



# Freedom in Christ

Galatians

# ***Galatians***

## ***Study Guide***

***Freedom in Christ***

***6 Studies***

***For Individuals or Groups***

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*CrossSites Bible Study*

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*{Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture verses are taken from the English Standard Version}*

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# Lesson One: We Were Born Free

## Biblical Passage: [Galatians 1](#)

**Big Idea:** In the opening part of Galatians Paul reminds us that true freedom and transformation come not from conforming to additional requirements but through a steadfast commitment to the grace found in Christ alone, encouraging believers to guard their faith against any misleading messages that dilute the gospel.

## Opening Thoughts

Paul authored his letter to the Galatians around A.D. 57, likely from Ephesus during his third missionary journey. Galatians is considered among Paul's earliest epistles.

The letter was composed as a response to reports that the Galatian believers were being influenced by Judaizers—Christian Jews who, in the apostolic and early post-apostolic periods, sought to require Gentile converts to adhere to circumcision and the Mosaic Law. Such teachings would have obligated Gentile Christians to conform to the legalistic practices of Judaism.

To illustrate the concept of freedom, one might recall the film *“Born Free,”* which depicted a couple raising Elsa the Lioness and ultimately returning her to the wild. This narrative serves as a metaphor for the central theme of Galatians: the Christian’s spiritual freedom and deliverance through Christ from the constraints of sin and religious legalism. The letter has been described as the *“Magna Carta of Spiritual Liberty”* and the Christian’s *“Declaration of Independence,”* emphasizing its pivotal role in the Reformation, notably through Martin Luther’s influential commentary.

In summary, Paul’s message in Galatians asserts that God’s favor cannot be earned through legalism, and that the gospel offers both freedom and liberation from the bondage of sin and religious legalism for those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

## Paul's Greetings

The Epistles of Paul consistently commenced in one of two manners. In his letters to the Romans, Philippians, Titus, and Philemon, Paul identified himself as a servant or prisoner of Christ. Conversely, in correspondence with the Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Galatians, he introduced himself as an apostle. This distinction reflects the differing receptions of his ministry: he adopted the role of servant among churches that welcomed his message, while asserting his apostleship when addressing congregations that questioned his authority.

From the outset of Galatians, Paul emphasizes his apostolic authority. This approach is likely a response to individuals promoting the "three Rs of religion"—rules, regulations, and rituals—who were undermining the message of grace and challenging Paul's legitimacy as a preacher of the gospel. Consequently, Paul begins his letter to the Galatian churches by reaffirming his identity as an apostle of Christ, expressing concern regarding their departure from the gospel of grace, and briefly recounting his own conversion.

Contemporary parallels remain, as some continue to advocate the addition of rules, regulations, and rituals to the doctrine of salvation. Studying Galatians offers valuable insight into the nature of grace and

the liberation from works-based religions. This concept constitutes the central theme of Paul's letter to the Galatians, wherein he seeks to highlight the freedom found in faith over adherence to religious regulations.

## The Galatian Church

### Galatians 1:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:*

The Galatians were originally Gauls from the north of the Black Sea. They separated from the main group migrating westward, which eventually settled in what is now France (historically known as Gallia or Gaul), and established themselves in Asia Minor in the third century B.C.

In New Testament times, the term "Galatia" could refer either to a region in north-central Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) or to a Roman province located in central Asia Minor ([1 Corinthians 16:1](#); [Galatians 1:2](#); [2 Timothy 4:10](#); [1 Peter 1:1](#)). Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were cities situated within the province of Galatia, all visited by Paul during his first and second missionary journeys ([Acts 13:14-14:23](#); [16:1-5](#)). Both Peter and Paul commonly use the term to describe the entire province ([1 Peter 1:1](#); [Galatians 1:1](#); [1 Corinthians 16:1](#)).

The letter was addressed to all churches in the region of Galatia rather than a single congregation. Its purpose was to respond to teachings that claimed gentiles must observe Mosaic Law in addition to faith in Christ for salvation.

## Blessings

### Galatians 1:3-5

*<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Paul's greeting of "grace and peace" ([1:3-5](#)) was a common salutation in antiquity. Even today, it remains customary for Jews to greet one another with "shalom," meaning peace. In this passage, Paul employs the greeting in a manner that transcends its traditional use. Notably, the concept of "Grace" emerges as a central theme throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians. A thorough understanding of Grace is fundamental to comprehending God's disposition toward humanity and the nature of salvation. Paul illustrates that Grace not only redeems us from the penalty of sin but also liberates us from its power.

Paul addresses the Galatians to refute the influence of the Judaizers—a group of converted Jews who had entered the church and advocated adherence to Mosaic law as essential for salvation. Through his writing, Paul asserts with conviction the believer's freedom in Christ, emphasizing that salvation is achieved by grace alone.

As we begin this study, it is essential to clarify the definition of grace. Grace must be understood as unmerited, undeserved, and unearned favor. The enduring acrostic succinctly conveys this concept:

**God's Riches At Christ's Expense.** Salvation is not based on personal merit or deeds, but solely upon the person and work of Christ.

## Paul's Grief

### The Apostles Concern

#### Galatians 1:6–7

*<sup>6</sup>I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*

Traditionally, Paul begins his letters with an expression of gratitude for his audience. However, in his letter to the Galatians, he omits any statement of thanksgiving or commendation. Instead, Paul expresses his astonishment that the recipients have so quickly departed from the gospel he initially presented to them. He is concerned that the Galatians have exchanged the message of grace for adherence to the law.

The Galatians did not merely abandon Paul's gospel teachings; rather, they were persuaded to follow an alternative message. The term translated as "deserting" (*metatithēmi*) originates from a context of military desertion, which historically was a capital offense in times of war. Abandoning the gospel of grace that Paul had imparted was therefore not only a departure from doctrinal principles, but also a rejection of the God who had called them to salvation.

The gospel of God is regarded as the gospel of grace, emphasizing divine redemption independent of human effort or achievement. This shift represented more than a change in theological perspective; it was a departure from a personal, benevolent deity who demonstrated compassion by calling individuals through the grace of Christ.

There were a group of false teachers called "Judaizers." They were "Christian Jews" who attempted to impose the Jewish way of life on gentile Christians. They believed that in order to be saved and become a believer, one had to first accept Judaism. This meant that the Judaizers sought to compel the gentile Christians to live like Jews. This meant a gentile Christian would have to submit to circumcision (for males) and agree to live under the "yoke of the law." This meant that their salvation was by works and not grace.

Paul expressed considerable surprise at the rapidity of these events. The term translated as "amazed" conveys a sense of astonishment or unexpectedness and may also suggest underlying irritation. Paul did not find it unexpected that the Judaizers had arrived in Galatia; however, he was taken aback by the positive reception they received. This development concerned Paul greatly, prompting him to write this letter to address the matter directly.

The situation in the Galatian churches should stand as a warning to us. We have to be discerning when it comes to what is being taught in our churches. Satan wants nothing less than to confuse the gospel and lead people astray. Like the apostle Paul we should be grieved when we see fellow believers being led astray by false teachers. Like Paul we need to be willing to take a stand against those who would seek to distort the gospel.

## The Apostle's Curse

### Galatians 1:8–9

<sup>8</sup> *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.* <sup>9</sup> *As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

The false teachers (Judaizers) that were misleading the Galatian churches probably had some very impressive credentials. They may have claimed that they had the support of James the leader of the Jerusalem church. So not only were they teaching a false gospel, but they were also seeking to undermine the authority and teachings of Paul.

Paul was so offended by the false teachers that he says through hyperbole (a deliberate exaggeration for emphasis): “*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!*” ([Gal 1:8](#)).

Paul took so seriously the truth of the gospel he pronounced a curse on anyone, including angels, that would teach another gospel. The word that is translated curse is *anathema* which means to set aside something for God’s Judgement and destruction. Paul was calling down God’s wrath on anyone who would distort and teach a false gospel.

