

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS
FOR EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIVING

GALATIANS

A Biblical Study
JOYCE MEYER

GALATIANS 3-4

God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. ²³ Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. ²⁴ The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. ²⁵ But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

SONS AND HEIRS

²⁷ For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed by Christ. ²⁸ There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female since you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise. ¹ Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the time set by his father. ² In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements^a of the world. ³ When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁴ to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁵ And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁶ So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE GALATIANS

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BY JOYCE MEYER




*Faith
Words*

NEW YORK NASHVILLE

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ABOUT GALATIANS



Author: *Paul*

Date: *AD 53–57*

Audience: *Christians in the province of Galatia*

The books of Romans and Galatians are closely linked in content, and both were written by the apostle Paul. In Romans, Paul opens to us the fullness of the gospel of grace, and in Galatians, he defends that gospel because it has come under attack by people seeking to draw the early Christian believers back into legalism. Paul probably wrote both letters from Corinth while he was ministering there.

We can see that Paul was passionate about ministering the gospel as much as he possibly could. While he was in one place teaching, he was thinking about and ministering to churches in other cities through writing letters to them. Paul worked hard toward his goal of seeing people saved by grace through faith and presenting everyone “fully mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28–29), and he frequently mentions how often he prayed for the believers in every city.

Paul emphasizes in both Romans and Galatians that not only are we justified by faith, but we must learn to live by faith as well. I like to say that we should not reserve our faith only for times of trouble when we need God's help, nor merely for our initial salvation, but we should learn over time as the Holy Spirit teaches us to do everything we do by faith. We are to continually abide in Christ and rely on Him to help us at all times and in all things. Paul even goes so far as to say that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

Paul had been to Galatia two times and hoped to go again, but the Holy Spirit sent him elsewhere. When he first went to Galatia, the people there were idol worshippers, but by God's grace Paul was able to bring many of them to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through preaching. We can see from this example that when people are led by the Holy Spirit, they don't always get to do what they want to do or what they think is best, but they submit to the Spirit's leading. Paul tried on several occasions to go to certain places to preach the gospel, but he said that the Holy Spirit prevented him and sent him somewhere he had not planned to go (Acts 16:6–10). Freedom to follow the Holy Spirit in our daily lives is exactly what Paul is trying to remind the Galatians that they are free to do, and in order to be free we must not submit to legalism—a set of rules and regulations about how everything involving our relationship with God must be done.

Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites lived under the law. It seems there was a rule about almost everything they had to do, and they were proud of their ability to keep the rules.

However, the problem was that no one could keep them *all*. Therefore no one could ever be justified before God through the law. But Paul announced that God had provided a solution: He sent His Son to pay for the sin of mankind, and by grace through faith in Jesus, the perfect Son of God, salvation is available to all who will believe in Him and put their trust in Him.

Salvation is a free gift, but many people found that truth difficult to believe. Even if they accepted Christ, they tried to add some of the old laws to their faith, so in essence their so-called faith became no faith at all. We live by one or by the other—faith or the law—but mixing the two does not work. Paul says in Galatians that he died to the law in order to live to Christ (Gal. 2:19). When Jesus died on the cross He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), meaning He had fulfilled the law, and now God’s children could be free from the ceremonial rules and regulations they had once been required to perform.

Sometimes when people enthusiastically receive Christ, they go through times of severe testing shortly afterward. This was the case with the Galatians, as certain men began telling them they had to submit to the Law of Moses and that they must be circumcised, as the Jews had been, in order to have a covenant relationship with God. The Jews believed and taught that Gentiles had to become Jewish before they could become Christians. In short, their gospel was Jesus plus the Law of Moses. The truth is, we need Jesus only, not Jesus plus something else, in order to be saved.

Satan always comes and attempts to steal our faith in a variety of ways. That is certainly easier for him to do with new believers who haven't had time to become rooted and grounded in their faith. But Paul encourages people throughout his writings to stand firm in the truth they have learned and not to fall back into the bondage from which they have been delivered.

The Book of Galatians has had a profound effect on many people, including some prominent Christians we read about and learn from. Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, was one, and another was John Bunyan, the famous Puritan preacher and author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Many scholars consider Galatians to be "the Magna Carta of Christian Liberty," according to sermoncentral.com.

It is always good to read the Bible, but studying it is much better. We need to dig deeper into the Book of Galatians, as well as the rest of the Bible, and when we do we will find hidden treasures that not only help us live for God better but also continually make us more and more free to enjoy God and the life He has provided for us through Jesus.

