

## ***"Belief Or Bewitched?"***

**Christian Liberty**

Galatians 3:1-14

Dr. Jonathan Watt

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**Jonathan:** I'm just slowly waking up. I don't know about you, but I am not a morning person. (*Laughter.*) Which is actually a good thing that I'm standing up, because if I were sitting like you, I don't know how I'd manage this. Oh, man! It was a late night and a short one, too.

But it's good to be with you. I enjoyed last week. I hope you did as well. And I hope that in messing with a book that has had a huge impact particularly on Protestant history—that's only part of the picture—that we're getting something that would be not only, as a necessity, an insight into the first century, because we're reading about what's happening there. But of course the thing that we're interested in is what does it have to say to us today as well. (Am I running over your feet here? Okay, here we go.)

So the first question to always ask, by the way, in any communication is what is the other person saying? What are they meaning? What are they trying to get across? This is before you take the next steps involved with "well then, what do I think of it and what am I going to do with it?" It's a basic principle of what we call *exegesis*. What does *exegesis* mean, by the way? There's our test for this morning.

**Participant:** To lead out; to draw out.

**Jonathan:** To lead out, to draw out, to get the meaning as it was intended in the first century. It has nothing to do with Jesus—you know, like Jesus it out, or something like that. No, of course; it's g-e-s-i-s.

And you know what? Twenty years ago I would have sort of considered what I just said to you to be so obvious that it didn't need to be mentioned.

**Transcriber's Note:** A cell phone rings.

**Jonathan:** Okay. Yeah, I've seen the movie "Dead Poets Society." Isn't that like God calling, or something like that? (*Laughter.*) Well, I was just curious, okay?

And twenty years ago I wouldn't have thought twice about that. I probably wouldn't have said it, because it was kind of obvious that when someone communicates with you that you want to know what they're trying to get at. But you should be aware—no offense to any of us; we're not spring chickens, most of us. There are a couple of you guys I would classify as young guys. But most of us were growing up in an era in which certain things were assumed that are being widely not assumed anymore. And one of those things, relevant to what we're talking about right now, is that a lot of interpretation is now focusing not on what the original writer, speaker, whoever mean, but what does the reader/hearer perceive it to mean and want it to mean? So you, we, I, because I work with young adults so often, we need to be very, very, very, very, very familiar with this.

I am going to pray in a minute, by the way. This is just a softening up time. (*Laughter.*) And I wanted to tell you a little story just to help those concepts stick with you.

Years and years ago, probably around fifteen years ago, the movie "The Matrix" came out. Do you guys remember "The Matrix?" By the way, if you have not seen "The

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Matrix" at least twenty times, you need to, okay? You need to just get it and get looking here.

But anyway, I went to see "The Matrix" because I heard a very respectable Christian speaker/writer on the radio. I listened to my friend who had listened to him. And he said, "You've got to see this new movie 'The Matrix.' It's got a real Christian message."

And so I went to see the movie. And I thought, "Yeah! I can really see the Christian message." You know, there's the appearance of reality. There's real reality. There seems to be rebirth, rejuvenation and so forth.

And I was fine for a little while until one of my former colleagues who has since passed away and gone into glory, the philosophy professor, Dr. Barnum Batar, one day took his students to see "The Matrix."

And I said, "Oh! A good Christian movie!"

He said, "Christian? No, no," he said. "This is a Nietzschean movie."

I said, "What?"

"Yes. Nihilism! There's nothing real out there."

And I said, "How do you conclude that? This great Christian speaker said it was a Christian movie."

He said, "Wait! Pay attention to blah-blah-blah-blah-blah."

So I went back to see it a second time. That's when you had to go to the theater to see it. (*Laughter.*) So I went back to see it dutifully a second time. And I saw it and I thought, "Wow, yeah! That's a real Nietzschean message there!" So I kind of back pedaled a bit.

And then I'm talking to someone. "Hey, did you see the movie 'The Matrix?'"

"Yes," he said. "It was a great Buddhist message, wasn't it?" (*Laughter.*)

And I said, "What?"

He gave me another reason to see it. And so I went back to the theater a third time to see the movie. (*Laughter.*) I thought, "Yeah. I can see that there's a Buddhist message in there." (*Laughter.*) (*Unclear.*)

And then about that time I'd been reading up on post-modernism. These days, everyone has heard of post-modernism and what that's about. Back then it was still kind of new.

And just in case you're not sure, post-modernism in part is not a philosophy. It's not a religion. It's not a culture. But it's a drift in Western culture in America, which has an emphasis on subjective perception.

By the way, we're all subjective in our perception. I'm not saying that it's true. I'm just saying that subjective perception rules the day. So it's what the viewer/hearer/reader thinks. So now it's like up here. I know you're hiding in there; I see you. (*Laughter.*) Hold the door closed; I know you're there. (*Laughter.*) You're suspicious looking. (*Laughter.*) Do you just let him stand there all the time? (*Laughter.*) We'll have to talk. (*Laughter.*)

So anyway, I went back and saw it as a movie where there's enough that's being said so it really draws you in. The cinematography was very, very interesting. It really changed a whole generation of a lot of things. But also I realize that this is a movie where you really get to apply your interpretation of it. And again, in my opinion—and you don't

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have to agree with me on this!—so long as everybody understands that's the role of a particular movie or book or story, that's fine.