This should stand as a warning to anyone who seeks to alter or water down the truth of the gospel or the Word of God. True believers are called to have nothing to do with false teachers regardless of their credentials. In fact we are to be discerning when it comes to what we are being taught and what our churches believe. We should never stay in a church or school that denies the Bible and distorts the gospel of Christ. To do so is to be disobedient to God and will cause one’s testimony to be compromised and weaken.

## Paul's Gospel Call

### Paul's Commission as an Apostle

### Galatians 1:10–17

<sup>10</sup> *For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.* <sup>11</sup> *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel.* <sup>12</sup> *For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.* <sup>14</sup> *And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.* <sup>15</sup> *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,* <sup>16</sup> *was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;* <sup>17</sup> *nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.*

Paul begins in [Galatians 1:10](#) by presenting a concise overview of his credentials as an apostle. He provides a biographical summary of significant events in his life to further substantiate his calling and

demonstrate the authenticity of the gospel of grace he advocates. Paul outlines his life before conversion, during conversion, and after conversion to furnish evidence of his legitimacy.

Paul's opponents questioned his credibility because he was not affiliated with the church in Jerusalem. They asserted that Paul's message, which did not conform to the Law, indicated that he was teaching a different gospel. According to them, Paul's commission was self-appointed rather than sanctioned by the Church in Jerusalem and therefore should not be accepted.

In response, Paul clarified that his intention was not to seek approval from others. He stated that preaching the gospel was not done to gain favor among people and explained that trying to please people would be inconsistent with being a servant of Christ.

By nature, people pleasers are not martyrs. The desire to escape ridicule and trouble is one of their hallmarks. Pleasing people does not bring the kind of severe persecution that Paul had endured and being a people pleaser is totally incompatible with being a bondservant of Christ. Paul's concern was not his own popularity or personal success but God's truth. At stake was the very integrity of the gospel.

Unfortunately, there are too many "Christians" and churches trying to be people pleasers. The "Seeker-Friendly" church growth movement was built around making people comfortable in church. This has led to a watering down of the gospel. When a person is truly confronted with their sin it is going to be uncomfortable. If it is your goal to be liked by the culture, then you will not be a faithful and fruitful believer.

Paul continues his autobiographical account by informing the Galatians that the gospel he presented was not derived from any human source. Rather, he asserts that he received this gospel directly through a revelation from Jesus Christ ([Gal 1:12](#)). Paul emphasizes his point by stating unequivocally that the gospel he preaches is not of human origin.

This statement directly addresses the Judaizers, who traditionally acquired their religious teachings primarily through rabbinic tradition and rote memorization. Instead of engaging in personal study of the Scriptures, most Jews—including both religious leaders and laypersons—relied extensively on human interpretations of Scripture to serve as their religious authority and guide.

Paul provides an account of his background prior to his conversion. Although born a free Roman citizen, Paul—formerly known as Saul—maintained a strong Jewish identity, describing himself as a "*Hebrew of Hebrews*" ([Phil 3:5](#)). He received his education in Tarsus, a renowned academic center, was proficient in multiple languages, possessed considerable intellectual ability, had an in-depth knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and studied under the esteemed Jewish teacher Gamaliel. His expertise positioned him as a prominent religious scholar and advocate for the faith.

Before his encounter with Christ, Paul could not tolerate any contradiction or compromise of Judaism. For this reason, he became the chief persecutor of the church. Many believers were jailed by Paul. In fact, he stood as a witness to the stoning of Stephen ([Act 7:58](#)). Paul thought he was doing God's work by stamping out Christianity.

Paul, originally known for opposing the early Christian movement, experienced a pivotal encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus that significantly altered his path. Following this event, Paul shifted from being a persecutor of the church to becoming an advocate and preacher of the Christian message.

Paul came to understand the identity of Jesus and recognized that his life's purpose had been established by God from birth. He acknowledged that his upbringing and experiences were formative, ultimately preparing him to share the gospel with the Gentiles. Notably, Paul's conversion was not attributed to human persuasion but resulted from a direct encounter with Jesus.

After his experience on the road to Damascus, Paul did not immediately return to Jerusalem. He maintained that the gospel he preached was not received from any individual. Additionally, given his previous actions against the church, he may have been viewed with suspicion by early Christians in Jerusalem.

Instead, Paul traveled to Arabia, which borders Palestine to the north, east, and south. Some scholars suggest that Paul went to this area to separate himself from his earlier life. During this time, Paul is believed to have studied scriptures and reflected on his new beliefs regarding God and Christ. He also began preaching the gospel, which led to opposition upon his return to Damascus ([Acts 9:23-25](#)).

## Paul's Launching of His Mission

### [Galatians 1:18-24](#)

*<sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) <sup>21</sup> Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God because of me.*

Three years following his transformative experience on the road to Damascus, Paul returns to Jerusalem. His return most likely brought apprehension for both Paul and the Jerusalem believers. Paul's departure from the Jewish leaders who had initially tasked him with pursuing Christians represented a significant shift, and the believers understandably exercised caution due to his earlier actions. As indicated in [Acts 9:26](#) the disciples were hesitant to trust Paul, concerned that his intentions might not be genuine.

Barnabas introduced Paul to Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, during a meeting that lasted fifteen days. No other individuals were present, and following this engagement, Paul proceeded to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Then to his hometown of Tarsus.

Throughout his years in Syria and Cilicia, Paul did not maintain contact with the apostles residing in Judea and Samaria, thereby ensuring that his preaching remained uninfluenced by them. He continued to share the gospel as it had been directly imparted to him by Jesus Christ.

When reports of revival in Syria reached Jerusalem, the city's leadership dispatched Barnabas to Antioch for further investigation ([Acts 11:20-26](#)). Subsequently, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus, Paul's hometown, to bring him back to Antioch to instruct the local believers. Paul notes that he would not have been personally recognized by members of the Judean church during this period, underscoring the limited influence of the Jerusalem church leaders on his ministry.

In response to criticisms from the Judaizers, Paul recounts his conversion experience and affirms the source of the gospel message he proclaimed. He emphasizes the baselessness of the charges against him and highlights the longstanding acknowledgment of his apostolic authority by the Jerusalem church leaders, who praised God for Paul's role in spreading the gospel among the Gentiles.

## Application

As a believer, you may struggle with the pressures of conforming to cultural standards instead of God's truth. Reflect on [Galatians 1:10](#), where Paul emphasizes that we cannot serve both God and people. This week, take time to assess areas in your life where you may be compromising your faith for acceptance. Write down one specific area where you will commit to standing for your convictions, whether it's at work or in social circles, and share this with a fellow believer for accountability.

## Discussion Questions

1. As Paul begins this letter, what does his mood seem to be?
2. What was the main reason Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, and how does that context shape our understanding of the text?
3. How were the Galatian Christians being thrown "into confusion"? ([1:7](#))
4. What does it mean to be a slave to Christ? Are you a slave, or are you still trying to please people (v. [10](#))?
5. What practical steps can you take this week to embrace the unchanging gospel as explained by Paul in [Galatians 1](#)?

# Lesson Two: The Freedom of Grace

## Bible Passage: [Galatians 2](#)

**Big Idea:** The liberating truth of the Gospel is that we are justified by faith in Christ alone, freeing us to extend grace to ourselves and others while abandoning the shackles of religious performance and tradition.

### Opening Thoughts

During my upbringing, I attended churches that taught the doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture. Salvation was presented as granted by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ, and any works produced were considered outcomes of salvation rather than prerequisites for it ([James 2:14-26](#)).

While attending college, I encountered individuals who could be characterized as contemporary Judaizers. These individuals originated from congregations with extensive lists of dos and don'ts, encompassing everything from hair length to preferred Bible translations. Their belief system insisted on adherence to such rules as necessary for salvation, viewing compliance as evidence thereof. Similar to Paul's experience, they regarded those who did not follow these regulations as false teachers.

