

Galatians Explained: Word by Word (Gal 1:1-5)

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Galatians Explained

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Bible Text: Galatians 1:1-5
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Congregation, in school our young people learn English, English literature. In first grade, they learn to read, to read the alphabet, to make words, to decipher a whole sentence. It's beautiful to see that, that young people learn to read and read out loud at home. But you know, it is so important, do you realize that? It's so important to read, not only to read books and the newspaper but to read the word of God. It has pleased the Lord to reveal himself in a book. In a book. Not in a movie. Not in something visible but a book with letters and words and sentences inspired by the Holy Spirit and every word is in the right place, every word is important, has a deep meaning. We believe in the literal verbal inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It's quite something that you see young people that can read now a little bit, to read the first lines and Psalms out of their own Bible. They can read it. I would say do it, read the Bible, that's the word of God. And yet it becomes increasingly difficult to read. The attention span is getting shorter and shorter. Who of us is reading carefully for themselves a whole chapter, just slowly, absorbing it, what does it say? Meditating on it. That's something we don't do so easily anymore, to read, to go deep, to linger, to ponder, to meditate, and that's why at the table we still read the Bible, I hope, but you know, sometimes a very short piece or sometimes a long piece with understanding it.

So it's important to read the Bible slowly and in intend to begin a series about Bible reading. I mean, to read the Bible together in church, the epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians. We're going to read the Bible together like John Calvin did in his sermons, not with points and themes but just word after word. I could have come with 10 points this morning, I'm not doing that. There are 10 points, I think, in the piece we hope to study today but you will see it for yourself when we go word for word. So the text for this morning is Galatians 1:1-5 and we will stop with every word.

1 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) 2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: 5 To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I would say keep your Bibles open and just try to follow this whole sermon. Look at the text and say, "Oh, that's the next word. Oh, that's the next sentence, that's the next piece."

Paul. That's the first word. Paul. We don't start an epistle like that. We don't begin with our own name. Maybe on the letterhead but that's the old way of writing a letter. To this, first mention your own name.

Paul. Who is that? Who is Paul? You may know a few things of him, maybe you've forgotten a few things about him. Let us just think about him. Paul. His original name was Saul, like King Saul. That was his Hebrew name but his Latin name or his Latinized name was Paul. He was born in Tarsus, that's in the south of what's now Turkey, a harbor, a port, and he was therefore called Saul of Tarsus. This Saul was Jewish, had Jewish blood in his veins. He was truly Jewish, felt a Jew completely, but he also was a Roman citizen. He had a dual citizenship, he would say, Jewish and also Roman.

You know, this Paul grew up in a Jewish family and his father took things very seriously. He was Pharisee himself, a Pharisee himself. He writes about that in Acts 23. And at quite of a young age, his father and mother sent him away to university in Jerusalem, so they must have been quite affluent, rich and important people. How can you just send someone to Jerusalem from Tarsus, who is going to afford that? Apparently they could. An elite family with money and they sent him to the university of Gamaliel. It was a very famous Jewish school.

And we read that he was also family of a few more people mentioned in the Bible. I read about a nephew of his, the son of one of his sisters living in Jerusalem who spared his life by just telling the authorities, they had intended to murder him and he told them he was a nephew of his sister, so maybe that's where he stayed. We read in Acts 23 about Andronicus and Junia, his kinsmen. So there was some Christians who were family of his, and some state that he was also related to the Herod family, to King Agrippa, Herod Agrippa because Flavius Josephus, one of the early historians, wrote about a certain Paul, a certain Saul who was related to the king's family. We also read in Romans 16:11 about Herodion, Herodion who was also his kinsman.

Anyway, this Paul, he went to that university and he was trained in classic Hebrew literature, Latin literature, philosophy, ethics, Bible knowledge. It was quite a broad education and for years and years he sat at the feet of that special professor Gamaliel. So he knew his Bible very well, and on top of that he was kind of a man, quite a man, very fervent and thorough and passionate. If he did something, he did it 100%, he did it well. And as you know, that means something. Let me read it to you from Philippians. "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

He was a very religious, dedicated man. He felt a top Jew. He felt great about himself and it was all for his honor and glory, and yet you know that he was stopped, right, by the Lord on the way to Damascus. He had received letters from the high priest to capture them and the Lord stopped him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He couldn't see for a while. He couldn't do anything for a while. He did not eat for a while. Then Ananias came and blessed him and he was converted by the Lord. "Yea, doubtless I count," after that happened, "I count all things now but loss," all his good works became loss, "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung," it's just dung, "that I may win Christ."

