

Who are you? That's right. You're what? Phrygians, right. You're mostly slaves or sons of slaves. By the way, the word slave appears in this book a great deal. I think he was writing at a level people could understand. Now then, Blastinius just recently left here, Drachma Blastinius, and even more recently, you have received this letter from Paul. It is addressed to you concerning the problems that Blastinius' visit has created. But what I want you to understand as we look through chapter one is that Paul answers the charges. Well, actually, I would say he puts the record straight about what really happened regarding some of the tales Blastinius has told about him, but before he does, he has an opening. The book opens, and the opening of Galatians is often neglected, because starting about verse five or six there's so much fun there you can't wait to get to it, but remember that from the very first moment that he opens the scripture, or starts writing this, his thoughts are filled with all he's going to say and they are reflected even in the opening. Well, let's talk to the Lord for a minute.

*Under Your blood, dear Lord, and by Your grace and through Your cross, Father, in Your Son, we come to You, and we're safe in such a situation as that. We thank You for the cleansing the blood of Christ has given us. And this morning we exalt in our high estate with You. Now open our eyes to how much higher it is than we realize and set men free, Lord Jesus, to You. Open all our eyes and may Christ be glorified. Amen.*

*Galatians 1:1 - Paul, one sent, not by men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.* Alright, it sounds like a salutation written to you, but it establishes something immediately. Now, what is established? Well, it establishes that Paul is an apostle. I'm going to skip over that part. He's going to establish that really well before it's over with. It establishes the origin of the gospel. Now, what is the origin of the gospel? God the Father is the origin of the gospel. Do you know what else He is? He's the middle of the gospel. And do you know what else He is? He's the end of the gospel.

Now, I know it's morning, and you look like you're sound asleep. Why don't you just wave at me? Would you wave? Especially those of you back there. Alright, you are awake. You are conscious. This is the whole point. We can go home, saints. Who originated your salvation? God. God, when? Who knows when? Way back there, but on the day that you were converted, who originated? Where is the origin of your salvation? God. You did not take the first step. That's right; you were provoked by God to salvation. He caused you to call on His name, and immediately thereafter, He left you all on your own to work like the dickens, to stay that way, and to keep in good favor with Him. *No!* He is also in the middle. He is the sustainer of your salvation, and Paul establishes this. The Father initiated His Son's coming. He is the one who chose you on the day of conversion. He was the provocation of your salvation, and it is really up to Him, and to Him alone, to keep you saved.

Now, Paul is already boiling mad, even as he writes this part right here. *I, Paul, and all the brothers who are with me, to the gatherings in Galatia. Grace is yours.* Where'd it come from? Say it. Look at it. Where'd it come from? And the peace you have in your heart, if you've got any left after what

Blastinius has done to you, where did it come from? God the Father. How will that peace remain? By sustaining a good relationship with the Lord. No, He alone sustains the peace as well as the grace in you and will to the end. All spiritual experience originates with the Lord. All spiritual experience is maintained by the Lord, and all spiritual experience ends with the Lord. Yesterday, you were very, very dry and needed the Lord. You sat down with Him, and you knew you needed a touch from God. Your heart was just broken, and you came before Him, and He met you. Now, do you do like the Shinto, who beats his two sticks together until his little god comes out of his little house and meets him? Did you get God there? Let me tell you something: God could have left you high and dry yesterday if He wanted to. It was out of His own provocation that He came and met you in your time of need, and you didn't earn it. That's my point. You didn't trick Him into coming. You didn't merit His favor into coming. He came because He is the originator of everything there is about your faith, and you're going to discover that from one end to the other.

By the way, Paul will close this letter the same way He ends it with the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ from God the Father. That's where it starts, saint. That's where it ends. Alright. *Who gave Himself up for our sins that He might deliver us out of this present age according to the will of our God and our Father. To him be glory forevermore. Amen.* Will you repeat that with me? *To Him be glory forevermore. Amen.* Glory, peace, and grace are His. They stretch from one end to the other.

Now, I'm going to take just a minute to do this because some of you are not familiar with this. Somebody tall hand me one of these, would you? Brad, come steal one of these things right quickly, would you? Thank you. Alright, that's great. I needed a bulletin board, and I've got it. Alright, there it is. You see? We'll return it. I want you to imagine something that cannot be imagined. I want you to imagine God. This is God, but actually, you can't do that because before He created, He was all there was. Then He created eternity. That goes on inside of Him. Eternity is in God. In fact, saints, everything is in God. Absolutely everything is in God. There's nothing that is outside of God. Everything is in Him. He did all of His creation within Himself. It's inside Him. So, He created eternity, then He made beings that were spiritual in the other realm. Then He made time. Now here's the beginning of time. Can you see the beginning of time right there? There's the beginning of time, and there's the end of time. Do you see the end of time? Now, time has a beginning and an end. It's not like eternity. It's a straight line. Eternity, we symbolize a circle. There's time beginning. There's time. Now, where's the beginning of time? Where? Say it. I want to hear you say it because it'll help you. In God. Where's the end of time? Do you know what you just said? You said I don't know if you know this or not, but what you said was that when God created time, He was at the beginning and the end of it at the same moment. Do you understand that? No, you don't understand that, and you never will understand it because you're caught in it.

When He said, "I am the beginning and the end," He literally meant that the very first thing that happened in creation was God. And the very last thing there will ever be in creation is God. In fact, the very first thing in creation was Christ. The very last thing in creation was Christ, but both of those events have already taken place because they took place in Him. He is outside of the finite.