The problem is that, day in and day out, when all of us are talking with somebody at home, or with the family at home, or we're talking with a friend, or we're talking at work, or whatever, wherever we are, 99.9 per cent of the time, when we say something, we have a particular meaning in mind. And we want it to be understood, you know?

If someone says, "Hey, would you like a cup of coffee this morning?" your response is not going to be "Yeah, I really like the color of your new car." (*Laughter.*) Right? Because there is meaning to both of those statements and they don't connect, unless you spill the coffee on the car. (*Laughter.*)

So back to where I was. We'll pray and then we'll look at this. What we're interested in is this. Do you remember the term we had last week, *occasional documents*? We said that the New Testament, like most things, is written to deal with something on a particular occasion, a particular situation, with particular people in mind, particular events, or whatever, is out there. And so our first job is to spend time stepping into their situation, which we did last week. We set the groundwork. We're not going to do it again. We've got the groundwork for it. And then once we've sort of seen how it's addressing those particular needs, we can start to make bridges in terms of what difference it makes to us today.

Father, I'd like to ask that all these men who've taken the time and made the effort this morning to just be here, probably searching for and open to a variety of things, maybe much of them the same and maybe some of them very particular and personal, would You please help us? We need help. All of us do. We need change or further change of heart, soul, mind, motivations, directions. Even if we were to identify somehow, which we can't, but if we could somehow identify even the longest standing, most mature believing gentleman in this place, he would still need that, and the rest of us do as well. So would You please minister to our souls as we spend time stepping into what You did in history with these people and spoke to them in a way that made a difference. May that happen in our own lives and experience today. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jonathan:** All right. So we're in Galatians 3:1-14. Let me take approximately half a chapter today. And then you may see that I have a little blurb at the very, very bottom of your handout that says, "Galatians 3:15-29." That's okay. You know, that's if everything goes the way we're thinking it might this morning. If not, we can adjust it. That's quite all right, too.

And I think you may know why I gave us the title "Belief Or Bewitched?" And I've got to say that when I hear the word bewitched, I can't help but see the face of Samantha. (*Laughter.*)

**Transcriber's Note:** Referring to a character from "Bewitched," an old 1960s TV sitcom.

**Jonathan:** It's interesting that cultural icons stick with you. It's very interesting. But this, of course, is a different kind.

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All right. Now by the way, I want to mention to you that this is the very first time in this letter in which Paul addresses the people personally—sort of personally—with an address. Even though it's identified as Galatia at the beginning of the letter, writing to the saints in Galatia, this is the first time he sort of directly says to them, "Hey, you Galatians." It's the first time, unfortunately with an adjective with it. *(Laughter.)*

Okay. *"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you,"*—and these are the people—*"before whose eyes 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 the 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? Does He then who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you do it by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?"*

*"Even so 'Abraham believed God.' This is a quotation here from Genesis. 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Therefore be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham."*

That's an important statement for us today. *"Those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.' So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham the believer."*

*"For as many as are under the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law in order to do them'—to perform them. 'Now that no one is justified by the law before God.'"*

By the way, we said last week, you may remember, that Paul is speaking to Jews, probably having diverse conclusions about the Law. And we can't say all, but a very large number who he was dealing with assumed that I've got to do the law to be God's person. It kind of goes that way. And if I do this, I'm righteous. And as we said last week, he concluded the opposite.

*"That no one is justified by the law before God is evident, for 'the righteous man shall live by faith.'" That's another quotation from the Pentateuch, from the five books of Moses.*

*"However, the law is not of faith. On the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.'"*

*"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree', in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Through faith, very specifically.*

So you can see that this is very much inter-notching. If you're saying, "Boy, this sounds very familiar with where we've been." Not where we were last week when I was with you, but with what you were doing before that, you're exactly right. He's hitting on this theme all the way through.

So we've said, and you've said before I showed up here, that you had already identified these people called Judaizers. They were Jewish people who are saying, "Look.

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If people are going to come to our God from non-Jewish backgrounds, they have to become Jewish ritually in order to then come to Jesus."

The argument, as we said last week, is at least a believable argument, because you say that this is what God's people have been doing, at that point, fourteen hundred years. Of course, it's the way to go. I mean God Himself said it's the way to go.

But then you've got overlaid with that a very, very subtle other thread coming in there that says that if you do these things, you're made righteous. If you don't do these things, you're not made righteous. And of course, they've ignored the faith piece. And that's a very important piece that Paul is now exploring significantly here.

So I guess that's where we've been, and that's the way it is. So we're probably dealing with stuff that has to do with what's going on in terms of what we call the Galatian stuff in the lower part of Galatia.

In other words, we said last week—and I didn't elaborate' I just kind of said it—that this is probably a letter written before the Council at Jerusalem. We said that last week. Either way, that doesn't matter. There's no harm if we get it wrong.

But the point is—and this is where we're going to make connections when we come back to this in a couple minutes—the point is that what happens is that people want to trust a religion they control. And so there are a lot of things we don't share with these people and they don't share with us. Their situations and ours are different. But one of the common threads of human nature seems to be that humans like religion they control, where they can say, "I do this, this, this, this and this. And therefore I must be good with God."