As we proceed to [Galatians 2](#), Paul continues to address accusations alleging that he was a self-appointed apostle preaching a gospel distinct from that of Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem. Paul details two significant encounters that reinforce his apostleship and the legitimacy of his message. In [Gal 2:1-10](#), he recounts his second visit with the Jerusalem leaders, and in [Gal 2:11-21](#), he describes an instance where he exercised apostolic authority to confront and correct the apostle Peter.

### Paul in Jerusalem

#### The Reason for Paul's visit

##### [Galatians 2:1-2](#)

*<sup>1</sup> Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. <sup>2</sup> I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.*

After an extensive ministry spanning fourteen years, Paul undertook his second journey to Jerusalem, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. This event is documented by Luke in [Acts 15](#). Prior to this visit, Paul and Barnabas had completed their initial missionary journey, as described in [Acts 13:1-14:28](#).

It was a wise decision for him to take Barnabas and Titus with him to Jerusalem. Barnabas was a trusted colleague who had strong ties to the church in Jerusalem. The fact that Paul was going to defend the gospel message that he was preaching to the Gentile, meant that Barnabas would be there to affirm that Paul's message was accurate.

Titus on the other hand served a different role. Titus was a Gentile believer. He was strong evidence that Gentiles could become faithful believers without having to submit to the Mosaic Law. Titus had a good reputation among the churches.

Paul's journey to Jerusalem was prompted by the arrival of the Judaizers in Antioch ([Acts 15:1](#)). These individuals began instructing Gentile believers that adherence to Mosaic Law, particularly circumcision, was necessary. Jewish legalists expressed concern over Paul's teaching that Gentiles were not obligated to observe the Law to qualify as believers, resulting in significant debate within the church.

In response, the church leaders in Antioch appointed Paul, Barnabas, and several others to travel to Jerusalem for a meeting with the apostles and elders. The purpose of this visit was to seek clarification regarding whether Gentile believers were required to comply with the Mosaic Law.

## The Results of Paul's visit

### Galatians 2:3–10

*<sup>3</sup> But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—<sup>5</sup> to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. <sup>6</sup> And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. <sup>7</sup> On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised <sup>8</sup> (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*

Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, they initially met privately with the church leaders to ensure that Paul's teachings were doctrinally sound. Meeting in private allowed for the correction of any potential inaccuracies before public dissemination, thereby avoiding possible division within the congregation. The primary aim of this visit was for Paul to confirm the validity of his message to the Gentiles. He sought to avoid spreading information contrary to the views of the Jerusalem leadership, recognizing that it would be counterproductive to continue advocating a message of grace if the leaders required adherence to legalistic teachings.

Titus served as a prime example in this context. As a Greek believer who had not undergone Paul, requiring Titus to be circumcised would undermine the doctrine that salvation is attained through faith alone and imply that adherence to the law is essential for circumcision, he was presented by Paul to the leaders in Jerusalem to gauge their response to a Gentile becoming a Christian without adhering to this Jewish practice. For acceptance by God. The outcome of this meeting was that the Apostles and elders affirmed and supported the message of the gospel that Paul was proclaiming.

Following the private meeting, a session was held with the other leaders. Paul provided a public report on his ministry, detailing how the Holy Spirit had been bestowed upon the Gentiles and describing their acceptance of the gospel message.

James, serving as the leader of the church, provided a summary of the arguments and articulated the resolution of the matter in [Acts 15:13–21](#). He concluded that both Jews and Gentiles attain salvation

through faith in Jesus Christ, and that Gentiles are not bound by the requirements of the Law. However, James recommended that Gentile Christians abstain from practices that might offend unbelieving Jews, so as not to create obstacles to their potential acceptance of the faith.

The endorsement by James and the church in Jerusalem affirmed Paul's appointment by Jesus to deliver the gospel. The leadership expressed their support for his successful ministry among the Gentiles and requested that Paul and his associates maintain consideration for the impoverished in Jerusalem.

Paul's decision to travel to Jerusalem and engage with church leaders underscores the significance of maintaining ongoing dialogue among Christians. Continuous efforts to deepen our understanding of the doctrines we uphold and communicate are essential. As Paul valued the integrity of the gospel message, it is imperative that we preserve its authenticity without compromise. Through sincere and constructive discussions with fellow believers, we can foster spiritual growth and ensure the accuracy of the teachings we share.

## Paul in Antioch

During a mission trip to Alaska, I spoke with a member of the local church who mentioned that over the years, various pastors had preached in the village, each presenting different interpretations of the gospel. This resulted in some confusion within the community. To effectively engage with communities, it is important for actions to be consistent with spoken messages and aligned with the principles of the gospel.

In [Galatians 2:11–21](#), Paul describes an instance where he confronted Peter regarding a situation in which Peter's actions were not consistent with the gospel message he was conveying.

## Peter's Deviation

### [Galatians 2:11–14](#)

*<sup>11</sup> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”*

Peter had spent a considerable period in Antioch prior to his encounter with Paul. The scriptural account does not specify the timing or motivation behind Peter's visit to Antioch, but it can be inferred that he was present long enough to regularly dine and interact with Gentile believers. His actions did not raise immediate concerns among observers regarding any resistance to such practices.

In ancient times, sharing a meal represented a significant bond between participants. As a result, Jewish customs typically prohibited dining with Gentiles. Peter diverged from these traditions by not only consuming Gentile food but also engaging in fellowship at their tables.

We need to go back to [Acts 10](#) where Peter had a vision from God. In that vision God tells Peter that there is nothing unclean that God has made clean. Peter understood that God was breaking down the barriers

between the Jews and Gentiles. Also Peter was present at the meeting in Jerusalem when the issue of Gentile believers was settled. So for this reason he should have been comfortable interacting and eating with Gentile believers even in the presence of fellow Jews.

At some point Jewish believers from Jerusalem came to Antioch to see what was happening for themselves. Peter being afraid of the Jews and their reaction to his eating with Gentiles chose to separate himself from the Gentiles. He was afraid of losing popularity or prestige with the Jewish believers. Peter's actions even caused Barnabas to withdraw from eating with Gentiles.

Paul addresses Peter's inconsistency by stating, *"If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"* ([Gal 2:12](#)). In this context, Paul is questioning why Peter's actions do not align with his professed beliefs. Peter had yielded to the influence of leading figures within the community who shaped public opinion.

## Paul's Doctrine

### [Galatians 2:15–21](#)

<sup>15</sup> *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;* <sup>16</sup> *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.* <sup>17</sup> *But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!* <sup>18</sup> *For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.* <sup>19</sup> *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.* <sup>20</sup> *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* <sup>21</sup> *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

In recounting this narrative to the Galatians, Paul delivers one of the New Testament's most emphatic statements regarding the doctrine of justification. He articulates the nature of justification ([Gal 2:15–16](#)) and subsequently offers a defense of the doctrine in ([Gal 2:17–21](#)). Paul emphasizes to the Galatians that justification is not achieved by works; adherence to the law alone does not result in salvation. Justification is attained solely through faith in Jesus Christ.

The word *justify* (*diakioun*) is a legal word taken from the courts. It pictures us on trial before God. We have committed the most heinous of crimes; we have rebelled against God and broken our relationship with God. The only way that we can have a restored relationship with God, is by placing our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul communicates to the Galatians that, while the Law is limited in its capacity—it serves only to condemn and enact judgment—Christ's actions offer a transformative alternative. By taking humanity's place, Christ died on the cross and overcame death through resurrection, thereby granting the possibility of eternal life. According to this perspective, faith in Jesus Christ is the sole means by which an individual's relationship with God the Father can be restored, resulting in justification before God. In this sense, justification is viewed as complete absolution from past transgressions.

Paul describes what it means to be justified by faith in [Gal 2:20](#). “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Paul characterizes his Christian life succinctly as being “in Christ.” He articulates that, upon placing faith in Christ, individuals receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they are no longer autonomous but belong to Christ, whose presence resides within them. Although believers continue to live in physical bodies, they are called to live by faith in Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself on their behalf.