Jesus came to give us a new way to live, one filled with life and power, with righteousness, peace, and joy. This is the way of faith in Christ by which we receive complete forgiveness for our sins and assurance of eternal life. In this new way, we have the freedom and privilege of being led and guided by the Holy Spirit rather than following written rules and regulations.

Jesus sacrificed Himself on the Cross and died there,

bearing the burden and punishment of our sins. As promised, He rose from the dead on the third day and is now seated at the right hand of God. On Pentecost, another promise was fulfilled and our Heavenly Father sent the Holy Spirit to be in us and with us at all times (Acts 2:1–33)—to teach us, help us, comfort us, and guide and lead us in all things. This was good news for the Galatians, but some of the Jews were having a hard time accepting the new life in Christ and continued hanging on to their old legalistic ways, trying to convince those who were following Christ that they were wrong.

In this book I will discuss the problem with works of the flesh, which occur when we use our own human energy to try to accomplish what only God can do. Martin Luther, whom God used to bring about the Protestant Reformation, was a man who experienced the agony of trying to work his way into right standing with God by doing every conceivable thing he could think of (works of the flesh) and finding that none of it gave him a clean conscience or assurance of God's acceptance. He was miserable and tormented until he discovered the gospel of grace and realized that Christianity is not about what we can do for God, but what He has done for us.

People who seek acceptance from God through their own works live by fleshly efforts that leave them exhausted, worn-out, and frustrated. I like to call works of the flesh “works that don't work.”

In Galatians, Paul also deals with many practical issues of everyday life. He addresses topics such as the danger of

people-pleasing, reaping what we sow, the proper way to deal with people's faults, avoiding self-righteous attitudes, compromise, love, walking in the Spirit, and many others.

I believe you will find the Book of Galatians very helpful in your personal walk with God, and my prayer is that it will help you in your journey toward being formed into the image of Jesus Christ and being His personal representative during your time on earth. I also believe you will learn to enjoy your walk with God and the life He has provided through Jesus.

This book is meant to be studied, and you will find various Scripture references throughout the manuscript that will deepen your understanding of what that particular section of the book is teaching if you choose to take time to look them up.

Key Truths in Galatians

- Our relationship with God is based on grace, not law.
We are to reject legalism and embrace grace in every area of our lives.
- In Christ, we can be set free and we can stay free.
- We are to walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh.
- We reap what we sow.

CHAPTER 1



CALLED BY GOD



Qualified by God

Galatians 1:1–2

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the churches in Galatia:

Paul begins this letter to the Galatians as he does some of his other epistles, by establishing in the first sentence that he is an apostle called by God, not by man. I am sure he does this because there were many who questioned his commission and authority. Where did he get the right to teach others, especially since he had formerly persecuted the church of Jesus Christ? What qualified him?

Many are called into the gospel ministry in much the same way as Paul. God calls them and qualifies them by anointing them for a special task. This perplexes those who don't understand that God chooses who He uses for reasons that often make no sense to us. Paul's past as one who persecuted Christians certainly did not qualify him. It actually would have disqualified him had that been the criteria for God being able to use him.

Having a sinful past prior to receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord does not disqualify anyone from being used by God.

In fact, it may actually help us have compassion for those who are deceived and are living sinful lives, as we once were, and who need to be rescued and restored. Nothing helps us understand someone in trouble more than having had the same trouble ourselves.

Paul teaches that God chooses and uses what the world considers foolish in order to show the folly of worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:27–28). Those whom God chooses to use for His work are very different from those the world would choose. God often chooses people who do not have the right qualifications for the job based on worldly standards, but they do have the right heart. Their motives are pure, and they love Jesus greatly.

When God was ready to replace King Saul, He told the prophet Samuel that He would anoint someone from the house of Jesse as the new king (1 Sam. 16:1). Samuel went and examined all of Jesse's sons one by one. God rejected each one, so he asked if any of the brothers were not there. The one God chose was the one the family believed was so unlikely they had not even brought him in from the field for consideration. The one God chose was named David, and Samuel anointed him to be king (1 Sam. 16:1–13). God doesn't look on the outward man, but on the heart (v. 7), and David had a heart filled with desire for God.

We might say Paul also had a heart for God, and he had formerly been a zealous and committed Pharisee. He had a lot of zeal for God, but it was zeal without knowledge. Although he had done many terrible things, he actually believed he

was serving God as he did them. When Jesus confronted him on the Damascus road, he was quick to repent and ready to do whatever Jesus asked him to do (Acts 9:1–19). After this encounter with the living Christ, Paul was never the same. He was saved by grace, certainly not by any of his own good works. He was deeply convinced of the truth that we are saved by grace alone and not by our works, and his mission in life became to teach others that same truth.