And I don't know, but I want to say this very sensitively. I mean this, because I'm not throwing stones. I can't remember if I said this last week. But the summer I met my wife, which is an unmentionable number of years ago, (*laughter.*) It's amazing how you can be married almost forty years and still only be twenty-nine years old! (*Laughter.*)

Anyway, we were part of a team of college students who were working with an inner city church in Buffalo. And the way this church was going to connect with the neighborhood—and they actually did a very good job with it—was that they borrowed a number of the approaches. Some of you remember the book *Evangelism Explosion*. It's still around. And it was sort of cutting edge back then.

And we did a survey. We surveyed no fewer than fifteen hundred households in the neighborhood of that church.

By the way, it was a terrifying experience. I was eighteen and I was knocking on doors and saying to people, "If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would go?"

But anyway, I was young. I was learning. We all were. And we noticed a pattern, and we definitely confirmed it. We were in a heavily Roman Catholic area—not entirely, but heavily, as Presbyterians would look at it. But just going to my point that people like a religion that they can control, do you know what we got? When asked on what grounds, if you do believe that when you die you're going to be with God, on what grounds would God welcome you into heaven, it was a very interesting answer that kept on recurring.

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It wasn't the same as the Galatian answer, by the way. It was not "because I keep the law," although, in a funny, negative way, it was. It was "yes, I think I'll be welcomed because I have never—"

**Participant:** Killed anyone.

**Jonathan:** Killed anyone, yeah. They knew they had sinned. (*Laughter.*) No one was going to say, "I'm perfect." But they would say, "Well, I'm not that imperfect." (*Laughter.*) Which again is a self serving kind of thing.

But again, this is to be human. No matter where you are, on a social ladder, or a religious ladder, or a linguistic ladder,—you know, some people speak prestige languages and others don't, you know, like those of us who live in Pittsburgh. (*Laughter.*) That's not a prestige dialect. Sorry, guys, but youns ain't ranked up there with the people of Oxford. (*Laughter.*) I know it's not fair, but that's the way it is.

Anyway, no matter where you are on that ladder of whatever, you tend to look for someone a little bit lower than yourself on the ladder. That just seems to be human nature. And so it's a Jewish problem here, but it's not a uniquely Jewish problem. It's a human problem. So let's wander through a little bit and see what's coming up here. And I'm going to bring something in with some personal reflection on a couple points that I think is a good way to go.

Anyway, I start out with this really pointed question that will actually take in the first five verses. I often go one by one. I won't do that. I'm going to take a block of verses. And I'll just acknowledge that in this block of verses there is a half dozen questions. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom! Okay?

I use this technique when I teach English composition, which I do sometimes. I say to people, "Don't ever ask a series of questions. Maybe you can ask one question. But when you write, don't do this." But there are times when it's warranted. And this is one of them, because they're all getting at the same thing from slightly different angles, okay? They're all getting at the same thing. Let's take them one at a time and you'll see how they work together.

*"You foolish Galatians!"* By the way, the word *foolish*—the Greek word means "without thinking; thoughtlessly." So it's not foolish in the sense of, at least not totally in the sense of I've been tricked, although there's a piece of that in there. It's foolish in the sense that you're not really processing the line someone is giving you. So allow both of those. *Foolish* is okay, but *unthinking* may be a word that sews both of those together. That might work here.

So the first question is *"Who has bewitched you?"* Now of course Paul knows the answer to the question, because even if he had not been converted, but maybe from some human reasoning he had sort of been brought into the Christian circle which in fact he was persecuting, who knows? He would have been one of those kinds of people.

And by the way, think about it. If you say, "I believe in Christ and doing lawful things so that I get blessed by God," it's a kind of an insurance policy.

One of the writers who gets at this is C. S. Lewis in his book *The Screwtape Letters*. Have you come to that interesting little piece? If you haven't read it, by the way, the premise of the book is that there is a senior uncle demon who is training his nephew

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Wormwood in how to hopefully mislead a guy who is a Christian away from "our enemy." Of course, "our enemy" is God because it's from the demon's point of view. And he suggests various things to sort of help mislead this Christian guy.

And one of the things that he tries to get the nephew to do is to tell the guy and prompt the guy to think that it's not just Christ who we deal with. It's "Christ and." And he has a set of "Christ ands", like Christ and good health, or Christ and good living practices. I don't remember his exact list. But it was sort of that I have faith in Christ. But as an extra guarantee, I'm going to be really good in these various areas.

By the way, another person, probably someone that you're familiar with, at least through the story telling, is one who is described as a wealthy young ruler, someone who is in a good position in society. As far as he is concerned, the world is his. He comes to Jesus and he asks, *"What good thing must I do?"* Exactly, you see?

And by the way, do you realize that Jesus does not give him a quick answer. Some would give a quick, blunt answer. But Jesus actually responds with a question. "Well, what does it say in the Scripture? You've got to do this." He's answering from the Law. He's answering correctly. But the correct answer is not where the real issue lies. The real issue lies with the young man who wants to control his eternal destiny as well as his current circumstances.

Control is a big issue, probably for a lot of us. But this is not a counseling session. *(Laughter.)*

Okay. So the first question is *"who has bewitched you?"* You can see why it's so bewitching, because these are things that appeal to human beings broadly. It's a Jewish problem and not a Jewish problem at the same time. It's a human problem.

