
Galatians
STANDING FIRM IN
-FREEDOM-

Galatians: Standing Firm in Freedom
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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version. Printed in the United States of America.

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My goal with this commentary on Galatians is to offer a theological, pastoral, and practical exposition of the Apostle Paul's urgent appeal to the churches of Galatia. Paul is contending for the very heart of the gospel, confronting not only theological error but the spiritual drift that leads believers from grace into spiritual slavery. In Paul's day, the gospel of Jesus Christ was under siege—distorted by legalism and threatened by false teaching. As we will see through our study, the same struggles remain in our day.

Galatians is a passionate call back to the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. It's a pastoral plea to stay anchored in the gospel and resist any and all counterfeits. In this commentary, I've sought to walk verse-by-verse through Paul's urgent message, helping us understand the original context, but also applying it to our everyday lives.

I wrote this commentary with the church in mind—for pastors who preach, leaders who teach, and everyday Christians who long to stay rooted in the gospel. My prayer is that this resource would help make the text come alive, strengthen your faith, and call you deeper into the joy, freedom, and the identity we have as sons and daughters of God.

So, whether you're a pastor, small group leader, or disciple of Jesus hungry for truth, may your affections for Jesus be stirred, may you be grounded in grace, and be reminded that because you are in Christ you are no longer a slave—you are a son or daughter. Don't go back. Don't trade your inheritance. Stand firm in the freedom Jesus died to give you.

-Pastor Al Johnson

HOW TO USE *Study Guide*

To help you better know and apply God's Word in practical ways, we create content like this Galatians Commentary and Study Guide. We do this because, at The Well, we believe that a life of knowing, loving, and walking with Jesus leads to practical and visible changes in our lives. I hope that you would not only know God more, but that you would also find that walking with him daily is essential, life-giving, and transformative.

Each chapter consists of an entire verse-by-verse commentary, contemporary application, study, and group questions for the corresponding chapter in Galatians.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

When setting out to write this study material, I wanted to create a resource that helped make Galatians accessible to the everyday Christian. The commentary section will help you understand what is happening in each verse, making the difficult passages simple. By breaking down each verse, readers can uncover both context and clarity in the text. My goal is for you to understand the heart of the Apostle Paul's words for the churches in Galatia, and how they can equip you with knowledge that empowers you to live out your love for Jesus more effectively in your daily life.

Contemporary Application

While you will certainly find breadcrumbs of application dropped throughout the commentary, the application section of each chapter is designed to make a particular point for today's Christians. The benefit of the application section following the commentary lies in its ability to bridge the gap between ancient texts and contemporary life. While understanding the historical and theological context of Scripture is crucial, the application section translates these insights into practical guidance for everyday living. It challenges readers to consider how biblical principles can inform their choices, relationships, and spiritual journeys today. By offering concrete examples, this section encourages personal reflection and action.

Study Guide

The Study Guide portion of each chapter is broken into two parts. The first part is for personal journaling and note taking. The second part contains a list of various questions to prompt group discussion. The group leader can choose whichever questions they think are the most relevant for the people in their group. Whether you're leading a mealtime conversation with your family or opening up the discussion with your small group, these questions will hopefully encourage everyone to open their Bibles and grow in their love for Jesus together.

Introduction TO GALATIANS

At the heart of this letter to the Galatians is an unapologetic declaration that there is no other gospel (Gal. 1:6–9). The good news of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is not one of many paths—it is the only path. To distort the gospel is to sever oneself from the grace of God (Gal. 5:4). This is why Galatians opens not with a gentle greeting, but with a spiritual alarm bell. Paul marvels that the Galatians are "so quickly deserting" the one who called them in grace for a different gospel—which, he says, is no gospel at all.

The message of Galatians is clear: there is only one gospel, and it is the power of God for salvation. To abandon it is to lose everything, yet to cling to it is to find true freedom, life, and joy.

The Galatians were being taught that believing in Jesus wasn't enough. They needed to add something, do something, or contribute something to ensure their faith was real. That same false gospel is alive today in churches, in pulpits, in small groups, and in the hearts of believers who genuinely love God but feel they must prove their worth to stay in his love. False

gospels show up in all kinds of ways and that is why the book of Galatians still matters for us today.

Historical Background

Paul's first missionary journey, recorded in Acts 13–14, marks the beginning of the gospel's expansion into Gentile territory and sets the stage for his letter to the Galatians. Sent out by the church in Antioch of Syria (Acts 13:1–3), Paul and Barnabas traveled through Cyprus and then into the southern region of the Roman province of Galatia, planting churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. These cities were culturally diverse and spiritually pluralistic, with both Jewish synagogues and pagan idol worship. In each city, Paul preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, resulting in both revival and resistance. Many came to faith in Christ, but Paul also faced intense persecution, including being stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:19). These newly planted churches, filled primarily with Gentile believers, were established through hardship, prayer, and the clear preaching of the gospel of grace. It is to these very churches that Paul later writes the letter of Galatians, alarmed that those who had received the gospel with joy were now being influenced by teachers insisting on adherence to the Mosaic Law (Gal. 1:6–9, 3:1–3).

Date & Authorship

The Apostle Paul is universally recognized as the author of Galatians, both by the early church and modern scholarship. The letter bears all the marks of Paul's distinct voice; it is bold, theological, pastoral, and deeply personal. He identifies himself directly in the opening verse (Gal. 1:1) and defends his apostolic authority throughout the letter.

As for the date, Galatians is one of Paul's earliest epistles, written between AD 48–49, shortly after his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) and before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Why was Galatians written?

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians in response to a theological crisis. After Paul had preached the gospel of grace and established churches in Galatia, false teachers—commonly referred to as Judaizers—entered the scene. These men were teaching that faith in Jesus was not enough; Gentile believers also needed to be circumcised and follow the law of Moses to be truly saved (Gal. 2:3–5, 5:2–6; Acts 15:1).

Paul sees this not as a minor doctrinal difference, but as a complete desertion of the gospel (Gal. 1:6–9). He writes with urgency and passion to correct their theology, restore their understanding of the gospel, and call them back to freedom in Christ.

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." — Galatians 5:1

Key themes in Galatians

Paul addresses several crucial themes throughout the letter:

Justification by Faith Alone (Gal. 2:16; 3:11)
At the heart of Galatians is Paul's declaration that sinners are made right with God not by keeping the law, but by trusting in Jesus Christ. Justification—a

legal declaration of righteousness—is received through faith alone. No amount of religious performance, moral striving, or obedience to the Mosaic law can earn God's approval. Only through Christ's finished work can anyone be justified. Paul hammers this point repeatedly throughout to guard the gospel from distortion and to free believers from the snare of false teaching.

The Superiority of the Gospel (Gal. 1:11–12)
Paul preaches the gospel he received directly from Jesus Christ through divine revelation. This underscores the authority and reliability of Paul's message. In a world full of competing messages and distorted gospels, Paul's insistence reminds us that the true gospel stands alone. It is superior because it is God's message, not man's. To believe anything else, Paul warns, is to abandon the only message that can truly save (Gal. 1:6–9).

Freedom in Christ (Gal. 5:1–6)
Paul preaches the gospel he received directly from Jesus Christ through divine revelation. This underscores the authority and reliability of Paul's message. In a world full of competing messages and distorted gospels, Paul's insistence reminds us that the true gospel stands alone. It is superior because it is God's message, not man's. To believe anything else, Paul warns, is to abandon the only message that can truly save (Gal. 1:6–9).

The Role of the Law (Gal. 3:24–25)
Old Testament law had a temporary and preparatory role. It acted like a guardian or tutor, guiding God's people until the arrival of Christ. The law revealed sin but could never redeem anyone from it. Its purpose was to point

towards the coming Messiah, who alone could fulfill its demands. Now that Christ has come, believers are no longer under the supervision of the law, they are under grace.

Union with Christ (Gal. 3:26–28)
All believers are sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is through faith in Jesus alone that we are united with him and become full members of God's family. In Christ, we are clothed with his righteousness and enjoy the same status before the Father as sons and heirs according to promise. Union with Christ is the basis for both our identity and our unity as the people of God.

Walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–26)
The Christian life isn't about trying harder in our own strength, it's about resting in Christ and walking by the power of the Spirit. Paul contrast the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, showing that real transformation flows from communion with God. As we yield to the Spirit's leadership, he produces in us love, joy, peace, patience, and all the marks of a new life in Christ. The path of sanctification and holiness for the Christian is one that is Spirit-empowered, grace-filled, and Christ-centered.

A Father's Heart
Paul writes with a father's heart. The churches in Galatia were not just congregations he visited, they were churches he helped birth through gospel proclamation, personal sacrifice, and Spirit-empowered perseverance. His ministry there was marked by both fruit and suffering. He was violently opposed, rejected, and nearly executed (Acts 14:19). Yet the gospel advanced, and many came to faith in Jesus.

Paul was a spiritual father to these churches. In Galatians 4:19, he writes, "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you," revealing his deep love and paternal care. He had labored among them with the heart of a father, longing not just for their initial conversion, but for their maturity in Christ. As we read and study this letter, we should keep this in mind and let the weight of Paul's burden shape our own hearts. As Paul contends for the Galatians' freedom, know that he's contending for ours too.

No Other Gospel

GALATIANS 1:1-10

Commentary

1:1

While the exact order in which the apostle Paul wrote his thirteen books of the New Testament is uncertain, the majority view holds that his letter to the churches of the Galatians is likely the earliest (Sproul 2022, 1). Paul writes not by the authority of man but by the authority of Jesus Christ. It was God the Father who raised Christ from the dead and gave him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). From the Lord Jesus, Paul received his commissioning as an apostle.

Throughout Paul's ministry, many questioned his apostleship because, prior to his conversion, he was a fierce opponent of Jesus and his church. Thus, Paul's aim is clear: it was Jesus who saved and commissioned him, and it is through the power and call of God that he writes to God's people in Galatia.

1:2

Paul, along with a band of other ministry leaders, writes to the churches of Galatia. Notice first that Paul loved to be part of a team. This is consistently seen throughout Scripture, both in his letters to fellow ministry associates and in his expressed desire for the companionship of men such as Timothy, Titus, and Mark.

Here, Paul and his team have a message for the churches in Galatia. It is not entirely clear which specific churches he is addressing. Galatia is not a city but a region in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). John Stott suggests that this letter is addressed to the churches in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—cities where Paul had planted churches (Stott 1998, 5). Though the exact nature of how these churches functioned together is unknown, the letter reveals Paul's urgent desire to address the pressing issues they faced.

1:3

In typical fashion, Paul opens his letter with a formal greeting, extending grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Greetings like this can often be overlooked because of their familiarity. However, the more one studies the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, the clearer it becomes that Paul labored in ministry solely by the power of God's grace—and he commends us to do the same (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9).

1:4–5

Furthermore, Paul reminds us of the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus willingly gave himself for us—to die in our place for our sins—and thus to deliver us from our sins and from the evil of this present age. This good news both saves and sustains us as Christians. We never graduate from the gospel. It is from this good news, and for the sake of keeping believers tethered to it, that Paul writes.

1:6

Paul's tone quickly shifts. His words are sharp, pointed, and, some have suggested, even angry. He begins by expressing astonishment that these churches have so quickly deviated from the grace of Jesus and embraced a different gospel. This is the reason for his writing, and a legitimate reason to be upset.

There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ! There is no other name by which one can be saved!

Paul's words carry a sense of urgency but also a striking simplicity. Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible completed in the late fourth century AD), suggests that Paul's aim was to make himself comprehensible even to the foolish (Jerome 2010, 58). Paul spoke plainly so that everyone could understand.

1:7

There is no other gospel. This is a truth that even contemporary Christians must settle firmly in their

hearts. In a modern world marked by pluralism, moral relativism, cultural drift, and widespread apostasy, guarding the gospel is not optional—it is essential.

Even in the first century, the gospel was under attack. Paul makes it clear that false teachers were actively distorting the gospel of Christ, spreading spiritual confusion, and leading people away from the truth. The Greek verb translated "distort" in the ESV is also rendered "pervert," meaning to alter, reverse, or change into the opposite; to twist it into something entirely different. The issue was not mere misunderstanding, but a deliberate twisting of the saving message.

Commenting on this passage, Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Paul loved the souls of men, and to tolerate spiritual poison is to aid and abet the murder of souls" (Spurgeon 2013–14, 13). Gospel distortion is not merely a theological error; it is a spiritual threat. False gospels do not simply lead people astray; they damn them to hell.

Paul's zeal for the gospel reminds us that the message of Jesus Christ must be guarded with both courage and clarity. We are not free to edit, dilute, or improve upon the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16), and to tamper with it is to tamper with the only hope of mankind.

1:8–9

Paul's speech is crystal clear and thunderously serious. He pronounces a curse—twice—on anyone who dares to preach a different gospel than the one centered on faith in

Jesus Christ alone for salvation. This includes anything that adds to, subtracts from, or distorts the message of grace through faith. Jesus plus anything—works, rituals, law, or modern ideologies—is no longer the gospel. It is a lie.

The term "accursed" is the English translation of the Greek word anathēma. It is one of the strongest and harshest verbal expressions of condemnation. One commentator suggested that this may be the most severe statement in the entire New Testament: "It does not set well on modern ears accustomed to tolerance at any price" (George 1994, 97). When it comes to judgment and the wrath of God, our modern culture tends to flee from any doctrine that even suggests such realities. Yet this is exactly what the apostle Paul evokes. The word anathēma literally means "God damn you." Paul is saying, "May God put his curse on your head. May God send you to hell if you preach any other gospel than that which comes from his Word in the New Testament" (Sproul 2022, 13).

Paul goes so far as to say, "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." Think about the weight of that statement. Paul is not only excluding false teachers but also includes himself and even angels in this warning. No one, not even the most seemingly spiritual or authoritative figure, is allowed to alter the gospel. The message is not ours to manipulate; it is God's to proclaim.

He then repeats himself in verse 9. He says it twice because of how emphatic and eternally significant this issue is. A false gospel does not merely mislead; it condemns. It does not offer life; it destroys it.

This is a moment where theological precision and pastoral urgency collide. For Paul, guarding the gospel is not about winning arguments; it is about saving souls. Eternity is at stake.

1:10

Paul anticipates the obvious pushback: "Paul, you're being too harsh!" But Paul is not seeking the approval of others. He is striving to remain faithful to the one who called him. His loyalty lies with Jesus Christ, not with the cultural elite, Christian leaders, or public opinion.

