

Lovers of God, Part Four

By

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Lovers of God: This is the fourth of a multi-series of articles pertaining to the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit. This article will cover some of the background material of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. This information will help one to understand the urgency as to why Paul told these Christians to “walk NOT in the ways of the flesh,” but to “walk in the Spirit.” Before I begin, I will summarize the material covered in article three.

I open article three with this statement: “Some people (I should say most) believe it is impossible to be like Christ.” In an attempt to free people from what I call a lie from the abyss, I directed my readers to the Gospel of John, Chapter Fifteen. From that portion of Scripture I covered three relationships Jesus taught his Apostles. The first covered the believer’s relationship to his Lord (John 15:1–11). Jesus instructed the Apostles to allow God to prune away unhealthy habits from their lives. Jesus told the Apostles to abide in him by word, by love, by obedience, and in joy through the power of the Holy Spirit so that they would be able to produce healthy and abundant fruit.

The second covered the believer’s relationship toward others who believed (John 15:12–17 and Matthew 5:43–48). In these two accounts is brought out the authority of Jesus. Jesus commanded the apostles to love one another. His command was that they were to love, to bless, to do good and to pray for those who hated, cursed and persecuted them. Jesus also told the apostles to be perfect even as the Father which is in heaven is perfect. I stressed the importance of the word “if.” I went on to explain that one’s whole attitude or submission of their will to accept what Jesus taught rests upon that two-lettered word—“if.”

The third covered the believer’s relationship with this world (John 15:18–27). Jesus explained to the Apostles as to “why” the world reacts with hostility toward them. Jesus told the Apostles that they were to be of a different nature; that they were to be identified as belonging to him and that the world hated him. Jesus encouraged the Apostles to be active in the world. He told them to love all people. Jesus also promised them that the Holy Spirit would help them so that they would be able to give effective witness to God’s love and grace so as to counteract the hostility of the world. As recorded in the Gospel by Luke, “Nothing is impossible with God.” I believe this and stand firm on his word. How about you?

Let’s now look at Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Today, if someone were to consult a world map to locate Galatia in the Middle East, they would not be able to find it. Where did these people come from that Paul wrote to? Several hundred years before the birth of Jesus, some tribes from Gaul (France) migrated into Asia Minor and founded Galatia. Later on, the Roman Empire conquered and took over Galatia and expanded its borders. Today we know this country as Turkey. It was during Paul’s first missionary journey to Southern Galatia when he started the churches at Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts, Chapters 13 and 14).

Paul had heard that false teachers were stirring up and leading some of the Galatian Christians astray. He wasted no time in reaffirming his Apostleship, the Gospel message, and exposing these false teachers. Who were these false teachers? What did they teach? These teachers were called Judeaizers and they came up from Jerusalem to lead the Christians to their own idea of the Gospel. They moved among the Christians and tried to persuade them to follow Jewish tradition based on the Old Testament Law. When this didn't work, these men would compromise or mix together elements from the Gospel message of Jesus along with the Law of Moses so as to please both sides (Acts 15:1 and 24, Galatians 1:6–9, 2:4, and 6:12–15). Also read Matthew 7:15–20 to see what Jesus had to say concerning false teachers. (Is this not still being done in the church today? Editor.)

Upon a quick survey of the entire letter to the Galatians, Paul did not waste his time defending the Gospel by engaging these false teachers, but instead wrote to convince the Galatians that all they needed was faith in God's grace. Paul uses three approaches in attacking his enemies and in ministering his converts to the truth.

His first approach is "personal" (Galatians, Chapters 1 and 2). He explains his authority by reviewing his own personal experience with Jesus and in the proclaiming of the Gospel (1:1, 11–12). Because Paul was not with original twelve apostles from the start, his enemies used this against him in saying he was not a true Apostle. Paul, in verse 1:1–24, explains that he had received the Gospel independently from Jesus and not from the twelve Apostles, but that they had approved his message and his ministry (2:1–10, compare Acts, chapter 15). Furthermore, Paul had even defended the Gospel when Peter had compromised his earlier stand concerning circumcision (2:11–21).

In these first two chapters, Paul expressed his anxiety (1:6–7). We can see this also in his great love for the truth because he pronounced these false teachers accursed. The Greek word he used is "anathema," which means "dedicated to destruction" (1:8–9). Paul didn't speak to please man, as we can readily see in verse 10, and he also explains his motive in verse 5. "To God be the glory!"

Chapters 3 and 4 are doctrinal. In them Paul presents several arguments to establish that sinners are saved by grace through their faith in Christ, not by their works and the Law of Moses. First he appeals to their own experiences by asking questions in order to help them to see the difference between living in the liberty of God's grace and living in the bondage of the Law (3:1–5). Then he goes back to the Old Testament Law in 3:6–14 to show that even Abraham and the Prophets understood salvation as being by grace through faith. Having mentioned the Law, Paul now explains why the Law was given originally (3:15–4:18). He then uses the story of Sarah and Hagar to illustrate the relationship of Law and grace (4:19–31).

The final two chapters of the letter are "practical." The Judeaizers accused Paul of promoting lawlessness because he preached the Good News of the grace of God; so in this section he explains the relationship between the grace of God and practical Christian living. He shows that living by faith means liberty, not bondage (5:1–120; DEPENDING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT, not the carnal flesh (5:13–26); living for others, not for self (6:1–10); and living for the glory of God, not for man's approval (6:11–18). It is either one series of action or the other—Law or grace—but it cannot be both!

Here are a few important questions concerning your understanding of the New Testament. Answer them as best as you can. Compare what you think with what the Bible teaches. In answering these questions, you should be able to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

1. What is the Good News (Gospel)?
2. What is the grace of God?
3. What does it mean to “walk in the flesh?”
4. What does it mean to “walk in the Spirit?”
5. What is a believer/Christian?
6. What is faith?
7. What is a disciple?
8. What makes an Apostle?
9. What is salvation?
10. Does a Christian have to be a member of one of the following churches in order to be a true Christian?
 - a) The Roman Catholic Church.
 - b) The Lutheran Churches?
 - c) The Baptist Churches?
 - d) The Methodist Churches?
 - e) The Presbyterian Churches?
 - f) The Assembly of God Churches?
 - g) The Church of God?
 - h) The Greek Orthodox Churches?
 - i) The Churches of Christ (non-instrumental)?
 - j) The Christian/Churches of Christ (instrumental)?
 - k) The “you-name-them” Churches?

If you say yes to any of the “churches” mentioned above, re-read the New Testament!

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