You know, this Saul of Tarsus was getting very close with condemnation, he was on the very shortcut to hell, so high-minded, so proud, feeling so good about himself according to the law, proud of himself, religious elite, and apparently there is hope for people like that. There's hope for people like that. So proud, so Phariseeistic, so religious. There is not only hope for worldly people and cold people and indifferent people, there's hope for religious people. So let's get it in our minds, don't only look at worldly people that can be converted from the street but also people in church can be converted. Nothing is impossible with God.

Paul, an apostle. An apostle, what does that mean? Apostello is the Greek word and it means "to send out." To send out, to be an apostle of someone, and sometimes the word "apostle" is used in a common sense, kind of a messenger. Like in Philippians 2:25, "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger," it says, apostle, your messenger, "and he that ministered to my wants." So sometimes people are sent by authorities, ambassadors and messengers, and they were called apostles. So that's apostle in the common sense, the common sense of the word. Isn't that what the Apostle Paul means? Who sent him? A congregation? A king? A high priest? No, he means apostle in the deepest sense, in the narrower sense, apostle in the sense of someone specifically called by Christ and also an eyewitness of his resurrection.

So there were 11 of them, right? And the Apostle Paul says, "I am the twelfth. I am an apostle of Jesus Christ. I'm an apostle not of men," because there were apostles sent of men. "No, that's not what I mean, not by men, neither by man. I was not chosen by lifting up of arms or ballots. I was not chosen by a people, not sent by a people. I was sent by God as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, an apostle not of men, neither by men but by Jesus Christ." You know, let us wait a moment. Why bragging, starting like that? "I, Paul, I, an apostle. I'm called. I'm called by God. I'm called by Christ." Why profiling yourself in such a bold way to begin with? You know, there's a reason behind that because the Apostle Paul is deeply concerned and kind of agitated. He's a little bit angry and he does not say it yet but you kind of feel the atmosphere, you feel the tension. There's something wrong and he's saying, "Listen, I'm going to tell you something, but not of men, not by men, but straight from God. I have authority. I have the authority to say a few words to you because God called me to this special service."

You know, some have compared these first verses, the first five verses with a threatening storm. You know, it's a beautiful summer day, you say, "Hey, look at the horizon, the dark clouds. It's getting dark." And in the far distance you see some flashes of lightning. It's not there yet but it's coming, and so in those first verses of Galatians you hear the storm coming. Later he would say words like "foolish" and "accursed," and express how really disappointed he is, but you feel the atmosphere already coming, the tension.

"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." So the Apostle Paul feels that he is one of the 12 and he's going to tell the truth. He's not going to discuss things, he's not going to get into a dialog with the people, "And what do you think? What do you think is right? What do you think is wrong?" No, he comes with the power of the word of God. "This is the truth. Take it or leave it. You're not going to change it. It's the gospel of Jesus Christ."

An apostle personally called by God, a witness, and the Apostle Paul thinks it's important to come with this authority first and, congregation, it's important also to compare this first verse with verse 12. We are not there yet but I think we have to compare it, "For I neither received it of man," do you see this clause? And "neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it." So he's saying this, "I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ and that is God's work, he called me. So that calling is from God and the gospel I preach is also of God. So if you reject me, you reject Jesus Christ and you reject God. So you have to abide with what I'm saying because God has sent me to preach this gospel. He has given this gospel unto me. I did not receive it of men but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." So apparently something is wrong in the congregations, something is not right and he has to set people straight, and he comes with boldness and says, "Listen, I have something to say to you. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, not by the will of men but by Jesus Christ."

You know, we have no apostles anymore. We have no apostles anymore. We have pastors and they are called by men on the ballot, chosen by the congregations and indirectly by God. But we don't have apostles anymore. The apostles were specifically personally called by God to the work without any means. We don't have apostles anymore but what do we have? What do we have? We have the Bible. We have the word of God that's written by the prophets and the apostles so that straight from heaven, the Bible inspired by the Holy Spirit. So read it in this verse, "Paul, an apostle who wrote Bible books, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." We have the Bible. 2 Peter 1:19, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."

So therefore we need to read the Bible very carefully. It's, as I said in my introduction, it's God's word, every word, and connection and grammar, I would say every comma almost, right, and there were no commas in the original but you know what I mean. It's all inspired by the Holy Spirit and it's important to not just smooth over it and just remain

shallow, but we have to stop with every word and just go deep, not just skimming over the water but scuba diving in the text. It's the word of God, after all.