Paul's rhetorical question drives home a powerful point: if his goal were to gain applause or accommodate cultural preferences, he would have no business being a servant of Christ. The gospel, by nature, confronts sin, offends pride, and dismantles self-righteousness. It has never been, and will never be, popular in a world that worships anyone other than the resurrected Jesus.

Paul could have avoided conflict, but gospel compromise always comes at the cost of gospel power. Pastorally, this verse is a wake-up call for modern Christians and church leaders. Are we shaping our message to win approval? Are we softening the truth to avoid backlash? Paul reminds us that the call to serve Christ means crucifying our desire to be liked. The fear of man and the fear of God cannot coexist; whichever rules us will control the message.

Application of Galatians 1:1-10

When I was in college, there was a particular organization on campus that claimed to be Christian, but their

evangelism strategy primarily focused on converting other Christians. Strange, right? They targeted what they considered "low-hanging fruit"—professing believers—and invited them to multi-week Bible studies. Many of these believers joined small groups that began with common tenets of the Christian faith and the life of Jesus.

However, by the end of the study, these groups would begin to persuade their attendees that they were not truly saved. They used Scripture out of context to imply that believing in Jesus Christ alone was insufficient for salvation. Instead, they presented a five-step plan for salvation, insisting that each step must be completed in a specific order for a person to be truly saved. Belief in Jesus was part of their message—but it was not enough. In their eyes, there was more work to be done.

I encountered this group when they began targeting a friend of mine, someone I had personally led to Jesus. My friend told me about the Bible studies he was attending, expressing confusion and doubt about his salvation. He was starting to question whether salvation really came through Christ alone. The studies seemed persuasive to him. As a new believer, he couldn't yet recognize that he was being led astray.

Indignant, I confronted the leaders of this group, asking to attend one of the Bible studies with my friend so I could hear for myself what was being taught. They refused, insisting that my friend would be meeting privately with two of their leaders for what they called "discipleship." Knowing they were preaching another gospel, I passionately opposed them. I challenged their leaders to contend with

me about their teaching, telling them plainly that their message contradicted the gospel revealed in Scripture.

This led to a heated debate in a Starbucks on campus, where I refuted their claims, exposed their misuse of Scripture, and boldly proclaimed the raw, unadulterated gospel. Let's just say things got intense. At one point, I told them to "go to hell" with their teaching—because that's exactly where a false gospel leads. When they accused me of not being Christlike, I reminded them of Galatians 1:8–9.

I was fired up and consumed with zeal because dear friends of mine were being targeted by false teachers and led astray. It is with this same kind of zeal that the apostle Paul writes the opening section of Galatians. As Luther put it, "Here Paul is breathing fire. His zeal is so fervent that he almost begins to curse the angels themselves" (George 1994, 97–98).

There Is No Other Gospel

The Bible is clear: there is no other gospel. It is a grievous offense to alter it in any way. The gospel—literally "good news"—is the message of God's gracious plan to save sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a divine announcement rooted in historical events, centered on the person and work of Christ, and offered freely by grace through faith alone.

The Bad News

God is holy, sovereign, and the Creator of all things. He made humanity in his image to know him, love him, and reflect his glory. As the righteous Judge,

God demands perfect obedience to his law and will punish sin (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 6:3; Hab. 1:13; Rom. 1:18–20).

All of humanity has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. From Adam onward, every human being has inherited a sinful nature and chosen rebellion against God. Sin separates us from God, bringing spiritual death, bondage, and eternal condemnation (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:10–12, 23; Eph. 2:1–3).

The Good News

But God, in his mercy, sent his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, into the world. Jesus lived a sinless life, perfectly fulfilling God's law. He died a substitutionary death on the cross, taking upon himself the wrath of God that sinners deserved. He rose bodily from the grave on the third day, conquering sin, death, and Satan (John 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:24–26; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

This salvation is offered as a free gift. Sinners are not saved by works, moral improvement, religious rituals, or personal merit, but solely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith means trusting in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Salvation is a gift of grace, not a wage earned (Eph. 2:8–9; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 4:5).

At the moment of faith, the believer is united with Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, justified before God, adopted into his family, and given new spiritual life. The Spirit empowers believers to live in obedience, grow in holiness, and bear fruit that glorifies God (Rom. 8:1–11; Gal. 5:16–25; 1 Cor. 6:19).

The Required Response

The gospel demands a response: repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Repentance is turning from sin to God. Faith is trusting Christ alone for salvation; a wholehearted surrender to him as Lord and Savior (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9–10).

Those who repent and believe this gospel are forgiven, reconciled to God, and granted eternal life with him. Those who reject it remain under God's judgment and will face eternal separation in hell. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new (John 3:16–18; 2 Thess. 1:8–10; Rev. 21:1–5).

The Only Gospel That Saves

God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Any message that adds to or subtracts from this truth, whether it is works-based salvation, moralism, legalism, lawlessness, or cultural distortion, is a false gospel.

And so, as Paul makes clear in Galatians 1:8–9: "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."

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Apostolic Authority: Why does Paul emphasize that his apostleship came not from man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father?

Grace and Peace: Paul opens with a greeting of "grace and peace." How are these central to the Christian life? Why might these familiar greetings often be overlooked, and how can we recapture their depth and meaning?

The Work of Christ: What does Paul emphasize about the nature of Christ's sacrifice in verse 4? What does it mean that Jesus gave himself "to deliver us from the present evil age"? Why is it important to remember that we never "graduate" from the gospel?

A Different Gospel: Why is Paul so shocked and angry that the Galatians are turning to a different gospel? What are some modern examples of "different gospels" being preached today? The Greek word for "distort" means to twist or pervert. What are subtle ways the gospel can be distorted today?

The Danger of False Teaching: Why does Paul use such strong language ("accursed") to describe those who preach a different gospel? Paul repeats himself in these verses. What does this repetition tell us about the seriousness of the issue? How does Paul's warning apply to us today regarding spiritual influencers, Christian leaders, or movements?

Fear of Man vs. Fear of God: What does Paul say about the motivation behind his message? Who is he trying to please? Why is the fear of man so dangerous when it comes to preaching or living out the gospel? In what ways are you tempted to soften the gospel in order to avoid conflict or gain approval?

Personal Application: Have you ever encountered a group or teaching that distorted the gospel? How did you respond? Why is it easier to be passionate about false teaching "out there" but more hesitant to confront it when it affects people close to us? What would it look like for you to guard the gospel with both clarity and courage in your current context?

The Gospel Message: In your own words, how would you explain the gospel as Paul defines it in this passage? What are the key dangers of adding to or subtracting from the gospel? Why is "Jesus plus anything" no longer the gospel?

Divine Calling

GALATIANS 1:11-24

Commentary

1:11

The church in Galatia had two competing and influential voices in its life. One was leading them to trust in another gospel, and the other was the apostle Paul, who was trying to correct, lead, and guide them in the truth. Paul's opponents were a group called the Judaizers—Jewish "Christians" in Paul's day who insisted that Gentile believers had to adopt Jewish customs, especially circumcision, dietary laws, and observing the Mosaic law, in order to be fully accepted by God. They taught that faith in Jesus wasn't enough; you needed Jesus plus the law to be truly saved. This teaching Paul had already called anathema (accursed).

The Judaizers were dangerous because they didn't deny Jesus outright; they added to him. In doing so, they undermined the gospel of grace, turning it from good news into religious slavery. Paul would later call their message a return to bondage (Gal. 4:9). At its core, Paul's conflict

with the Judaizers was about the very heart of Christianity: is salvation by grace through faith alone, or not?

Therefore, to lay a stronger foundation for why the Galatians should trust him and not the Judaizers, Paul goes on to describe how he didn't receive the gospel from man, but directly from God.

1:12

Paul didn't go to a Christian seminary, nor was he taught the gospel by the other apostles. Rather, he received the gospel directly from Jesus Christ himself. Jesus showed up and saved Paul in Acts 9, and it's one of the most dramatic conversion stories in all the Bible.

At the time, Paul, also known as Saul of Tarsus, was a violent persecutor of the early church. Saul wasn't seeking to know or trust Jesus; he was trying to destroy Jesus' people. Armed with authority from the high priest, he was making his way to Damascus to arrest Christians when Jesus appeared. As Saul approached the city, a blinding light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4–5).

Paul came face-to-face with the risen Christ. He was blinded for three days, led into the city by hand, and eventually healed and baptized by a believer named Ananias, whom God had sent.

1:13

This letter was likely written about twenty years after Paul's conversion, so the story of his transformation would have still been fresh in the minds of the original Galatian audience. One commentator notes the familiar tone with which Paul addresses the Galatians: "He had been their pastor and their father in the faith; they loved him deeply …" (Sproul 2022, 22). They knew about his conversion story and had witnessed his faithful ministry, yet they were still so easily swayed by false doctrine. Here, Paul reminds them not just that he was a Jewish convert, but "why he left Judaism and why the Galatians, who are reverting to what he had left, should not embrace it" (Sproul 2022, 22).

1:14

Paul wasn't nominal in his pursuit of Judaism. He was zealous. He was passionately advancing in knowledge, influence, and leadership. Paul is emphasizing the depth of his devotion to the Jewish faith, which he has now left behind (Moo 2013, 100). He wants the Galatians to know that he is well-versed, educated, and fully aware of the appeal of Judaism, for he had been where they are, but to the highest degree. Paul's conversion doesn't just make him trustworthy; it makes him precisely the right authority to speak to the Galatians about the issues they are facing.

1:15–16

What is so striking here is Paul's understanding of the grace of God. He traces God's divine call on his life back to before he was born. Our salvation and calling aren't something we

earn or stumble into on our own—it is God's initiative from start to finish. Paul had been a violent persecutor of the church, but none of that disqualified him. Why? Because God's grace isn't based on human merit, effort, or works. The Galatians were being swayed away from God's grace toward works-based salvation. Paul emphasizes the great news of the gospel: your good works cannot save you, but neither does the horrendous nature of your sin prevent you from receiving the salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

Paul explains that before he was born, before he had done anything right or wrong, God had already chosen him, set him apart, and appointed him to preach Christ. Yet for many years, Paul lived contrary to the gospel and was zealous in doing so. He even killed Christians, seeking to destroy Christ's church. But his past sin didn't keep him from the grace of God.

The same is true for every believer: your past doesn't nullify God's plan. If you are in Christ, it's because God called you by grace—not because you earned it, but because Jesus did, for you.

1:17-19

After Jesus showed up on the road to Damascus and saved Paul, he didn't immediately seek validation from the apostles in Jerusalem. Instead, he went to Arabia for a period of solitude, spiritual formation, likely deep reflection, and to learn from the Lord Jesus. The point Paul is making here is that he didn't receive the gospel from Peter, James, or John, but directly from Jesus. Paul is not

a disciple of the apostles; he is an apostle himself, called and commissioned by the Lord Jesus, just like the others.

What's especially noteworthy about this time in Arabia is how it reflects a pattern in God's dealings with his people. God often pulls people away to prepare them for their calling.

Before Paul was sent to the Gentiles, God took him to Arabia for a season of preparation. Paul remained in Arabia for three years before he finally went up to Jerusalem. This three-year gap emphasizes that his understanding of the gospel was formed independently of the Jerusalem apostles. Therefore, his visit to Jerusalem was relational, not educational.

Paul also mentions that the only other apostle he saw was James, the Lord's brother, indicating that he had limited contact with the established church leaders.

1:20

Then, almost as if anticipating accusations of dishonesty, Paul includes a kind of oath in verse 20. His tone here is both serious and pastoral. He is guarding the integrity of the gospel by defending the story of how he received it. Moreover, Luther notes that Paul is presupposing the false teachers' accusations that he might not be telling the truth, and thus he adds an oath: "If this happened to the apostles, it is hardly surprising that it happens to us today" (Luther 1998, 65).

1:21–24

As Paul brings this chapter to a close, he further explains that after his brief visit to Jerusalem, he went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia and remained largely unknown to the churches in Judea. Paul's radical transformation—from persecutor to preacher—became a powerful testimony to God's grace. Even though the Christians in Judea hadn't met Paul personally, they recognized God's work in him and praised God for the miracle of his salvation.

Application of Galatians 1:11-24

The authority and teaching of the apostle Paul are still under attack in our day, just as they were in his. Over the past fifteen or more years, I have repeatedly heard people seek to undermine Paul's New Testament writings, criticizing him as misogynistic and outdated, attempting to dismiss or reinterpret his teaching to fit modern sensibilities. I've seen progressive "Christians" try to pit Paul's teaching against Jesus, suggesting that they taught two different things. I've heard it said that Paul hijacked Jesus' simple message of love and turned it into a rigid system of theology. I've heard countless dismissals of large sections of Paul's writings, from subjects like gender and marriage to large theological topics like sin, justification, the wrath of God, and substitutionary atonement. There have been many times when I've quoted the Bible, and someone has replied, "Oh well, that's Paul," implying Paul misunderstood Jesus, or that what Paul taught was merely his own invention. This is quite similar to the type of opposition Paul faced in Galatia.

Paul's Authority Still Under Attack

In modern deconstruction movements, Paul is often treated as a source of "toxic theology." His call to holiness, submission to Christ, church discipline, and doctrinal clarity are seen as oppressive, rigid, or power-driven. This has led to the selective acceptance of Scripture, where Paul's letters are ignored or edited in practice. In addition, some "Christian" circles question whether Paul should even be considered on the same level as the other apostles. They treat his letters as pastoral opinions rather than the authoritative Word of God. This undermines both the canon of Scripture and the doctrine of inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16).

When we pick and choose which parts of Paul's New Testament writings we will adhere to and which we will reject, we strip his epistles of their Spirit-inspired weight and relegate them to a kind of optional commentary, subject to modern critique, revision, or outright dismissal. Instead of reading Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ—called, commissioned, and carried along by the Holy Spirit—some treat him as just a Christian thinker with culturally bound biases, particularly when it comes to topics like sexuality, gender roles, authority, and sin.

If Paul's writings are optional or inferior, then the Bible is no longer one cohesive revelation from God but a fragmented collection of some divinely inspired words mixed with human conjecture. If this were the case, how could we even know which was which? This leads to a slippery slope where mankind becomes the final authority, picking and choosing which parts of the Bible to accept based on personal preference or cultural norms.

Undermining the Gospel Itself

Just like in the Galatian churches, what's ultimately at stake is not merely Paul's credibility, but the gospel itself. Paul was entrusted by Jesus himself to articulate the riches of grace, the doctrine of justification by faith, the mystery of the church, and the hope of resurrection. To disregard Paul is to discard some of the clearest, Spirit-breathed explanations of what Jesus accomplished and how the church is to live in light of it.