Now notice the second question. *"Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?"* Okay, that's interesting? *"Did you receive the Spirit?"*

You'll remember that Joel chapter 2 says that one of the things that is going to happen in the New Covenant is that people are going to experience the Spirit of God in a breadth and at a quality depth such as has not been experienced in the Old Covenant. Now remember that the Spirit is active in the Old Covenant because He is doing various things with various people, okay? But there is something more that is yet to come.

"And did this happen because you were extra good, or did it happen because you trusted God who is going to do what He said?"

Third question. *"Are you so foolish?"* Boy, if someone said this to me—and I'm sure it has been said to me! "Are you that dumb?" *(Laughter.)* You know, you recoil a little bit. *"Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"*

We want to take this to heart because, you know, when a person is new to Christ, new in faith, a lot of really exciting things are happening. Not everybody can remember these, by the way. And if you don't, don't worry about it. Not everybody can remember. For some people, their faith goes back to such a young time. They can't remember a time when they didn't have it.

But there are many of us who remember very clearly a kind of a cross over period, where we were in a certain mode of seeing and doing and being. And then we were snapped up in a very dramatic kind of way. And remember that wonderful wow feeling,

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like I never saw things quite the way I do now? And apparently some of these people, maybe all of them, can remember such a conversion. And they're excited. But the problem is that they've clouded it. And he's trying to appeal back to them "Did you get to that point because you trusted God?" There's the belief part. "Or did you get to that point because somehow somebody was giving you the line that you've been bewitched by? They told you, 'Hey, be extra good. And if you're extra good, God will be extra good to you.'" And it's a much more complicated equation than that.

So here's our next question. Boom, boom, boom, boom! *"Are you being perfected by the flesh?"* He's assuming that they really did come to genuine faith.

By the way, just a thought. I'm not fully decided on this. But just a thought. It's interesting in Galatians a similar kind of assumption to what is going on, as Paul writes in a pretty crazy church situation, the Corinthian letters. I picture the sixteen chapters of the Corinthian letter as a long clothes line with dirty laundry. (*Laughter.*) I'm just thankful that it's their dirty laundry. I would be very embarrassed if mine was out there. But here's the common thing I'm just observing. In both cases, Paul does not—I mean, I think there are times when you can say to someone, "Look, I'm just wondering if there's real faith here, because there just seems to be evidence against that." I'm not saying you can't ever pose that question. I'm just saying that in these two cases, that's not the angle Paul generally takes. His angle is "you seem to be believers. Now we've got to work on making things the way they ought to be, consistently with that." So, just an observation.

All right. A couple more questions. Let me come down to number four. This is a very different one. *"Did you suffer so many things in vain?"* Now we don't know, of course, what they were, all right? We just know and we can assume, we can guess, that these people—

**Transcriber's Note:** Dr. Watt draws a diagram.

**Jonathan:** By the way, remember we said last week that Galatia is, loosely speaking, the center of Turkey? And Paul's first missionary journey which actually comes up from over the South, the ocean side, he went over to cypress and then up to, loosely speaking, central Turkey. He did sort of this crook shaped trip. And part of it, not all of it, was on the edge of Galatia.

And what we're looking at here is a place where it's not a fully possessed Roman province as Asia Minor tended to be. That's what it was called by the Romans. And this is turkey; I just made this as a rectangle. So this is Asia Minor, with cities like Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Sardis—you know, the famous seven letters of Revelation. They're all addressed over here. Here's Ephesus, okay? Over here, actually about here, is where Paul and Barnabas came from. That's Syria and Antioch. And probably they would come down Cypress, and then they would sort of come upward and do this little hooking thing right here before going back over.

And so what you can see is that they're not in the center of the Roman activity in Asia Minor. They're out towards what's known right on the edge here as the Phrygian Frontier, where there is a number of interesting ideas, a lot of folk religion.

Let me make another link here, because folk religion means that you get kind of a well known religion. By the way, you could give the example of Islam, okay? You happen to



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have a well established religion. But then sistered to it are local, often animist, beliefs, and you get a blended religion. Now there's folk Islam. There's folk Christianity. It's Christ and various local ideas. This probably tells us again this same message—that human beings like security. That's good. At times, security isn't bad. But it seems to me that this is one of these themes that we share with them, even though the form is different.

Anyway, *"did you suffer?"* It seems on this frontier that we've described here that they're getting pummeled. We don't know by what. Are they pummeled by heresies? By outright persecution? The point he's getting at is that, you know, "you were willing to sort of absorb the bad stuff," whatever it happened to be, "because of your Christian faith."

If Christianity was nothing more than being good, we would have relatively little problems, because people generally like people who are honest, people who won't steal from them, people who work hard. You know, these are all desirable qualities. If the faith is nothing but those things, most societies will say, "Yes, you're useful to us. We'll keep you around."

But if you start talking rational things like "I believe in a risen Savior, and furthermore He's telling me certain ways that I'm to live my life and all of my life," that's when the difficulty comes in.

So the very, very last one. *"Did God send the Spirit in connection with law, or by faith?"* We all know what the answers to these are.

Here is how one writer put it as he kind of got to all these questions. "All that had been said about the excellence of Christ is on the point of being denied by the Galatians." All that has been said by Paul and others about the excellence of Christ is on the point of being denied by the Galatians. In other words, sometimes you effectively deny something by blending it.

