingly, Corinth isn't mentioned here, and I wonder if the Corinthians felt so terrible about the way they had treated him that they said, Paul, we completely trust you and we want you to take our money. You don't need to put it in anyone else's hands. I don't know, it's just a thought.

I don't know if that's true or not. All right, let's continue here. And you'll notice here in verse 5 that the we section of Luke will begin again.

All right? So you'll just notice that he's back in the story. Why? Because now Paul's back in Philippi. The last time we've seen Luke was in chapter 16 when he dropped Luke off, remember, and then he went down to southern Greece and all the different things.

But anyway, now Luke's back in the story. Verse 5. But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. While we sailed from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came to them at Troas within five days, and there we stayed seven days.

On the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day. And he prolonged his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the windowsill, sinking into a deep sleep. And I've heard, and you probably have, that the lamps were sucking all the oxygen out of the upper part of the room there and probably helped to make him fall asleep, whatever. Anyway, and as Paul kept on talking

and talking and talking and talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead.

Okay, now this was written by a doctor, right? The physician says he was dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, Don't be troubled, for his life is in him. When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then he left.

They took away the boy alive and were greatly comforted. But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board, for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. Okay, now if I remember right, the land juts out, and the ship was going to have to kind of go around that land mass thing, and it was going to take some time to do that, and Paul could cut right across on foot and basically get there to their next port in the same amount of time, or at least in enough time before they sailed again.

Let me read what Coney Berenhausen says here, because they bring out an important aspect to Paul's life that's worth reading. We have seldom had occasion to think of the apostle in the hours of his solitude, but such hours must have been sought and cherished by one whose whole strength was drawn from communion with God, and especially at a time when, as on this present journey, he was deeply conscious of his weakness and filled with foreboding fears. There may have been other reasons why he lingered at Troas after his companions, but the desire of solitude was one reason among others.

Strength and peace were surely sought and obtained by the apostle from the Redeemer as he pursued his lonely road that Sunday afternoon in spring among the oak woods and the streams of Ida." Okay, some flowery language there, but you get the picture, that he just had a great opportunity to be by himself out in the countryside and have a nice, long talk with the Lord as he made his way down to this next location. Okay, verse 14, And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mytilene. Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios, and the next day we crossed over to Samos, and the day following we came to Miletus.

So, in other words, this is one of those little ships that just kind of hugs the coast and they're going from port to port, you know, sailing in the daytime and staying the night in each of these ports. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. From Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

All right, I'm getting myself fouled up here, sorry. In this little passage here, this little story which takes up the rest of the chapter, and this is really what I want to focus on today, it's kind of broken down almost like it's an epistle. It's very Pauline, you know, or Paulinesque, I guess you could say.

In the first three verses, 18 to 21, Paul reminds them of his past ministry at Ephesus, and 22 to 24, he shares his plans to go to Jerusalem. 25 to 31, he talks about his own future, but also the future of the church of Ephesus. Excuse me.

And then the rest he concludes with some final words of exhortation. All right, so let's just read through some of this. Verse 18, and when they had come to him, he said to them, you yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plot of the Jews.

How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now behold, bound in the spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me, but I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.

Let me just stop there for a second, because he's probably mistaken here, and I think that if he was mistaken, it doesn't say anywhere that he actually went to Ephesus after he was released from prison later, but it seems like he probably did. And I think what was happening was this impending arrest and this desire to go to Rome, in his mind, this was the end of his time in the whole Aegean Sea area. I think in his mind, he knew he was going to just be in Rome the rest of his life, but it didn't turn out that way as the story went on.

But let me just continue. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. He's referring to the word the Lord gave to Ezekiel.

Remember when he said that, you know, it's your responsibility to bring the truth, and if you won't bring the truth to them, their blood is on your hands. I think that's what he's referring to here. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves, men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

And this is exactly what happened, you know, as time tells. And you can see different references to it in 1 Timothy 1, verses 6 and 7, and 19 and 20, and also in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy 1 through 7, and 2 Timothy 1.15, and 2.17 and 18, and chapter 3, but also in Revelation, you know, where Jesus talks to the Ephesian church about how they withstood the Nicolaitan people, you know, supposed leaders who came to them. They came in there, and apparently the Ephesians stood strong all that time.