Paul's letters aren't secondary; they are Scripture. To treat them otherwise is to tear a hole in the fabric of biblical authority. The same spirit that attacked Paul in Galatia is still alive, challenging the sufficiency of grace, questioning the authority of Scripture, and distorting the gospel. But just like Paul, the church must contend for the faith and refuse to be swayed by another gospel.

The reason Paul is so often attacked is because the overwhelming evidence suggests he is legitimate. Jesus really called him, saved him, and sent him to plant churches and write books of the Bible. If you were trying to fabricate a religious movement, Paul is the last person you'd choose to put at the center of it. He was a violent persecutor of the church, a zealot breathing threats and committing murder against Christians, and a rising star in Judaism.

And then Jesus showed up. Not in a dream. Not through a secondhand story. But visibly, audibly, and personally. In Acts 9, Paul was literally knocked to the ground by the risen Christ and blinded by his glory. He didn't convert because he lost an argument; he converted because he encountered the living Jesus. That's not the profile of a fraud or

manipulator. Rather than exacting vengeance (which was his right), Jesus gave Paul mercy and grace. A sworn enemy of Jesus and his people became a child of God.

Paul was a man undone by grace. He saw that there was more mercy in Jesus than there was sin in him. His testimony laid the foundation for his ministry, but more importantly, it served as an example to the world: you can't out-sin the grace of God.

Paul's Ministry: Marked by Suffering and Faithfulness

After his conversion, Paul didn't run a public relations campaign to smooth over his past. He didn't seek affirmation from the Jerusalem apostles to validate his message. He went into the wilderness of Arabia to be trained by Jesus so he could continue to accurately preach Christ, suffer like Christ, and plant churches for Christ. Paul's ministry would be marked by suffering. He was beaten, imprisoned, stoned, hated, and ultimately martyred. Yet the core of his message was always this: Jesus Christ is enough. Salvation is by grace, through faith, apart from works of the law. This is the very message Satan does not want going out to the world. So, from the beginning of Paul's ministry to the present, there has been an all-out demonic assault to keep Paul's ministry contained.

If you want to undermine the gospel of grace, you have to go after Paul. But since his life and ministry are so obviously marked by sincerity, sacrifice, and supernatural calling, the only option left is to discredit him—by twisting his words, attacking his character, or

suggesting that his letters are merely opinions shaped by whatever cultural bias is fashionable at the moment. You have to make Paul out to be a misogynist, a legalist, a supremacist, or a relic of a less-enlightened age. In other words, you can't win by engaging the Paul of Scripture. You have to reinvent him or cancel him.

And that's exactly what's happening today. In our cultural moment, people don't want a gospel that calls them to repent, die to self, and submit to Christ. So Paul becomes the punching bag. He's not attacked because he's unclear, but because he's too clear. He doesn't bend to culture, affirm the lusts of the flesh, or water down the cross of Christ. He speaks with the authority of Christ and calls everyone—Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, free—to one path: repentance and faith in Jesus. That's offensive to the modern mind. So people try to dismiss him as outdated, harsh, patriarchal, or out of step with "the real Jesus"—as if Jesus and Paul are somehow in conflict.

Stand Firm in the Gospel

If you preach the Bible and don't edit it, if you stand where Paul stood and say what he said, you too will be maligned. You will be misunderstood, misrepresented, and mistreated. They will go after your teaching, and when that doesn't work, they'll go after your character. Just like Paul. Just like Jesus.

Faithful gospel preaching has always drawn fire because light exposes darkness, and truth confronts lies. In an age that exalts tolerance over truth, clarity is seen as cruelty, and conviction as arrogance.

So if you find yourself under attack for standing with Paul and preaching the Bible, take heart. You're in good company. The goal isn't to be liked—it's to be faithful. The world hated Paul because it hated Christ. And if Christ is truly in you, the same world will have the same reaction. But that's not the end of the story. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation, and the Word of God will not return void. So preach it, stand firm in it, and let the chips fall where they may.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Competing Voices & the True Gospel: Who were the two competing voices influencing the Galatians, and what made the Judaizers' message so dangerous? How can "Jesus + anything" be just as damaging as outright rejecting him? If you truly believed salvation is by grace through faith alone, how would that change your approach to performance, guilt, and comparison?

Paul's Conversion & Testimony: Paul claims to have received the gospel directly from Jesus. Why is this important to the authority of his message? How does Paul's background as a zealous persecutor of the church strengthen his credibility to speak against legalism? Why do you think the Galatians, who had heard Paul's story and seen his ministry, were still tempted to turn away?

Calling, Grace, and Preparation: What does Paul's description of being "set apart from birth" teach us about the sovereignty of God in salvation? How should Paul's past sins shape our view of who can be saved and used by God? What are some ways God pulls people into "wilderness seasons" for preparation? Have you ever experienced that?

Apostolic Authority & Gospel Integrity: What is at stake when people begin to question or dismiss Paul's apostolic authority in the church today? Have you ever encountered someone who rejected Paul's teachings? How did you respond, or how should we respond?

Modern Application & Cultural Resistance: Why do you think Paul is under such attack in today's culture, especially in progressive circles? Why is it dangerous to treat Paul's writings as optional or merely "pastoral opinion"? What does that do to our view of the Bible as a whole?

The Cost of Faithfulness: Paul's life after conversion was marked by suffering and rejection. Why is that important to understanding his message and ministry? What can we learn from Paul about standing firm in gospel truth even when it's unpopular or costly?

CHAPTER 3

Unified By The Gospel

GALATIANS 2:1-10

Commentary

2:1

There continues to be debate on the exact timeline of this trip. Was it fourteen years after Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, or fourteen years after his conversion? We simply don't know (Sproul 2022, 32). What we do know is that after Paul and Barnabas spent more than a decade preaching the gospel, planting churches, and training Christians, they went back to Jerusalem, taking Titus with them. Think of this as an intentional moment to align with the other apostles to maintain the unity of the church.

2:2

This is more than a casual visit; it was a deliberate, Spirit-led trip, as the text says they went up because of a revelation. Paul wanted to make sure that the message

he was preaching was congruent with the other apostles. There had been growing tension over the nature of the gospel, particularly whether Gentile converts needed to follow Jewish customs. Paul wanted his readers to know that he was preaching the same gospel as the rest of the apostles. He was not doing his own thing; he was deeply invested in the integrity and unity of the church.

2 : 3

For context, the Old Testament sign of God's covenant with his people was circumcision (Gen. 17:10–14). Every Jewish male was required to be circumcised as a physical mark of belonging to God's covenant community. Jesus was circumcised according to the law (Luke 2:21), fully fulfilling the law's requirements (Matt. 5:17).

However, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the gospel began spreading beyond the borders of Israel to the Gentiles, those outside the Jewish covenant (Acts 10:44–48, 13:46–48). As Gentiles began receiving the Holy Spirit and coming to faith in Jesus, questions naturally arose about whether they should receive the Old Testament sign of the covenant.

Paul writes that Titus, a Gentile convert, had not been circumcised, and yet when Paul brought him to Jerusalem, he was fully accepted as a Christian. Paul emphasizes that even among the original apostles and early church leaders, there was no demand that Gentile believers adopt Jewish customs to be accepted by God.

2:3–4

Paul points out that all the apostles were in agreement on this issue: that circumcision was not a requirement for salvation or inclusion in the family of God (Acts 15:1–11; Rom. 4:9–12). This is because salvation is by grace through faith, not by works of the law. Circumcision, once a sign of the covenant, now has no power to justify anyone before God. In Christ, something greater has come.

Remember, Paul is writing to the churches in Galatia, where false brothers had infiltrated and were insisting that Gentile converts follow the Old Testament law to be saved. Paul's emphasis is that he and all the other leaders in Jerusalem did not agree with the Judaizers. If Titus didn't need circumcision to be saved, then neither do we need to add anything to Christ's finished work to be fully accepted by God. This is the heart of Paul's message, the gospel!

2:5

As one commentator says, "Suffice it to say here that the freedom Paul celebrated was not the privatized individualism that equates liberty with doctrinal license or moral laxity. The freedom for which Christ has set us free is a liberty grounded in 'the truth of the gospel'" (George 1994, 151).

Paul and the other leaders would never compromise the gospel. When it comes to those who oppose the gospel and edit the Scriptures or preach a false gospel, there are only two options: contend or compromise. Here, Paul makes it clear that they will stand firm so

that the truth of the gospel remains intact for others. This stand wasn't just for his own sake; it was for the Galatians and for all Gentile believers to follow.

2:6

Paul is referring to the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem, men who were widely respected and considered pillars of the early church. Yet he says their status made no difference to him, because God shows no partiality (Deut. 10:17; Acts 10:34). This is not disrespect, but rather a declaration that the gospel's authority doesn't come from man but from God (Gal. 1:1, 11–12).

Once again, Paul's point is that he did not receive his gospel from these influential men, nor did he need their validation. When he laid out the gospel he preached among the Gentiles, they had nothing to add, meaning his message was already complete, true, and aligned with what the other apostles preached.

2:7–9

Rather than opposition, Paul received fellowship. James, Peter (Cephas), and John recognized that the same God who empowered Peter to reach Jews with the gospel had also empowered Paul to reach Gentiles. Though their audiences differed, their message was the same gospel of grace.

Paul was not in competition with the other apostles. Instead, they acknowledged his calling and gave him "the right hand of fellowship." They were essentially telling Paul, "We affirm your calling. Keep it up." The apostles

stood together, preaching the same gospel, recognizing God's calling, and modeling gospel-centered partnership; a ministry given to them each by the Lord Jesus.

2:10

When the apostles affirmed Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, they added only one request: that he continue to remember the poor. Paul gladly agreed, noting that this was already on his heart. Even amid deep theological discussions about the gospel, practical love and care for others—especially the poor—remained a priority. The early church understood that preaching grace and living generously go hand in hand.

Application of Galatians 2:1-10

Up to this point, Paul has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that he and the other apostles are unified under the same gospel. His purpose has not only been to defend his apostolic credentials but also to show that he preaches the same gospel that they do. He's aiming at the unity of the church rooted in the truth of the gospel.

Jesus himself prayed for the unity of his followers. In John 17:21, he prayed, "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." In other words, the unity of the church is not a preference; it is a strategic witness. It reflects the relational oneness of our God and points a divided world to a saving God.

Unity has become a buzzword that many aspire to, but even terrorists are unified and strategic in their mission, so it is important to know exactly what unites Paul and the apostles

together. I see three core areas of agreement in this text that can still serve as pillars of unity in the church today: the gospel message, distinct callings, and care for the poor.

Unity in the Gospel Message

First and foremost, the apostles were unified in the message of the gospel. Paul makes it crystal clear that when he presented the gospel to the Gentiles, the other apostles "added nothing to me" (Gal. 2:6). That is, they didn't correct him, refine his doctrine, or rebuke his methods. They recognized that the message Paul was preaching—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ—was the same message they were preaching.

This is just as critical in our day as it was in theirs. As Paul made clear in chapter 1, if you deviate from the gospel, we must deviate from fellowship. Unity does not mean we all agree on every secondary issue or have the same methods, music, or even church culture. But true gospel unity means we do not compromise on the core message of how people are saved. The apostles agreed that people are not made right with God by the law, circumcision, or religious works, but by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8–9).

This point is so central that Paul will later write in Galatians 2:16, "a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." Unity in the gospel means we don't tolerate any distortion of this message. That's why Paul was so passionate in confronting the Judaizers. He was not looking for a fight, but he was not afraid of one either if it meant protecting the gospel and the church.

The longer I've done ministry, the more I've noticed a concerning shift in the broader church—a growing reluctance to call people to repentance. In an effort to be more palatable, inclusive, or culturally relevant, some churches have softened the gospel to the point where sin is rarely confronted and repentance is seldom mentioned. Repentance was certainly part of the gospel that the apostles preached, because there is no gospel message without repentance (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30, 20:21, 26:20). In Acts 17 Paul makes it clear that repentance is not optional—God commands it of all people, everywhere (Acts 17:30). Moreover, in summarizing his ministry, Paul explains to the Ephesian elders, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20–21). Both repentance and faith are linked as inseparable responses to the gospel.

The gospel without repentance is like a doctor refusing to tell a patient they're sick—it may feel kind in the moment, but it ultimately leads to destruction. Jesus didn't come to affirm us in our sin but to rescue us from it. The early church understood this. They preached Christ crucified and called people to respond with repentance and faith. That message hasn't changed. No amount of cultural pressure or modern sensibility can rewrite the truth that repentance is the first step into the kingdom of God. If we abandon the call to repent, we're not preaching the gospel of Jesus—we're offering a counterfeit that cannot save. "Churches must not maintain unity at the expense of the gospel" (Keller 2024, 48).

Unity in Distinct Callings

Second, Paul and the apostles were unified in the gospel message, but the mission to take that message to the world meant they had different callings and ministry assignments. Paul makes this point in Galatians 2:7: "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." In other words, the same gospel and the same mission, but different mission fields.

This is a picture of kingdom cooperation. Paul's calling was to Gentiles, those outside the Jewish world. Peter's calling was primarily to Jews. That didn't make one calling superior to the other. It didn't create jealousy or rivalry. Instead, they saw their different assignments as part of the same mission.

We can learn from this. Unity in the church does not mean everyone must look the same, reach the same group, or serve the same way. God gives different callings, passions, and gifts to different people, and we need them all. Some are called to the city, others to more rural places. Some preach in megachurches, others in much smaller churches. Some reach skeptics and intellectuals, others reach kids, addicts, or the elderly.

The church today, particularly in America, must resist the temptation to compare or criticize so quickly. When the church walks in unity around the gospel and champions the various callings (like Peter and Paul), we become a dynamic and powerful movement the world must reckon with.

Unity in Caring for the Poor

Finally, unity in the church was expressed through a shared commitment to compassion. In Galatians 2:10, Paul says, "Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."

This detail might seem minor, but it reveals something deep about the early church. The apostles weren't only concerned with doctrinal unity or strategic mission; they cared about the welfare of struggling Christians and poorer churches. Beyond the biblical command to care for the poor, the particular reason at play here was that the Jewish churches were much poorer than the churches Paul was planting. And in their poverty, these churches called for care and support from Gentile churches. This can be seen in Rom. 15:25–26; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; and 2 Cor. 8–9 (Keller 2024, 46). It was the natural overflow of the gospel. Gospel people care about gospel fruit, and one of the clearest fruits of true gospel belief is generosity toward those in need, especially the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Study Guide

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What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Text: Why did Paul return to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus after years of ministry? What does this tell us about Paul's view of church unity? What is the significance of Titus not being required to be circumcised? How does this speak to the nature of salvation by grace through faith? What does Paul mean when he says the other apostles "added nothing to me" (v.6)? How does that validate Paul's message and authority?

