

RAY C. STEDMAN

Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

New Enhanced Edition



Adventuring Through the Bible

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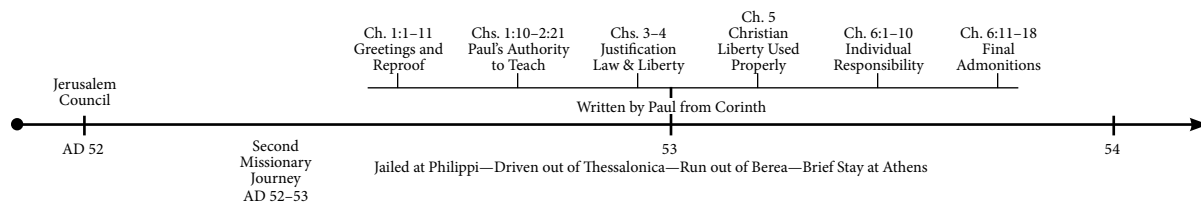
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How to Be Free



Two of the great leaders of the American Revolution in 1776 were the American-born Benjamin Franklin and the Englishman Thomas Paine. Once, as these two men discussed their passionate belief in liberty, Franklin commented, “Wherever liberty is, there is my country.”

Paine replied, “Wherever liberty is not, there is my country.” Paine was committed to going wherever there was oppression and injustice, and seeking to bring liberty to those countries. And he did so, passionately working for liberty—at great personal cost—in England, America, and France.

Paine’s attitude was much like that of the apostle Paul, as expressed in his letter to the Galatians. Seeing both political and religious oppression on every hand, seeing people held down by Roman law and Jewish legalism, Paul saw that a large part of his mission was to go wherever liberty was not, in order to bring freedom to people whose spirits and souls were in chains.

Our Spiritual “Emancipation Proclamation”

Galatians is probably the most

colorful epistle in the New Testament, filled with vivid, forceful language. It is closely related to Paul’s epistles to the Romans and Hebrews. These three New Testament letters—Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews—form what might be regarded as an inspired commentary on a single verse from the Old Testament:

The righteous will live by his faith (Hab. 2:4).

Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews all quote this verse from Habakkuk, and each offers a different aspect or dimension of this profound truth. In Romans, Paul places the emphasis on the words “the righteous,” detailing what it means to be righteous and how a person becomes justified before God

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is his great treatise on our liberty in Jesus Christ. This chapter explores Paul’s declaration of independence from religious legalism and bondage. Today, as in Paul’s day, there are those who would steal our freedom in Christ. While the other religions of the world would bind us to one form of legalism or another, Paul’s message in Galatians is that *Jesus Christ has set us free.*

and declared righteous in Christ. The epistle to the Romans delivered Martin Luther from his terrible legalism and showed him the truth of God's grace through faith.

In Hebrews, the emphasis is on the last words "by . . . faith." Hebrews is the great New Testament treatise on faith, culminating in that memorable section on the heroes of the faith in chapter 11, demonstrating that salvation has always been by grace through faith, in both the Old and New Testaments.

In Galatians, Paul places the emphasis on the words "shall live" as he comes to grips with the question of what it means to truly live the Christian life. The answer can be framed in a single word: liberty. Galatians is the letter of Christian liberty, the fullest expression of life and faith.

As Christians, we are called to liberty in Jesus Christ. The goal of this epistle is for Christians to discover the freedom of living in accordance with all that God has planned for them. Paul wants us to experience freedom to the utmost in our spirits, restrained only as necessary to be in harmony with the design of God.

So it is with good reason that this letter has been called the Bill of Rights of the Christian Life, or the Magna Carta of Christian Liberty, or Our Spiritual Emancipation Proclamation. The message of Galatians sets us free from all forms of legalism and bondage in the Christian life.

The Galatians' Unique Identity

Unlike the letters Paul wrote to individual churches, such as his letters to Corinth and Ephesus, this letter is addressed to a number of churches in a wide region. In the

introduction to the letter we read:

*Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers with me,
To the churches in Galatia (1:1–2).*

The Galatian churches, described in Acts 13 and 14, were established by Paul on his first missionary journey, when he traveled with Barnabas into the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra. In Lystra, he was first welcomed and honored as a god, then later stoned and dragged outside the city and left for dead. In fact, he experienced persecution in every one of the cities in the region of Galatia.