Praise the Lord for that. All right, and then verse 31, Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day, for a period of three years, I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And that word admonish is *muthateo*, which is basically the foundational Greek term that we use in our biblical counseling, going to people, sharing from your heart, helping them with biblical solutions to their problems, their issues, their sin issues, their flesh issues, using the Word of God to help people.

And also I'll mention here that three times Luke refers to tears in this passage. In verse 19, tears of suffering. And here in verse 31, tears of pastoral anxiety.

And then in verse 37, tears of personal affection. So let's continue reading here. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything, I showed you that by working hard in this manner, you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that He Himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And that's not something that's in the Gospels. That came through oral tradition. But let me read what McLaren said about this.

Even at the close, Paul cannot refrain from personal references. He points to his example of absolute selflessness, and with a dramatic gesture, holds out, quote, these hands to show how they are hardened by work. Few religious leaders have ever talked so much about themselves as Paul did, and yet been as free as he was from taint of self-display or self-absorption.

You know, somehow Paul could do it, and you never had the sense of self-serving when he did it. And you know, when we share testimony, and actually I'm going to share a little bit of my own testimony here in a minute. If you are referring the glory to the Lord and what the Lord has done, and if you are in a good sight of your own lack and your own failures and so on, you can share your testimony, and the Lord will bless it and use it.

So I say that because we can sometimes get ourselves tied up in knots about talking about ourselves and what the Lord has done in our lives. We're called upon to share our testimonies and what the Lord is doing and has done in the past. It's one of the most powerful tools he's given us.

So we have to somehow find the balance to make sure that we're saying it in such a way that the Lord is getting the glory, which is the truth, you know, but not getting ourselves hamstrung, which is what the enemy would love to happen to us. Get us so tied up in knots about, well, you can't say anything, you know, because it would seem this way or that, that you don't have a testimony anymore. All right, let me finish this out here.

When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all, and they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again, and they were accompanying him to the ship. I'm going to read this quote by Farrar. After these words, which so well describe the unwearied thoroughness, the deep humility, the perfect tenderness of his apostolic ministry, he knelt down with them all and prayed.

They were overpowered with the touching solemnity of the scene. He ended his prayer amidst a burst of weeping, and as they bade him farewell, anxious for his future, anxious for their own, they each laid their heads on his neck and passionately kissed him, pained above all at his remark that never again should they gaze, as they had gazed so often on the dear face of the teacher who had borne so much for their sakes and whom they loved so well. If Paul inspired intense hatreds, yet he also inspired intense affection.

He had, to use the strong expression of St. Luke, to tear himself from them. Sadly, and with many forebodings, they went down with him to the vessel, which was by this time awaiting him, and we may be very sure that Paul was weeping bitterly as he stepped on board and that sounds of weeping were long heard upon the shore until the sails became a white speck on the horizon, and with heavy hearts the elders of Ephesus turned away to face once more, with no hope of help from their spiritual father, the trials that awaited them in the city of Artemis." Wow, that's just some good writing there. That is just capturing the moment and what he went through.

All right, now I want to use the rest of my time here to talk about this phrase in verse 22, and really these three verses, 22 through 24. And now, behold, bound in the spirit, I am on my way. And this is the NAS that I'm reading from, and that is literally what the Greek says.

But the NIV says it better, I mean really captures the thought better anyway, says that he's compelled by the spirit, and that's really what it means. To be bound by the spirit means to be compelled by the spirit, to be led, directed, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do what God has laid out before you to do. I've got one more quote to read to you, but it's also a good one, and we need to hear this.

The spirit was only pleased to give general indications of what was to come. Complete knowledge of what is about to happen can never be good for man because it takes him from the call to a living daily trust in God. The feeling that all is settled and known tends to prevent faith from keeping up a daily dependence.

We cannot too thankfully rejoice that our future is wholly unknown to us and that we are cast entirely upon the promise of grace for the day and upon the assurance that the Lord will provide. I'd rather walk in the dark with God than go alone in the light. We know nothing, nay, we know everything if we know our ever-present guide.

I know that's kind of difficult language to keep up with, but I think you got the sense of it, that we go into a future that is dark to us. We don't know what the future holds. This passage here is very special to me and to Kathy as well.