He is in the infinity. He is not bound by time and space. You are bound by time and space. He is not. He has not only seen the end but also been there. He was there the moment He created space time, because space time is in Him. Now, that will drive a predestinarian stark raving mad. It will also drive an Arminian stark raving mad. He's outside of theology, saints. You and I can't understand that, but if you can look at that and understand how utterly established you are in your Lord. For your Lord...concentrates much more on the beginning, or He concentrates on visiting the middle, that's where we are right now, in the middle, but actually your Lord's greater concentration is at the end, that's right. In fact (laughter)...those of you listening on tape, these people are making fun of me here. Hey, listen. I've got a little pride left here. I don't have much hair left, but I got a little pride left. Those of you who thought I was bald, I've got a few up there waving just to prove I'm not. No, actually, probably the Lord called you before the foundation of the world by inspecting the end of the ages, and He found you there. He found you there in His grace and said, "Wonderful." Then He calls you, and then He redeems you because He knew at the very end you were glorified, totally, utterly glorified.

Gene, that's crazy. I don't believe that. I don't either, because in fact He was in both places at once. But that's how established you are in Christ. You are not sitting here hanging by a spider's thread. There is a great establishment in you. Now, the very next verse, he says, "I'm amazed that you, you Galatians, could be so quickly taken away from the gospel by a man who is preaching that which is not a gospel." Now, in essence, what did Blastinius teach you? The law. Alright, but in essence, what's the real reason he came? What does it boil down to? Works? Alright, bondage. Absolutely. What? Conformity. Excellent. I love these. Separation. Religion. Wonderful. I'll take them all. That's great. Did you hear all of those? Let's do them again. Bondage, separation, law, legalism, religion, works, independence, self-righteousness, conformity, and now I'll add one more. The greatest tragedy of all: he was teaching them to try to merit and to gain what they already had. I want to repeat that: he was seeking to get them, to obtain from God by individual personal merit, that which they already had, and that is the tragedy.

There is something basic in all of us when we are lost. We need a gospel that is centered on ourselves so desperately. It is our nature to earn our salvation, and after we get converted, the same basic thing remains. And that is to keep in favor with God by something that we ourselves do. God will have none of that. Listen, saints; He already got you scoped out. He knows what you do not know. You can't. You already are clear that you couldn't save yourself, but what you're not clear on, perhaps, probably, almost certainly, I'm going to pretend you don't. After all, you're Galatians. I'm certain you don't. You're confused on this point: that your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ is also not dependent on your self-effort. As sure as your salvation is centered on Christ and centered in God, so is your walk centered on Christ and centered in God. You don't have any idea how determined He is to make Himself the center and the circumference and the content of your faith.

I'm going to try to illustrate this just a little bit. I'm probably going to do this several times. You're going to forgive me for being a little personal here. I'm just going to do this. I had two daughters; I never knew what a son was. I had no idea what it was like to have a son. I'm privileged this year

to have my grandson at my home. Now, I know lots of people adore that kid, but I can tell you two people in this room who think he hung the moon, and that's Mike, and that's me. Now, Mike, is there anything on earth Nathaniel could possibly do to cause you to disown him? I thought a lot about that, him running around the house. I learned so much about boys. I discovered one thing. I can locate him anytime I want to. All I have to do is follow his clothes. There's a shoe. There's a sock. There's another shoe. There's another sock. Oh, there's a shirt. Alright, he's down that way. He never puts anything away. My two daughters...just never had to clean up after them. This kid is just all over the place. I tell you, I love that little boy. It is inconceivable that he could do anything that could cause me to disown him, and He doesn't even belong to me. He's my grandson, not my son. It's inconceivable.

Do you have any kids? Those of you who are not married, you'll have to ignore us for a minute. How many of you have kids? Let me see your hands. Alright, they're stinkers, aren't they? But look, think about it. That little child...just think about that little child. All the pain, headache, heartache that kid's causing you, none of it is particularly sin. It's just aggravation. Is that not true? It's just aggravation. Some of it is sin, huh? Yeah. But yeah, the older they get...Can you think of anything that you say that any one of your kids would do that would cause you to disown them? I can't conceive of anything. I think I saw you shake your head this way. Heathen. Heathen. Gentile. Heathen. If you, sinful, fallen heathen Gentiles, would not disown your own kids, how much more will God hold you, His sons and daughters? Yeah. Say amen. Say amen. Do you think he holds you less?

I saw a cartoon, and I thought of us and what we think God's like. It had about six or eight frames, and this is really a good picture of a Christian's typical... at least, you Galatians... view of God. The first frame shows this very disgruntled man opening the door, looking out, and putting his hand out like that. Then he closes the door. A little while later, he comes out, looks up in the sky, and puts his hand out, still disgruntled and very angry. About four or five frames show him opening the door, extending his hand, looking around, closing the door, and going back into the house. Finally, it's very late in the evening. He opens the door, walks out on the porch, puts his hand out, and it's snowing, and this wicked smile comes over his face. Then, in the last frame, he throws the door open, and he orders his daughter out of the house.