Ancient Galatia was a highlands region in central Asia Minor, which is now known as Turkey. Galatia was named for the Gauls, who had originally come from the area we know today as France. About three hundred years before Christ, the Gauls invaded the Roman Empire and sacked the city of Rome. Then they crossed into northern Greece and continued across the Dardanelles straits into Asia Minor. At the invitation of one of the kings of the region, they settled there.

So the Galatians were not Arabs or Turks or Asians. They were a Celtic race, of ancestry similar to that of the Scots, the Irish, the Britons, and the French. Julius Caesar, in his Commentaries on the Gallic War, wrote, "The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves and fond of change, and not to be trusted." French historian Augustin Thierry wrote of the Gauls, "Frank, impetuous, impressible, eminently intelligent, but at the same time extremely changeable, inconstant,

THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

THE GOSPEL OF LIBERTY (GALATIANS 1–4)

INTRODUCTION—WHY HAVE THE GALATIANS DEPARTED FROM THE GOSPEL OF LIBERTY? 1:1–9

THE GOSPEL OF LIBERTY CAME DIRECTLY FROM GOD 1:10–24

THE GOSPEL OF LIBERTY AFFIRMED IN JERUSALEM AND BY PAUL'S REBUKE TO PETER 2

SALVATION COMES BY FAITH, NOT WORKS OR THE LAW 3–4

HOW TO LIVE FREELY (GALATIANS 5–6)

STAND FAST IN YOUR LIBERTY 5:1–12

IN LIBERTY, LOVE ONE ANOTHER 5:13–15

WALK IN THE SPIRIT, NOT THE FLESH 5:16–21

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 5:22–26

LIVE FREE, DO GOOD TO ALL, CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER 6:1–10

CONCLUSION, INCLUDING A CURSE UPON THOSE WHO IMPOSE THEIR LEGALISM ON BELIEVERS UNDER GRACE 6:11–18

fond of show, perpetually quarrelling, the fruit of excessive vanity.”

On his second missionary journey, accompanied this time by Silas, Paul again visited the Galatian cities and the churches that had been established there. On his second journey, Paul spent considerable time in various cities of the region due to sickness. He refers to this illness in a rather oblique manner in this letter. Evidently it was some kind of serious eye trouble, for he says to the Galatians:

Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. . . . I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me (4:14–15).

Some Bible scholars feel Paul had inflamed eyes that made him seem repulsive. Yet, these Galatians received him with great joy, treating him as though he were an angel of God or even Christ Jesus Himself. They reveled in the gospel of grace he brought because he had disclosed to them—with vivid clarity—the work of the crucified Lord. As a result, they had entered into the fullness of life by the Spirit and had received the love, joy, and peace that Jesus Christ gives when He enters the human heart.

The Apostle’s Anger

But as Paul writes this letter (probably from the city of Corinth), something has gone very wrong in Galatia. Certain people, whom Paul labels in another place as “wolves” (see Acts 20:29), had come among the Galatian

believers and were seducing them away from the gospel Paul had given them. Who were these wolves? They were Judaizers—hardened legalists who had come from Jerusalem with what Paul calls “an alien gospel,” a mixture of Christianity and the practices of Judaism. The gospel of the Judaizers was not a totally different gospel, but a perversion of the true gospel.

The Gentile believers had received from Paul the fresh, liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. Now these wolves declared a gospel of bondage, of rules, and rituals. In order to become genuine Christians, they claimed, the Gentiles would have to become circumcised, keep the law of Moses, and obey all of the Old Testament regulations.

What about Jesus Christ and His completed work upon the cross? Well, the Judaizers hadn’t set Jesus aside totally. Instead, they maintained an outer shell of Christianity, but the heart of their false gospel was not grace and faith; it was works. The Lord Jesus Christ was given a secondary place in the gospel. Keeping the rules and rituals of the law of Moses was paramount.

Moreover, the Judaizers undermined the apostolic authority of Paul. They challenged him for being (in their view) independent, undependable, and overly enthusiastic. They even claimed he had graduated from the wrong seminary! They were trying to get the Galatians to reject his authority as an apostle.