I want to share a story with you. In 1982, when I had that dramatic six-hour episode with the gun to my head and the Lord used all that to bring me back to himself, and after that happened, I started doing my best to live for the Lord as a cop, working in this maximum jail facility in Los Angeles. For several months there, I was able to live the Christian life there in that intense, hostile situation.

The biggest problems I had were not the inmates. It was the other deputies that I worked with, partly because they had come to be accustomed to me being one of the most aggressive ones. I was always the first one in a fight and just stuff like that.

They had come to know me that way. Now, all of a sudden, I'm this milk toast, and I don't want to fight anymore. I don't have any problems with everyone.

I love everybody. That's not a good setting for a cop in L.A. County Jail. But anyway, so several months went by, and the Lord started speaking to me and to Kathy about going into the ministry.

He had really called me into the ministry when I was 16 years old, and I used to read those old missionary stories and biographies like David Wilkerson and stuff like that. God used those books to put something in my heart to one day be in the work of God with him. I knew it was going to be some kind of a special work, but it was all very vague to me, and I ended up backsliding for years and so on.

But when I came back to the Lord, the Lord started resurrecting that. The call of God upon your life, once it's there, it's there. It doesn't go away.

And so I finally, after the Lord had made it known to us both, and we were both confident that we had heard from the Lord, I put in my two weeks' notice with the L.A. County Sheriff's Department. I can't tell you what a huge thing that was. I mean, what I had to go through to get on the Sheriff's Department and so on, and what it meant to me to be a cop and all of that, it was a huge thing for us to take that step.

Well, anyway, as soon as I put in notice, the word got out, and I think it was that very night that some of my friends, deputy friends, cornered me in a stairwell there at the jail and just started coming at me about, What are you doing? Are you crazy? What's wrong with you? And I'm trying to tell them that the Lord has called me into the ministry. What do you mean called you into ministry? Did he speak to you? Just that kind of sarcasm. Oh, man, they really gave it to me, and I went home that night.

I was so discouraged, and whatever I had been feeling was just gone, and I just was in despair that night. Kathy tried to encourage me and say, You knew that it would be challenged, but it just didn't matter, and I picked up my Bible, and I said to the Lord in desperation, God, I've got to hear from you. So I opened my Bible, and I plunked my finger down in it, looking for a word from the Lord.

It's not the thing to do, but sometimes the Lord will condescend to our immaturity, and my finger landed right here in verse 22. We had already felt like, kind of made plans to go back to Sacramento to go to Bible school there, and when I saw this, verse 22, I'm just going to read these verses here again, and with in mind how the Lord used it to speak into me a rhema word that day. And now behold, bound in the Spirit, I am on my way to Sacramento, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds, and I haven't dealt with that yet, and afflictions await me.

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus. When I read that, I knew that he was speaking to me, that he had given me a ministry. I don't mean pure life ministries, I just mean called me into ministry that I had received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the grace of God.

Now, as I thought about this last couple of days, it came to me this way, and this is just one of those coincidences, maybe coincidence, I don't know. But I've been looking for some letters, so I have this big box of memorabilia, just stuffed crammed full of all kinds of letters, and magazine articles I've written over the years, just all kinds of stuff over my years of ministry. And so I started going through them, and while I was looking for these letters, I thought, you know, let me just organize this mess.

So I've been doing that over the last few days. And it's kind of like it has taken me back into earlier periods of the ministry. Mostly what really got me was in the early 90s.

That was the period of time that just really stood out to me, and I started reading some of the letters that I had written in the early 90s, and Kathy did also, and it affected her the same way. It was like unbelievable the problems we faced when we first got here in Kentucky and started the work here. It was just like brought me back.

It's been so long since I have had to face those kind of issues that we faced in those early days. Enormous problems and obstacles of establishing a ministry to sexual addicts in a farm community in Kentucky. I mean, that alone, and how the community rose up against us and at one point tried to drive us out of here, and just all of the challenges of that, the lack of money.

One of the things I ran across was my 1995 W-2. Our combined income for 1995 was \$4,900. I mean, that's how broke we were, and Jeff and Rose can attest to that.