Living the Christian life involves placing faith in Jesus Christ—not only acknowledging His sacrifice, but also recognizing His presence within. This belief offers sustenance and strength. Material possessions such as wealth, homes, vehicles, or career achievements do not bring true peace; rather, it is the indwelling of Christ that does so. Such an understanding defines what it means to live by faith in Jesus Christ.

## Application

You may be experiencing peer pressure within your church community to adopt specific behaviors or beliefs, reminiscent of the influence exerted by the Judaizers on the Galatians. For those navigating the tension between traditional practices and authentic faith, it is advisable to define core beliefs based on scriptural principles. Consider allocating time this week to reflect and document perspectives on grace versus works. Engaging in conversation with a trusted mentor or church leader can further clarify understanding and reinforce one's sense of spiritual identity when encountering external influences.

## Discussion Questions

1. The first century church was having trouble with people adding observance of the Law as a requirement for salvation. Do you think that the established church today is guilty of adding cultural requirements to the Gospel? What do you think they are? Have you personally “tacked on” something that is really only cultural?
2. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem? ([2:2](#))
3. How did Peter deviate from the true gospel and become hypocritical? How did Paul respond?

4. Why is it easier for Christians to live by rules and traditions than by faith?
5. What does [Galatians 2](#) teach us about the importance of community and accountability in our faith journeys?

# Lesson Three: Faith's Assurance: The Path to True Justification

## Bible Passage: [Galatians 3](#)

**Big Idea:** *Justification comes through faith in Christ alone, assuring believers of their status as God's children and freeing them from the bondage of the law and the pressure of self-righteousness.*

## Opening Thoughts

Many of us have been a part of churches or traditions that said, “*The way to receive the power of the Spirit is to get rid of all of the sin in your life.*” Give up your drinking, stop smoking, just clean up your life then the Holy Spirit will come upon you to empower and use you. Consequently, many people have spent months, years, even decades trying to clean up their lives in order to earn the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Others waited day after day in what used to be called “*tarrying meetings.*” “*We’re going to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon us.*” If we praise loud enough, pray hard enough, and wait long enough, the Holy Spirit will come upon us. We’ll be changed and empowered. Then we will be able to have a radical impact on our culture and community.

[Galatians 3](#) presents Paul’s passionate defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. In this chapter, Paul addresses the Galatian believers who are tempted to supplement their faith with works. He clarifies their misunderstanding regarding the function of the law, affirming that justification and righteousness are attained through faith in Christ rather than adherence to legalistic practices. Additionally, Paul underscores that receiving the Holy Spirit and witnessing God’s miracles results from faith in Jesus Christ, not observance of the law. The chapter concludes by highlighting how faith in Christ transforms one’s understanding of the law and affirms the believer’s identity as a child of God through faith.

## Faith: Not Foolish Rituals

### [Galatians 3:1–5](#)

<sup>1</sup> *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.* <sup>2</sup> *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?* <sup>3</sup> *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* <sup>4</sup> *Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?* <sup>5</sup> *Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—*

Paul begins by asking the Galatians “*Why do you no longer embrace and enjoy the simplicity of Jesus Christ?*” Paul wanted to know who was placing a spell on them by saying they had to follow a long list of rules to receive the Holy Spirit. He is basically asking the Galatians “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit by faith or by works?*”

The word foolish (*anoetoij*) does not connote mental deficiency but means mental laziness and carelessness. The Galatians were not stupid; they were just listening to the false teachings of the Judaizers

and passively accepting it. They were not taking the time to go back to what they had been taught by Paul and discern the truth. They were blindly accepting what was being taught without studying for themselves.

While in college I came in contact students that came from churches like those that Paul is writing to. They had been taught to believe that in order to be a true Christian you had to follow a certain set of rules. Many a preacher has led people astray by teaching that in order for a person to be a good Christian they had to live a legalistic based life. This is no different than what the Judaizers were teaching the Galatian believers.

An illustrative example of legalistic reasoning comes to mind, as recounted by my father during his service with the local Baptist Association. The organization received a donation of Portuguese-language Bibles intended for missionaries working with Portuguese-speaking communities. However, several pastors present at the discussion, who adhered strictly to the King James Version, objected to distributing these Bibles as they were not in the King James translation. This inflexible approach risked limiting missionaries' ability to provide accessible scripture to those they sought to serve, solely due to the conviction that only the King James Version was valid.

Paul is telling the Galatians and us; you have been set free from the bondage of sin. Why then would you want to place yourself under the bondage of the Law or some other legalistic system? To do so is to say that grace is not enough and you hamper the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and the ministry of the church.

## Faith: Like Father Abraham

### Galatians 3:6-14

*<sup>6</sup> just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? <sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. <sup>10</sup> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” <sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” <sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” <sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

Paul cites Abraham as an example of someone justified by faith rather than works. According to the biblical account ([Gen 12:1-4](#)), the Mosaic Law had not yet been established when Abraham responded to God's call, and would not be given for another 400 years. Abraham is described as being justified before the command of circumcision was given. Circumcision, like baptism, is presented as an external sign reflecting one's faith in God. Neither act is considered to confer salvation or contribute directly to it; instead, they are viewed as outward indications of an internal process involving the Holy Spirit.

The problem with the Law or any legalistic system for trying to work your way to heaven fails. We are sinners by nature. There is no amount of good works that will make us justified before a Holy God. Paul is telling the Galatians; these false teachers are giving you false hope that will leave you cursed before God. The only way a person can be justified before God is to place their faith in Jesus Christ. *“The righteous shall live*

by faith" [Gal 3:11](#). No matter how good or disciplined a person becomes, without faith they still fall short of God's glory.

Abraham demonstrated this kind of faith by obediently leaving his homeland for an unfamiliar country at God's direction. His faith, rather than his actions, was regarded as righteousness. The grace Abraham received was not the result of his works; instead, it was attributed to his faith. Abraham did not earn his justification through works but by obediently trusting in God. As a consequence of Abraham's faith, all nations of the world are being blessed.

We can do all the right things. Go to church every time the doors are open. Study our Bibles regularly. Feed the poor. Preach the gospel. All of which we are called to do. But these activities alone will not get us to heaven. All the work we do will not bring us justification. Like Abraham we must place our faith in Jesus. Only our belief in the finished work of Christ on the cross will make us justified. Our works are a result of our faith ([James 2](#)).

## Faith: Fulfills the Promise

[Galatians 3:15–22](#)

*<sup>15</sup> To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. <sup>16</sup> Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. <sup>17</sup> This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. <sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. <sup>19</sup> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. <sup>20</sup> Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. <sup>21</sup> Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

Paul presents a comparison between God's covenants and human contracts, suggesting that, similar to signed agreements, covenants are binding. He raises the question of why God's covenant would be considered revocable if human contracts are not. The Judaizers argued that the law, given after the Abrahamic Covenant, should take precedence. Paul addresses the Galatians, emphasizing that God's covenant with Moses does not contradict the earlier covenant with Abraham but is instead complementary. According to Paul, while the Mosaic covenant is significant, it neither changes nor cancels the Abrahamic covenant. The promise made to Abraham was that his descendants would benefit all nations, a promise that was fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who offers salvation. Paul further teaches that, like Abraham, people must approach God through faith and that salvation is by grace through faith rather than adherence to the law.

It was never the purpose of the law to save a person. The law was to be like a mirror it showed man that his sins are a transgression against God ([Gal 3:19](#)). The law laid down the perfect standard and made a person

aware of when they had deviated from that perfect standard. It was there to show us the magnitude of our sin and our need for a savior.

## Faith's Freedom and Family

### [Galatians 3:23-29](#)

*<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

Paul uses another image to describe our position under the law before the coming of Christ. He says the law was like a guardian. A better translation is “custodian” or “strict nanny” During the time of Paul a slave was assigned to each child to escort them to school and help in their supervision. This person was not a sweet babysitter but was more like an army drill sergeant. They were responsible to keep the child in line. They would teach the child what was and was not acceptable. This person would punish the child when they failed to obey.