"By Jesus Christ, and God the Father." By Jesus Christ and God the Father, they are one. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's Son. He was raised from the dead. You feel something about the Trinity, about the unity of the Father and of the Son. I read in John 5, "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." So the apostle is writing to the Galatians, "The Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the Father and you talk about the Father? Then you also have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are one. If you don't hear the one, you don't hear the other. He has revealed himself in his Son." So the Apostle Paul is bracing himself for the rest of his epistle.

"By Jesus Christ, and God the Father." Jesus, you know what Jesus means, right, children? Jesus. What did the angel tell Joseph? He was to call his name Jesus. Why? Because he shall save his people from their sins. That's the explanation of it. Jesus means "the Lord saves," but the explanation of it is "he saves his people from their sins." And you know what Christ means, right? You know that from Catechism classes. Christ. Christ means "anointed; messiah; qualified by the Father, having three offices: the prophet, the priest and the king." It's all in there. So the Apostle Paul says, "I am called by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." The Father of his church, the Father of his people, the Father of the Lord Jesus, it's all so deep and so beautiful.

Verse 2, "And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia." What does it say? "And all the brethren." Who are they? "And all the brethren which are with me." So the Apostle Paul is writing to the Galatians and he says, "I have something to say to you and it's not only me. I'm supported by my brethren. Together. Together we have something to say to you. Paul, an apostle, and all the brethren with are with me."

Who are those brethren? We don't know for sure. There are three options, I would think. Maybe some people he was close friends with, his fellow laborers like previous, Demas and Luke and Timothy and some other people, very close companions and fellow laborers and office-bearers with the Apostle Paul. Or maybe not officially office-bearers but supporters of him. He often traveled with a small group of men. Or he means the congregation he was writing this letter from. That might have been Ephesus or Corinth or Antioch, saying, "I write in this letter also on behalf of the congregation I am visiting right now. So I write this to you but I also ask my fellow laborers, they thought about that and together we write the letter to you." Or he means the church in general because they are all the brethren that are with him. I don't think that's what it means, as some say that's the case.

Anyway the Apostle Paul writes a letter and he says, "I'm not alone. I'm concerned but I'm not alone. I'm going to tell you the truth and I feel united with the church of all ages. I am not someone coming with something new, brand new, something strange, a foreign doctrine. No, it is the old doctrine and I feel the support of the entire church and my brothers in the ministry." So you feel it, don't you? There is something behind it. He is

bracing himself. He wants to say something. He's defending himself and saying, "Listen, people, there is something that needs to be talked about, and I am an apostle of Jesus Christ and I write it unto you with all the brethren, with all the brethren which are with me, and I write unto the churches in Galatia."

"Unto the churches," plural. There was more than one congregation called the Galatians. Who are the Galatians? Have you heard of the Celt? Three centuries before Christ, the Celts came and crossed the Bosphorus to Turkey and conquered that whole area, and they were called the Celts or the Gauls or the Galatians, it's the same word. The Celts, remember the Celts from England? The Celts, they traveled and conquered. Or the Gauls, or the Galatians. And they were kind of special people, kind of gullible, kind of not so traditional. They could easily get into another doctrine. It was the character of the people, of the nation.

So the Apostle Paul is writing to an ethnic group, not per se to the people in the province of Galatia. The province of Galatia was even bigger than where the Galatians lived. The Galatians are originally Gentiles. So it is the province of Galatia, it's bigger than the place where the Galatians lived. So Derbe and Iconium, those places the Apostle Paul visited before, they were people of the Galatians, and that's why he also writes in chapter 4, verse 8 and chapter 5, verse 2, that there were Gentiles. Chapter 4, verse 8, "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods." So he writes to Gentiles in chapter 5, verse 2, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." So they were not knowing with God and were serving other gods by nature, and they're not circumcised. So in Antioch in the southern place of Galatia also lots of Jewish Christians are living. No, he's talking about the Gentile Christians from the north of the province of Galatia, talking to the Galatians themselves. And even Caesar, the emperor of Rome, wrote in a book called the "Gallic War" that the Galatians were gullible and that they could easily change their opinion just like that.

So now "the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia." All those churches were independent churches and they were kind of together the body of Christ. The church but the church is not only the church in general, the overall church, the umbrella church, but also congregations, churches. So the Apostle Paul writes to them and if you compare this introduction with the introduction of other epistles, you think it's different. Other epistles like to the Ephesians and the Corinthians, Romans, he says, "To the beloved ones in Jesus Christ. To the faithful to the sayings," verses like that. He doesn't say that here. He's concerned, "Are they real Christians? I'm in doubt about that," he writes. "I'm concerned. I hope it's true. I hope it's the saving grace. I'm not so sure. I hope for the best but I think I need to warn them."

