

The Guiding Questions in Galatians

(1) In what ways is the “present age” “evil”?

1:6 Now that we are rescued we should not desert Him

1:7 some people have come into the church to throw it into confusion and pervert the Gospel of Jesus.

2:13 Under pressure even Peter, previously empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach on Pentecost, loses his nerve as he has often in the past (during the storm in the boat, in the high priest's courtyard).

2:15 the mistaken notion that a person can be justified by observing the Law

4:9 The “elemental spiritual forces” are “weak and miserable” and yet they still exert a pull on us.

4:17 “Those guys” are zealous to win back the ones who have been set free by the Gospel, and alienate them from Paul and Jesus.

4:29 The son born of the flesh persecutes the son born of the Spirit.

5:2 Some people wanted the Galatians to be circumcised; some people want to impose legalistic requirements on those who have been set free by Jesus.

5:7 Those people are like people who cut in on a marathon runner to prevent him from reaching his goal.

6:12 The hypocrisy of the age is the insistence on circumcision as “the mark of sincerity” when the hidden purpose is “the mark of persecution-avoidance”

(2) What was / is the Father's will?

1:6 The Father's will is that the people rescued by Jesus should live in the grace of Christ.

1:9 The Father's will is that those who preach this other Gospel should be under His curse rather than His blessing

1:15 It was the Father's will that Paul should be *set apart* in his mother's womb for this ministry; that he should be *called* into the ministry by the grace of God, and that the Son of God would be *revealed* in him so that the Gospel could be preached to the Gentiles.

3:10 The Father's Will was that everyone who does not obey the Law should be under its curse / everyone who relies on the works of the Law are under a curse

3:19 The Father's will was that the promise would be fulfilled in the Seed.

3:22 The Father's will was that everything would be locked up under sin so that the promise could be given through faith in Jesus.

4:5 The Father's will was to redeem those who were in slavery under the law.

6:2 The Father's will is that we should carry each other's burdens.

(3) What was it that Jesus did?

1:12 Jesus revealed Himself – and the Gospel – to Paul directly; he did not learn it from another human being, but from Jesus Himself, so there can be no doubt as to his calling

1:15 Jesus *set apart* Paul in his mother's womb for this ministry; that he *called* Paul into the ministry by the grace of God, and Jesus *revealed* Himself in Paul so that the Gospel could be preached to the Gentiles.

2:20 He was crucified - and us with him.

3:1 Jesus was crucified.

3:13 Jesus became a curse in our place, and so redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

3:37 He has made us God's children through faith.

4:5 Jesus came at the appointed time to redeem us and give us the adoption of God's children.

5:1 Jesus set us free.

5:11 Jesus died on the cross in a way that was sure to offend many.

6:14 Jesus' death caused the world to be crucified to me, and I am crucified to the world.

(4) What did His rescue look like?

2:5 In this section the rescue of Jesus is the rescue from slavery.

2:20 His rescue looks like our death, from sin's perspective.

3:2 His rescue looks like our receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

3:13 His rescue looks like His taking our place under the curse.

4:5 His rescue looks like being born of a woman, born under the law.

6:15 His rescue looks like a new creation, not a sign imposed on the existing creation.

(5) What happens now that we are rescued?

1:6 Now that we are rescued we should not desert Him

2:9 The other apostles extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul and his associates

2:10 remember the poor

2:20 God does not raise us just to say "Now you have to live by the Law." Instead He gives us the Holy Spirit

3:3 We do not live the rest of our lives "by means of the flesh" but by the Spirit.

3:23 We are no longer under the guardianship of the Law.

3:26 We are children of God through faith in Christ.

3:27 We are clothed with Christ.

4:7 We are not slaves any longer.

4:30 "Get rid of the slave woman and her son!"

5:1 Now that we are free, we do not allow ourselves to become slaves again.

5:6 The only activity we value is faith expressing itself through love.

5:13 Since we are free, we should not indulge the flesh; since we are free, we should serve one another in love (Luther: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; and a Christian is a perfectly free servant of all, subject to all")

5:16 Walking in the Spirit is the best way to practice not-walking-in-the-flesh.

6:1 If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

6:5 Deal with your own issues without expecting others to deal with them for you.

6:10 Look for opportunities to do good to all people.

6:17 We bear the marks of Jesus' crucifixion on our bodies through Baptism.

“Bible Verse Arms Race.” The key to winning is to pile up as many verses on your side of the argument as you can while simultaneously discounting your opponent’s verses because they aren’t reading them in the correct context or they have the original language wrong.

It’s universally understood that New Testament verses always trump the Old Testament, and Jesus’ Red Letters always trump Paul.

An example of this conflict played out on the floor of Congress recently. In a widely covered debate within the House Agriculture Committee over the future of the Farm Bill, which funds national SNAP and food stamp programs, Rep. Juan Vargas, D-Calif, referenced Jesus’ words in Matthew 25.

“[Jesus] says how you treat the least among us, the least of our brothers, that’s how you treat Him,” Vargas said, adding that Jesus specifically mentions the importance of feeding the hungry.