Paul was greatly disturbed by this news, and his anger comes through loud and clear when he writes:

Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (1:8).



To put it bluntly, Paul says that anyone who preaches a gospel different from the one he preached should be damned to hell. That should leave no doubt about the strength of the apostle's feelings on this matter. He repeats the same curse in the very next verse:

As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (1:9).

When we hear such words as *damned*, we think of curses and insults. But Paul is not being profane. He is simply stating the fact that anyone who comes with a different gospel is already condemned. Such people reject the truth of the grace of Jesus Christ. Those who reject His grace and seek to work

their own way to God through rituals or good deeds are already accursed.

At the close of the letter, Paul's emotions are stirred against those who preach circumcision and legalism instead of the liberating grace of Jesus:

As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! (5:12).

In other words, "Since the Judaizers are so zealous to put Christians under bondage to circumcision, I wish that, while they're at it, they would completely remove their manhood!"

Here you can clearly see the fire that flashes throughout this letter. The apostle is deeply disturbed. In fact, Paul is so intense

and passionate that he can't even wait for a secretary to take dictation. Despite his poor eyesight, he painfully, indignantly scrawls this epistle out in his own large-lettered hand.

Why is the apostle so angry with these Judaizers? Because they have perverted the purity of the gospel. And in doing so, they have attempted to reenslave those who are just becoming free through the grace of Jesus Christ. They are undoing everything Paul himself is trying to accomplish by preaching the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is simplicity itself: first, Christ gave Himself for our sins—that's *justification*; second, Christ gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil age—that's *sanctification*. All of it is by grace and not by works. It is the assault upon these truths that has so deeply disturbed the apostle. He knows that injecting legalism into Christianity kills the very heartbeat of the gospel and leads people back into bondage, failure, and misery.

These two aspects of the gospel—justification and sanctification—make up the basic outline of the letter to the Galatians.

The Gospel of Liberty

Chapters 1 through 4 of this epistle deal with justification by faith. Christ died for our sins—that's the basic declaration of the gospel, the good news that Christ has borne our sins. So Paul spends Galatians 1 defending this good news.

First he shows that the gospel was revealed to him by Jesus Christ directly and that he didn't receive it from anyone, not even from the apostles. Christ Himself

appeared and told him this good news. Paul writes:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (1:11–12).

Second, the other apostles acknowledged that Paul's gospel was the same gospel they had received. Some people have claimed that Paul preached a different gospel than Peter, James, John, and the others—that Paul's gospel is superior to theirs. But Paul himself in this letter says that fourteen years after his conversion, he went up to Jerusalem and had an opportunity to compare notes with the other apostles.

When he did so, the other apostles were amazed to discover that this man, who had never been a part of the original twelve, knew as much about the truth of the gospel as they did. In fact, he knew what had gone on in the secret, intimate gatherings that they had had with the Lord Jesus Christ. You can see an example of this in 1 Corinthians, where the apostle describes the Lord's Supper. He says:

I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:23–24).

How did Paul know all of this? He received it directly from the Lord Jesus. So when Peter, James, and John heard that this man knew as much about what had gone

on in the Upper Room as they did, they recognized that here indeed was a man called of God. His apostleship, which came directly from Jesus Christ, rested upon that fact.

Third, it was not only revealed to him by Christ and acknowledged by the other apostles, but it was vindicated when Peter came to Antioch.

Peter, the ostensible leader of the apostles, was in error in Antioch. You can read the story in Galatians 2:11–21. The difficulty between Peter and Paul involved the question of eating kosher foods versus Gentile foods. Peter was a Jew, raised to eat nothing but kosher foods. But when he became a follower of Christ, he ate with the Gentiles and thus indicated the liberty he had in Christ.

But when certain men came down from Jerusalem, Peter began to compromise and went back to eating only with Jews, thus denying the very liberty that he had formerly proclaimed. Paul was angry with Peter, and confronted Peter publicly. Think of that! This maverick apostle challenged Peter the Rock—

And he vindicated the gospel as he did so.