In the same way the law was given to point out our sin and to threaten a great punishment if we didn’t obey completely. But, when it comes the law no one can perfectly obey it and earn God’s approval. This realization causes us to long for a better way to salvation and relationship with God. God provided a way when He fulfilled His promise by sending His son, Jesus, who provides us a restored relationship with God the Father. The law showed us our need for Christ and the forgiveness and righteousness that He provides by faith. No longer do we need the law to be our guardian.

When we accept the grace of God and place our faith in Jesus we are no longer children bound by the law. We become mature members within God's family. The Apostle Paul refers to believers as "sons of God," using the metaphor of Roman society where reaching adulthood involved replacing children's garments with the toga of an adult—a symbol of new rights and responsibilities. Similarly, Paul teaches the Galatians that through embracing Christ, they have set aside the "old clothes" of the law and adopted Christ's "robes of righteousness."

This transformation results in unity among all believers in Christ. Paul asserts that while the Law introduced divisions across individuals, nations, foods, and animals, the purpose of Christ was to foster unity rather than division, emphasizing equality for all in Him. The Christian life, therefore, gains depth and significance in light of these truths, as the believer recognizes the benefits found in Christ. This relationship is based on grace, not adherence to the Law, positioning each individual as an adult member and heir within God's family.

## Application

Many of you may face the challenge of feeling unworthy or struggling with guilt from past mistakes. [Galatians 3](#) reminds us that through faith in Christ, we are all children of God and are not defined by our past. To embrace this truth, take time this week to write a letter to God, confessing your weaknesses and thanking Him for His grace and forgiveness. Then, share this testimony with a friend or in a small group setting to reinforce your status as a beloved child of God. This act can lead to healing and remind you of your identity in Him.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why did Paul say that the Galatians were “foolish” and “bewitched”?
2. Read [Galatians 3:10-22](#). How does Paul contrast the Law of Moses and faith?
3. Through whom were the promises of Abraham fulfilled? ([3:16](#))
4. Where and how do you need to stand up and live like a child of God?
5. What commonly accepted rules have many Christians tried to make part of the gospel? How is this similar to what the Judaizers were doing among the Galatian believers?

# Lesson Four: From Slavery to Sonship

## Bible Passage: [Galatians 4](#)

**Big Idea:** *The liberation from the law leads us into a deeper understanding and experience of our identity as children of God, equipping us to live in the freedom of grace rather than the bondage of works.*

## Opening Thoughts

One of the tragedies of being enslaved by legalism is that it makes a person look like they are spiritually mature when, in fact, legalism leads them back into slavery. When you are consumed by legalism you are unable to enjoy the true freedom that salvation offers.

[Galatians 4](#) concludes the second major section in Paul's letter to the Galatians. In chapters 1 and 2 Paul proves the authenticity of his apostleship. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Paul defense of the gospel's message, presenting nine arguments that demonstrate the superiority of the gospel of grace over the gospel of the law. In doing so, Paul systematically dismantles the teachings advanced by the Judaizers.

In [Galatians 4](#), Paul explores the transition from the Old Covenant of the Law, which puts people in bondage, to the New Covenant of grace, which brings believers into a right relationship with God as heirs and sons through Christ. Legalism can present an appearance of spiritual maturity while actually resulting in a return to restrictive practices, preventing individuals from experiencing the genuine freedom offered by salvation.

## Slavery to Sonship

### [Galatians 4:1–7](#)

*<sup>1</sup> I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup> but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. <sup>3</sup> In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

In [Galatians 4:1–7](#), Paul vividly illustrates our transition from being slaves to heirs. Imagine a child who grows up in a wealthy household, yet until reaching maturity, is treated no differently than the servants. Likewise, before we accepted Christ, we lived under the law, bound by our sins. But upon faith in Christ, we became God's heirs, inheriting eternal life and His promises, moving from bondage to freedom. This emphasizes the gravity of our redemption in Christ.

During Paul's day while an heir was still a child he lived and functioned as a slave until the time his father decided that the heir was mature enough to become a man. As a child, a guardian controlled the heir's every movement. The transition from childhood to adulthood was clearly defined in most cultures.

- For a Jewish boy that day would have been the first sabbath after his 12th birthday. He would become “a son of the law.”

- In Greece, a boy was under his father's care from the age of 7 until he was 18. He then became what was called an ephebos, which may be translated as cadet, and for two years he was under the direction of the state.
- Under Roman law, the year at which a boy became an adult was not definitely fixed, but it was always between the ages of 14 and 17. At a sacred festival given by the family called the Liberalia, he took off the toga praetexta, which was a toga with a narrow purple band at the foot of it, and put on the toga virilis, which was a plain toga worn by adults.

Paul draws the analogy between the life of a believer and that of a child. Prior to the completed work of Christ on the cross, individuals were subject to the "elementary principles of the world," which are present in various human religions as the pursuit of divine acceptance through personal effort. For the Jewish people, this entailed adherence to the Law. God instituted the Law to reveal humanity's inherent sinfulness and inability to attain His perfect standard independently. At the appointed time within God's sovereign plan, He sent His Son. Through the redemption accomplished by Jesus on the cross, believers are granted the privilege of addressing God as Father and transition from a state of servitude to becoming heirs of the Kingdom. Paul emphasizes that while striving for righteousness (fulfilling the Law) is commendable, being loved and cared for by God the Father represents a far greater blessing.

Paul's message to the Galatians extends to all believers: in Christ, believers are no longer slaves but are recognized as sons and heirs. Under grace, there has been a transformation from bondage under the law to the status of children and heirs with full rights and privileges. Consequently, Paul questions the rationale for reverting to the constraints of legalism when such a close and personal relationship with God—as that between a parent and child—is now available to all who believe.

## Avoid Ancient Bondage

### Galatians 4:8–20

<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? <sup>10</sup> You observe days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. <sup>12</sup> Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. <sup>13</sup> You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, <sup>14</sup> and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup> Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? <sup>17</sup> They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. <sup>18</sup> It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, <sup>19</sup> my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! <sup>20</sup> I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul transitions from presenting a theological argument against returning to legalism to making a personal inquiry regarding the Galatians' decision to revert. He reminds them that prior to embracing the gospel, they

were subject to servitude under pagan deities. Through the gospel, God initiated a personal relationship characterized by love, enabling true knowledge of Him. Legalism, which neither achieves righteousness nor offers freedom, is no longer binding upon them. Despite this, the Judaizers persuaded the Galatians that observing the Mosaic Calendar was essential to obtaining God's favour.

Paul expressed concern regarding the Galatians' swift acceptance of the teachings promoted by the Judaizers. He perceived that his efforts to convey the truth had led to his being viewed as an adversary. The Judaizers persuaded the Galatian community that Paul's apostolic authority was questionable and argued that his gospel, which did not include adherence to the law, was therefore incomplete. As a result, their influence contributed to a shift in the Galatian believers' attitude toward Paul.

Paul was genuinely worried about how legalism was affecting the Galatians. He warned them that following legalistic rules wouldn't bring them closer to God, and he feared that if they kept down that road, all his work with them would have been pointless. Not only would his efforts go to waste, but the Galatians would also find themselves caught once again in a restrictive system of rules, missing out on the joy and freedom that comes from a personal connection with Jesus Christ.

Paul warns in [Galatians 4:8-20](#) about the risk of being influenced by false teachings. In a world with many different beliefs, it is important to remain grounded in the truth found in God's Word. Building a strong foundation through regular Bible study helps you understand Scripture more deeply. If you are faced with conflicting philosophies or misleading ideas, seek guidance from the Holy Spirit for discernment and wisdom. Maintain your faith confidently with confidence amid evolving perspectives, and be prepared to articulate the basis of your hope in Christ in a clear and reasoned manner.