There are a couple of different ways to do it. You can deny something by just saying, "I don't believe it." And some people do that. Sometimes professing Christians do that. That's sad. But I'm just saying that. That's one kind. The other is just to dilute it so far that you invert it. Yes, Don?

**Don:** Yes. It's interesting that you brought up 1 Corinthians. I think Paul seems to be harder on the Galatians in some respects than he is on the Corinthians.

**Jonathan:** Yes, he is.

**Don:** The Corinthians have a nice, warm greeting at the beginning. Galatians doesn't. He just launches into a full fledged diatribe. That's because the nature of the gospel was at stake.

**Jonathan:** Yes. You actually just took my message for the very next point.

**Don:** Oh! *(Laughter.)* He's going to do the rest of the study for me. *(Laughter.)* You've literally just made the connection that I'm sort of leading people up to. That's exactly my point.

And so if you start to say "faith plus good works," you've effectively denied the very cutting edge of the gospel. By the way, can we put the preferable alternative out there? Because of faith and justification and all that comes with it, there are good works expected.

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**Participant:** Right.

**Jonathan:** That's the difference. We're not being told, "Come to faith in Christ and do what you want." We all know that's not the message. But the order is a significant one. Yes, that's exactly why he is so hard on them.

Now come down to the next couple of verses, six through nine, really. I've lined them up separately. But there's an interesting parallel going on here with Romans 4. I want to highlight what it is, because Galatians and Romans have a very, very deep concern. You probably know this very well. It's with justification, as we would say, by faith alone.

And Paul likes to use Abraham in a way that poses a question which I also want to bring into the consideration. First with Romans. What does Paul get at in Romans four, which I'm not going to read, because you have to read through the whole chapter to see it. But it's actually the same message that we just read in Galatians. And it is what did Abraham discover? There was faith, and he was justified by faith without having yet had the chance to then do other things that might lead him to believe that "the reason God loves me is because I do these other things."

Now again, if you think I'm sort of beating a dead horse, I apologize. But some dead horses have to be beaten. *(Laughter.)* Every year in our Old Testament course, after we teach this message very, very clearly, we always ask this question on our exams. So if any of you are going to take Bible 112 at Geneva College, I'm giving away the answer. *(Laughter.)* The question is this. On what grounds did God choose people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others? On what grounds?

Now of course the answer is, there were no grounds. God chose them and then He taught those people how to love Him. But inevitably we get a very significant number of people responding.

It's one of two things. One of them is, well, because that person walked with God. Therefore God chose him, which is by the way not true, demonstrably not true, in the case of Jacob, right? He was not a good man, at least not at heart. Though he changes.

And then the other thing we get is this. Well, the person wasn't walking with God the way He wanted him to, but God knew down the road that he would. And therefore God chose them, which gets tricky as well. It leaves choice in the hands of people, but at the cost of God's mysterious truth. According to Ephesians 1, there were certain choices God made back since the beginning of time, and we weren't kicking around at that point, you know? So Paul keeps on wrestling things back from our control.

Well, it goes back to Abraham in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. What did Abraham learn? By faith He had to trust God and then things would start to play out from there.

Now I'm not going to read James 2. But James 2 also uses Abraham. And there's a statement in James 2:24 where he, James, takes this case that he's making with Abraham. And James says, "*You see that a man is not justified by faith alone.*" Okay?

By the way, there is no explicit statement anywhere in the Bible that I'm aware of that says, "You see, there is justification by faith alone." Now the message is all through there. But I'm just saying that statement, at least with the word *alone* is not in there.

And by the way, when Luther was translating into German a critical piece of the book of Romans, he actually took the liberty of adding the German word for *alone*. Luther had

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the right idea, although he didn't have the justification to throw in the word *alone*. Technically speaking, it's not there.

And then you've got this statement in James, where James seems to sell out Paul, Abraham and Martin Luther. You know, by the way, Luther struck back. He called James "an epistle of straw." (*Laughter.*)

But the question that we simply have to ask is this. What is James getting at? I want to make a suggestion to you: that Paul takes a chronological approach. Early on in Abraham's life, how is Abraham justified? Well, by faith, because he comes by faith to this relationship with God before he has then gone on to do things that are either meritorious or not. So from a chronological point of view, there is justification by faith alone.

What is James getting at? Ah, James has a different situation, okay? This is why it's always good to look behind the scenes.

Paul is looking at the gospel going to new people who are, if you will, being threatened by the Judaizers' message. What's James dealing with? He's actually dealing with Jews as well, probably back in Palestine, as far as we know. But he's looking at generational Christians, one to two generations, maybe three, down the road, people in the early 60s A.D. Maybe they've been believers for a while. Maybe their parents have been believers for a while. And what are they doing? They're starting to get a heady faith, which thinks genuinely good things, but then neglects to make the link between what you're thinking and believing and what you're doing. It's a different problem.

So Paul is going chronologically. You believe and then these things follow. James is going logically.

**Participant:** I think that another comparison is that in Galatians Paul is referring to the Mosaic law. When you go to James and you read that, the examples say a lot, because those examples are all about works of mercy, which is a lot different.

**Jonathan:** Overlapping, but different—being good to other people at times when they're vulnerable. Good point made. Thank you.