No one is more qualified to teach others a truth than those who have firsthand experience with what they are trying to teach. Paul had a fire in him that no amount of criticism or judgment from others could put out. He was called by God—not by man—to teach the message of grace; therefore, man could not stop what God had begun.

If you have been invited to do a job for God, you can be assured that nothing in your past can hinder you. God sees your heart, and He sees who you are becoming, not merely who you have been in the past. If we wish to walk with God, we must look forward. We have no eyes in the back of our head, and we might let that convince us that we are not to spend our lives looking back but, rather, looking to the future. Don't look at the wrong things you have done; look at the right things you can do.

Personal Reflection

In what ways are you qualified for God to use you?
How could He use your past to help others?



Grace and Peace

Galatians 1:3–5

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul adds his normal and frequent greeting, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” His greeting was much more beneficial to its recipients than most of our greetings might be today. We may greet a person with the words *hello* or *hi*, but Paul wishes those he meets the power of amazing grace in their lives and the peace of God, which is truly wonderful.

Unless we understand grace, we will never have peace, and Paul desires peace for every person. After all, what is life really worth if we don’t have peace? No matter what else we have—power, position, riches, influential friends, or possessions—it is worth nothing if we don’t have peace to go along with it. Peace leads us to joy, and I think what every person desires above all else is to be happy. Paul says that the Kingdom of God is not about meat and drink (things), but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17), and to that I say, “Amen!” We want to know that we

are right with God and to have peace and joy. As Matthew 6:33 teaches us, if we will seek first the Kingdom of God and His way of being and doing, all the other things we desire will be added to us. The psalmist says, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4 NKJV).

Sadly, we often spend a great deal of our lives searching for what we think will make us happy, but we find once we obtain each thing, it is unable to provide us with what we thought it would. We go from possession to possession, job to job, relationship to relationship, or even religion to religion searching and searching, but all the while the simplicity of the gospel is available if we will open our eyes and see it. God created us for His pleasure and ours, and nothing else will ever satisfy us except a deep and intimate relationship with Him, putting Him and His will first in all things. This world is not our home, and I doubt that we can ever be completely satisfied as long as we dwell here. In fact, as believers in Christ, I think a part of us is always longing for our eternal home where we will see Jesus face-to-face.

Consider this Scripture verse and then ask yourself if you are pursuing the right things in your life:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires

pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15–17

I urge everyone to spend their time on earth preparing for eternity. If we spend our time merely trying to have what the world offers, we will always end up disappointed. We may and should enjoy the things of the world, but God must always come first. I like to say, “Enjoy whatever God gives you as much as possible, but don’t become so attached to it that you feel you cannot be happy without it.”

I remember quite often that everything I purchase is already in the process of decay and that it is not eternal. If you ever wonder if that is true, just drive by a junkyard and consider that all the junk you are looking at was once someone’s dream. It was shiny and new, but now it is old, worn-out, and forgotten. Let us remember what Jesus says: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19–20).

In his greeting to the Galatians, Paul says that Jesus gave Himself so that we might be delivered from this present evil world according to the will of God (Gal. 1:4). Although we sojourn here for a period of time, we are to be in the world but not of it (John 17:14–16). You might say that those of us who are saved by God’s grace remain here to help the world,

not to expect the world to help us. We can bring joy to the world by sharing the good news of the gospel, but the world cannot bring true lasting joy to us. The important thing is to not get attached to it and to always remember that we are merely passing through. Before long we will all stand before God. What an amazingly wonderful day that will be! Then and only then can we be completely satisfied. Through Christ we can be content while we are on earth, but our complete satisfaction is only found in Him.

Personal Reflection

In what ways are you seeking God above all else?



CHAPTER 2



NO OTHER GOSPEL



No Other Gospel

Galatians 1:6–9

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!

Paul uses strong words in attempting to convey to the Galatians the danger of accepting or even entertaining the idea that any gospel other than the one he has preached to them has any validity at all. Two times he pronounces a curse on anyone who preaches another gospel. Some might feel that his strong language is in opposition to his message of grace, but it isn’t. Paul knows the danger of deception and does not want the Galatians to lose their newfound freedom.

We must be firm in what we believe, and although we should not be narrow-minded and unwilling to learn new

things, neither can we be so open-minded that we are ready to believe anything we hear or read.