Well, think about it. Are you following me at all? You're not following me. Okay, sister, let's talk about it. What are you not following? That God waits for the very worst possible moments under the very worst possible conditions. You've done something that displeases Him, and in the snow and rain and sleet, He orders you out of the house, making sure that you're penniless and without a coat. I think that this is a typical impression that we have of our Lord. Well, I do not know exactly what Paul of Tarsus preached to you, but he said that if an angel comes down and preaches anything different, or if a man comes and preaches anything different to you, let him go to hell. And those were Paul's own words, not mine. Let him be cursed. Let him be damned. Let him be cut off. Let him be anathema. Alright, we'll go on from there.

By the way, what verse am I in? Verse 7. *It's really not the gospel; it is a distortion of the gospel.* Verses 9-10. *As we have said before and to say again, let him be damned if he preaches such a thing. For now, am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.* Do you realize what he's done here? He's lost his temper. He just plain flat lost his temper. He is sitting there hurt and injured because Blastinius said, "Oh, Paul is a man pleaser. He carries the favor of men. I find this interesting because Blastinius is teaching that you carry the favor of God. And he says Paul is a pleaser, and he's preaching a gospel that is basically a God pleaser. Paul is really hot under the collar about this. So, he loses his temper and says he does not know who this person is. Now this is the fascinating thing. He and Blastinius are going to cross paths for the next 10 to 15 years. Blastinius will come and visit every church Paul ever founded, but this is the first time this man has ever been in his life, and he has not yet learned his name. He does not know who he is.

Now, the next book Paul writes is to the Thessalonians. He knows his name. When he writes the letters to the Corinthians, he knows who that man is, and he calls that man; he refers to him distinctly. He refers to him as a he, not as an it. By the way, if you want to read this, you can read it in *Our Mission* (Now entitled *Climb the Highest Mountain*). It's a study of the passage. He makes it very clear that he knows who the person is who came to Corinth and troubled them, and he calls that man, that person, his thorn in the flesh, whom God gave him to keep him humble. Blastinius is Paul's thorn. He follows him throughout his life, but Paul doesn't know who he is right here. All he knows is this man has destroyed the gospel of the grace of God, and he comes on now shooting out of every cannon, and he just plain flat what you and I would say cusses. Now that's not true. He didn't do it, but if we say things like this in our language, according to our social codes and standards, it is usually considered to be swearing. To him, it was not. He said, "Let the man be damned." Then he stopped and said, "Now, does that sound like a man pleaser? Thank you. That doesn't sound like a man pleaser. That doesn't sound like somebody who's trying to get along with people to curry their favor, and that's what that passage says. No, he goes on to say, and he's still...all these things are just tight in him, and they're about to explode. No, I tell you for sure that if I were going to be a man pleaser, I sure wouldn't follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Alright, the following two verses I would like to read. Verses 11-12. *For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* Now, where did Paul get his gospel? From God. Where'd he get it from? Jesus Christ. I'm going to say yes to that, but it's a fascinating sentence. I agree with you 100%, but this sentence can be translated in two different ways. I think they're both correct. This is written in the middle voice. Now, I want to impress you with my understanding of Greek. I know this because I had two years of Greek, but I also know it because I read it in a commentary. It's written in the middle voice. Well, I don't really know. I said I read it in a commentary. I'm going to explain right now. He says, "I receive my gospel as a revelation from Jesus Christ." But the middle voice also implies what the revelation he received was. Now, what was the revelation of his gospel? That's exactly correct. His revelation

was Jesus Christ. In other words, the revelation not only came from the Lord Jesus Christ when it got to him, *but the revelation was Jesus Christ.*

Now, those of you who are back here sleeping. Saints, I'm going to drill this to you again and again and again. The center of your faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. The middle of your faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. And the circumference of your faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. *The gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ.* The gospel isn't grace. It isn't mercy. It isn't peaceful. Your salvation is Jesus Christ, but your maintenance is also Jesus Christ. Wonderful. And so, in writing it, he said two things. My gospel did not come from men. Blastinius would agree with that. Blastinius said, "Nobody ever taught Paul of Tarsus," implying he thought it up for himself. Paul says, "You're right. I did not get my gospel from men. I got my revelation: Jesus Christ. My gospel is by revelation: Jesus Christ. My gospel, and the revelation of my gospel, is from Jesus Christ, and it is Jesus Christ.

You Galatians hear this. Blastinius has done you a great disservice. He has, for a moment, taken from you the only hope you have. Not only as a lost man but as a Christian, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm going to try to explain that to you. If there is anything else except the Lord Jesus Christ, if, in fact, it is on the basis of merit, you are influencing God in any faith, way, shape, form, or manner that will cut you off from the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't mean cutting you off as if you're losing your salvation. Forget that. I'm not talking about the believer's security or any of those things; we're talking about an experiential failure. Only two things can happen to you if you shift away from Jesus Christ. Two things.

If you set for yourself an ethical code of any kind, if you set for yourself or if you allow anyone else to set for you an ethical code, you have therein pinned your hope, whether you know it or not, to that ethical code. You have shifted from Christ to some sort of ethic. Even if it's so small and so short, you have shifted away from Christ, and one of two things will happen. Now listen and see if you would like either of these things to happen to you. One, you will try to do that thing. Oh, I will tell you exactly what will happen. You will succeed...for about three or four weeks. This is one of the great privileges of being a Christian, where we're endowed with a "forgetter." Most of you forgot those two or three weeks. Remember those two or three weeks? I have prayed every morning for the last three weeks. Thank God there are three years instead of three weeks, but if you really get attached to this ethical code, I'll tell you exactly where you must end up. You must end up in despair and hopelessness. That's where you've got to end up because I have got something to tell you. You aren't ever going to get up and pray every morning for three years. If you can do that, we'll stuff you and put you in a museum. You will end in despair because you have pinned your Christian life on Christ plus some kind of code.