So what's the deal? Well, we show it now. Coming on down to verses 10 and following, if you rely on the works of the law. Now specifically, remember we said last week that everybody needs law. If you have no law, life is dangerously chaotic. You've got to keep it all in balance here. If you are relying on the works of the law, you will violate the law. And if you violate the law, you're under the condemnation of the law. And if you're under the condemnation of the law, you're under the curse of the law. Christ freed us from that.

By the way, an interesting observation. The last piece, the very last verse of what is probably the latest writer of the Old Testament, Malachi, writing somewhere around 454 B.C., the closing words of the last writing prophet of the Old Testament say that God is going to be changing people. Otherwise, He's going to strike the land with—and the final word of the Old Testament is "*a curse.*" Interesting. So he says that Christ freed us from the curse.

Caution

! Because we're trying to be appropriate with this message to our generation, the early

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21<sup>st</sup> century, the West in particular, the caution is that whereas Paul dealt with the Judaizers issue which we're well oriented to now, you've got to realize that this is not our issue. You know this. I know you know it. I'm just reinforcing what I know that you know. That is not our issue in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. We are dealing with the opposite of Jewish legalism. What words would you use for what we're dealing with today?

**Participant:** Antinomianism.

**Jonathan:** Antinomianism—probably the longest, nastiest and most appropriate word to use for it, which means what? Antinomianism means—

**Men:** Against the law. No law.

**Jonathan:** Yes. Without law' against law, the far opposite end. So you want to be careful, because a well meaning young believer, let's say, who is in an antinomian environment, will be very tempted to say, "Oh, look! The Bible does say that I'm free from the law. Therefore I can do what I want."

Again, just to be realistic, not trying to take shots. But I face this almost every year. There are a few students that I'm aware of who cheat on our tests. And if we catch them, we say, "You're going to fail this particular item. You're going to go on record with the academic office. And if this shows up in other courses, you could be either failing a whole course or semester, or face suspension," depending on how big it grows. And people will sometimes say, "Look. I admit that I cheated, okay?", because usually when you say that you haven't cheated, you can demonstrate it.

But we typically get two other responses that come. The first response is, "You know, now that I've acknowledged it, it should all just go away." The second is, and it's almost predictable—they'll say to me, "Where's the grace?" (*Sighs.*)

Now I believe in grace. But what they're saying is, "Can you make it so that I don't have any effects from my choices?" And of course that's a very important issue. There are both.

We want to have good effects from good choices. We want to have negative effects from negative choices, because a lot of us are held, we're sort of hemmed in, and thank God we are, because a lot of bad things we could be doing we don't do because we realize that by doing them there are going to be negative consequences. I'd love to say that I do the right thing just because I want the right thing. (*Laughter.*) Sometimes it's true. Other times it simply isn't. So we're often hemmed in by the consequences that are negative. And we're also encouraged by the consequences if I do something good. I get to see benefits. And they're basically saying, "Help me separate my choice from consequences." It's not a good thing.

So what specifically have we been redeemed from by grace? We are redeemed from the curse of the law.

Now we still need law to live by—to speak truth, not to steal, the whole list there. We still need that. We're not freed from doing it. We're freed from the curse of that.

And so finally, as we sort of get down to the last little bit here, verses 13 and following, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. It's pretty explicit there. A beautiful saying—"*having become a curse for us.*" "*God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf*", as it says.

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And then an interesting little piece, just briefly here. And I want to make it become very personal here. *"In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles."*

I just want to remind you that Abraham's covenant is articulated no fewer than three places in Genesis. The first place is Genesis 12. It is then repeated and to some degree elaborated on in chapter 15, and then again in chapter 17. So there are three. If you missed the first two, you've got a third chance, okay? I guess that's grace.

But one of the things that's part of that—and there is a variety of things that we're not going to go into in the covenant—but one of the covenant pieces is that God will bless Abraham and Abraham will be a blessing to all of the nations. I know that almost all of the Bibles say "all of the nations."

Remember, just a quick reminder. Nation-states, as we know them today, don't come about till the seventeenth century. They're a relatively new invention in the last four hundred years. They're not a bad invention, by the way. But they weren't kicking around back then.

What might be better understood—and I know it's a little awkward—but "all types of people, all cultures of people, all ethnicities and regions," not just nation-states. I haven't come up with a great, tidy one-word replacement. I just want to remind you that it's people groups, diversities of culture that Abraham will be a blessing to. And this promise and principle through Abraham, promised specifically through Joel, the Spirit on all people, can be now enjoyed by non-Jewish people. Yes, sir?

### **Participant:**

"To live above with saints we love,  
Oh won't that be the glory!  
But here below with saints we know,  
Now that's another story." (*Laughter.*)

**Jonathan:** I like that. Okay. So law—as I'd been saying last week and I want to repeat again—law at the heart of it involves the character of God. We need law. We need human laws. We need divine laws. I know I'm restating the obvious, but let's just make sure. The clear statement is that we cannot be justified by being very good at any law, human or divine. That's a clear message.

Now here's something I don't want to assume. And it's a query for you to reflect on. This book of Galatians assumes at least that the people who are being addressed care about justification. Did you ever think about that, the subject of how you are justified? When you say to people, "We're going to talk about how you're justified," you're assuming that justification is already somewhere between here and here, and that they're really concerned about it.