Paul isn't actually cursing people, but by divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit he is pronouncing that divine judgment must fall on anyone who leads others into error. The pure unadulterated message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only true gospel, and anything that teaches that we need Jesus plus something else will lead us in the wrong direction. Of course, we should obey God and pray and other such things, but those spiritual activities do not save us. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8–9).

Paul begins this section with "I am astonished." Philip Graham Ryken in the *Reformed Expository Commentary: Galatians* says Paul is what the English would call gobsmacked. *Gob* is slang for mouth and to be *smacked* is to be slapped with an open hand. So someone who is gobsmacked, opens his mouth, puts his hand over it, and lifts his eyebrows in amazement. Paul was gobsmacked. His astonishment regarding how quickly the Galatians were entertaining anything other than what he had taught them was very concerning to him. He couldn't be with them all the time, and he wanted them to be strong enough in their faith that they would not believe lies tempting them to believe any other doctrine.

The Jews who held the belief that it was good to have Jesus as long as certain Jewish laws were also followed were called Judaizers, and Paul considered them dangerous to anyone who was not firmly and deeply rooted in the truth regarding

salvation. One reason Paul was so astonished was that his missionary trip to Galatia had been one of his most successful. Sinners were saved, miracles were performed, and churches were planted. He could hardly believe that after what the Galatians had witnessed and experienced, they could so quickly begin falling away.

Paul was angry, and that is understandable. No one wants to see their hard work turned to ashes, and he wanted to communicate with the Galatians as soon as possible to wake them up. I have heard it said that the church's greatest troublemakers (both now and then) are not those outside the church who criticize, oppose, ridicule, and persecute it, but those inside who try to change or pervert the gospel—people who take sound theology and twist or distort it. They don't totally deny it, but they add to it or take away just enough to turn it into a false doctrine without the people even realizing what is going on.

Excessive reasoning can cause a person to start believing false doctrines. Faith is a matter of the heart, not the head. For example, I've never seen God, but I know He is real. I did not see Jesus die on the cross, but I know He did. I know that God is good, even though there are bad things that happen in this world. I know God loves me and that He always will. How do I know these things? God's Word tells me they are true, and I know in my heart they are true. Faith believes what it does not see in the natural realm; it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1 NKJV).

The Galatians had experienced the freedom Jesus gave to them and they knew His peace and joy, so why would they return to the bondage of following religious laws, rules, and regulations? The Jews who had crept in among them made a persuasive argument, and they started thinking too much instead of continuing in simple faith.

You may or may not be familiar with the term *the law*. I want to make sure you understand what I am talking about when I use it and give a few examples you might relate to. Paul is talking about the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant—laws the Jews had with God. He wanted those he taught to know they had been set free from the law through Jesus. However, not everyone believed that, and they were busy trying to force people to believe they still had to follow those same laws.

The Jews had to follow many rules and regulations in order to be acceptable to God. In addition to these laws, we are capable of making laws of our own and trying to force them on other people, as well as following them ourselves. When we make a law out of anything, we always feel guilty if we don't follow the rule we have established. For instance, some churches believe it is wrong for a woman to cut her hair or wear makeup, jewelry, or even colorful and attractive clothes. Any woman attending those churches must follow those rules or she is made to believe she is unacceptable to God. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:4–5 that it is wrong for a man to pray with his head covered and wrong for a woman to pray with her head uncovered. The reason for this is that

doing so would have made women equal with men, and in the culture Paul was addressing, it would have been inappropriate; a woman's hair was not to be cut short or shaved (1 Cor. 11:5–6). Thankfully, we know that Jesus has set women free, and there is no longer male or female because we are all equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28). But in Paul's day, the culture had not yet changed, and he did not wish to cause problems over certain customs because he had something much more important to teach the believers.

Paul was also the one who said a woman should not adorn herself by braiding her hair or wearing expensive gold, pearls, or apparel, but that she should adorn herself modestly and be more concerned with having beauty on the inside rather than outside (1 Tim. 2:9; see also 1 Pet. 3:3–4). Once again, this was a cultural issue, because in those days most of the women who had elaborate hairstyles and wore lots of jewelry and expensive clothing were prostitutes. Paul wanted the women of God to dress in a manner that would leave no room for judgment.

Our culture is different now, and guidelines about appearances don't apply to us in the same way they did to people in Paul's day. Of course, people today should dress appropriately and not in a manner that would cause others to lust after them or that would bring undue attention to them. God created lots of colors, and surely He meant for them to be enjoyed. Our clothes do not need to be drab and colorless; they simply need to be appropriate.