Salvation by Faith, Not Works

In chapters 2 through 4, Paul shows us that the gospel is about salvation by faith and not by works. We can do nothing to secure our salvation. Jesus has done it all. Moreover, salvation is the result of a promise and not the law. This promise predates the law of Moses, having been given to Abraham four hundred years before Moses was born. The law, therefore, cannot change the promise.

Paul also shows that those who are in Christ are children, not slaves. They are no longer servants; they are part of the family of

God. Paul then explains an event from Old Testament history—the story of Abraham’s two sons, one born to Hagar, a slave woman; the other born to his wife Sarah, a free woman. The son of the slave woman was born, Paul said, “in the ordinary way.” The son of the free woman was born “as the result of a promise.” Then he explains the allegorical significance of this historical event from Genesis:

These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. . . .

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman (4:24–26, 28–31).

In other words, those who are slaves to the law and to legalism cannot share in the inheritance of those who are free, who are saved by the free grace of God that is received by faith. Those who live under legalism are children of the old covenant, and are children of slavery. Those who live under the grace of the new covenant are free, and are children of promise. We who are free are like “the Jerusalem that is above,” and we belong to what the apostle John called “the Holy City,

the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven” (see Rev. 21:2).

With this allegory and these word pictures, Paul declares a great truth: We are justified by grace through faith, not by works, not by law. And because we are justified by God’s grace alone, in fulfillment of the promise and the new covenant, we are free.

This is the truth that delivered the soul of Martin Luther, the monk of Wittenberg who nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the castle church and so began what we call the Protestant Reformation. Luther had tried to find his way to heaven on the pathway of works. He had done everything the church of his day demanded. He had tried fasting, indulgences, sacraments, the intercession of the saints, penances, and confessions. He had endured night-long vigils and heavy days of labor, but the harder he worked, the more his inner distress increased.

Finally, in desperation, he went to the head of his Augustinian order for counseling. The dear old man who headed the order knew little about the Word of God—so miserable was the condition of the organized church at that time. Yet this man did tell Luther one thing: “Put your faith not in yourself but in the wounds of Christ.”

A dim ray of light broke upon Martin Luther’s troubled soul. But it wasn’t until he was in his little room in the tower, preparing lectures on the Psalms for his students, that the full light shone upon him. He was struck by a verse in the Psalms:

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness (Ps. 31:1).

This verse gripped Martin Luther’s heart as he suddenly realized that the righteousness of God was to him a terrible thing. He saw it as an unbending righteous judgment by which God would destroy everyone who failed to measure up to the holiness of God. Luther said that he even hated the word righteousness.

But then, as he began to investigate the Word, it led him to the epistle to the Romans where he read: “The righteous shall live by faith.” That struck fire in his heart, and he saw for the first time that Another had already paid the penalty for sin so that he didn’t have to. Christ entered the human race and carried our guilt so that God might, in justice, accept us—not according to our merit, but according to His.

Martin Luther was never the same man again. This discovery led him to challenge the system of indulgences and all other legalistic practices that kept people in bondage to the organized church and the letter of the law.

How to Live Freely

It is interesting, as someone has pointed out, that every single religion known to humanity is a religion of works—except the gospel of Jesus Christ! Hinduism tells us that if we renounce the world and relate ourselves to the “spirit of the universe,” we will at last find our way to peace. Buddhism sets before us eight principles by which human beings are to walk and thus find themselves on the path to salvation. Judaism says we must keep the law and then we will be saved. Islam says that a person must pray five times a day and give alms and fast during the month of Ramadan and obey the commands of

Allah. Unitarianism says that having a good character can save us. Modern humanism says salvation is achieved through service to humankind.

All are ways of works. In every case, salvation is attained by human effort. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has done it all! He alone has *done* what no one can do—and *He has set us free*.

In Galatians 5 and 6, Paul turns to the second and equally important aspect of the gospel, summarized in these words:

[The Lord Jesus Christ] gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father (1:4).

Christianity is not solely about going to heaven when you die (justification). It is also about living now in this present life (sanctification). It is being set free from bondage to the world and its evil and wicked ways. It is being liberated in the here and now. This, too, is by the gift of Jesus Christ.

He came not only to deliver us from death, but also from this present evil age. How does He deliver us in the here and now? By living His life through us. That is the key to sanctification.