**Transcriber's Note:** Somewhere between the head and the heart.

**Jonathan:** Don't assume that of other people today. And don't assume that necessarily of yourself. There's a healthy kind of self-examination you should go with.

What are we getting at? Well, if I were to say about Western culture, not just American, "What is really on people's minds?" To me, justification doesn't rank up there. I wish it did. I wish it was always something that was a burning priority to me. But let me

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just simply tell you. In Western culture, having lots of choices, and being able to make any choice I want, in any respect I want, in any zone I want, on any time schedule I want, I think that's the number one priority in America. I think I'm talking collectively. I'm not saying every individual man. I'm saying collectively.

What can I say? Whatever makes America, it's the concept of freedom. I think that's a safe thing to say. But the way a very large chunk of Americans and those in Western culture perceive freedom is that freedom is freedom to do what I want, the way I want it, and whenever I want to do it. And by the way, tomorrow I can change my mind.

So be realistic. And I want to give you a quote. I like this. You always like what a book says when it agrees with you. (*Laughter.*) This is a great book! (*Laughter.*) Actually, I don't agree with everything in the book.

The author is a Christian psychologist, a Christian counselor named David Palison. And some years ago I realized, before I read this book, that I needed to ask people in counseling, "what do you want?", because I was assuming that they knew what they wanted. And I'm saying don't assume that people want justification.

He adds the same thing. He said, "Don't run to the 'Christian right answer.'" He puts that in quotation marks. "Without first working hard and honestly to analyze" what he calls "deviant functional gods."

I'd like to expand that a little bit. Let me just say that I think some of those people are actually hungry for some of the right things. The way they're going about it may not be very good.

I think most of us like a certain degree of stability and security in life. The question is, have you taken that and put it up to the level of idolatry?

So anyway, he develops a whole list of what he calls X-ray questions. And they are very similar to some of the questions I started asking people years ago. Let me give you just a couple. He has a long list. I'm going to give you just a couple. I mean, these all have a whole commentary and Bible references to go with them. I'm not going to give you that. But the book is David Palison's *Seeing With New Eyes*.

Some of his questions get at what people are really wanting. Questions like these. What do you love? What do you hate? What do you want? What do you desire? What do you wish for? What do you crave? Where do you bank your hopes? What do you rely on? What do you fear? What are the things that you definitely do not want, that you definitely do not want to have? Fill in the blanks. Just a couple more.

What do you feel like doing? When I ask this of a lot of young adults, it's a very open-ended question with no secret agenda to it. I asked a bunch of young adults. I said, "You know, if you weren't in the classroom, what would you like to do?" I'm just trying to get to know what they would like to do. It means exactly what it says. But if they can answer "what do I like to do?" rather than "what major do I think I'm supposed to choose?", I'll understand them more.

Okay, just one or two more. What do you think you need? What makes you tick? What are your plans, agendas, strategies, and so forth that you are determined to accomplish? And if we ask ourselves these questions, we're going to have some better insight into what motivates us. And if we are willing to ask other people these questions, not so we

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can rush to a quick shutdown, but to say, "I want to get to know you. What really does make you tick?" Then there's a potential meeting of soul to soul that can open up some meaningful things down the road.

There are never guarantees in life. From a human point of view, life has no guarantees. Now God has various guarantees that He stands by. But from our experience of what seems to us the random things of the day, there are no guarantees. But these are the things to look at, because people like to be self-reliant.

Now one final brief observation that goes with Galatians, but we haven't hit this yet. But Paul does hit it in a passage that I bet many of you know. It's Romans 6 verse 1. And it gets at what I call the dangerous freedom of grace. I don't have time to get into what he had been talking about. He was talking about the federal headship of Adam and Jesus in chapter 5.

And then he goes, *"What shall we say, then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace might increase?"*

Now we all know the answer to the question is no. That's the easy part. "God forbid it," he says. But why would you even ask that question to begin with? Now the only conclusion that I can come up with is that if grace and the things that go with it like patience, forgiveness, the letting go of things that maybe mattered once and we're willing to let them go,—a chance for a new beginning, a chance not to get the punishments we deserve, and all these other things—that's risky business.

So I gave you an example of a misconstrued grace from the student who wants to be able to choose anything he did and then not feel the consequences. That's on the one end. But the other end is this. If grace is really, really, really big, and we're determined to deal with people graciously, meaning full of grace, then we're going to end up taking some interesting risks—risks that are so patient, so generous, so openhearted, that it is possible that the other person or we ourselves might abuse it and say, "Well, if I got away with it once, I can get away with it again." That's a risk. It's a genuine risk. But that's still a preferable risk to seeking the false assurance of legalism.

They're both risks. Legalism gives the appearance of security. But then you're banking your whole hope on how I can be good enough to impress God. Grace has a risk as well. But the grace risk is one of faith which says, "Since God has dealt with me, and forgiven me so much, I need to start to see how to do that with others. Yes?"

**Participant:** Martin Luther was accused by those of his day. "Well, if you start teaching justification by faith alone, there's going to be a floodgate of iniquity." And what did Luther say? "So be it. Let it flow." Obviously he was speaking hyperbolically there. But his point was hey, which is worse? Which is more preferable?

**Jonathan:** It's so interesting that the observation that came to him was apparently behind what Paul writes in Romans 6:1.

**Participant:** Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that if people don't ask that question after you present the gospel, then you haven't presented the gospel.