## Allegory of Assurance

### [Galatians 4:21-31](#)

*<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. <sup>24</sup> Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." <sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. <sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." <sup>31</sup> So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

Paul offers a detailed comparison between grace and law, as well as faith and works. He supports his argument by referencing the narrative of Sarah and Hagar; Sarah is described as Abraham's wife, while Hagar is identified as his concubine. Through this story, Paul illustrates the concept of enslavement that may occur when individuals attempt to earn salvation through works.

Abraham fathered two sons with two women: Ishmael, born to Hagar (the slave woman), and Isaac, born to Sarah (the freewoman). Paul draws an analogy between these women and two covenants—the covenant of the law and the covenant of grace. Sarah, representing the freewoman, symbolizes the liberty found in salvation through faith, whereas Hagar, the slave, exemplifies the restrictive nature of adherence to the law.

Paul advocates for the Galatians to move beyond legalism and embrace the freedom afforded by faith in Jesus. He explains that adherence to the law is no longer necessary, as believers are liberated through their belief in Christ. Drawing a parallel to the separation of Sarah and Hagar, Paul suggests that legalism and genuine love cannot coexist within the same congregation; a church must either become increasingly rigid and ritualistic, or foster a spirit of openness and compassion. Paul encourages the Galatians to reject the legalistic teachings of the Judaizers, affirming that they are no longer bound by the law but are set free through faith in Jesus Christ's completed work.

If you find yourself challenged by the pressures of religious practices or traditions within your church, consider the message from [Galatians 4:21-31](#), which contrasts Hagar and Sarah. Sarah embodies the promise of freedom, encouraging you to embrace the liberty available through Christ. By prioritizing inward spiritual transformation over external rituals, you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you towards authentic worship and meaningful service.

## Application

As Paul speaks about being heirs through Christ in [Galatians 4](#), consider how often you may allow the pressures of life to overshadow your identity as a child of God. If you're feeling overwhelmed with work, relationships, or societal expectations, take a moment to reflect on your value in God's eyes. Create a visual reminder of your identity in Christ, perhaps a scripture verse you can post where you see it daily. This tangible reminder can help refocus your mind on God's promises and bring peace amidst chaos.

Reflect on how you may be living in spiritual bondage instead of freedom, as described in [Galatians 4](#). Are there harmful habits or past mistakes you hold on to that keep you from fully experiencing God's grace? This week, spend time in prayer and fasting, asking God to reveal areas of your life that need His freedom. Write down specific actions you will take to break free from these chains, whether it's seeking accountability or eliminating certain influences from your life.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Paul emphasizes the contrast between being a slave and being a son in [Galatians 4](#)?
2. Since the Galatians were no longer slaves, what had they become? ([4:7](#))
3. How are those who live under the Law immature? ([4:1-2](#))
4. What motivated the Judaizers to turn the Galatians against Paul? ([4:17](#))
5. How can we show concern for Christians who have turned away from the truth?
6. What can you do this week to encourage other Christians to enjoy their freedom in Christ?

# Lesson Five: Freedom in Christ: Living by the Spirit

## Bible Passage: [Galatians 5](#)

**Big Idea:** Freedom in Christ equips us to live authentically and love selflessly in a world often characterized by law and selfishness. Through the Holy Spirit, we are invited to embody this divine love, making a transformative impact in our communities.

## Opening Thoughts

In the fifth chapter of Galatians, Paul states that believers have been liberated through Christ and are no longer subject to the constraints of the law ([Gal. 5:1-12](#)). Instead, their guidance comes from within, through the Holy Spirit ([Gal 5:13-26](#)). The most effective way a believer is going to battle sinful temptations and impulses is to “Walk by the Spirit” ([Gal 5:16](#)). This means that as a believer we must seek to no longer be controlled by the legalistic system of the Law and allow the Holy Spirit to have control of our whole being.

## Freedom from Legalism

### [Galatians 5:1-12](#)

*<sup>1</sup> For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup> Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. <sup>3</sup> I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. <sup>7</sup> You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> This persuasion is not from him who calls you. <sup>9</sup> A little leaven leavens the whole lump. <sup>10</sup> I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. <sup>11</sup> But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. <sup>12</sup> I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!*

In [Galatians 5:1](#) Paul turns his attention to what genuine obedience to the true gospel means. He urges the Galatians to consider the consequences of falling under the influence of false teachings ([Galatians 5:1-6](#)). As followers of Christ, we are freed from the negative impact of the law and should not attempt to return to it. Just like with any legalistic system, keeping all the rules flawlessly is impossible because of our sinful nature. Only faith that expresses itself through love has true value in Christ.

Christ set us free from the slavery of the law. Paul points out to the Galatians six negative consequences of returning to the law and its legalistic control:

1. **“Christ is of no benefit”** ([Gal 5:2](#)). If a person insists on returning to the law it invalidates Christ’s work on the cross. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, which was perfect and complete, cannot benefit a person who chooses to place their trust in anything else. When a person submits to something other than Christ, in the case of the Galatians “circumcision,” it demonstrates that they are not fully trusting

what Jesus did on the cross. Anytime we add works to what Jesus has done, we invalidate the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

2. ***Obligated to keep the Law.*** ([Gal 5:3](#)). If an individual chooses to adhere to a part of the law, they are required to observe the entirety of it. This requirement often leads to conflict, as the law governs all aspects of life and demands complete compliance for any possibility of atonement. Similarly, Jesus calls for a comparable level of commitment and loyalty. Paul therefore presented the Galatians with a challenge: they could either accept Christ and the associated benefits, or commit themselves to fulfilling the entire law. This decision represents a choice between freedom and bondage, between grace and human effort. Whenever someone attempts to achieve salvation through observance of the law or legalistic regulations, they ultimately reject the grace offered in the gospel.

3. ***Fallen from grace*** ([Gal 5:4-6](#)). It is important to understand that Paul is not addressing the issue of a believer's security here, but rather contrasting two approaches to salvation: grace versus law, or faith versus works. His message to the Galatians—and to us—is that grace and law cannot be combined; accepting God's grace is incompatible with requiring adherence to legalistic rules. Paul emphasizes that those who try to live by works adopt a mindset that prevents them from truly receiving the benefits of God's grace. In this context, he describes such individuals as having fallen from grace.

4. ***Hinders spiritual growth*** ([Gal 5:7-10](#)). Paul uses the metaphor of a race to describe a believer's life. Paul is telling the Galatians that trying to obey the law will hinder their ability to grow in their faith. This is because the false teachers distort the truth. Their teachings were causing them to take a spiritual detour that was hindering their growth. They had become more concerned with obeying the law than obeying the truth. Turning to a cooking illustration, Paul compares the false teaching of legalism to yeast. A little legalism can contaminate a believer's ability to grow spiritually. That is why it is important that we must guard against trying to add anything to the saving grace of the gospel.

5. ***True teachers persecuted*** ([Gal 5:11](#)). False teachers often criticize the church loudly. Judaizers claimed Paul supported circumcision, prompting him to ask why he was still persecuted. Paul had clarified his stance against circumcision and addressed the matter with church leaders in [Acts 15](#).

Paul's experience of persecution was regarded as proof that he was faithfully conveying the message of the cross. For those who challenged him, the main issue lay with the doctrine itself, which claimed that salvation comes through faith in Christ's sacrifice rather than adherence to laws or reliance on personal merit. From this standpoint, individuals committed to scriptural teachings will face resistance. . It is suggested that they act professionally and respectfully so any offense stems from the gospel's content, not their behavior. If teachings do not prompt reflection or challenge current beliefs, it may be worthwhile to review the message being conveyed.

6. ***Anger*** ([Gal 5:12](#)). Paul was completely exasperated with the false teachers who were preaching circumcision and sabotaging the Galatians' faith. He had reached a point of righteous anger against the false teachers. To put in plain English, Paul wishes that if the legalist are so hung up on circumcision that maybe they should show ultimate devotion to God by castrating themselves as was a common practice of pagan worshipers.