This concept of the law did not end with the Jews. It lives and breathes today. Now, that's one of the things that can happen to you, and the other one is as bad or worse. Are you listening? Please listen. This is important. You will delude yourself into thinking that you have lived by your code. I didn't say you live by it. You will delude yourself, trick yourself, fool yourself into believing you have done it, and you will become insufferably conceited. And please don't come and join the

gathering where I meet. Those are the only two choices that you have. You will end up in despair, or you will become an insufferable cad who believes that he has attained. And frankly, I don't know which one of you to have more pity on. I do too. I have pity for the brother in despair. The other brother can just go ahead and live in his delusion.

Now, which one of those choices do you want? You're going to end up in despair. You'll end up an insufferable, conceited human being that none of us can bear. Who is doing great damage to everybody else? Or would you like to make Jesus Christ the beginning, the end, and the middle? Those are really the only choices you have. Those are your three choices. God and nature and the very sphere of creation, the very bloodstream of the universe, allow you no other choices. For sure, you cannot live up to any standard that you will set for yourself. I don't care what it is—even the most anemic one. Somewhere along the line, my dear friend, there'll be something you cannot do. You Galatians are going to have to make your choice. Make your choice. Galatians, make your choice.

Now, then, Paul goes about setting...he's got two stories out on him, and he's going to set them straight. I'm going to take the one about Peter first because it happened first, then I'm going to talk to you about the one about Jerusalem. Well, Blastinius has told two stories about Paul. We referred to him last night. One of them was that he didn't come from Jerusalem. And the other one is that he confronted the great apostle Peter in a very ugly scene. I want to tell you the story of Simon Peter and Paul at Antioch, and this is what happened. We're going to look at it really closely. Simon Peter is working great miracles, preaching grace. Somewhere in their past, either that week or those 15 days when Paul was in hiding 14 years ago, when he first got converted, he and Peter had a conversation in which they both agreed. You kind of confess it to one another. I never did live up to the law, did you? No, I never did live up to the law here. Couldn't do it. They both had told one another that and rejoiced in the fact that they could not live up to the standard they had set for themselves and had been taught by their forefathers. They both knew that. And here's Simon Peter in power, preaching the gospel, and in comes some folks from Jerusalem, the mother church. Hey, remember that, would you? The mother church from which all things must come. Jerusalem has had a great influx of Pharisees, Sadducees, and all sorts of religious scribes and so forth, and it seems to have tilted the church just a little bit, maybe a whole lot. Peter's preaching, these people come in, they're really nice. By the way, one of them is Blastinius. Paul has never met him before. They shake hands, say, "Praise God, and they're all sitting around there enjoying. These men are going into the homes, preaching in the evening, and telling stories about the church in Jerusalem to the saints in Antioch. And it's just delightful.

Paul gets called out of town for a few days. I made this up. He has to go with some of the Christians who've come into the city to hear Peter, and he has to go back to their town. Paul decides to go with them, with some young Christians, and the young Christians are going to baptize some people out there in some town. Paul's gone about a week now. By the way, this is very reasonable because when you get to Antioch, you'll need someone waiting to pick you up if you've never been there, since there are no street signs and no addresses. You have to be met and brought in, and shown

how to get to a certain place because the town's big and there are no markers. It's very difficult if it's the first time there. So, Paul is taking them back home. In this case, they're taking him to their town and to where they meet. So, he comes back about a week later and walks into a room. It's a banquet given in Peter's honor. He's about to go home. In the meantime, during this week, Blastinius and his friends in the great prevailing church in Antioch are preaching a gospel of merit toward God.

Paul walks into the room, and there's great joy and exuberance, right? No. How would you feel, Gentile? If you had been in that room, Peter had come up and hugged you, you had hugged him, and you and he and everybody else were getting along fabulously. But since those people had started preaching circumcision for the last week and saying that you could not really be in God's favor unless you were circumcised, and that the Bible clearly taught that you were not supposed to eat a meal with someone uncircumcised, and here are two, three, four thousand uncircumcised people. You walk into this room, maybe 500 to 1000 people present, and these preachers of this new gospel come in. I'm sure they're dressed in black. There are about 15 or 20 of them. They're all sober-faced. Then they look around, and they go over to a table alone, and they do their little prayer, and they do their little whatever it is they do, and all these Gentiles have never heard of any of this, and they're from the mother church.

Suddenly, my self-esteem is falling through the floor, and so is yours. You don't know what's right. You're confused. Simon Peter walks in as the guest of honor. He looks around, and every one of those guys eyes him, and all these other Christians are looking at him out of the corner of their eyes. Peter waivers, and he goes down and sits down with those men in black, and Barnabas is standing there with him, and Barnabas is just lost. That man led him to the Lord. Now he has led all these people to the Lord, but he is confused and doesn't know what to do but follow Peter over there. Saints, we've got a classical mess on our hands here.