Verse 3, "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Did I say about the tone? I heard thunderings at a distance. I saw some flashes of lightning. I see a further storm coming. I feel the tension in the atmosphere. And yet, "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Didn't he say that already? From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, but that's

already his theme. The theme of the preaching of the Apostle Paul is by grace only. He can't stop talking about it, "By grace only. Grace be to you." You know, we will see that in the coming weeks. I won't always go to Galatians, no, I will skip a few times as well, but we hope to see in the future in Galatians that his theme, the overall theme of the Apostle Paul is by grace only, and he gives here already a first glimpse of that grace, "Grace be to you." So he is firm and concerned and disappointed and he still loves that people. It's possible. It's possible to be firm with a child and yet love it. It's possible to strongly disagree with a person in the congregation or a family member or a friend, to strongly disagree and be kind of upset and still love that person, now let that person then that you are not only concerned but also love. And that's true in all relationships, even in marriage, even if you're deeply concerned, don't only vent your concern, also hold onto one another.

"Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our." I thought he was so concerned. Yes. He was in doubt, questioning but still for now, "our, our Lord Jesus Christ." The possessor of all things. "Grace be to you and peace." Through God's grace, by grace only there is also peace. What is peace? I can go two different directions with peace: objectively and subjectively. What does that mean? Well, objectively means just factual. The Lord Jesus came as the Prince of Peace to make peace with his people, to not be at war with them, to not frown on them anymore, but to forgive them so there is peace with his people. So it's a fact. The Lord Jesus made peace with his church. There's no war anymore. We are not children of wrath any longer. But also subjectively, how that fact feels. "Grace be to you and peace." I hope it's not only true as his prayer and wish and blessing, it's also how it's felt and experienced and tasted, to taste that peace, to have that peace in your heart.

So "Grace be to you and peace." Congregation, that's what we need, God's grace and God's grace makes peace and gives peace in the heart as well because the Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. Don't you need that, God's grace? By grace only? You already see it in between the lines, by grace only, by faith only. You don't have to work hard for yourself. You don't have to do it yourself. You don't have to qualify any path or way or form. It's by grace only.

Then verse 4, he just spins it out. Verse 4, "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." Who gave himself. You know, the Apostle Paul, I guess imagine how he is writing this. I just see him holding his pen or dictating it to his writer, "Who gave himself for our sins." How sweet. Who is that? The Lord Jesus. He was given by the Father but he was willing to give himself, to sacrifice himself, to give himself, "Who gave himself for our sins." The apostle is still very positive and says "our." "Who gave himself for our sins," because the word "sin" means missing the point and wasting your time and missing your purpose. And in spite of all the sins, provoking God to anger, Christ has given himself as a sacrifice to absorb the wrath of God, to make peace yet, who gave himself willingly. It's all from above. He gave himself. We don't give ourselves. It's not from our side. He gave himself. He's doing all the work. All the work. He gave himself in spite of our sins and for our sins.

Do you see that? So he's wondering, "Does this not touch the hearts anymore, Galatians? You, at first, accepted that gospel and things are changing. I feel that. Things are changing. I heard that. You're going back to the workhouse, back to the law," as we hope to see in the future. "I'm so concerned about you. Just think about this: he gave himself for our sins." In order to do, what? "That he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." So let us have a look at that. "To deliver us from this present evil world."

First we sing. Psalter 421, stanza 5.

"O God, our shield, with face benign
Look on Thy servant, wholly Thine,
And keep him, Lord, Thou great Defender!
One day, passed in Thy house of praise,
Is better than a thousand days
Spent in the realm of earthly splendor."

421, stanza 5.

Christ has given himself, he's given himself over unto death to be crucified, to experience hellish agonies in order to deliver, to rescue, to save. That's the word "to deliver," it's the same as saving and rescuing.

So what does he rescue of? "To deliver us from, from this present evil world." All those words are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Every word, so we have to take that very seriously and read word for word. So it's this present world. The word "world" is not comes here but aion. The age, of this present age, this present time. There is a present time and a future time, right? We live in the present. We don't live in the future.

So he is talking about this time, this age, this world we're living in now, and that world we live in now is an evil world. Evil world in what sense? That sin is dominant, because Satan is alive yet. The world is strong and influencing the church and persecuting the church and ruining the church, and the flesh in the heart is strong. This present evil world. It's so easy to be swept away with this world and to live in sin and to just live and enjoy this life, enjoy all the good things, and the Lord says that's evil. It's evil to just live for all the good things of this life. That's sin itself. That's a waste of time.