We used to go to Goodwill's to get our clothes. That was like a big event for the month. We'd save up our money and go up into Cincinnati and try to find some clothes to wear.

But I'm just explaining to you what it was like here. What is that? 20 years ago, whatever. The hardships, the constant hardships, and for me personally, the migraines, the unending migraines week after week and the sleepless nights.

But really the biggest issues were always people problems. Everywhere we turned, people who rejected us, people who used us, people who disappointed us, people who turned on us, people who were hateful to us, people who stole from us. But the thing that got me more than anything else over the years were those who we had really poured ourselves into personally, and then to watch them turn their back on the Lord and go back to a self-centered lifestyle.

I don't have words to explain what that's like when you spend years building into someone's life and to watch them turn away from the Lord like that. And we've seen it a number of times. Mostly not.

Most of the people who work for us at Pure Life have come into a marvelous life in God, but there were those certain ones who were very, very close to us. Jeff and Rose have had their own. But for Kathy and me, we've had certain ones that we were so close to, and to see them turn away from the Lord, just the grief was overwhelming.

Those were the kinds of things that really wore us out, I think. But anyway, I don't mean to paint a bleak picture here, and I don't mean to say all this in a self-serving way. I'm getting at a point here.

You guys are in ministry, others watching by video. Maybe God is calling you or speaking to you about going into the ministry. Or you have just gone into the ministry, and you, like Kathy and me, 31 years ago, you had that naive kind of excitement about, man, I'm going to be in the work of God.

But you don't realize what that work means. Now you guys here have been in the daily grind. Some of you a long time.

Robert, I think, 12 years. Jeff and Rose, 20 years. Brad, 15 years.

Bill, 15 years. Some of you guys have been at this for a long time, the day in, day out, trudging through the mundane-ness, the problems, the unending difficulties and afflictions and opposition of the enemy. And sometimes it just feels like, man, won't I ever get a break from this? But I want to tell you something.

In that box of memorabilia is another story. There is a stack of just thank you cards that is that thick of people whose lives have been absolutely, now these are only the ones who wrote to me or us, whose lives weren't just a little affected. I was talking to her about, well, I mentioned a radio speaker, and I said, you know, I know that that guy has gotten a lot of letters of appreciation, but he did not, God didn't use, partially because of who he is, I don't want to mention who he is, but partially because of his type of ministry.

Oh, he's a voice on the radio, okay? But what we have done and are doing here at Pure Life Ministries, getting so involved in the interior life, people's heart issues, we do have people who turn away, and it is heartbreaking. You counselors have a difficult row to hoe, but the ones who listen, the ones who respond to the Lord, it's not just like they heard a nice little radio talk or a nice little sermon or something. Their lives are completely changed, and I read those thank you cards.

Some of them are just, the people cannot come up with the words to express the level of their gratitude. Now, if that's the case for us, and it is for all of us here involved in this work, and many also who are

watching on video, if that's the case for us, what was it like for Paul? He was about my age at this point, and he had about another 10 years before his days of ministry were over, and I suppose I do as well. And so he could look back and see all the fruit of those difficult times, those trials, all the problems with people that he had at different times.

He could look back, but there was so much wonderful fruit. When we do get to heaven, we are headed somewhere, aren't we? We do have a hope. We are going somewhere.

All the efforts that we are putting forth, all the mental struggles that we go through, the constant opposition and problems that we face in this ministry, all of it is valuable to the Lord, and we will see the fruit of all of it when we get there to that wonderful land of bliss. Then God will show us things that we have long since forgot about, just like I have forgotten 90% of the stuff that I've gone through in the last few days. I have forgotten those people, those situations.

I forgot all the hardships. All that's gone, you know? But it's all being recorded up there in heaven, all these issues that we're dealing with. Praise the Lord.

It's not just another mundane day or whatever, seemingly useless, hopeless, worthless. It's not like that. God is using all of it, and one day there will be a reward awaiting all of his people who have gone the narrow path, obeyed the Lord, and let their lives shine for him to glorify him in this world.

Praise the Lord. I hope that that encourages you guys a little bit, you know, because I know it can be difficult. All right, God bless you.

Next week we're going to set sail with Paul for Jerusalem and see what happens.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/vH222BJDnIk.mp4>

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