Well, Paul of Tarsus has just come back into town. He doesn't know everything that's going on. He walks into the room, and he stands there. I have so many things I want to say at this point. I think Paul has gotten stuck with the image of being a natural rebel. He's going to go against the crowd because he's one of these guys who are going to be free no matter what it costs. I'm afraid of those kinds of people, frankly. I really am. If that's what Paul is, I'd rather have him be that than what Peter and Barnabas are right now, because I need somebody. My life hangs in the balance right now. I'm one of those Christians out there, one of those heathen Gentiles who is uncircumcised. I am really confused. I don't know if Paul did this out of a naturally bombastic nature, or if we need more men who have visited other realms. To go into the other dimension where there is no dimension. To walk through that door into other realms, to leave this planet and go where all things are real and all things are true, and discover what really is. Yes, we need more men like that. A man who has been caught through the other door and has seen that Christ is everything. To have faced your God in other realms. I'm certain that's what we need. A man who has seen Jesus Christ in all his glory. That's all we need, and I think that's what we got that day when Paul walked through that door and walked into that room and saw what had happened. He

was really clear that this was not a man to be crossed, and he was a man to be respected, loved, and, in almost any conceivable situation except the supremacy and centrality of Jesus Christ alone as it comes to salvation and to living the Christian life.

Well, I hope that's what I'm saying here. I believe it is, but now I'm going to shift the scenery. I want to talk to you about something. I want to talk to you about Peter and those guys over there at that table. What's going on over there? Let's talk about Blastinius and his friends at that table. What is going through the mind of Blastinius? Now help me. They're sitting over there at that table, eating all alone because they're not supposed to eat a meal with the uncircumcised. Now, what's going on in their minds? Pleasing God. Okay, we got some. Alright, that's excellent. Do you have any other contributions to make here? Alright, we'll be glad when you Gentiles finally get your act together. Teaching by example. Well, now what's he going to do? What's Peter going to do? What's Paul going to do? They've really got Paul in a corner. They really do. They're winning. They know it. When Peter sits down, they've as good as won. But even before Peter walked into the room, I'm going to tell you what they're thinking about. You're not going to believe what these guys are thinking about. Let me tell you what they're thinking about, and this may help you a great deal. I hope it will. I hope you can get this. They were thinking about dirt. They were thinking...yes...they were thinking about dirt. You don't understand. I take that literally. They were literally thinking about dirt. That's right. Their obsession was with being clean. They wanted to be uncircumcised Gentiles. Cool.

Was this washed before it was served to me? Did a Gentile drink out of this after it was washed, or has it been cleaned? They're thinking very cleanly. They are thinking of dirt. It's the only thing that obsessed them, dirt. I cannot get dirty. I cannot get physically unclean. I'm standing here in the middle of thousands of people, any one of whom might touch me, and I will become unclean. The only thing that is on these guys' minds is dirt. I see a lot of puzzled looks. Man, listen, what I'm telling you right now is absolutely necessary for you to understand, if you're ever going to understand what the law will do to you, dear sister, dear brother.

Are they over there thinking about the glories of Jesus Christ, praising the Lord? Are they even thinking about the law? No, they are thinking about dirt. They don't want dirt, and they are obsessed with "not dirtying me." They have to go over and sit down. They have washed their hands to make sure they're clean. They are looking at the vessels, and they're wondering. They've got a little prayer they're going to pray; they hope the prayer will take it away, in case a gentile has touched that thing, since it was served to them. Dirt, dirt, dirt is all they can see, all they can think about—their concentration on dirt. I don't know if you understand. There is no place in their minds or hearts for the gospel. There's no place for the worship of a magnificent Lord here. There's no personal encounter here. There's no law here. There is an absolute total obsession with dirt, and they don't know that. In fact, I'm the first person ever to catch them at it. I needed to be there and say, "Hey, all you guys think about is dirt." That's all they're thinking about: dirt. Paul's not in the room yet. Well, we're going to come to Peter in just a minute. Peter had this old flaw. We'll get to Peter's old flaw here in a minute.

Now I want you to understand something. There have been a lot of wonderful things happening in Antioch, but they are all coming to a screeching halt right now. The blessing is gone. Those people are thinking about dirt, and these people over here are confused. Some of them have lost their self-image and self-respect. Some of them are just confused. The whole thing has come to a screeching halt because something other than the Lord - an ethical code - has taken its place. These men, they don't have room in their minds for their Lord because all they ever think about is dirt. I want you to get clear. These people think about dirt, dirt, dirt, dirt, dirt. From morning to evening, they're obsessed with dirt.

Now, I'm going to tell a couple of stories, and I'm going to be really risky because I'm going to bring up a subject that is just not in my vocabulary. I don't talk about it, but I want to get this over with: I want it on tape. I'm going to say it once. I'm going to tell you two stories. They're true. They both happened to me. I was in Quebec with several friends, and we were having a meeting at my home. Let's say we were having a party, that sounds good. I don't remember, but I met a couple, and I had really been disturbed by looking at this particular sister. She always looked unhappy, and she wore grubby clothes. Everything about her said unhappy, unworthy, and ugly, and it grew in me. That night, I was standing in the entrance way, and everybody came in, and there was a lot of happy hugging and so on, and she stayed over on one side. Nobody could touch her. Nobody could come up and hug her, and she was over there with that death mask on her face, and I did what I did spontaneously.