I had an aunt who believed certain things were wrong,

such as wearing colored eye shadow, so she always corrected me when she saw me wearing it. She and my uncle did not drink any alcohol, but they also refused to even go into a restaurant that had a bar in it and felt that eating in those restaurants was wrong for others also. They watched television at home but refused to go inside a movie theater. These types of practices are personal preferences and should not be forced on other people or used to make them feel guilty. The things we should all avoid are the things mentioned in Scripture, not things other Christians decide on their own should be avoided. I know some people who fast one day every week, but they don't tell other people they need to do the same. God may ask us to do or not do certain things that are personal to us, and we should keep them between the Lord and ourselves and simply be obedient to Him without imposing those personal convictions on others.

We can make a law out of anything, and when we do, we always feel guilty if we don't keep it. We also tend to judge harshly others who don't do as we do, and Paul teaches that we have no right to do that (Rom. 14:4). He writes that all things are permissible, "but not all things are beneficial *or* advantageous . . . constructive [to character] *and* edifying [to spiritual life]" (1 Cor. 10:23 AMP). In Paul's day, some people thought eating meat was sinful, and others felt they were free to eat meat, so Paul said let everyone be "fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5) and that we should not judge one another over these matters (Rom. 14:13). If you want to read

more about these issues, you will find broader explanation in Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8, and 1 Corinthians 10:20–31.

God Is Not for Sale

If we let our flesh have its way, rather than walking by the Spirit, it will always look for some way to get at least some of the credit for doing good deeds and being a good person. When we are proud of the works of our flesh, we usually judge others who are not doing things the way we do them. We should humbly receive the goodness of God knowing that we don't deserve it, and we should respond to His goodness by doing all we can for God because we love Him and because of all He has done for us, not for any other reason.

Because human nature is flawed and wants to earn or deserve what we get, convincing people that they need to do one thing or another to be saved and acceptable to God is easy, and the devil takes advantage of that weakness if we let him. There are, of course, good things we do, but we do them because of what God has done for us by His grace, not in order to get something from Him. God is not for sale, and we cannot buy His favor with any amount of good works—it's a gift. And God's favor—His love, grace, and mercy toward us—is not a gift if it has a price tag.

Pride that drives us to try to earn God's love and forgiveness is dangerous because it can keep us from experiencing true freedom in Christ to become everything we are created to be. Think of it like this: If you give someone wrong

directions to a location they want to get to, they will get lost. If that can happen in terms of physical locations, just imagine what can happen to us spiritually if we are given wrong directions about receiving new life in Christ and follow them without question.

I heard a story about a woman who was very anxious that she and her child would miss their train stop. She asked the conductor if he would make sure she got off at the right place, and he said he would. Another man sitting nearby told her that he would help her because the workers on the train often had so much to do they might forget her. At a certain stop, the man told her it was the place she needed to get off the train, and he helped her with her child and their luggage.

The train continued and came to another stop, and the conductor came back to look for the woman. He was surprised by her absence and asked the people around where she was and if they had seen her. The man who had helped her off the train said that since the conductor had not come at the last stop, he had helped her off. The conductor said, "Man, you have made a huge mistake! That was not a regular stop, it was an emergency stop we made for another purpose, and you have left the woman at a very dangerous place where she may be attacked by wild animals."

This story helps us understand what can happen to us if we listen to the wrong people. The apostle John encourages us not to believe every spirit, but to test them to make sure they represent the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:1).

It is sad to say, but too many people who start off right

concerning their belief about salvation through Jesus end up deceived. They have been miserable in their lives of sin and self-effort and have had the gospel preached to them, believed it, repented of their sin, and received Christ as Savior and Lord. They go along happily for a while and begin to grow in knowledge concerning Christ and the new way of living He offers. The devil hates this, so he puts someone in their midst who presents another message that includes their current beliefs, but adds something to it that, if believed, will cause them to get lost as the woman on the train did.

I have found that a simple check of my motives as to why I am doing certain things helps me stay on the right track. Am I doing what I do to get something from God or to give something to Him? Paul tells the Corinthians that any work done with a wrong motive will be burned up in the fire on Judgment Day and there will be no reward for it (1 Cor. 3:13). I don't want to waste my time doing things and then losing my reward; I would rather face the truth about why I am doing what I do and make sure I am not doing it as a law I feel I must keep out of some false religious obligation.

I want to encourage you to receive the gift of God's love, grace, and mercy and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in every area of your life. Make a determined decision to steadfastly put your trust in what Jesus has done for you and not in works of the flesh that can never make you right with God. That's the only way you can have the life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit of God that Jesus died to give you!