We know that this age is evil. We feel its pressures to conform, to lower our standards, to believe all the lies shouted at us by TV, films, popular music, and the people around us. But we fall into the trap of thinking that we can deliver ourselves.

So we set up our Christian programs, we fill our days with activity, we teach Sunday school, we sing in the choir, we join a Bible study or a Christian group—and we think that we are free. These are all good things, of course, but they do not save us. If we think we are saved by all the good religious works we do, we are still in bondage. We are still steeped in Galatianism. We are living by works—not by faith.

In the closing two chapters of Galatians, we see that the whole point of our Christian walk is to repudiate the life of the flesh, with

WORLDLY APPROACHES TO SALVATION	
Hinduism	salvation achieved by renouncing the world and relating ourselves to the “spirit of the universe”
Buddhism	salvation achieved by living according to the eight principles (right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration)
Judaism	salvation achieved by keeping the law
Islam	salvation achieved by praying five times a day, giving alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and obeying the commands of Allah
Unitarianism	salvation achieved by having a good character
Humanism	salvation achieved through service to humankind

its self-centeredness, and to rely upon the work of the Spirit of God to reproduce in us the life of Jesus Christ. This is all gathered up in one of the best-known verses of the entire letter:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (2:20).

The old self-centered “I” has been crucified with Christ so that it no longer has any right to live. Your task and mine is to repudiate the old self, to put it to death along with “the works of the flesh”—the works that are listed in 5:19–21: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft (a word that, in the original Greek, is linked to abuse of drugs for mind-altering, mood-altering purposes); hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. All of these ugly acts and attitudes are the works of the flesh—the old self-centered life that, Paul declares, was judged and cut off at the cross, to be replaced by the life of Jesus Christ shining through us.

Instead of being controlled by the flesh, our lives are to show a growing evidence of control by the Spirit of God. The evidence that God is gradually sanctifying us and taking control of more and more of our lives is found in Galatians 5:22–23, in a list of character qualities that Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit”—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Now this is where Christian liberty enters in. You haven’t begun to live as God intended you to live until the fruit of the Spirit is a consistent manifestation in your life. Anything less is the bondage of legalism, with its frustration, fear, and failure.

In Galatians 6, Paul describes how being filled with the Spirit enables us to experience true fellowship with each other in the body of Christ. When our lives show evidence of the indwelling of God’s Spirit, we begin doing the things that lead to wholeness and unity in the body of Christ: We begin bearing one another’s burdens, restoring one another in meekness and gentleness. We begin giving generously to meet one another’s needs, and we begin sowing to the Spirit instead of to the flesh.

Paul’s Personal P.S.

Paul closes his letter to the Galatians with one of the most intensely personal postscripts in the entire New Testament. He writes:

See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! (6:11).

Painfully scrawling each letter, hampered by poor eyesight, he says in effect, “I do not glory in my flesh like these Judaizers do. They love to compel people to be circumcised. To them, each circumcision performed is another scalp they can hang on their belts as a sign they have done something for God. I don’t glory in works of the flesh. I glory only in the cross of Christ which has crucified the ‘old man’ with all of his arrogance, ambition, and selfishness.”

Paul knows that his strong words in this

letter will stir up anger and opposition among some in the church, but he is ready for it. He writes:

Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (6:17).

In other words, “If anyone wants to make life hard for me—don’t even think about it! My life as an apostle has been costly for me. I have earned the hatred and persecution of many. I bear in my body the scars of serving the Lord Jesus.”

If you challenge the world and its ways—even if you challenge worldliness in the

church—you will be resented, hated, and persecuted. You’ll be shining the light of God’s truth upon those who love darkness—and they will lash back.

But be of good courage! Follow the example of Paul when he says, in effect, “It doesn’t make any difference to me. I am scarred and battered and beaten, but I glory in the Lord Jesus Christ who has taught me what true liberty is. Wherever liberty is not, wherever people are held in bondage and oppression, that’s where I will go—and I’ll point the way to liberty in Christ.”

GALATIANS

HOW TO BE FREE

1. Read Galatians 1:11–24. How did Paul establish the fact that his gospel came to him as a revelation from God? Why is this significant?