By the way, it was about 40 degrees below zero. I'm not exaggerating. 30, 40, maybe 20; down there, it doesn't matter. I don't know if you've ever been to Quebec City, but we were in a house that bordered the Plains of Abraham. I just said to her, "Sister, come on. We're going to go for a walk." Just spontaneously. No plan, nothing, and we walked outside. We walked over to the Plains of Abraham, where they'd cleared some paths. We were walking along in the snow, and it was cold. I said, "Tell me a story. I want to hear it. Tell me about yourself." And her story couldn't have been worse. She had the worst thing in the world that could possibly happen to a human being. Her father was a minister, but brothers and sisters, not an ordinary minister; this guy was with the Plymouth Brethren, and that's really bad. This man had lived under moral conduct with himself and with his children, and from the day they were little bitty kids, he had pounded it into their heads. Dress modestly. Do this. Do that. Do this. Don't do that. Do this. She was terrified of doing something wrong. She told me this story.

Now, I'm Latin, saints, and I naturally reach out and touch people. I just do. I hug folks. I just don't have this problem of walking up to people. This gal was standing about three feet from me, and if we turned a curve, those three feet stayed that way, you know, no matter what happened, that was those three feet away. I kept listening to her tell her story, and she knew that I was trying to help her. I finally turned to her and said something that set her on the road to recovery, and she's doing really well here now. I keep up with her because we're all friends, and every once in a while, I inquire about her. Something happened that night that began changing her life. In fact, someone told me that more happened to her that night than had ever happened before from all the counselors,

sermons, and everything else. Let me tell you what it said. I don't apologize for it, but I don't do things like this very often.

I just turned to her, and I said, "Sister, you know what your problem is? All you do is think about sex." She was horrified. I had used the word, for one thing. Are you following me at all? I am telling you the truth. That's all that girl ever thought about. She was afraid to do anything that might prove to be morally wrong. She lived in utter fear of evil and sin, and she shouldn't touch, and she should keep herself dressed poorly. She saw herself as a very ugly person. I talked to her about that just the way I'm talking to you, and I said, "Your obsession with an ethic that has been put on you by your dad." I said, "Now, sister, get right over here." I stopped cold. I said, "Stand right there. I'm sure that's the closest she'd ever been to anybody but her husband." I said, "Now, don't break into pieces. I'm going to put my arm around you." I said, "After all, it's cold out here." I put my arm around her, and we walked back to the house, and I talked to her about her freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we got back toward the house, I said, "I want you to tell me something you want. You really, really, really want." And she said, "No, I can't." Boy, there was something she wanted. It was obvious. I said, "Tell me what it is you want." She said, "I can't. We can't afford it." I said, "Tell me what it is." She said, "I want a piano." I said, "You're going to get one." "Oh, no, no." She didn't deserve a piano saint. She didn't deserve anything. Then I said to her, "Do you consider yourself pretty, kind of average, or kind of homely?" Kind of homely. Well, I said, "Girl, I got news for you. You're beautiful." I said, "The next time I see you, I want to see you in a dress. I want to see you fixed up, and I want you to put some earrings on." You know, oh, who is this madman talking to me this way?

We walked back into the house. I was a good friend of her husband. I got him over in the corner, and I said, "Your wife wants a piano. Go get her one." I know she wants a piano. Well, go get her one. She wants one. And he went out and bought her one. She went out and bought herself something she had never worn before in her whole life. She bought her two little earrings that clip right here, went out and bought herself a dress, and she kind of felt this way when she got that dress and those earrings. She didn't know what was going to happen to her. Now, I know this sounds really terrible, saints, but her whole mind for her entire life had been set on sex. Now, that's a crude way of putting it, but hear me. Can you follow me? Those Pharisees didn't think of anything but dirt. And that father, and he had pressed it upon his children, that father, who was a preacher, didn't think of anything but sex. His obsession was not the Lord Jesus Christ; it was morality and immorality. Are you following me? Make room in your heart for the Lord.

I'm going to tell the same story again, only I'm going to put it in a different place at a different time. I'm going to do this one time. I've never done this before; I'm not going to do it again. I hope you people forgive me, but I have a point to make. I'm a little irritated. They're thinking about dirt. She was thinking about immorality. Yeah. Not in the way that people normally think, but that's where it was. Well, we had Blastinius visit us once, in living color. In fact, the color was gray. We

had a conference in Santa Barbara, and we sent out an invitation, and somebody had put a name of someone into that mailing list that we sent out to get all the way to the state of Maine, to the town of Farmington, and these people got that thing, and they were Judaizers. They were moralists, and they got off the plane, and they came to Santa Barbara, California. There were seven of them, as I recall. Is that correct? And they lived in John Bradley's house. I knew that, John. I was going to bring it up. John, you verify what I'm about to say. Alright.

The women had their clothes down to here and up to here, and their dresses came right down to the floor. All you could see were their hands and their faces. There was nothing else you could tell about those women, but that was all there was. The men wore completely black clothes, with a white shirt buttoned here, no tie, and this is the way they were. They had, I guess, ordered them from the Amish; they had Amish hats, and they walked around just like this all the time. Moralists like you wouldn't believe moralists. They were sitting over in that corner, you know, this is where they had put their life as Christians.

Now then, John told me this story, and I've heard it from others. Here's what happened. When they would eat together, if one of the single brothers or the married brothers happened to come to the table and sat down in such a way that his seat would be next to one of those women, one of the sisters in this group, the sister would get up and move over to be with another sister. There had to be the oldest man or the oldest woman between...separating them from everybody else. A sister could not sit next to a brother, whether he was unwashed, like we were, or washed like they were. The single sisters, or the married sisters, had to sit next to sisters, and the buffer was the oldest lady, and on the other side, the buffer was this gentleman who was leading them. You couldn't penetrate that little circle any closer than that.