Rep. Stephen Fincher, R-Tenn, who has been advocating to dramatically cut federal nutrition assistance spending, countered with 2 Thessalonians 3:10. “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’”

Two men, each Christians apparently committed to living in a way that lines up with the Bible and their faith, with two very different verses that model very different moral imperatives.

For every Mary at the feet of Jesus, there’s a Martha chastising her for not helping in the kitchen. For every protest sign that triumphs a God who universally loves His creation, there’s a banner on the other side of the street that quotes Jesus’ analogy of the narrow road. For every verse in Galatians celebrating the joys of being saved by grace alone, there’s a verse in James that says faith without works is dead.

In my (biased) view, many folks “have faith” in Christianity because they believe Christianity is “right.” In other words, that it’s historically true, morally sound and spiritually resonant. But once they’ve taken the name “Christian” and now stand on the “right side,” they reverse-engineer their newfound faith to match their long-standing beliefs, biases and preferences.

Historical American Christian leaders used a wide range of verses, both Old and New Testament, to prop up slavery as a just and biblical practice. Likewise, an American capitalist reads the Bible and sees a God who prefers freedom and equal opportunity for all, and thus understands that capitalism is God’s best for humanity. A socialist reads the same Bible, sees the early Christian community as described in the first few chapters of Acts, and derives that a socialist system is God’s best.

Feminists read the accounts of Jesus and see Him as the ultimate gender barrier iconoclast. Those who believe men ought to be the head of a household are pleased to focus on Paul’s advice for families in 1 Timothy and the Old Testament purity laws, because it reinforces their understanding that a woman’s best role is at home and in submission to her husband.

All these ideas are Biblical. But which ones are right?

This is why the Bible Verse Arms Race is not a very good way to discover Biblical truth. **When two people, each with a firmly held “faith,” find as many verses as possible to uphold their belief and dismiss the others, no one leaves convinced of anything except that the other person is stubborn.** (Including, I might add, an increasingly post-modern, relativist world that sees these debates as archaic and disingenuous.)

I think Jesus offers a solution in Matthew 7:15-20, when He warns against false prophets. “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit ... Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

In much of our Christian culture, the evidence of “good faith” is belief in the “right answers” of Christianity, defended by a large collection of Bible Verses. Jesus’ words in Matthew 7 directly challenge this notion, as He proposes good deeds are the tangible effects of good faith.

Anne Lamott has more punch. **“You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”**

Am I saying seeking the solutions to complicated theological problems is useless? No, such work can help perceive the character of God. But unless we strive to live in a way that reflects this discovered character, systematic theology devolves quickly into a clanging cymbal.

If we have faith in a God who cares for people in need, then our deeds ought to reflect that faith. If we believe God considers food stamps for minimum wage earners and disabled folks to be "stealing," our deeds (and proposed legislation) will reflect that faith.

Good faith and good works are dance partners. Alone, they epitomize the ultimate meaninglessness that plagues post-modern philosophy. **But, when intimately joined together, they possess the ability to draw out the true essence of the other, and in turn fling us into the supreme goodness of God.**

By Steven Harrell at www.relevantmagazine.com

Commandment	We should fear and love God that we may not But . . .
1 Thou shalt have no other gods.	We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.	
2 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.	curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name	call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks
3 Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day.	despise preaching and His Word	hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.
4 Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother [that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long upon the earth].	despise nor anger our parents and masters	give them honor, serve, obey, and hold them in love and esteem
5 Thou shalt not kill.	hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body	help and befriend him in every bodily need [in every need and danger of life and body].
6 Thou shalt not commit adultery.		lead a chaste and decent life in words and deeds, and each love and honor his spouse.
7 Thou shalt not steal.	take our neighbor's money or property, nor get them by false ware or dealing	help him to improve and protect his property and business [that his means are preserved and his condition is improved].
8 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.	deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor	defend him, [think and] speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.
9 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.	craftily seek to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, and obtain it by a show of [justice and] right, etc.	help and be of service to him in keeping it.
10 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is his.	estrangle, force, or entice away our neighbor's wife, servants, or cattle	urge them to stay and [diligently] do their duty.

The Ten Commandments (Dr. Martin Luther's Explanations)

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

We should fear and love God that we may not . . .

- curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name
- despise preaching and His Word
- despise nor anger our parents and masters
- hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body
- take our neighbor's money or property, nor get them by false ware or dealing
- deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor
- craftily seek to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, and obtain it by a show of [justice and] right, etc.
- estrange, force, or entice away our neighbor's wife, servants, or cattle

But

We should fear and love God that we

- call upon [His Name] in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks
- hold [His Word] sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.
- give [all in authority over us] honor, serve, obey, and hold them in love and esteem
- help and befriend [our neighbor] in every bodily need [in every need and danger of life and body].
- lead a chaste and decent life in words and deeds, and each love and honor his spouse.
- help [our neighbor] to improve and protect his property and business [that his means are preserved and his condition is improved].
- defend [our neighbor], [think and] speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.
- help and be of service to [our neighbor] in keeping [his property or house].
- urge [his people] to stay and [diligently] do their duty.