Adding human effort or requirements to the concept of divine grace as provided through the death of Jesus is considered by many theological perspectives to substitute the gospel's message with legalism. To avoid legalism, it is important to understand that salvation is not contingent upon adherence to rules, but rather upon faith in Christ. Individuals are encouraged to demonstrate their faith through acts of love and compassion toward others, thereby embodying the values central to their beliefs.

## Freedom to Serve

### [Galatians 5:13–21](#)

*<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. <sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Paul advises the Galatians to exercise discernment, urging them not to construe their freedom in Christ as justification for inappropriate conduct. Scriptural freedom is characterized by liberation from unwarranted constraints, which empowers individuals to responsibly engage in a renewed relationship with God and fulfil their divine calling.

Furthermore, Paul observes that anger or resentment may arise amid conflict or disagreement. He refers to [Galatians 5:13-15](#), recommending its guidance on serving others with love. Through the practice of forgiveness and addressing issues with grace and understanding, individuals contribute to reconciliation. Prioritizing love and unity, even among those with differing perspectives, fosters a more harmonious and cohesive community.

Paul cautions the Galatians against succumbing to the works of the flesh ([Gal 5:19-21](#)). In several of his writings, like [Rom. 1:29-31](#); [1 Cor. 5:10-11](#); [6:9-10](#); [Eph. 4:25-32](#); [5:3-5](#); [Col. 3:5-8](#), he provides thorough lists of specific sins that exemplify these “works of the flesh.” The passage in Galatians divides these acts into four types: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, and idolatry. Paul makes it clear that those who consistently engage in such behaviors will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Do not use your freedom in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another in love. Are you struggling with selfish desires taking over your actions? Start actively looking for opportunities to serve others in your church and community. By shifting your focus from yourself to serving others, you will find fulfillment and grow in love and humility.

## Fruitful Freedom

### Galatians 5:22–26

*<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

During my college years, a preacher posed an interesting question: what do you expect to find inside when you peel an orange? Most people would naturally say orange juice. But suppose someone had put ink inside instead; then that's what you'd get—whatever's inside is what comes out. In the same way, whatever fills us internally will reveal itself outwardly. It seems logical that if the Holy Spirit resides within us and works through us, then that influence will be reflected in our actions and behavior.

Paul explains what it means to have the Holy Spirit residing in us by contrasting actions of our old nature with those of a new nature led by the Spirit. In [Gal 5:19–23](#), he compares the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Paul first lists the acts of sinful flesh, grouping them into four categories: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, and idolatry. He declares that anyone who continually practices these actions will not inherit the kingdom of God. Next, Paul lists the fruits produced by the Spirit. It's important to note these are called the fruit of the Spirit—not the fruit of personal effort. When we live controlled by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit produces qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our lives.

Paul identified nine qualities, known as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which are produced in a believer's life. These nine qualities can be divided into three groups: foundational fruit, relational fruit, and devotional fruit. All nine characteristics should be present in a believer's life as proof of the Holy Spirit's work within them.

### Foundational Fruit

These are called foundational fruits because if you do not have Love, Joy or Peace, it will be very difficult to be able to give evidence of the others.

**Love** – Paul begins with love, considering it fundamental to the development of all other fruit. The Greek term "agape" (ἀγάπη) denotes a form of divine love characterized by personal choice and intentional self-giving service, rather than mere pleasant emotions or feelings. This type of love is not contingent on the recipient's worthiness but arises from grace, benefiting even those who may not merit it. According to Paul, this is the form of love that God demonstrates towards humanity ([John 3:16](#)).

**Joy** (χαρά), identified as chara, represents the second aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. The term appears approximately 70 times in the New Testament, consistently referring to a sense of happiness rooted in spiritual truths. Joy is regarded as a profound and enduring sense of well-being that persists in individuals who are assured of their relationship with the Lord. This state does not arise from favorable external circumstances or simply from human emotions that have been divinely influenced. Sometimes our greatest times of Joy are when life's circumstances are most painful and severe

**Peace** (εἰρήνη, eirēnē) can be understood as the tranquility of mind arising from a restored relationship with God, in contrast to joy, which is characterized by a sense of exhilaration stemming from this reconciliation. The verb form of "peace" refers to the concept of binding together; an idea echoed in the modern phrase "having it all together." This suggests that peace embodies a state where all aspects are properly aligned and functioning as they should. Importantly, like joy, true peace does not depend on external circumstances; indeed, some of the most profound experiences of peace may occur during periods of significant difficulty or distress.

## Relational Fruit

The next group of three are related to how we relate to others. These characteristics/attitudes undergird our relationships in life.

**Patience.** (μακροθυμία) The term "makrothumia" refers to a form of patience characterized by tolerance and the endurance of difficulties or injuries caused by others. It involves a composed willingness to accept circumstances that may be irritating or painful. Individuals demonstrating patience show understanding toward the shortcomings of others. In the same way that God is patient with humanity, God's Spirit enables us to exhibit patience toward others ([Romans 2:4; 3:25](#)).

**Kindness** (χρηστότης), or chrēstotēs, denotes a genuine concern for others. It is not to be interpreted as weakness or indecision; rather, it signifies an individual's earnest commitment to act with gentleness, mirroring the care exemplified by the Lord. The Apostle Paul illustrated this concept when he reminded the Thessalonians that, though he possessed apostolic authority, he "proved to be gentle among [them], as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children" ([1 Thess. 2:6-7](#)). Kindness entails consistently seeking to promote the wellbeing of others in all circumstances. As God demonstrates such care for His people, His Spirit likewise enables believers to extend kindness to others ([Colossians 3:12](#)).

**Goodness.** (ἀγαθωσύνη) The word "agathos" refers to moral and spiritual excellence, recognized by its gentleness and active helpfulness. Paul illustrated this virtue when he noted, "One will scarcely die for a righteous man; but perhaps someone might dare to die for a good man" ([Rom. 5:7](#)). Goodness extends the idea of kindness by turning positive attitudes into tangible actions. Empowered by the Spirit, people actively do good for others ([Ephesians 5:9](#)).

## Devotional Fruit

This list concludes with three general characteristics that undergird all the believer's actions.

**Faithfulness.** (Πίστις) Pistis (faithfulness) is the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit that pertains to loyalty and trustworthiness. Jeremiah declared that "the Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness" ([Lam. 3:22](#)). Faithfulness in this context communicates a willingness to practice without fail what one believes. As God has been devoted and persistent to fulfill the promises he has made, so also his Spirit empowers us to be persistently devoted. We must conduct ourselves just as faithfully as God. We are dependably loyal to our Lord and to our fellow believers. We even dependably love our enemies.

**Gentleness.** (πραυτης) Prautēs (gentleness) includes the idea of gentleness but is usually better translated meekness. It is that humble and gentle attitude that is patiently submissive in every offense, while being free of any desire for revenge or retribution. The standard Greek lexicon explains it as “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.” It is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, recognize your own vulnerability, and respond in a caring and compassionate manner.

**Self-control.** (εγκρατεια) Enkrateia (self-control) has reference to restraining passions and appetites. By concluding the list with self-control, Paul highlighted the importance of discipline and active submission of one’s will to the Holy Spirit in order to bear fruit. We also acknowledge our inability to produce the fruit of the Spirit on our own, regardless of how hard we try. Self-control is the ability to keep one’s desires in check. This was a characteristic widely admired in Paul’s time, but not widely practiced any more than it is now. Coming at the end of Paul’s list, this term reminds us that with the Spirit’s many positive impulses, our desires no longer become the basis for selfish, destructive thoughts and actions ([2 Peter 1:5–7](#)). Self-control was one of the virtues most emphasized by philosophers and respected in Roman society. Philosophers often taught that the wise needed no law to regulate them, because their virtue itself was a law. Paul says that people of the Spirit fulfill the moral intent of the law (5:14) by means of the Spirit guiding their lives.