So the Lord Jesus gave himself and paid the price in order to rescue people from the influence of this world and from sin, from this evil world, and he disconnects from the world and he rescues out of the talons of Satan and gives new hearts and makes people different and so they don't feel at home in this present evil world anymore, and they become pilgrims on their way home to the new world.

Have you been delivered from this present evil world? Are you still floating there and living there in sin and just enjoying your life and doing your best and working hard,

having a family, and there is entertainment, and without God in the world, having no hope, no forgiveness? You know, if you love this world, you will perish with the world. You need to be delivered from this present evil world and that's the work, again, of God the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost. He draws out of the darkness unto his marvelous light. He converts. He sanctifies. He forgives. He delivers from thinking the worldly way.

"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world," and you can see that. If people have been delivered from this present evil world, they are different people. You should be able to notice that in all the fruits of the Spirit

"According to the will of God and our Father." You know, what is behind this? What's behind that being delivered from this present evil world? It's God's doing. It's his will. The Apostle Paul does not stop talking about it and called of God. The gospel is from God. He was raised from God. He gave himself. He delivers people. It's his will. It's his doing. It's all about God. It's all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing from our side. All from his side.

"According to the will of God and our Father," not the revealed will but the secret will of God. Revealed will? Secret will? What do you mean? Now the secret will is this: if God wills something and has decided something and has decreed something in eternity, it will happen regardless. It's going to happen. If he wills it, it's going to happen. But the Lord also wills and wants that we obey the law and people disobey him. That's a will you can resist. That's revealed so you can resist. We always do. But his decree, his will from eternity we cannot resist. It's happening anyway and he saves his people regardless from their sins.

So he has given himself for our sins in that he might deliver us from this present evil world according to his will. It was his will. Well, it's not our will. We have no free will. We have no free will. We cannot say, "Well, it's up to me." We have a will, we have a will, yes, we do, but the will is bound, and we are responsible because of that will, that bound will we have. It's an evil will but it's here about the Lord's will. Do you know what that all is about? The Apostle Paul hammers on it, "By grace only. By grace only."

"According to the will of God and our Father," and then he closes with verse 5, "To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." You know, I was trying to imagine how he was writing this and I see tears in his eyes, I see him being emotional, led by the Spirit. "To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." He can't stop. He's so filled with that true happiness and that adoration that he praises God in a doxology, in praising him, "To whom be glory." He gives honor to God the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost. Glory and he says the Lord deserves the glory to continue forever and ever in eternity.

We often see that in the Bible, "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," right? "Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God be honor and glory forever and ever. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory forever and ever." It's everywhere in the Bible. The Lord is

saying, "I do this for my own glory." And that's bliss, that's heaven. What is heaven? To forget about yourself and to only glorify God, and to see him and to adore him and to praise him and to be there ever with him so that you learn, Paul, a Pharisee, hopeless case, he will never budge. He is such a declared enemy of Christ. He cannot be converted ever, and yet it happened. An apostle. He was even called an apostle and we have that prophetic book and the writings of the apostles and they're infallible and the means of grace. We have to read it and spell it.

Oh, it is of God. God gives us those apostles and he gives that Bible and in connection with the whole church and all the brethren, unto the church of Galatia, those Celts, those Galatians, those Gauls. Apparently it is possible that a church of Christians is weakening, something is not going right. That's possible in our church too, that we have the right doctrine and so forth but still maybe there's a weak spot here and there. It's possible. Even God's children, even God's children can err. So that's why the Apostle Paul is critical of the churches he planted himself. Let us not have that feeling kind of we are above that and we don't need that critical sound. We also need to be set straight time and again, and it's so clear that it is by grace only he has given himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil world. He delivers. He wills. He saves. It's all from above.

So I hear thunderings at a distance but I still see the Apostle Paul holding onto the congregation, not disconnecting, not just dropping them, saying, "No, it's enough. I don't even want to talk to you anymore. You're just wrong." No, he's holding onto it in a friendly and firm way. Congregation, read that Bible. Start reading differently. Read word for word at the table. Read word for word and just go slow with your family. And maybe you say, "What does this mean?" And maybe you can open a commentary of the margins or of Matthew Henry or something and just search the scriptures. We have to learn reading again because there's such a fullness in it, and ask for the application of the Holy Spirit. All things are possible with him. Amen.