Unity Around the Gospel: What were the core areas of unity between Paul and the other apostles? How do those same pillars apply to the church today? Why is unity around the gospel message more important than agreement on secondary issues (e.g., church style, cultural preferences)? Paul stood firm against false teachers who wanted to add to the gospel. Where do you see similar threats to the purity of the gospel today, and how should the church respond?

Callings & Cooperation: What does the relationship between Peter and Paul teach us about honoring different callings within the same mission? Have you ever struggled with comparing your calling or gifts to others in ministry? How can Galatians 2 help reshape that perspective? What might unity in distinct callings look like in our local church or among churches in our city? How can we better champion others who are reaching different people in different ways?

The Gospel & Repentance: Why do you think modern churches are often tempted to avoid preaching repentance?

What are the dangers of removing repentance from the gospel? How would you explain the role of repentance in the gospel to someone unfamiliar with Christianity? What does true gospel preaching require us to say about sin, grace, and the need for personal transformation?

Caring for the Poor: How does generosity toward the poor, especially fellow Christians in need (Gal. 6:10), reflect a heart transformed by the gospel?

Personal Reflection: Are there any ways you've been tempted to add something to the gospel—either for yourself or others? How is God calling you to contend for the truth of the gospel in your own relationships, workplace, or community? Spend time praying for unity in the church—both locally and globally—especially unity around the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 4

Pastoral Opposition

GALATIANS 2:11-21

Commentary

2:11–12

While there was genuine unity between the apostles in their shared belief in Jesus and the gospel message, their ultimate loyalty was not to one another but to the Lord Jesus. That's what Paul is demonstrating here. He loved and respected Peter, but when Peter's actions undermined the truth of the gospel, Paul did not hesitate to say something. "Paul voiced his opposition to Peter not behind his back or through the rumor mill, but he spoke frankly, forthrightly, and directly to Peter" (Sproul 2022, 39–40).

Paul brings up this incident for at least two major reasons. First, he is writing to the Galatians to defend the purity and singularity of the gospel. There is not one gospel for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. There is only one gospel:

salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter, by withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentile believers when certain Jewish Christians came around, was acting as though Gentile Christians were somehow less pure or perhaps less accepted by God. That behavior, even if unintentional, implied a second-class status for Gentiles and subtly suggested that full inclusion in God's family required adherence to Jewish customs and traditions.

Second, Paul is reminding the Galatians—most of whom were Gentiles—that their access to Christ is full and complete. Gentiles, in the biblical context, are all non-Jewish people from other nations. In Christ, Gentiles are now fully included without having to become culturally Jewish. Paul is emphasizing that Gentiles don't need to adopt Jewish ceremonial laws, especially circumcision, to be accepted by God. The cross of Christ is sufficient. This confrontation with Peter becomes a living illustration that the gospel is for everyone, and that any distortion, whether in word or behavior, must be corrected so that the grace of God in Jesus Christ remains clear and undiluted.

2:13–14

At first, Peter had rightly embraced his freedom in Christ. As seen in Acts 10, God had given Peter a clear revelation that the dietary laws of the Old Testament were no longer binding under the new covenant: "What God has made clean, do not call common." This was about more than food; it signified that the division between Jews and Gentiles had been broken down in Christ. Because of that, Peter initially ate freely with Gentile believers in Antioch, sharing meals in full fellowship with them as equals in the gospel.

But when a group of men associated with the "circumcision party" (that is, the Judaizers) arrived, Peter changed his behavior. Out of fear of what these men might think or say, he withdrew from the Gentiles and stopped eating with them. Peter's actions undermined the truth he knew and had previously lived out. "Paul finds this behavioral change not only 'hypocritical' (in the sense of contradictory) but also theologically wrong and dangerous" (McKnight 1995, 99). Peter knew the gospel, had seen the vision from God, and had even defended Gentile inclusion in Acts 15, yet here he was acting in a way that contradicted those convictions.

What made matters worse was that Peter's hypocrisy influenced others, including Barnabas, to follow his lead. Their behavior created a public division in the church, reinforcing the false idea that Gentile believers needed to conform to Jewish customs to be fully accepted. That's why Paul says in verse 14 that "their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel." The gospel is not just a message to be believed; it is the truth that must shape the way we live and relate to one another.

2:15–16

Following Paul's account of his rebuke of Peter, there is a shift in his writing toward the real issue at hand, justification by faith alone. Paul begins by acknowledging a shared Jewish heritage between himself, other Jewish Christians, and Peter: "We ourselves are Jews by birth." In doing so, he highlights that even those who had every advantage under the law—those born into the covenant, raised with the Scriptures, and trained in the commands of Moses—still cannot be justified by the law.

If anyone could have been made right with God through obedience to the law, it would have been devout Jews like Paul or Peter. But even they know that's not enough.

The keyword here is justified, a legal term meaning to be declared righteous before God. "So when Paul says, as he often does, that we are not justified by the law, he is speaking generally of the entire law, setting the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of the whole law. The righteousness of the law, he says, does not pronounce us righteous before God; rather God imputes the righteousness of faith freely through grace, for Christ's sake" (Luther 1998, 86).

2:17

Gentiles were commonly referred to as "sinners" by the Jews. It's likely that within the Galatian churches, the Jewish believers were concerned that the inclusion of Gentiles into Christ apart from works of the law would mean that they too would become "sinners. This reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of both the law and the gospel. The law was never able to make anyone righteous before God; rather, it exposes our sin. Likewise, the gospel reveals that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are sinners in need of grace. Therefore, the suggestion that Paul, Peter, or any Jewish believer becomes a "sinner" simply by associating with Gentiles or living apart from observing the law is both false and offensive to the gospel. Paul rightly rejects such a charge.

2:18

Returning to the law after receiving grace through faith would be to rebuild the very thing that Christ fulfilled and freed us from. If Paul were to turn back to the law for righteousness, he would be the one in sin.

2:19

The law served its purpose, bringing Paul to the end of himself. By "dying" to the law, he was freed from its condemning power and now lives fully for God through Christ. "When a man finds and knows himself to be linked with Christ, his life is altogether a new life: crucified, then dead. Crucified, then the old life is put away. Whatever life a crucified man has must be new life. Whatever you have of life was not given to you till you came into union with Christ. It is a new thing, as new as though you had been actually dead and rotted in the tomb and then had started up at the sound of the trumpet to live again" (Spurgeon 2013–2014, 34).

2:20

This is one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament. Paul's old self—his striving under the law, his self-righteousness, his sinful nature—was put to death with Christ. His new life is not rooted in works, performance, or adherence to the Old Testament law but in the indwelling presence of Christ. Faith in Christ unites the believer so fully with Jesus that Christ's life becomes the believer's own. Because of this, the purpose of Paul's life is to live in a way that pleases God, but never by depending on his

own actions for justification. Instead, he lives a life of faith in Jesus, who loves him and gave himself for him.

2:21

Paul makes another strong statement by declaring that to rely on the law for righteousness is to nullify God's grace and render Christ's death meaningless. Either Christ is sufficient to save, or he isn't. Adding works to grace cancels grace. If our works cannot save us, then our works cannot sustain us. Paul will return to this logic repeatedly throughout his letter to the Galatian churches.

Application of Galatians 2:11-21

If they were asked, "Is one made right before God by placing their trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ?" I believe most Christians today would wholeheartedly affirm that justification comes through faith and would agree that in Jesus we are made right before God. In this sense, believers across a broad theological spectrum—including Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox—would agree that faith plays a central role in justification. However, the more pressing and foundational question is this: Is it faith alone that justifies, or is it faith plus works?

The question is not whether faith is necessary but whether faith is sufficient. Paul's argument here in Galatians 2 is that if righteousness comes through works of the law, if anything must be added to faith, then Christ died for nothing. This is why Paul confronted Peter so boldly in Antioch. Though Peter believed in justification by faith, his behavior implied that Gentile Christians still fell short of full fellowship with Jewish Christians. His actions reinforced

the Judaizers' false teaching that Christians needed to observe Jewish traditions to be fully accepted by God.

The Reformation

Centuries later, Martin Luther would find himself in a similar position. Seeing the Roman Catholic Church promote a way of salvation that combined grace with works, faith with penance, and Christ with indulgences, Luther stood up and opposed Rome. When he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church in 1517, he began what we now know as the Protestant Reformation. Over the years that followed, he helped Christians see that justification by faith alone is not only central to the Christian life, but it is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.

When Luther was pressed to recant or be burned at the stake, he replied, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason—for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience" (Luther 1958, 112).

The doctrine of justification was not only at the heart of the Protestant Reformation but also central to Paul's instruction to the churches in Galatia. The subject of justification by faith alone will always be crucial for Christians to maintain.

Developments of Our Day

Interestingly enough, we are now witnessing a surprising development in the modern Christian landscape: a noticeable rise in interest in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, particularly among younger generations. I've spoken with many who have converted from evangelical Protestantism, and their reasons are strikingly consistent. They're looking for something more historic, more structured, more sacred. They're weary of the consumer-driven, entertainment-saturated expressions of evangelicalism and are reaching back for something that feels ancient, rooted, and reverent. The liturgy, the tradition, the mystery, all of it seems to offer stability in an age of chaos.

There's no denying that we are living in a unique cultural and theological moment, especially within the world of conservative Christianity. As a pastor, I've found this subject increasingly pressing among the people I shepherd. Many conservative Protestants remain deeply committed to the core doctrines recovered during the Reformation, especially justification by faith alone in Christ alone. And yet at the same time, there's a growing sense that we share more in common with conservative Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodox believers than with progressive or liberal Protestants within our own denominations.

There is some truth to this. In an age where the world openly mocks the sanctity of life, redefines marriage and gender, and dismisses the authority of Scripture altogether, many conservative evangelicals and Catholics find themselves shoulder to shoulder, contending for the same moral ground. We both affirm the historicity of the life, death,

and resurrection of Jesus, the sacredness of the family, and the importance of Scripture, though Catholics hold Scripture alongside Church tradition. There's a kind of moral camaraderie forming, and while it may feel like unity, it also brings with it a pastoral concern I can't ignore.

Pastoral Concern

I've seen a sharp rise in online Catholic and Orthodox apologetics targeting evangelicals, not with the gospel, but with critiques of Protestant theology. Much of this content features debates and persuasive interviews defending Catholic or Orthodox doctrine while subtly, and sometimes overtly, attempting to dismantle Protestant convictions. What's striking is that many of these platforms rarely focus on engaging atheists, agnostics, or the irreligious. Instead, their primary audience seems to be Protestant Christians, especially evangelicals who are young in the faith or unsettled in their theological convictions. Their energy is not directed toward the lost but toward the sheep, those already within the household of faith.

From their perspective, this is evangelism. According to official Roman Catholic doctrine, Protestant churches are not considered to be in full communion with the "true" church. Vatican II softened the tone but not the substance; Protestants are still viewed as separated brethren at best, and our gospel presentations are seen as incomplete, even dangerous. Similarly, Eastern Orthodoxy does not recognize Protestant sacraments as valid and sees our worship services as compromised and out of line with the "true" tradition. In both systems, Protestant doctrine is seen as deficient, and those who

hold it, especially those outside sacramental participation, are considered outside the fullness of saving grace.

If Catholic or Orthodox believers focus their apologetics on reclaiming Protestants—with the assumption that we are not true or complete Christians—instead of reaching the lost, then I have a problem with that. This is the same thing the Judaizers were doing in Galatia.

My concern is that many are not moving deeper into Christ but drifting backward into something that resembles spiritual slavery. It echoes the very issue Paul confronted in Galatians. The Galatian believers began in the Spirit but were tempted to finish in the flesh. They were wooed not by paganism, but by a form of religious observance that seemed more devout, more structured, and more ancient.

What makes this moment so critical is that many Christians today are unaware of how works-based the systems of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy truly are. While they affirm grace, they do not affirm justification by grace through faith alone. In Catholic theology, justification is not a once-for-all declaration based on Christ's righteousness; it is a process infused with human cooperation, maintained through the sacraments, and vulnerable to being lost. The Orthodox view is similar in its sacramental system and unclear soteriology. These are the official teachings of both institutions. This is not a minor disagreement; it strikes at the very heart of the New Testament gospel.

I am not writing this to stir up hostility or division. I know many sincere and kind-hearted Catholics and Orthodox believers, some of whom I believe are truly

saved and do not personally preach a false gospel. My fear is that many are flocking to these traditions like those who flocked to the Judaizers. So as a pastor, I cannot stand by quietly and say nothing.

Like a watchman on the wall, I'll herald a warning: the doctrine that leads to true conversion is that one can only be made right with God by faith alone in Christ Jesus alone. We must never allow this doctrine to be softened, sidelined, or slowly surrendered. If we lose that, we lose everything. The concern of Galatians is not ancient history. It is unfolding all around us. What's at stake is not tradition or denominational loyalty, but the freedom of the children of God.

Our Opportunity

This moment, then, is not one of fear but of opportunity. It's a chance to rediscover, defend, rearticulate, and reassert the power and simplicity of the gospel. Not to change it or add to it, but, like Luther and the Reformers, to recover and retain its integrity. We ought to tell as many as possible that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

We must also approach our conversations with clarity and humility, not caricaturing all Catholics and Orthodox, but also not compromising the gospel. The answer to the modern resurgence of ancient traditions is not retreat or imitation, but a bold and beautiful proclamation of the gospel that once turned the world upside down.

We can honor the good, reject the errors, and engage our Catholic and Orthodox neighbors with truth and grace. Yet may we never forget, nor lose, the purity of the gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Paul Opposes Peter: What does Paul's confrontation of Peter reveal about the authority of the gospel versus human leadership? How does this shape our understanding of church accountability today? Why was Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentile Christians so problematic in Paul's eyes? What message was Peter unintentionally sending?

Contradicting The Gospel: In what ways can our behavior today contradict the truth of the gospel, even if our beliefs are sound? Are there any areas where you've seen this tension in your own life or church? Why do you think Paul chose to confront Peter publicly instead of privately in this instance? What does this tell us about the nature of public sin and public correction?