## Application

Scripture presents Christ as the fulfillment of the law and the embodiment of grace, providing liberation from sin and death. According to Paul’s explanation in this chapter, His redemptive work empowers believers to lead lives guided by the Spirit. Through a clear understanding of our identity in Christ and by embracing the freedom He provides, we can achieve genuine spiritual growth and transformation, thereby enhancing our capacity to love and serve others effectively.

If you’ve been struggling with feelings of anxiety or stress, focus on cultivating peace through prayer. Dedicate a few moments each day to pray, lifting up your worries to God and inviting His peace into your life. Join a local community group or Bible study where you can find support, encouragement, and accountability from fellow believers to help you grow in your faith and walk closely with God.

## Discussion Questions

1. How did Paul contrast legalists and true believers? ([5:5](#))
2. What are the side effects of trying to be saved by keeping the Law?
3. What happens to a Christian who is under the control of the Holy Spirit? ([5:22–23](#))

4. How much should we rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and power in our lives?
5. How can a person cultivate the character qualities of the Holy Spirit in his or her life?
6. What can you do this week to nurture the character of the Holy Spirit in your life?

# Lesson Six: Freedom to Serve

## Bible Passage: [Galatians 6](#)

**Big Idea:** Our freedom in Christ empowers us to live selflessly, engaging in acts of love and service that not only transform our own lives but also uplift our community, mirroring the love of Christ in every relationship and interaction.

## Opening Thoughts

Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians by demonstrating how freedom in Christ positively impacts our relationships. He explains that believers who live by the Spirit are liberated from selfishness and are empowered to love others selflessly. As believers cultivate the fruits of the Spirit, they become increasingly capable of supporting fellow believers in their personal growth. Paul also advises against growing weary in doing good, assuring that such actions will ultimately be rewarded by the Lord. He emphasizes that this freedom is a result of one's relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Bear Each Other's Burdens

### [Galatians 6:1–5](#)

*<sup>1</sup> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.*

People sometimes say that the church can be like an army that harms its own injured members. There is often a tendency within the church to judge or criticize others when they make mistakes. [Galatians 6:1](#) encourages believers to gently restore those who have fallen into sin. Instead of condemning, we should offer grace, understanding, and support to anyone who stumbles. The church is called to cultivate a community where empathy and restoration are valued, remembering that everyone needs God's grace and forgiveness.

Paul uses a hypothetical example to illustrate his point: imagine a believer who unintentionally falls into sin. The term "caught" suggests the act wasn't planned ahead of time. In such situations, those who are spiritually mature should help restore the person gently—much like mending a net or resetting a broken bone. Just as a broken bone requires careful handling, so too does restoring someone who has stumbled in faith. This gentle approach reflects the same spirit mentioned among the fruit of the Spirit in [Galatians 5](#).

Responding with harshness or strict legalism only worsens matters, whereas kindness and grace can aid in true restoration. It's worth considering how we would hope others respond if we were the ones in need of grace.

Some believers in Galatia saw themselves as highly spiritual and self-reliant, believing they didn't need help from their peers. Paul warns against this attitude, reminding them that pride can lead to personal downfalls. Therefore, he encourages ongoing self-examination to guard against arrogance.

In a culture that values self-reliance, it's easy to feel as though we must carry our burdens alone. Yet Paul, in [Gal 6:4-5](#), assures us that seeking help is acceptable. Confiding in a trusted friend or church leader when facing struggles allows others to support you. By embracing vulnerability, not only do we share our burdens, but we also foster deeper connections within the Christian community.

## Sow Seeds of Goodness

### [Galatians 6:6-10](#)

*<sup>6</sup> Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Paul builds on his message about supporting one another, emphasizing the importance of caring for the pastor. He makes it clear: if your pastor nurtures you spiritually, you should support him materially. Those who receive teaching from the Word of God ought to be willing to provide for their teachers, highlighting the church's responsibility to look after its pastor.

To explain further, Paul uses the agricultural analogy of sowing and reaping. Our harvest reflects what we plant—if we invest in selfish desires, we reap corruption, but if we strive to become more like Jesus, the outcome is eternal life. For example, every time we dwell on grudges, nurse grievances, cultivate impure thoughts, or indulge in self-pity, we are sowing seeds for the flesh. The more we do so, the less self-control we possess, making it easier for negative influences to move us away from godly things.

However, the opposite also holds true: as we live by the Spirit ([Gal 5:16](#)), are led and filled by the Spirit ([Gal 5:18](#)), and continue in Christ's word ([Jn 15:7](#)), we gradually grow to be more like Jesus. Paul reminds us in [Romans 12:1-2](#) not to conform to the patterns of this world but to be changed through a renewed mind—a renewal that happens as we plant spiritual seeds within ourselves.

Paul urges believers not to lose heart in doing good, much like a farmer faithfully tending crops. With patience, those who consistently sow good seeds will eventually witness a plentiful harvest. When you feel discouraged from doing good—especially when results are slow or thanks are lacking—refocus on serving with a Christ-like perspective. Seek to honor God rather than crave approval from others. Draw strength from Scripture's promises, holding onto the assurance that your efforts for the Lord always have purpose.

## Boast in the Cross Alone

### Galatians 6:11–18

<sup>11</sup> See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup> For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. <sup>14</sup> But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup> And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. <sup>17</sup> From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

As Paul approaches the conclusion of his letter to the Galatians, he personally takes up the pen from his secretary to write the final remarks in his own handwriting. This action was likely intended to underscore the authenticity of his authorship and the significance of his message.

Rather than ending with his customary personal acknowledgements, Paul reiterates his central argument throughout the letter, contrasting the improper intentions of legalists with those of genuine faith. He underscores the necessity of living by the Spirit rather than the flesh, stressing that meaningful Christian life entails crucifying the flesh along with its passions and desires and embracing a renewed existence in Christ.

It is possible for an individual to fulfill all legal requirements, yet without inner transformation, such efforts are inconsequential. Paul advocates for a cross -centered rather than law-centered life, asserting that his only cause for boasting lies in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ([Gal 6:14](#)). Whether one is circumcised or not is immaterial; salvation and new creation are achieved solely through faith in the cross of Jesus.

### What characterizes a Cross-Centered Life?

- A Cross-Centered life is marked by humility rather than pride, recognizing that salvation cannot be earned by human effort.
- A Cross-Centered life boasts exclusively in the accomplishments of Jesus Christ on the cross, placing confidence in His saving work instead of one's own ([Gal 6:14a](#)).
- A Cross-Centered life finds true value in the things of Christ, as opposed to worldly pursuits, thereby acknowledging the primacy of what is eternal ([Gal 6:14b](#)).
- A Cross-Centered life prioritizes internal spiritual transformation over adherence to external rituals, affirming that salvation stems from faith in Christ's work and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, not merely following rules ([Gal 6:15-16](#)).
- A Cross-Centered life seeks to please Christ rather than people, with Paul serving as an example of enduring hardship for faithfulness to Christ over human approval ([Gal 6:17-18](#)).

The law alone is insufficient to transform lives, as it emphasizes external conformity. In contrast, the grace of Christ enacts change from within. When confronted with life's challenges, the Cross-Centered Life encourages reflection on Christ's sacrifice and reliance on the strength found in His victory.

## Application

Maintaining spiritual focus can be challenging amid daily distractions. Galatians 6 encourages individuals to cultivate their spiritual well-being. Make it a goal this week to set aside a specific time every day for prayer and thoughtful reading of scripture.

Paul reminds us that it is important to provide support to individuals experiencing persistent challenges with sin. When observing someone in the congregation facing such difficulties, one should approach them with sensitivity and understanding. Assistance and encouragement should be offered, emphasizing that they are not isolated in their struggles. Demonstrating genuine care and compassion serves as an authentic representation of Christ's character.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the responsibility of church members toward their Pastors and Staff? ([6:6](#))
2. What responsibility do believers have toward each other? ([6:10](#))
3. What did Paul say about helping a Christian overtaken by sin? ([6:1](#))
4. What is the best approach to helping a Christian brother or sister caught in sin?
5. What encourages you to keep going in Christian service even when you feel like giving up?

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