The women were fearful of men. The men were fearful of women. They lived on the edge constantly. It was a musical chairs turnover. Is that right, John? And by the way, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to us for them to come to us. John Bradley, what was your reaction to those people when you saw them? Brad, what was your reaction? It wasn't fear, but it sure didn't seem to fit. Okay. John was scared. Most of the church was terrified. I wish that men were not afraid. I wish men could not be afraid of their own gospel. The church is terrified. I turned the conference over to the man. Did you hear me? I turned the conference over to the man, walked out, and didn't go to the meetings. He had it in the palm of his hand. He could have taken every one of us, leaving me stranded without a single friend in this world.

At the first meeting he spoke at, the entire gathering was present. At the second meeting that he spoke at, there were three people present who were not his family. And at the third meeting, there was no one there but his own group to hear him. And that was not a put-up job. Their brothers and sisters were terrified, and they learned grace that week. Did you not, Brad? Stand up here and testify to that. When did you, Brad, first learn grace? December 1976. Alright. Great. Good enough. I'm glad you still remember, brother. When they left... be patient with me... this is not typical of me at all. These are not subjects I have any interest in. I am interested in the Lord. But

when they left, people were comparing notes. Someone said, "Gene, what did you think?" And my answer was, "I'll tell you what I think. I think that the only thing those people ever thought about was sex." And here they were supposed to be the purest, most moral folks in the whole wide world. The brothers and sisters live so much closer to falling into sin than any of us did because they had to live morally perfectly, and if they, with all that strictness and tension on them...if they moved for a moment away from the high standard that they took to move a little bit was to acquiesce to everything wrong. Can you follow me? Do you understand what I'm saying? They had no middle space to move in whatsoever. It was total perfection. Move out of that, and in that moving, they were consenting to anything and everything. They lived in an obsession with a moral code. There was no place for Jesus Christ in their life.

Are you following me? What should saturate our hearts and minds and spirits and thoughts is Christ. And I don't mean learning things about him, but personal encounters with him. Those people knew nothing of that. And I'm going to end that story. That story's got an ending, believe it or not. I live less than 30 miles from where they hold out today. It's 10 years later, and that little community has grown, kept its strictness, and prospered, with more people moving in. And a few weeks ago, the man who was the leader, who stayed in your home, John, who was the father and propagator of that whole thing, got up in a meeting and denounced them all because they were not living strictly enough. They had not lived up to the standard he had set for them. They had utterly failed. He left. He left his wife. He left his family. He walked out the door and said, "I'm going to go and find some people who will obey the gospel that I preach." Oh boy, he's going to look all the way from the throne of God to the bowels of hell, and he will never find those people. That's the end of the story, and we are living by grace, saints. Praise the Lord. Amen. Yeah. Clap, will you? This is God. This is a happy story. I'm really glad to know the final end. That community is collapsing right now. They don't know what to do. They don't have any idea because a person who is under this kind of bondage has to have someone to relate to. They need someone to tell them what's right and wrong.

Well, I'm going to tell one more story. This is all about Blastinius and his crowd. Yes, brother. Oh, listen. I would have paid that guy to come. I would have paid that fellow to come. He gave us all our choice. The timing was perfect. Back many years ago, when I lived in Tyler, Texas, a friend of mine knew the particular pastor who did this. A pastor was very moralistic in his preaching, and he preached against high heels. Shows you how dependent we can get on. He preached on high heels. Well, the sisters in the church, you know, they just about believe anything. Christians will believe anything. And so, they didn't want to have high heels because that was a sin. They didn't know what to do because they didn't know where high heels ended. So, they went to the pastor's wife and said, "Where, what is, and is not a high heel." So, the pastor began studying heels, measured them, and explained to his wife, "This is a high heel, and this is not a high heel." All the sisters got down, and they measured the high heels according to what the pastor's wife told them. Threw away these kinds, went out and bought some others that weren't quite that high. Now, that means that this is a sin, right? You got it? About two and a half inches, three inches, that's sin. And

an inch is not a sin. An inch and a half is not a sin, but right there at an inch and 2/3, that's where sin begins.

Now, I ask you, when those sisters came into the meeting of that church, what were their thoughts on? Their feet? That's right, right on their heels. That's where their thoughts were, and they were meriting God's favor at an inch and a half, and all that was lower. Their thoughts were on that; there was no place for Jesus in that. The gospel ended for the people in gray. The gospel ended for those sisters in their high heels. Now I have said it. I have tried to impress it upon you. What's in your head, friend? What's your standard? How do you feel when you miss a day of reading the Bible? How about two days? What will happen to you at the end of three days without reading the Bible? Well, I heard someone say, you know, that if you go for a period of time without reading your Bible, you're going to begin to fall away from the Lord Jesus Christ. I challenge that because three-fifths of the world cannot read, and that means three-fifths of the world is cut off from a walk with Jesus Christ. I would say that if you do not have some living fellowship with Him on an ongoing basis, you're wide open to all sorts of problems. *But it is Him, and the first purpose of scripture is to lead you to an encounter with Jesus Christ.* It is not to gain merit with God. It may have a second purpose and a third and a fourth and a fifth and a sixth, but its first purpose is to lead you to a face-to-face living encounter with your Lord. All things of the gospel move in that direction.