Justification by Faith Alone: How does Paul's background as a Jew by birth strengthen his argument about justification? What does this say about the sufficiency of the law in salvation? What does the term "justified" mean, and why is it central to Paul's message in Galatians?

Made Right with God: How would you explain justification by faith to someone new to Christianity? Why is it dangerous to add anything to faith as a basis for being made right with God? Can you think of modern examples where this still happens?

Living by Faith in the Son of God: What does Paul mean by saying he has "died to the law"? Galatians 2:20,

What does it mean for your own identity and life as a Christian? How do you practically live "by faith in the Son of God" each day? According to verse 21, what are the consequences of adding works to the gospel?

Application & Reflection: Why is it important to not only believe the gospel but also live in step with its truth? What can we learn from Paul's boldness in defending the gospel, and how should we respond when the truth of the gospel is at stake in our own context?

Living By Faith

GALATIANS 3:1-14

Commentary

3:1

Paul opens this chapter with an emphatic tone and provocative language, calling the Galatians "fools." It's not that they were unintelligent, but that they were acting foolishly. As one commentator explains, the Galatian Christians "are failing to draw the obvious inference from their experience as Christians" (Moo 2013, 181). Paul's shock, grief, and anger all flow from deep pastoral concern.

It's as if the Galatians have hit "Control-Alt-Delete" on their gospel understanding and are now living as though the cross of Christ has no practical or theological relevance. His language signals just how alarming their drift is. He asks, "Who has bewitched you?"—in other words, "Who cast a spell on you?"

Some interpreters take Paul's words at face value, suggesting the Galatians are indeed under demonic influence. Others see rhetorical exaggeration, while

many land in between: Paul's rhetoric is sharp, but it also implies genuine spiritual deception (Moo 2013, 181). After all, Paul elsewhere says that Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). While the Galatians were believers, his rebuke suggests a deep and dangerous deception has taken root in their churches.

Paul reminds them that he has publicly preached Christ crucified before their very eyes. In essence, he asks, "How could you forget the very heart of the gospel? How could you trade the blood-soaked cross of Christ for your own works and self-righteousness?" The crucified Christ is not just the entry point of salvation; it is the center, the foundation, and the ongoing reality of the Christian life.

3 : 2

Paul now appeals to their experience. He asks them to remember how they first came to saving faith: grace did everything, faith was the only instrument, and the Holy Spirit was the gift.

He contrasts two options: did they receive the Spirit by "works of the law" or by "hearing with faith"? In other words, did the Spirit come through their effort or as a gift of divine grace? Receiving the Spirit refers to the powerful new covenant work that takes place at the moment of saving faith. It marks the beginning of the Christian life, when the Spirit sanctifies, empowers, and equips the believer for life and ministry. Their experience of the Spirit was so undeniable that Paul expected them to remember it and come to their senses.

To turn to the law after receiving the Spirit is to deny the very foundation of salvation. It is to regress spiritually, to begin by the Spirit but attempt to finish in the flesh, as Paul will soon say.

3:3

Paul exposes the absurdity of beginning the Christian life by the Spirit and then trying to complete it by human effort. The "flesh" here refers to relying on one's own strength to obey rather than on the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life begins and continues by the Spirit's work, not by human willpower.

3:4

The suffering Paul mentions likely refers to the persecution and hardship the Galatians faced as early believers (Acts 14:22). If they now abandon the true gospel, all that suffering would be rendered meaningless. Why endure for your faith only to give up on it? Paul's question cuts to the heart: "Was it all for nothing?"

3:5

Paul again appeals to their firsthand experience of the Holy Spirit's power. They had witnessed miracles—healings, signs, and wonders confirming the gospel. He asks, How did those things happen? Was it because they obeyed the law, or because they heard the gospel and believed? The answer is obvious: it was by hearing with faith. The Spirit's work, like justification and sanctification, is not a reward for human merit but a gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

3:6

Paul reaches the theological linchpin of his argument: justification by faith is not a new concept but rooted in the earliest pages of Scripture. Quoting Genesis 15:6, Paul shows that Abraham was declared righteous before his circumcision (Gen. 17) and centuries before the Law was given (Ex. 20). This dismantles the Judaizers' claim that Gentiles must keep the law to be justified. If Abraham, the father of Israel, was justified by faith apart from the law, then so are all who believe.

Abraham's faith serves as the prototype for justification by faith, fulfilled ultimately in Christ. The righteousness that was "counted" to Abraham is the same righteousness credited to believers through Jesus.

3:7–9

Paul continues, declaring that those who have faith in Jesus are the true children of Abraham. This statement would have shocked and angered many Jews. Paul insists that the gospel doesn't merely include Gentiles, it fulfills God's ancient promise to Abraham: "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (v. 8; Gen. 12:3). Abraham is the father of many nations not by blood, but by faith credited as righteousness. "So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (v. 9).

3:10–14

The result of righteousness by faith is a life lived by faith. Quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul explains that anyone

who seeks to live by the law must obey it perfectly; failure at any point places them under God's curse. Since no one can keep the law flawlessly, those who depend on it for righteousness are condemned by it. Paul reinforces his point by citing Habakkuk 2:4: "The righteous shall live by faith." Faith is not only the starting point of salvation, it is the enduring posture of those who walk with God.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Quoting Deuteronomy 21:23, Paul points to the crucifixion—"Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—as the moment when Jesus bore our penalty for sin and law-breaking. Through his sinless life (perfectly keeping the law in our place) and his death on the cross (bearing our punishment), the blessing of Abraham is extended to all who believe, including the Gentiles. Believers receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith. Jesus bore the curse so that we might receive the promise.

A life of faith, then, is not marked by striving to keep the law, but by trusting in the finished work of Christ and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Application of Galatians 3:1-14

Paul calls the Galatians to look to Abraham and his faith as the connecting thread of God's redemptive story. In that same spirit, it is fitting for us to reflect on Abraham's story as we consider how these truths apply to our lives today.

God's Calling

Abraham was the son of Terah, a man who lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, an early Babylonian civilization

in ancient Mesopotamia. According to Joshua 24:2, Abraham's father and his household, including Abraham himself, worshiped false gods. Ur was a highly advanced yet deeply pagan city, steeped in polytheism, sexual perversion, and idol worship. It was known for its sex cults, ritual immorality, gender reversals, and even castration as acts of devotion to false deities.

Like our own time, theirs was a culture where the lines of human identity, purpose, and sexuality were blurred under the banner of spiritual freedom. Abraham likely grew up surrounded by these practices, witnessing, and perhaps even participating in, the very sins God would later call him out of.

In Genesis 12:1, God called Abram out of this dark, idolatrous culture, not because he was righteous or religious, but because God is gracious. Abraham didn't come from a morally upright family or a God-fearing community. He came from the heart of a spiritually bankrupt civilization.

Our world today is not so different. While we no longer bow to statues or worship at ziggurats, we have built digital temples to self, sex, and personal autonomy. Our gods are just as demanding, requiring our time, our bodies, our children, our money, and our allegiance. Ancient Ur lives on in modern form through pornography, hookup culture, gender confusion, and the normalization of self-made identity. Yet the same God who called Abram still calls people out of darkness and into light.

Abraham's story reminds us that salvation is entirely by grace. God calls people out of bondage not because they

clean themselves up, but because he breaks through cultural noise with sovereign mercy. Abraham didn't "find God"; God found him. There was nothing in his background or behavior that earned divine favor. The same is true for us.

The Gentile Christians in Galatia needed this reminder too. Though Abraham is the father of the Hebrew faith, he was originally a Gentile. He wasn't saved by the law, nor was anyone else. As Genesis 15:6 declares, "Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." This happened long before circumcision and centuries before the Law of Moses. Paul's point is timeless: righteousness has always come by faith, not by works.

Abraham as the Prototype of Faith

In calling Abraham, God began a covenant of redemption that would ultimately culminate in Jesus Christ. Abraham was promised a land, a people, and that he would be a blessing to the nations—all of which pointed forward to the gospel, the kingdom of God, and the formation of the Church.

Abraham is not only the prototype of justification—believing and being declared righteous—but also the model for the Christian life. His faith was not a mere intellectual acknowledgment that God existed, but a lived trust that followed God's voice into the unknown. Abraham's faith was not perfect, but it was persistent. He doubted, stumbled, and sinned, yet he always returned to the God who had called him.

His life is the pattern of ours: a sinner made righteous by faith, living in obedience as a response

to grace. This is what Paul wants the Galatians to see, and what we need to remember.

Paul calls Abraham the "father of all who believe" (Rom. 4:11) because his story teaches us how to walk with God when the path ahead is uncertain. Abraham trusted when hope seemed gone, obeyed when the destination was unclear, and believed when the promise appeared impossible. His life testifies that faith is not merely belief in God's existence but trust in his character and promises, expressed through obedience.

Living by Faith

This is why Paul, in Galatians 3, presents Abraham as the model for all believers. We are not justified by keeping religious rules, attending church, or performing good works. We are justified by placing our faith in the God who justifies the ungodly, the same God who raised Jesus from the dead and fulfills every promise.

Like Abraham, we are called to leave behind the false gods of our generation, believe the gospel, and walk with God by faith. The Church must remember that our identity is not rooted in this world, but in the promise. We are sons and daughters of Abraham through faith; heirs of grace, not of merit. Our righteousness does not come from what we do for God, but from trusting in what God has done for us in Christ.

To live by faith means trusting God's Word even when the world mocks it, obeying his call when the road ahead is uncertain, and anchoring our hope in the promises of the gospel rather than the approval of man.

Study Guide

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How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Spiritual Clarity & Confusion: Why do you think Paul uses such strong language when confronting the Galatians (e.g., "foolish," "bewitched")? In what ways do Christians today lose sight of the gospel like the Galatians did? What are some modern "bewitching" influences that can lead believers away from the centrality of the cross of Christ?

Remembering How We Started: Paul asks the Galatians how they received the Spirit. How would you answer that question about your own life? Why is it important to remember how we first came to faith in Christ? What happens when we forget?

Beginning by the Spirit, Finishing by the Flesh: What does it mean to "begin by the Spirit" but try to "finish by the flesh"? Have you ever done this in your walk with God? How can we practically continue living by the Spirit instead of reverting to self-effort?

Suffering and Its Purpose: Paul implies their suffering might be wasted if they abandon the gospel. What have you endured for your faith, and how does that impact your commitment? How do we make sense of our suffering when we are tempted to give up or fall into works-based thinking?

Abraham's Story & Ours: Based on the commentary and application section, what stood out to you about Abraham's pagan background and God's gracious call on his life? How is Abraham's background similar to the Gentile Christians

in Galatia, and to many of us today? What encouragement does Abraham's story give you in your own faith journey?

Idolatry Then and Now: How does the culture of ancient Ur resemble the modern world? Where do we see similar idolatry, sexual confusion, or spiritual deception? What "gods" or cultural idols is God calling you to leave behind?

The Gospel is the Same: Why is it significant that Abraham was justified by faith before the law or circumcision? What does it mean to you that the gospel call has always been the same, from Abraham to the Galatians to us? Abraham didn't just "believe" in his mind, he followed with his life. What does a life of obedient faith look like in our generation? What steps can you take this week to walk more fully by faith and in the power of the Spirit?

CHAPTER 6

Bound By Promise

GALATIANS 3:15-29

Commentary

3:15

The discussion here focuses on covenant. "The core pattern by which God brings his redemption to pass for his people throughout history is through the structure of covenant" (Sproul 2022, 67). Paul points to the binding nature of a legal contract or covenant between two human parties. Once a covenant is ratified—finalized and made official—it cannot be altered. The whole point of a covenant is that it is secure, stable, and binding. The case Paul is making ultimately refers to the covenant that God made with Abraham, one that remains unaltered in every way.

That covenant, made by God himself, was a promise, a unilateral, grace-based agreement. And what was promised? That God would bless

all nations through Abraham's offspring (Gen. 12; 15; 17). Paul's argument is that this covenant was based on faith and promise, not law or works.

3:16

The promises of that covenant were made not just to Abraham and his many descendants, but to one singular offspring: Jesus Christ. This is how we must understand the Old Testament through the lens of Christ. The promises God made to Abraham are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. He is the true heir of the covenant promises, the offspring through whom all nations would be blessed. In other words, the covenant God made with Abraham was always pointing forward to Jesus, not merely to the ethnic lineage of Israel.

3:17

When the law of Moses came 430 years later, it did not, and could not, nullify God's covenant with Abraham. If we understand that human covenants cannot be changed once confirmed, how much more secure and unchangeable is God's covenant?

3:18

Grace is often hard for us to understand because we want to believe we've done something to earn God's love and promises. Deep down, we're uncomfortable with the idea of receiving something so valuable—salvation, blessing, inheritance—without contributing anything to it. Our flesh craves credit. We want to point to something we did and say, "Look at our obedience, our morality, our performance." But that's not how grace works.

"Paul is adamant: either something comes by grace or works; either it comes because of the giver's promise or the receiver's performance. It is either one or the other" (Keller 2024, 79). Works of the law are about earning; a promise is about receiving. God gave Abraham a promise, not because Abraham obeyed perfectly, not because he was morally superior, but because God chose to bless him by grace. That same grace now comes to us through Jesus Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

3:19

Why then the law? If God gave the promise to Abraham and salvation comes by faith, what was the point of the law? Paul's answer: "It was added because of transgressions." We must not see the law as a detour in God's plan, but as a temporary measure to reveal and restrain sin. It acted like a mirror, exposing our guilt and showing how far we fall short of God's holiness. The law was never meant to save; it was meant to prepare us for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Paul means when he says the law was in place "until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made."

3:20

In verse 19, Paul also says the law was "put in place through angels by an intermediary," a reference to how the law was delivered at Sinai through Moses. Verse 20 explains that the promise came straight from God, not through a middleman. It reinforces God's singular and sovereign role in the giving of grace. Salvation by promise reveals the unity of God's purpose and character: he is both the

Giver and the Guarantor, or as the writer of Hebrews says, the "author and perfecter" of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

3:21

Paul anticipates another possible objection: Did the law contradict God's promises? His answer: "Certainly not!" The law isn't in conflict with the promise, but it serves a different function. If the law had the power to give life, then righteousness could come through it. But it doesn't, and can't. The law exposes sin but cannot fix it. It diagnoses the disease but offers no cure. The promise, however, foretells the coming cure.

3:22

The law doesn't just reveal sin, it confines us under its weight. Why? So that the promise would shine all the brighter. By showing us our inability to save ourselves, the law drives us to Christ. It's as if the law locks us up, and Jesus is the only key. The law kept God's people until the promise was fulfilled, when Jesus bound himself to the law so that, in his perfect fulfillment, he would set free those who were bound.

