

One of the things we often forget is that the knowledge and understanding we have of the gospel was shocking to many in first-century Judaism. The idea that someone could become a Christian without conforming to the Mosaic law or practicing Jewish customs was almost unthinkable. The gospel declared that Christ had fulfilled the law—not just for law-abiding Jews, or even for the ethnically Jewish, but for *all* who call on His name.

This was such a radical truth, that it seems as though God chose to confirmed it in two clear ways.

First, through Pentecost.

Pentecost was a Jewish celebration remembering how God descended in fire at Mount Sinai and gave Moses the gift of the Law. Roughly 1,400 years later, during this very festival, again descended in fire—this time through tongues of fire that rested on those present in Acts 2. But instead of giving the Law again, He gave an even greater gift: the Holy Spirit. This signified that a *new* law had been given—the Law of the Spirit (Romans 8:2).

Second, through the epistles.

Throughout the New Testament letters, especially Paul's letter to the Galatians (chapter 3), we see a fierce struggle against those who taught that believers must still submit to Jewish customs. Paul consistently clarifies that the gospel overcomes the works of man, not only for salvation but also for sanctification. Our growth in holiness, no less than our justification, is a work of grace through faith.

Practical Takeaways

As for the modern world we live in, we do not face the same pressures that the first-century church experienced, but we do face some comparable ones. Within the various expressions of Christian culture, we encounter many different ideas about what is required for true spiritual growth and faithfulness. Often, people become dogmatic about matters that are not explicitly stated in Scripture, elevating personal convictions to the level of salvation issues or essential tenets of the Christian life. For some, this still includes the belief that Christians must return to Jewish practices; others add new rules, such as:

- Christians must never consume alcohol.
- Christians should not celebrate holidays like Christmas, because of their overlap with pagan practices.
- Only one English Bible translation is acceptable (Normally KJV), and thus is equal to or better than the original Greek and Hebrew.

- Worship must take place on Saturday, not Sunday.
- Spiritual acts (prayers, confessions, etc.) must be done in precise and monitored ways

All of these, in one way or another, attempt to add burdens—either by reviving the old law or creating new laws. Jesus rebuked such approaches: *“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders”* (Matt. 23:4). These approaches fail to trust the mystery of the gospel—that we are saved, kept, and sanctified through faith alone.

Paul suffers in order to testify to this truth: we are free from sin and free from works-righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. There are no works required to gain access to God, and no rituals required to maintain His favor. Salvation is a free gift, given to Jew and Gentile alike, through faith in Christ alone. Or in other words it is a gift given to both he who uses the KJV and ESV translations of the bible, someone who consumes alcohol and those who abstain.

Unique Lesson from Colossae

Colossae was a small, isolated city cut off from trade routes by Rome’s redirection of the highways. The town and church there by worldly standards, were irrelevant. Yet the believers there loved one another and Christ deeply, and Paul—despite his own suffering—invested in them. Likewise, we should not look to worldly measures of importance when deciding who to love or serve. Instead, we should heed James 2:1–4 and resist the temptation to favor the wealthy or influential, remembering that God often brings near those the world overlooks. We ought to look to those who God has brought into our church and our lives when we look to who we ought to invest in.

So we ought to emulate Paul and go to those who are around us, challenge the students to invest in the spiritual development of those in their group. We don’t need to have any official “I’m going to invest in person X” but just challenge them to do so and brain storm ways in which the students could do so.