**Jonathan:** I like that. That's good, yes. Yes, sir?

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**Participant:** This relates to Romans 6:1. As a believer, do I sin that grace may increase? I ran across a brother who is sinning. I need to obviously be gracious to him since I have been forgiven a great debt.

**Jonathan:** Yes.

**Participant:** But on the other hand, it affords me the opportunity to say that grace doesn't mean license to sin.

**Jonathan:** Right.

**Participant:** And we need to see that grace, while it is forgiveness, God has called us to something different than just simple freedom. There is freedom in Christ. But there is also a call to righteousness and godliness, and wholesomeness and right behavior with one another and with the society we live in. And if we violate that, then we're abusing grace.

**Jonathan:** And that's why Romans 6 verse 2 gets written.

**Transcriber's Note:** Romans 6:2, ESV. *"By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"*

**Jonathan:** Could I tell a story that might speak to a lot of people who are in situations in light of what you've said? And if you have to leave, I don't mind that. It's so relevant and frequent that it's worth it. I know it's twenty of eight. And I know we've gone beyond. So if you need to leave, no offense. Well I'll be offended. I'll just hide it. *(Laughter.)* So please feel free to leave. There's no problem.

But here's what happened. Some years ago I was guest preaching at a church. And I don't remember what the subject was. But after the service a woman who was middle-aged (and I'm middle aged, too), but she said, "Can I ask you something, because I've got a big issue that has opened up this weekend? But I'm going to need a couple minutes to play it through and see what you say."

I said, "Sure."

So we waited a long time. There was meet and greet time and a lot of people were leaving. And she said, "Here's my problem. I'm a younger adult sister. And you may have seen the news in just the last day or so." She gave her sister's name. I don't remember the name. I wouldn't say it anyway. But in the news, apparently, this sister had been arrested along with, I think, the controller of whatever town in Western Pennsylvania it may have been. It doesn't matter anyway. She had just been arrested basically for skimming funds from the town. And she was in anguish and the sister's in jail, and she and the controller are both in jail.

And no sooner is the announcement of the arrest made when she says, "And my mother is on the phone."

And I finished the sentence for her. I said, "And your mother is telling you, yet again, that you've got to forgive your screw-up sister, who has been screwing up for decades, and this is just the latest screw-up."

And then she says, "Exactly" How did you know?" *(Laughter.)* This is the story that plays out in a lot of families, right? It's hardly a secret.

And she said, "What am I supposed to do?"



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It's a problem that comes to a lot of us. You've got someone in the family. And I'm not talking about the person who hits the or a crisis, but the person who is living repeatedly, specifically, in a crisis of choice. There are crises of accidents, you know. You've got cancer, you know, or somebody ran into me while I was sitting at a red light—things that are out of my control. I'm not talking about those things. But this is a crisis where someone does this and it's a mess, and it's gone on for years and years and years.

And she said, "Am I supposed to forgive this person? I'm under grace and I'm supposed to forgive."

And I said this. We talked about a number of things. I said, "Look. Maybe right now forgiveness isn't the issue. I understand why it seems like the issue." But I said, "First off, your sister didn't steal from you. She stole from another party who just dragged her into court."

I said, "So let that play out. There are probably going to be some major penalties to pay." So the first observation is that if you've not been the one sinned against, generally speaking, you're not the one involved in the forgiveness thing. It's the person who has been offended, who has been hurt, who has been damaged.

#2. If forgiveness means that by letting something go, I'm sort of opening the door wide for you to turn right around, as you've done fifty times and offend me again, you don't have to facilitate that.

So, as one of my pastor friends in New England did some years ago, when he discovered that his teenage son had been drug dealing out of their home, and running quite a successful business in Boston—*(laughter)*—he pushed the son out the door. Now not out the door and onto the streets, but out the door into a very, very pricey rehab program, which, by the way, thankfully was effective, okay?

In other words, he's saying, "I love you, son. But I'm not obligated to give you the grounds on which to do your illegal business." So not supporting somebody else's misbehavior is common sense.

That's why, when someone approaches you on the street and says, "Can I have money for food?", one of the best responses is to say, "Sure! Let's go in right here. I'm going to buy you that food right now."

Or this is a more common one these days. If someone says, "Can I have bus money to get me to somewhere?", you say, "Sure! Let's go to the bus station and I'll buy you the ticket," because you're almost guaranteed to know what the next line is going to be, you know?

So I think it's a careful thing that you've opened up. And I'm very glad you did, because that's the scenario a lot of us face with family members and friends. It takes real wisdom, doesn't it, to kind of figure out how grace looks when other messages like responsibility and natural consequences are all kind of part of the Biblical picture we want to consider. So that's why I tell you this story, because that is probably an area where a lot of us are constantly dealing with family issues.

Okay. A good place to stop, I think and here we are. We're done. Thank you for staying longer. And Lord willing, I'll be with you one more time next week, and we'll look into the next section of Galatians, okay?

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So would someone here like to pray for us? Anyone. Should I just pick somebody? Pick him? Okay.

**Participant:** Lord, we thank You that You forgive us, that You claim us as Your children, that You will not let us go. We also thank You that You discipline us and that You hold us accountable for how we live in relationship to You. It's just that You don't make us worthless or cast us aside. We give You praise and thanks for that. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. (*Applause.*)