3:23–24

Paul uses another metaphor to help us understand the purpose of the law. He says it was a guardian, a type of supervisor. Like a teacher who leads, guides, and disciplines a child until maturity, the law played that role. It tutored, disciplined, corrected, and protected God's people until Christ came. It kept them in line, but it couldn't transform their hearts.

Now that Christ has come, believers are no longer under that guardian. The time of childhood is over; the fullness has arrived. The law pointed to Jesus, but Jesus is greater than the law. By faith we are justified, and through Jesus we have life.

3:25

The coming of Christ marks a major transition in redemptive history. The age of the law has given way to the age of grace through faith in Christ. We are no longer children under a guardian; we are full heirs through faith. The law served its purpose, but it was never the destination. It pointed ahead to the one who would bring life and salvation.

In summary, the law was given not as a means of salvation but to expose sin, restrain evil, and prepare God's people for the coming of Christ. It acted as a guardian or tutor, disciplining, guiding, and protecting God's people until the promised offspring of Abraham arrived. The law showed humanity its inability to attain righteousness through works and pointed forward to faith in Jesus. Once Christ came, the law's role as guardian ended because believers are now justified by faith and united with Christ.

3:26–29

In the fulfillment of the promise through Jesus Christ, those justified by faith now have a new identity in him. In Christ, the distinctions and divisions that once separated people—Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female—no longer define us. What defines us now is our faith in Jesus, which makes us sons and daughters of God.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." The word "sons" here does not exclude women but includes them as well. The term emphasizes legal inheritance rights in the family of God. In Christ, all believers—men and women alike—receive full legal standing as heirs.

This is marked by baptism: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Baptism is the sign and seal of our union with Christ. To "put on Christ" is to be clothed with Christ's righteousness (which comes by faith alone) and to live in his identity, not our old one.

Tying the whole chapter together, Paul says, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (v. 29). Belonging to Christ makes you a true child of Abraham; not by blood or law, but by faith. Christians are rightful heirs of the promises of God.

Application of Galatians 3:15-29

As a parent, there's something deeply comforting about the fence around my backyard. The sides separating our yard from the neighbors are made of a typical wooden fence. It's simple, familiar, nothing special. But the back of the yard is different. There, connecting the two wooden sides, stands a large stone wall. My kids call it "the stone wall," as if we live in Narnia or some kind of fantasy world.

The wall in my backyard isn't for decoration. Behind it, beyond the property line, is a wide-open field, an active job site full of heavy machinery, and just beyond that, a busy highway. The stone wall marks the end

of where it's safe to play. It isn't there to trap my kids or rob them of freedom; it's there to protect them.

From a child's point of view, the wall might feel like a limit. From mine, it's a gift, a boundary that keeps them in a place where they can run, explore, and enjoy life without danger. It's a boundary where freedom can flourish.

Too often, we assume that God's commands rob us of joy when they exist to maximize it. God is a good Father, and like any loving father, he delights in his children. He doesn't give commands to crush them or rules to rob them of joy. He didn't give the law to make his children earn his love; he gave it because he already loved them.

Why God Gave the Law

We see this clearly in the story of Israel. God did not give the law to his people while they were still slaves in Egypt. No, he delivered them first. Through the blood of the lamb and the power of his hand, he rescued them from bondage. It was only after their salvation, after they were already his chosen people, freed by grace, that he led them to Mount Sinai and gave them his law.

This is critical. The law was never about earning God's favor. Israel didn't obey to be rescued; they obeyed because they had been rescued. The law was not a ladder to climb into God's love; it was a fence to protect those already secure in it.

The law was never meant to be a ladder to reach heaven. It was a fence placed around God's people to expose danger,

restrain evil, and prepare the world for the arrival of Jesus. It's like the fence in my backyard. It exists to maximize joy, to keep my kids from wandering into a highway or a construction zone. The fence defines the boundary where safety and life flourish. It allows my children to run freely without fear. So it is with the law of God.

The Law as a Guardian

The Apostle Paul says the law was given as a guardian or tutor, not a Savior. It was never meant to justify us before God but to lead us to the one who would. The law exposed our sin, restrained evil, and created a framework for righteousness. But in the end, it pointed beyond itself to Jesus.

In Galatians 3, Paul explains that the law was like a guardian or tutor, a strict caretaker assigned to a child to guide them until maturity. It wasn't there to replace the Father, and it wasn't the end goal. It was temporary, necessary, and good. The law revealed how far short we fall from God's holiness. It showed us our sin with piercing clarity, but it could never save us. That was never its job.

Like the fence in the backyard, the law defined the safe space. It kept Israel distinct from the nations. It created a moral framework, a national identity, and a covenant relationship with God that would carry forward until the time was ripe for Jesus to come.

The Law Points to Jesus

The reality the law pressed into the hearts of God's people was this: you can't do this on your own. No matter how

many sacrifices were made, how many festivals were kept, or how hard people tried to obey, righteousness could not be earned. The law exposed the disease, but it couldn't cure it. It was a mirror, not medicine.

By showing us our need, the law pointed us to the one who could meet it. It set the stage for Jesus, the true Son of God, who would come and fulfill every requirement of the law on our behalf. He didn't tear down the fence and leave us to run wild. He stepped over it, met every demand within it, and then opened the gate to bring us into the Father's house.

Now that Christ has come, the role of the law as guardian is fulfilled. Those who belong to Jesus are no longer under that guardian, for we are now justified by faith. Jesus did what the law could never do. He gave spiritual life to all who believe. He took those crushed under the weight of failure and declared them righteous by grace through faith. He united us with himself, giving us a new identity as sons and daughters of God.

God gave the law to help his children, to shape his children, and to lead his children, but most importantly, to drive them to Jesus. And in Christ, we find the true freedom and joy that every boundary was meant to protect.

Justified by Faith, Not by Rule-Keeping

Now that Christ has come, we are no longer under the custody of the law. We're no longer children under a tutor; we've grown into our full status as sons and daughters of God. We don't relate to God through rules but through a

relationship of grace. We are justified—declared righteous—by faith in Jesus, not by our ability to follow commands.

This doesn't make the law worthless. It still reflects God's character. It still teaches us wisdom. And like the fence in the yard, it still reminds us that boundaries aren't the enemy of freedom; they're the context for it.

Boundaries that Bless

Think about the world we live in now. Everyone wants freedom, but few want boundaries. Everyone wants love, but no one wants commitment. Everyone wants justice, but without judgment. It's like trying to play a sport with no rules. Without boundaries, freedom becomes chaos. The law reminds us that God is not a God of confusion but of order, and that his ways are always for our good.

So, the next time you feel tempted to see God's rules as roadblocks, remember the fence. God's boundaries are not there to rob joy but to maximize it. The law pointed forward to Christ, the one who didn't just tell us how to live but who lived perfectly in our place and now lives in us by his Spirit.

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In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

What Do You See in The Text: Discuss the difference between God's covenantal promise and the law according to Galatians 3:15–18. What does Paul mean when he refers to the "offspring" (singular) of Abraham in verse 16?

The Law and Its purpose: How does Paul describe the purpose of the law in verses 19–24? What is the metaphor Paul uses in verse 24 to describe the role of the law? According to verses 26–29, what is the result of faith in Christ in terms of identity and inheritance?

It's All About Jesus: How does Paul show that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham? What does it mean that we are "baptized into Christ" and have "put on Christ"? Why is it important that the promise came directly from God?

Identity in Christ: What does it mean to be a "son of God through faith" (v. 26)? How is baptism a sign of this new identity? How does this passage reshape your view of yourself in Christ? Where in your life are you still tempted to believe that your standing with God depends on how well you follow the rules?

Grace vs. Law: Why can't the law bring salvation? Why do we struggle to receive grace instead of trying to earn God's love? What might be modern equivalents of trying to earn God's favor? What does it look like to live as a son or daughter of God, rather than a slave under the law?

The Fence/Guardian Metaphor: How is God's law like the fence in the backyard story from the application section of the commentary? How did the law act as a guardian for God's people? What fences has God placed in your life for your protection?

Gospel Clarity: How does this passage clarify the gospel message? How does being united with Christ through faith change your relationship with God? How does our shared identity in Christ promote unity in the church?

Personal and Group Application: Why do you think we often feel more comfortable trying to earn God's love through our performance? How does knowing that you're an heir to God's promises (v. 29) shape the way you approach daily life, struggles, or spiritual disciplines?

CHAPTER 7

From Slaves To Sons

GALATIANS 4:1-7

Commentary

4:1–2

This chapter moves from the language of promise and identity into the metaphor of inheritance and maturity in the family of God. Paul illustrates that although an heir legally owns everything, he is no better off than a slave while he is still a child. There is no real difference in terms of personal ownership until the inheritance is received.

The same is true today for those with trust funds. A trust has an established time frame for when the recipient may access it. The heir has a promise (the trust), but not possession.

Paul uses this image to show that the child, though heir to everything, is under guardianship and restricted until

the appointed time. The point is that the law's role was not a means of salvation but a temporary custodian until the fullness of time arrived in Christ. God's people were like minors under the law, possessing the promise but not yet the freedom. Only when Christ came did they step into their full inheritance as sons and daughters of God. That inheritance was for all who shared the faith of Abraham, not just ethnic Israel. Though Israel was God's chosen nation, they had not yet entered into the full rights of mature sonship because Christ had not yet come.

4 : 3

In verses 1–2, Paul paints a vivid picture of a child who, though the rightful heir to a vast inheritance, lives no differently than a slave until that inheritance is realized. He has no freedom or authority and must submit to guardians until the appointed time.

Now, in verse 3, Paul applies the metaphor to all of us. Just like the heir-in-waiting, both Jews and Gentiles were functionally enslaved before coming to Christ: "We were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."

The phrase "elementary principles" refers to the basic spiritual forces or foundational systems that governed both Jews and Gentiles before Christ. For the Jews, this meant bondage to the Mosaic Law. Though the Law was given by God for good purposes—to restrain sin, preserve holiness, and point to the coming Messiah—it was distorted into a legalistic system that falsely taught salvation could be earned. This corruption turned God's good law into a burden rather than a blessing. It

functioned as a harsh schoolmaster rather than a gracious guide—more like another Pharaoh than a loving Father.

For the Gentiles, their enslavement took a different form through paganism, idolatry, superstition, and empty man-made philosophies. These systems promised enlightenment or divine favor, but kept them in spiritual darkness and fear. Whether Jew or Gentile, both were trapped under structures that could never bring freedom or relationship with God.

Furthermore, the phrase "elementary principles" can also be translated as "elemental spirits," as many good Bible translations note in a footnote. The enslavement here, then, is more than ideological or systemic; it is demonic. Paul is not only exposing broken worldviews but also the spiritual powers behind them. Any religious system that denies Christ, whether legalistic or pagan, is a tool of Satan meant to blind, bind, and bury the souls of men. The teaching that salvation can be earned through law-keeping is not a minor theological error; it is a demonic lie from the pit of hell. The same is true for pagan systems. The god of this world, Satan, blinds the minds of unbelievers and enslaves them in spiritual darkness (2 Cor. 4:4).

4:4–5

All humanity, regardless of background, stood condemned and captive. "But when the fullness of time had come"—when God the Father, in his sovereign wisdom and perfect timing, determined that the world was ready—he sent forth his Son. This was not a random moment in history but the divinely orchestrated pinnacle of redemption. Every

Old Testament prophecy, every historical development, every rising and falling empire prepared the world for this decisive act of God. The promises made to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ, now reached their appointed unveiling.

God sent his Son, not created, not adopted, but eternally begotten and now incarnate. "Born of a woman," Jesus entered fully into the human condition, embracing our frailty, pain, and weakness. He did not stand at a distance but stepped into the very world enslaved by sin, subjecting himself to the same struggles we face. Yet he was also "born under the law." That means Christ voluntarily placed himself beneath the same demands, expectations, and curses of the Law that had condemned us. He didn't bypass the law—he fulfilled it perfectly. Where we failed, he obeyed. Where we sinned, he remained sinless.

Why did he do this? "To redeem those who were under the law." Redemption is the act of buying someone back from bondage. Christ paid the full price with his own blood to rescue us from the curse of the law, the condemnation of sin, and the grip of Satan. His mission wasn't merely to liberate, it was to adopt. He came not only to bring us out of slavery but to bring us into a new family.

"So that we might receive adoption as sons." This is one of the most breathtaking truths of the gospel. We're not merely pardoned criminals, we're beloved children. This is the full inheritance Paul has been describing: not just freedom from condemnation, but full inclusion in the household of God. In Jesus, we don't relate to God as slaves trying to appease a master; we approach him as sons and daughters, secure in our Father's love and heirs to all he has promised in Christ.

This is Christianity. This is the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. This is the good news for all humanity: God sent his Son to make us sons and daughters. The law could never do this. Moral striving could never earn this. Only the grace of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ could accomplish it.

4:6–7

Now that we are part of the family of God, we receive the family seal, the promised Holy Spirit. This once-future hope, long awaited by those who died in faith like Abraham, is now a present reality. The Spirit is not an optional add-on to salvation; he is the confirmation of it. Just as ancient kings sealed their decrees with a mark of authenticity, God seals his children with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, we are assured of our adoption, empowered for mission, and drawn into intimate communion with the Father.

Paul writes, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" This is deeply personal language. The Holy Spirit doesn't merely teach us to call God Father, he moves us to cry out from within, confirming that we truly belong to him. We are not strangers or slaves; we are sons. The Spirit himself testifies within us, assuring our adoption and echoing our cry of belonging (Rom. 8:15–16).

With sonship comes full inheritance. Augustine observed, "Since he is undoubtedly writing not to Jews but to Gentiles at this point and does not say, 'we were enslaved' but 'you were enslaved,' it is very probable that what was said above was also said of the Gentiles, because they had been

enslaved under the elements of this world" (Augustine 2012, 183). We, who were once slaves to rebellion, are now co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), recipients of all the blessings of the covenant, not because we earned it, but because Christ secured it and the Spirit applies it.

Application of Galatians 4:1-7

As a father, everything I have belongs to my children. Though they technically own nothing, everything that is mine is for them—my strength, my provision, my home, my name. It is theirs to receive, not earn. This is how God designed parenting to be. So when Paul writes in Galatians 4 about heirs and adoption, he points us to that same reality in the heart of God.