2. Read Galatians 2:1–21. What was Paul's motivation for confronting Peter? Focus especially on verses 20–21. How does Paul's argument about being crucified with Christ help set us free?

3. Read Galatians 3:15–25. If the purpose of the law was not to save us, what was its purpose?

Paul writes, "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." Does this mean that the Old Testament law has been abolished and we no longer need to obey it? Is that the freedom Paul talks about? Why or why not?

4. Read Galatians 4: 8–20. Why is Paul concerned about the Galatians? What is he afraid they will do? Is it possible for people who are free in Christ to go back into slavery? Explain.

5. Read Galatians 5:2–12. What does circumcision mean in this context? What is wrong with being circumcised? What would result if the Galatians practiced circumcision?

Read Galatians 5:13–15. How should we as Christians use our freedom?

6. Read Galatians 5:22–26. Where does the fruit of the Spirit come from? What is the process by which the fruit of the Spirit becomes evident in our lives?

What does Paul mean when he writes, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit”?

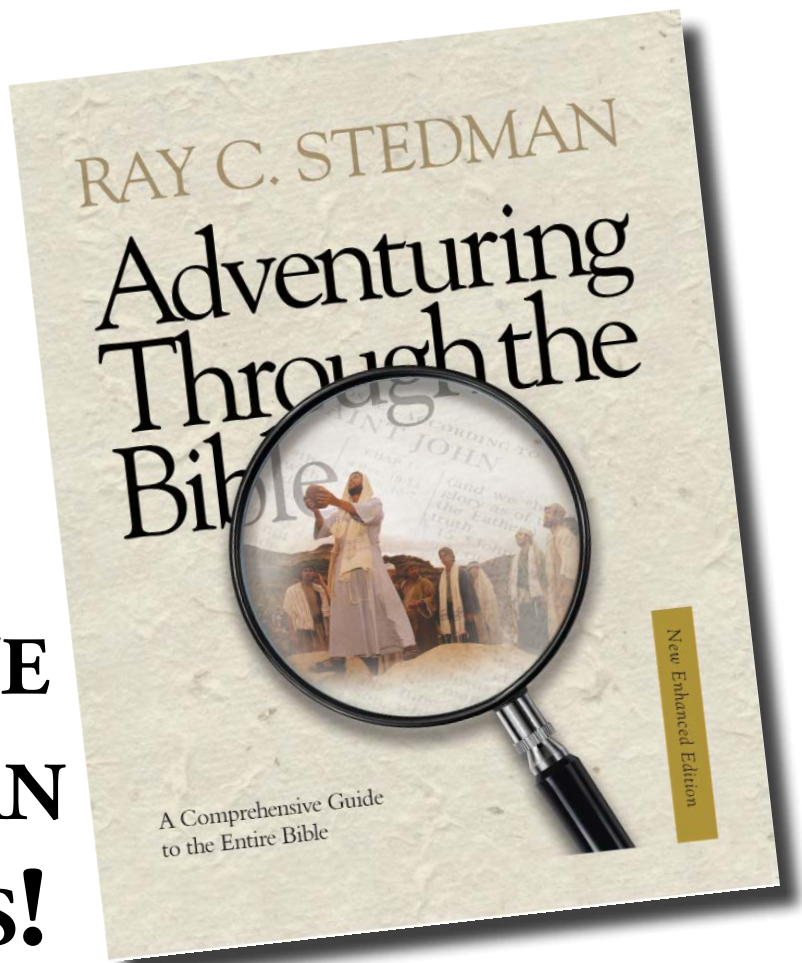
Personal Application:

7. As you look over your life, can you honestly say that you feel “free” in Christ? Why or why not?

8. The world’s mindset sees the gratification of sinful desires as “freedom.” But the apostle Paul, in 5:16–17, portrays the gratification of sinful desires as slavery. Do you agree that the “freedom” to sin is actually a form of “slavery”? Have you ever experienced “slavery” by engaging in sin? Explain your answer. What awakened you to the fact that you had become enslaved by your so-called “freedom” to sin?

9. What steps can you take this week to consciously and intentionally build the fruit of the Spirit (see 5:22–23) into your life?

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