Now, I have to handle Peter here. Let's talk about Peter for a minute. Simon Peter walks into the room, and why does he go over there? Now, we know what they're thinking. They're thinking of dirt. What's Peter thinking? Yeah, I think it's more obvious with what Peter's thinking. He has always been open to peer pressure. It happened right there on the night the Lord was on trial. He didn't even know those people around him, but they all were a pressure on him, and he capitulated. It was a weakness of Peter throughout his whole life. And it, well, raises its head again. It reaffirms itself here, but I'm going to tell you something else.

When Peter took one step toward those men dressed in black over there, he stepped out of grace utterly and totally, when he walked toward that table...you've got to know this...whether Peter was in touch with it or not, Peter was saying, even though, yes, it was peer pressure. It was man, had nothing to do with God. Nonetheless, somewhere down deep in all of this is a principle. Peter declared that by his outward physical conduct, he could gain favor with God. He could gain what he already had: the favor of God. Just like my grandson has got my favor, regardless of what he does. I don't care what he does; he can't get out of my favor. Peter was trying again to rebuild the gospel on the basis of a gospel he had already abandoned. He went back to it. A gospel of human effort and merit, and code and ethics. He was in a comfortable place, something that he was familiar with. He wanted out of the mess he was in. Those glares. He was testifying to angels when he walked over there that physical conduct could make God feel better about you. Do you understand that everybody is doing outward things here that have nothing to do with the inward things? The inward thing that's going on is dirt. The inward thing that's going on inside Peter is

fear and the desire to gain merit with God by sitting with people. I don't know what's going on with Barnabas. You and I are never going to understand that.

How important is this? Well, you know, the gospel stood in the balance, but forget that. I want to ask you a question. At that moment, could Simon Peter have healed somebody? Could Peter have just switched right out of there into one more glorious meeting they had been having in Antioch? Could those Antioch Christians have walked out of there into a meeting place and had a real rip-snorting' meeting with testimonies and Peter healing? Saints, it was over. It left with that one foot moving in that direction. Peter had stepped out of grace, and he was back into a standard, and the reality of the Christian faith died for him right there. I don't mean that he had in any way altered his relationship to God. I am just telling you, saints...this is what I'm going to tell you...there isn't any fun in obeying the law. Whether it's the Jewish law or the Christian law that has been put on you, there's no joy in it. Those people weren't happy. Peter wasn't happy. Barnabas wasn't happy, and those poor Gentiles were just miserable. They didn't know what was going on, but the operation of grace in all their lives had ceased.

Now, do an inventory of your own life, will you please? What are you living under? What are you living under? You cut that off just a second. I know that you should not judge me, and I should not judge you, and we're going to talk more and more about that as we go along. By the way, we haven't even got to Paul, but we'll do that later. But I do want to say this to you: as best you can, live under grace, and if you're going to live under bondage, keep it isolated to you. Don't propagate it. Say, "Amen." I know all of you are going to be watching to see what my wife is wearing. Don't you dare mention this to her. (laughter)

I want you to consider that story I just gave. Please consider it for your own life, for mine, for yours. How much bondage are you into these useless, worthless things? Now, perhaps you're saying, "But Gene, doesn't the Bible say concerning that sister in Quebec and those gray people who came to visit us and the coat, doesn't the Bible say that a woman should be modestly dressed?" And my answer to that is, if you begin there, your life as a Christian is over - in its joy and in its beauty. I talked about immorality. Doesn't the Bible teach against immorality? Yes, but if you start there, you have no hope. You might as well be a Muslim. It's a do-and-don't-have religion.

My dear friend, you establish first and foremost, first and all, you establish your freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you work out from there. But Gene, that's fearful and risky. Not nearly as fearful and risky as having a church full of people who don't think of anything but dirt. Brother, make room in your heart for the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider these things because these were the things that were fought over in the first century, not about salvation, but the Christian walk. And we'll go from here. It gets better and better.

Alright, let's see if we can clean up the mess. What have I done here? Who knows what's been done? You have a question?

**Audience:** What happens about working out our salvation with fear and trembling?

You know, brother, where is that verse? I don't know. Is it Philippians? We all know where it is. Alright. First of all, brother, that is not in reference to your conversion. That is in reference to the totality of salvation, the whole act of redemption. Brother, there's room for fear. There's room for trembling. We'll come to that in one little verse in Galatians, but you got six chapters, 149 sentences, going the other direction. I'm going to tell you again, if you don't start with freedom, you might as well become the biggest legalist in the world. You've got to start with freedom, and that's what Paul did. I want to remind you; I want to say it to you again. I want you to remember that this was the first piece of Christian literature ever set sail upon the face of the earth. What a radical, radical declaration it was.

These first-century Christians really were different. Saints, they were the only folks in human history who had ever been part of a quote “religion” that had not been tied to an ethical code—the first people in human history who were set free from all things. I want you to remember something about those Judaizers who sat over there in that corner. Is there anything in the Ten Commandments that says that a Jew is not supposed to eat with someone who is uncircumcised? The Ten Commandments. Where did that teaching come from? It came from a rabbi. Came from a Jewish concept of a Baptist preacher. It was manmade, and any gospel that is not the Lord Jesus Christ is manmade. I tell you, start with Him, brother, and the instincts of your Lord will resolve this problem, this situation.

**Audience:** Tell me, what do you recommend doing when you encounter temptation?

Oh, absolutely. I'm going to tell you all about that. There's a sure cure for that, brother. You're supposed to fast. (laughter) We're going to stop.