Often, big theological discussions like Paul's can feel distant from everyday life, as if they belong to academic debate rather than real experience. But here's the truth in simple terms: God is a loving Father who has made a way for us to become part of his family.

Before Christ, we were like children with no access to the inheritance. We were enslaved to religion, rebellion, legalism, or idolatry. But when Jesus came, "the fullness of time" arrived. Now, through faith in him, we are no longer waiting in the shadows. We are sons and daughters standing in the living room of our Father's house.

God is a loving Father who invites us to sit at his table, share his name, and walk in his provision. Just as my children do not work to earn my love, we do not strive to earn our place in God's family. In Christ, it is already

ours. Everything that belongs to the Father is now ours by grace. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." Every promise—peace, grace, power, joy, eternal life—is affirmed and fulfilled in Jesus. We don't work to earn the inheritance; we live from it. We don't obey to become children; we obey because we are children. That truth changes not just our identity but the entire posture of our lives.

A Picture of God's Grace

In our world, adoption is one of the clearest pictures of grace. A child is not adopted because they've earned it; they are chosen, loved, and brought in. They move from being outside the family to inside the home, taking the name and inheritance of their new parents. When we reflect on our spiritual adoption, especially as Gentiles grafted into the family of God, we see just how powerful and undeserved this mercy is.

Paul's point in Galatians 4 is that we who were once outsiders—estranged from God, dead in sin, following false gods, and believing demonic lies—have now been adopted by the Father. And not only adopted, but given full status as sons. Adoption isn't mere caretaking; it's a legal and binding change of status. An adopted child enjoys every right of a biological son, and so do we.

This means we don't approach God with the insecurity of a guest or the anxiety of a servant; we come with the confidence of a child. We approach the Father just as Jesus did during his earthly life and ministry. This reality has been both eye-opening and life-changing for me.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus walked closely with the Father. Though he could not see him, he spoke with him as one speaks with a friend. He withdrew to pray, listened for the Father's will, and obeyed, not out of fear, but out of love.

Now, through Christ, we have that same access. Romans 8:15 says, "You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" We no longer cower in fear or try to earn our way into God's presence. As adopted sons and daughters, we come boldly and freely, not as outsiders begging for crumbs, but as heirs seated at the Father's table. Our adoption isn't a temporary arrangement; it's a permanent covenant. Like a child who receives a new name and a forever-home, we too have been given a new identity, a new future, and a new forever-family.

Adopting Children

Over the years, I've had the privilege of walking alongside families through the adoption process. One of my favorite parts is writing recommendations for families in our church pursuing adoption. It's an honor to vouch for their character, love for children, and desire to reflect God's heart. I often remind them that adoption is a Christlike act, an overflow of divine love into the life of a child God has prepared for them.

Adoption is one of the clearest pictures of the gospel. It's a tangible reflection of what God has done for us in Christ, bringing us in, naming us his own, and giving us full access to his love and resources. Because we believe this picture, our church also works to connect families with funding, grants, and support. We've been blessed with members

who serve in foster care and adoption agencies, giving us a front-row seat to both the joys and challenges of this calling.

Watching a child come into a forever home, and knowing the church played a part—it never gets old. Every time, it reminds us that we were once spiritual orphans, but now we are sons and daughters of the King.

The Spirit, the Seal, and the Mission

We are the King's kids, and because we are sons and daughters, God has "sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal. 4:6). This is not just a theological concept but a living reality. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. He is both the seal of our adoption and the power behind our mission. He reminds us that we belong to the Father and empowers us to live as his children in a broken world.

As adopted children, we now join the Father in his mission to adopt others into his family. The Spirit doesn't only comfort us, he commissions us. He sends us to declare that there's room in the family for more. This is the heart of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

We don't join this mission to earn God's favor; we join it because we already have it. The same Spirit who seals our adoption also empowers our witness. And so we go, loved, sent, and empowered, as sons and daughters on mission, heirs of grace, children of the King.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Understanding the Text: In verses 1–2, Paul compares an heir to a slave. What is he trying to communicate about our relationship to God before Christ? What do the "elementary principles of the world" (v. 3) refer to? How were both Jews and Gentiles enslaved under them, though in different ways?

Gospel Identity: How does understanding yourself as a child of God reshape the way you relate to God daily? Have you ever struggled with relating to God as a loving Father? Why do you think that is, and how does this passage challenge or comfort you?

Adoption Into God's Family: How is the Holy Spirit involved in our relationship with the Father? How would your day-to-day life change if you truly lived with the awareness that you are a beloved child of God? Why is it important to distinguish between receiving the love of God rather than earning it for the Christian life?

From Slaves to Sons: What privileges come with being a son of God rather than a slave to sin? How does this passage challenge our performance-based mindset in our walk with God? In what ways can we help others live as sons and daughters rather than religious slaves?

Adoption and Family: How does the modern process of adoption reflect God's heart for us? Have you ever seen or experienced adoption (foster care, guardianship, etc.)? How did it reflect the gospel?

How does your identity as an adopted child shape your view of mission, worship, and obedience?

The Holy Spirit and The Mission: How is the Holy Spirit both the seal of our identity in Christ and the power for our mission? In what ways does your life reflect that you are a Spirit-filled son/daughter of the King? How should our adoption change the way we view evangelism and discipleship?

Personal Reflection and Response: Who in your life needs to know there's a seat for them at the Father's table? What's one way you can bring the message of adoption into your workplace, family, or neighborhood this week?

CHAPTER 8

Don't Go Back

GALATIANS 4:8-20

Commentary

4:8

One of the greatest joys of salvation in Jesus Christ is that we can now truly know God. The gospel doesn't just free us from sin; it restores our relationship with him. This is the heart of Christianity: we are not only forgiven, but brought back to God.

In my home, we remind our children that they were made by God to know God and to make him known. But as Paul reminds the Galatians, before Christ they "did not know God" and were enslaved to false gods.

The tragedy of idolatry is that it cuts us off from the very One who made us for himself. Before faith in Jesus, we were far from God, estranged, enslaved, and unable to return on our own. But the wonder of the gospel is this: in Christ, we are no longer strangers. We are sons and daughters. To know God is the pinnacle of our purpose and the source of our deepest joy.

4:9

Now that the Galatian believers have come to know God—or rather, to be known by God—they have entered into the full inheritance of sonship Paul described earlier. Yet his tone quickly shifts to shock and sorrow: "How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?"

Having been freed, why would anyone return to slavery? Having been adopted, why would anyone return to being an orphan? Paul's question pierces through every age of the Church. Legalism and idolatry both tempt us to trade grace for performance and freedom for bondage.

The "elementary principles" here refer to the basic spiritual forces or systems that once governed both pagans and legalists. As Douglas Moo notes, the term "refers to the religions the Galatians practiced in their pre-Christian past" (Moo 2013, 277). Paul is exposing the entire framework of self-justification, human tradition, and performance-based religion that keeps people enslaved.

These "elementary principles" are not harmless customs; they are instruments of spiritual bondage. Paul connects them to the powers of this present evil age and to demonic influence. The Galatians weren't merely confused; they were under spiritual assault. Legalism and idolatry are not opposites; they are twins. Satan doesn't care if people worship idols or obsess over rules, so long as they avoid clinging to the finished work of Christ.

What Paul calls "weak" and "worthless" are the deceptive systems that promise holiness but deliver exhaustion. They are spiritual counterfeits designed to make people feel pious while keeping them enslaved. Satan's oldest strategy is to replace the freedom of the gospel with a form of religion that looks holy but leads to despair.

4:10–11

Paul now moves from general concern to specific examples of how the Galatians are turning back to those "weak and worthless" systems. He points to their renewed observance of Sabbaths, new moons, festivals, and other calendar traditions, practices that were once shadows pointing to Christ.

These observances were never meant to be ultimate; they were temporary symbols anticipating Jesus' fulfillment of the Law. Now that Christ has come, to treat such practices as necessary for righteousness is not devotion but regression. It denies Christ's sufficiency and subtly embraces legalism.

The Galatians were beginning to believe that observing religious days could secure or enhance their standing with God. But in doing so, they were drifting from grace back toward bondage. Paul's tone becomes that of a spiritual father pleading with his children. He fears that his labor among them might have been in vain, not because they instantly lost salvation, but because they were perpetuating a gospel that cannot save.

4:12

When Paul says, "Become as I am," he invites the Galatians to share in his freedom from the Law through faith in Christ. Though raised as a devout Jew, Paul had relinquished dependence on the Law and embraced grace. He did not abandon God's revelation but came to understand its true purpose to lead people to Christ.

The Law was never meant to save; it was meant to guide until the Savior came. Having found that freedom, Paul could enter Gentile contexts and preach the gospel without imposing Jewish customs. His life embodied the very freedom he urged them to embrace.

4:13–15

Paul appeals to his shared history with the Galatian believers. He reminds them that it was "because of a bodily ailment" that he first preached to them. This suggests that his stay in Galatia was unplanned; God turned an illness or injury into a divine appointment.

Though we don't know the nature of Paul's ailment—perhaps an eye condition or chronic weakness—it's clear that his physical frailty didn't hinder his ministry. Instead, it became the very channel through which the gospel reached them.

He commends their initial response: they did not reject or despise him despite his weakness, but received him as a messenger from God. Their compassion and openness stand in sharp contrast to their current wavering under the influence of false teachers.

4:16–18

Paul's question, "Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?" reveals both his emotional investment and deep grief. Once welcomed with joy, he is now viewed with suspicion, not because he changed, but because he remained faithful to the gospel.

The fault lies not with Paul but with the false teachers who flattered the Galatians to win them over. Their goal wasn't to build the believers up in Christ, but to isolate them from Paul and from grace. Paul contrasts his sincerity with their manipulation; his ministry was for their good, theirs was for control.

4:19–20

Paul closes this section with one of the most intimate and emotional appeals in the letter. He writes not as a scholar but as a father in anguish: "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."

This is pastoral heartbreak. Paul isn't angry; he's aching. He compares his concern to the pains of childbirth, an image of both suffering and hope. His earlier ministry among them was like labor, and now he feels that pain again as he watches them drift from the truth.

His desire is not simply that they return to correct doctrine, but that Christ be formed in them. That phrase captures the essence of Christian maturity:

the goal is not moral perfection or ritual performance, but transformation into the likeness of Jesus.

Application of Galatians 4:8-20

It's entirely possible to know God, experience his saving grace, and still drift back into a kind of slavery. That's what we see in the churches of Galatia. This warning isn't just for them; it's for every generation of believers. When we start living as if God's love must be earned through religious performance, man-made traditions, spiritual checklists, or by comparing ourselves to others to feel more moral or holy, we are no longer walking in the freedom of the Spirit. We're falling back under a yoke of slavery.

This is spiritual warfare. The enemy doesn't merely want to distract you; he wants to redefine your identity and rob you of the joy that comes from being a son or daughter in Christ. He wants to whisper that you're not enough, that you must earn your place, that grace isn't sufficient. Our enemy is a master of counterfeits. He doesn't always come with obvious rebellion. He often comes cloaked in religious language and spiritual-sounding ideas. He will gladly let you be busy with "good things" as long as you're not resting in God's grace. He'll encourage discipline, as long as it's driven by fear rather than love. He'll let you pursue holiness, as long as it's disconnected from the cross of Christ. It's the same old strategy he used in Eden: twisting God's words, sowing doubt, and replacing trust with toil.

Spiritual Warfare

We must learn to recognize the enemy's tactics and counter them with truth. Satan rarely attacks through open

rebellion; he often works through half-truths, distorted doctrine, and subtle shifts in our thinking. That's why the battle for spiritual freedom is fought largely in the mind. If the enemy can influence the way we think, he can influence the way we live. His goal is to plant lies that sound close enough to the truth so that we don't question them until we're entangled in fear, shame, legalism, or pride.

One of the primary ways I teach people to fight back is by practicing Philippians 4:8. Paul writes, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." This isn't a call to positive thinking; it's a spiritual discipline of discernment. When a thought enters your mind, especially one that affects your sense of identity, value, or standing before God, run it through the Philippians 4:8 filter. Is it true? Is it pure? Is it Christ-honoring? If not, it's not from God, and it has no authority in your life.

This kind of discipline trains us to reject the enemy's lies and receive God's truth. When the accuser says, "You're not enough," we answer, "Christ is enough." When fear says, "You're going to fall again," we respond, "He who began a good work in me will carry it to completion" (Phil. 1:6). When shame whispers, "You've blown it too many times," we declare, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). These aren't just comforting words; they're weapons of warfare. Truth is a sword, and we need to wield it daily.

Knowing Your Weapon

A lot of guys like to talk about guns, gear, and tactical training. There's nothing wrong with that; being ready to defend your home or protect your family is honorable. But do you train with God's Word the way you train with your weapon? Do you spend time sharpening your spiritual discernment the way you sight in your optics or clean your rifle? Or maybe you neglect it all. The real war isn't just physical; it's spiritual. And the battlefield isn't just out there, it's in your mind and your heart.

I'm not talking about doing Bible drills to earn God's approval or achieve some special status as a Christian. Salvation is by grace, not grind. But strategy still matters. The Bible doesn't teach us to "sit back and hope for the best"; it says, "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). That means we need to gear up in the Word of God daily, because the fight is daily. We don't read Scripture to impress anyone or philosophize about lofty ideas; we read it to be equipped. We don't meditate on Scripture to appear spiritual; we do it to stay sharp, steady, and rooted in truth when the battle comes.

Philippians 4:7 says that the peace of God will "guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." That guarding doesn't happen in a vacuum; it's connected to prayer, mindset, and what we're feeding ourselves spiritually. The Word of God equips you and makes you combat-ready for the spiritual war we're in. If you want peace, you have to train your heart and mind to stay grounded in Christ. You can't fight off demonic lies, temptation, or identity confusion

with motivational quotes and good vibes. You need Scripture in your soul, not just as a sidearm on your belt.

Don't Go Back

Satan hates the gospel, hates grace, and hates you. He hates the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. So he counterfeits the gospel, mixing religious language with fear, self-righteousness, and works-based approval. He wants us to feel spiritual without being faithful. He doesn't want true holiness; he wants a heaviness that leads not to Christ but to burnout, pride, or despair.

Paul's pastoral plea to the Galatians is, "Don't go back." Don't trade the riches of God's grace for the rags of legalism. Don't return to the "elementary principles of the world," the lie that you can earn your place with God by what you do. That mindset didn't save you, and it won't sustain you. What began by the Spirit cannot be completed by the flesh.

Why live like an orphan when God has already adopted you? Why strive for what has already been freely given? You're not a servant trying to earn your keep; you're a child receiving an inheritance. To live otherwise is to deny what Christ died to give you.

Faithfulness Isn't Always Popular

Paul reminds the Galatians that the faithfulness of his ministry has been misunderstood by many and even used against him by his opponents. If the enemy can't turn you, he will turn others against you. In this section of Galatians, we can feel the pain Paul carries. Once celebrated and loved by the Galatians, he now finds himself viewed with

suspicion, not because he changed, but because he stayed faithful. That still happens today. Standing firm in the truth of the gospel may cost you popularity, relationships, or approval. But faithfulness to Christ is always worth it.

This is a challenge for anyone who wants to be both faithful and liked. The truth is, you're not always going to be able to be both. Sometimes, standing on what's true will cost you approval. Speaking the truth in love might still offend. Holding fast to God's grace in a world addicted to performance may cause some people to walk away. Like Paul, we've got to stay close to Jesus and his Word, even when it costs us something. Faithfulness isn't about being liked; it's about being loyal to Jesus.

Study Guide

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INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

From Strangers to Sons: Before coming to Christ, what "false gods" did you serve, knowingly or unknowingly? What does it mean to "know God," and how is that different from just believing he exists? Why is Paul's phrase "rather, being known by God" so important to understanding salvation? How should this relationship of being known by God shape our daily life and worship?

Spiritual Warfare: What are some modern versions of "elementary principles" that Christians are tempted to return to today? Where do you personally feel pressure to perform for God instead of resting in grace? How have you experienced spiritual attack through lies about your identity, worth, or status before God?

Applying Philippians 4:8: What does it look like to "filter your thoughts" through Philippians 4:8? Can you give a real example? Why is it essential to train with the Word of God, not just read it occasionally? What practices can help sharpen your discernment in the daily fight for peace?

Strategy, Not Striving: What's the difference between legalism and discipline in the Christian life? In your life, what's one area where you need to stop striving and start trusting? What's one way you can "gear up" spiritually this week in light of Ephesians 6:11?

Don't Go Back: Paul feared his labor might be in vain. How does that reflect his heart for these believers? Have

you ever caught yourself going back to old mindsets or habits that Christ set you free from? What did you do?

Faithfulness May Cost You: Why did the Galatians start to view Paul with suspicion, even though he hadn't changed? How do you handle the tension between being faithful to truth and being liked by others? Has standing for the gospel ever cost you a relationship or respect? How did you respond?

Gospel Labor and Spiritual Birth: Why does Paul compare his gospel work to childbirth? How does this metaphor help us understand what it means to disciple someone through spiritual confusion or drift? Have you ever felt the "pain" of seeing someone drift from the truth? What would it look like for you to "labor" in prayer or truth for someone right now who is wandering?

CHAPTER 9

Tale Of Two Sons

GALATIANS 4:21-31

Commentary

4:21

Paul makes a direct appeal to those who choose to live under the Old Testament Jewish Law, even though Jesus has already come, fulfilling both the Law and the promise made to Abraham. His argument isn't limited to the Mosaic Law alone; it extends to the entire foundation of the Jewish Scriptures, particularly the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy).

Paul is essentially asking if they've truly read it. "Look at the Scriptures," he says, "and you'll see that the Law itself reveals that the promise of salvation has always pointed forward to Christ."

4:22–23

To illustrate his point, Paul turns to the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman (Hagar) and one by a free woman (Sarah). The son of the slave, Ishmael, was born "according to the flesh," the result of human striving to accomplish God's promise apart from God's timing. But Isaac, the son of the free woman, was born "through promise," a miraculous act of God accomplished by his power alone.

Paul's use of this story shows that if you place your hope in the Law—if you try to earn your way to God through works—you are aligning yourself with the slave woman, not the free. You are choosing the path of flesh, not faith. But those who trust in the promise fulfilled in Christ are the true children of Sarah, the children of freedom.

4:24a

Here lies one of the most controversial moments in the entire letter to the Galatians. Paul chooses to interpret the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar allegorically. As one commentator notes, "An allegorical interpretation seeks to discern a hidden meaning in a given story or text, a meaning that may be entirely divorced from the historical referent alluded to in the narrative itself" (George 1994, 338).

This was controversial for a few reasons. First, the Judaizers would have rejected Paul's claim outright, insisting that the story of Abraham and his two sons was strictly historical, not Christological. But Paul argues that God was telling another story through

these historical events, one that always pointed beyond itself to the gospel of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Second, even today, many theologians view allegorizing a biblical text as risky, possibly even irresponsible, when it seems to depart from the plain sense of Scripture. Yet Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is not playing fast and loose with the text. He is revealing that beneath the historical narrative lies a God-given design; a providential pattern displaying God's redemptive plan.

4:24b–25

Hagar represents Mount Sinai (the place where the Law was given) and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, which is in slavery with her children. This means those who rely on the Law for righteousness remain in bondage. They are spiritual descendants of Hagar, not Sarah.

This would have been a shocking claim to Paul's Jewish audience. Jerusalem was the epicenter of religious life and national identity, the city God gave his people after freeing them from slavery. To describe Jerusalem as a place of bondage and to call her descendants "children of Hagar" would have been deeply offensive. Paul is showing that lineage and faith are not the same thing.

Yes, the Jews were descendants of Abraham and Sarah, not Abraham and Hagar, but if they reject Jesus and try to earn their way into God's family through works of the Law, they are no better than Abraham when he tried to force God's promise by having a child with Hagar. They

may be Abraham's physical descendants, but spiritually they align with the Abraham who acted in unbelief.

The reverse is also true: that the biological descendants of Abraham and Hagar—or any Gentile, for that matter—can become true children of Abraham through faith in Jesus.

4:26–27

If the Judaizers weren't already offended, Paul now declares that the physical city of Jerusalem is not the true Promised Land. Rather, the "Jerusalem above," the heavenly city described in Revelation 21:2, is the true Promised Land, the true home for God's people.

In other words, believers in Christ are citizens of a different Jerusalem, the one above. Our identity no longer rests in the earthly city or in human effort, but in the heavenly city built by God. This "Jerusalem above" represents the people of God who are defined not by the Law, but by faith in the promise fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

4:28–29

Paul brings his argument to a climax by reminding believers that we are like Isaac as children of promise. This is the true identity of every Christian. Just as Isaac's birth came through God's supernatural intervention rather than human planning, so too are believers in Christ born again by supernatural intervention through the Holy Spirit.

The persecution Paul refers to recalls Ishmael's mocking of Isaac in Genesis 21. Paul traces that

conflict forward to the present tension in the Galatian churches. The Judaizers are like Ishmael, persecuting those who walk in the freedom of faith.

4:30

Though Paul's words sound harsh, his point is about spiritual separation. The Judaizers and the Galatian believers are not on the same path. Paul is urging them to decisively reject the teaching of the Judaizers and cling to the finished work of Christ alone.

4:31

In Christ, we are children of the free woman—heirs of promise and citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Don't trade your freedom in Christ for the yoke of legalism. Live as the free sons and daughters of God that you truly are.

Application of Galatians 4:21-31

God tells his story not only through the pages of Scripture but also through the lives of his people. Just as the gospel was woven through the lives of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, that same redemptive narrative continues in us today. Our victories and failures, our long seasons of waiting, and our moments of breakthrough, all are being folded into the grand tapestry of God's story.

Jesus Is the Hero

Every story has a main character, a central figure around whom the plot revolves. In every novel, film, or testimony, we instinctively look for the hero. Who overcomes? Who saves the day? Who brings resolution to the tension?

The Bible is no different. From Genesis to Revelation, the story unfolds with rich characters, high drama, deep tension, and ultimate resolution. In God's story, there is one main character, one true hero: Jesus Christ.

God's story is not first about us, but about him. God created a perfect world where our first parents, Adam and Eve, walked closely with him. But they rebelled, and the world became broken and corrupted by sin. From that moment on, a rescue mission began, not driven by human effort but by divine grace.

Like a master storyteller, God gave glimpses of the coming hero. He began with a promise: one day, a descendant of the woman would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15). This is the first whisper of the gospel, the protoevangelium, the first good news. From that point forward, every page of the Old Testament echoes with anticipation. In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham and promises that through his offspring all nations will be blessed, a promise pointing to the Messiah (Gal. 3:16). In Genesis 22, when Abraham prepares to sacrifice Isaac, God provides a ram as a substitute, foreshadowing the day when another Father would not withhold his Son, but offer him as the true substitute for sinners.

In Exodus, the blood of the Passover lamb protects Israel from death, prefiguring Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose blood saves us from judgment. The tabernacle and sacrificial system weren't empty rituals; they were visual prophecies pointing to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. The manna, the water from the rock, the bronze

serpent, all were shadows of Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Healer lifted up for our salvation.

In 2 Samuel 7, God makes a covenant with David, promising an everlasting throne through his descendant. This Son of David would be more than a king; he would be the eternal ruler whose kingdom will never end. The Psalms echo this hope: Psalm 22 anticipates crucifixion centuries before it existed, and Psalm 110 reveals a divine King who is also an eternal Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

The prophets sharpen the picture. Isaiah foretells that a virgin will conceive and bear a son called Immanuel—God with us (Isa. 7:14)—and that this child will be the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). In Isaiah 53, we meet the suffering servant, pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Jeremiah promises a new covenant written on hearts, not stone (Jer. 31:31–34), and Ezekiel describes new hearts and the indwelling Spirit. Micah identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of the eternal ruler (Mic. 5:2). Zechariah envisions a humble king riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9) and one who is pierced yet brings cleansing (Zech. 12:10; 13:1). Malachi closes the Old Testament with the promise of a coming messenger, fulfilled in John the Baptist, who pointed to Jesus and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

From the first breath of Scripture to the final word of the prophets, God has been telling one unified story. Every promise, prophecy, and pattern points to Jesus. The Old Testament isn't a collection of moral tales. It's the build-up to the arrival of the true and better Adam, the greater Moses,

the eternal King, the suffering Servant, the perfect Lamb. Jesus isn't just part of the story; he is the point of the story.

Our Story

Our stories are woven into this great unfolding story of redemption. Jesus is not only the hero of the Bible; he is the hero of all human history. More than that, he can be the hero of your life if you will let him be. As Paul writes in Romans 1, the truth of God's power and glory is revealed to all (Rom. 1:19–20). The question is: will your story testify to your own efforts to replace Jesus as the hero, or will it point unashamedly to him as the true victor, the one who holds your life and brings ultimate victory?

The beauty of the gospel is that God does not save us and then step away. He redeems our past, repurposes our pain, and uses even the broken, messy pieces of our lives to magnify the glory of his grace. Just as Scripture is all about Jesus, so a Christian's life must be all about Jesus. The longer we walk with him, the more we recognize the golden thread of mercy running through every trial and triumph.

If you belong to Christ, your story is not random. It is not meaningless. Your life is part of something eternal; an unending story of redemption and restoration. Your story joins countless others, forming a living testimony to the power of God's kingdom breaking into this world.

The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the most profound ways to communicate truth, and for Christians, telling the truth means embracing both the beauty and the brokenness

of life. The gospel isn't a highlight reel of victories; it's an honest reckoning with sin, suffering, and the cross. We need the courage to face our pain, not to numb it or hide it, but to process it with Jesus and hold it up to the light of God's promises. The gospel gives us permission to be honest. It speaks into the aching corners of our hearts, acknowledging the depth of our wounds while revealing the power of redemption. The cross does not ignore suffering; it confronts it, embraces it, and redeems it.

The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims that even in our worst moments—even when we are lost, ashamed, or broken—God is not finished with us. His grace does not merely clean us up; it transforms us. He adopts us, forgives us, and makes us new. God takes what is rejected and scarred and reshapes it into something beautiful. This has always been his story.

As Ephesians 2:10 declares, "For we are his workmanship [poiēma], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." We are God's poiēma, his masterpiece, his crafted poem. God is not only the author of Scripture, he is the author of our lives, the perfecter of our faith, and he is still writing (Heb. 12:2). God is not done with you. He has good works prepared for you. Stay near Jesus and walk in them. And be sure of this: if God has begun a work in you, he will complete it (Phil. 1:6). Trust him. Obey him. Follow him.

If you are walking through a season of pain, know this: your pain is not pointless. Your story is not over.

The cross is the proof.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

The Law vs. The Promise: What is the significance of Isaac being born "through promise" and Ishmael "according to the flesh"? How do we sometimes try to force God's promises through our own effort? In what ways do modern Christians still struggle with choosing law over grace?

Slavery and Freedom: What does Paul mean when he says Jerusalem (the physical city) is "in slavery"? Why is Paul's comparison of the present Jerusalem to Hagar so offensive, and what is the core truth behind it? In what ways can religion become a form of bondage instead of freedom?

The Heavenly Jerusalem: What is the "Jerusalem above," and how does this shift our perspective on our identity as Christians? How does knowing we belong to the heavenly Jerusalem impact our lives practically?

Children of the Free Woman: What are some practical ways to live like a free son or daughter of God? How can we discern when we're slipping back into law-based or performance-based thinking?

Identity and Inheritance: What does it mean that we are children of promise like Isaac? Paul says, "Cast out the slave woman and her son." What spiritual or ideological "slavery" do you need to cast out in your life today? Why is it so tempting to trade freedom in Christ for the control of legalism?

God's Story in Us: How has God woven his redemptive story through your own life? Where have you tried to fulfill God's promise in your own strength, and how did it turn out? Paul says God was telling a story through Abraham's family. What story is God telling through your life right now?

Jesus at the Center: In what ways does this passage point to Jesus as the true fulfillment of God's promises? How does knowing "Jesus is the Hero" reshape the way we read Scripture and see our own story? How do your seasons of waiting, breakthrough, or failure become part of God's redemptive plan?

CHAPTER 10

For Freedom

GALATIANS 5:1-15

Commentary

5:1

This verse is the hinge point of Paul's letter, bridging his theological treatise in chapters 1–4 with the practical exhortations of chapters 5–6. After laying out his case that righteousness comes by faith alone and not by works of the law, Paul now turns to the practical application of living out this freedom we have in Christ.

Freedom is a gift to enjoy. The point here is that freedom is both the means and the end of the gospel. Jesus didn't free us so we could sin, live in shame, hide in fear, wander in confusion, or fall back into slavery. He set us free for the purpose of freedom itself. We were set free, so we should live free.

"What freedom? Not the freedom given to us by the emperor, but that with which Christ has made us free—freedom from God's everlasting wrath" (Luther 1998, 241). Paul wants the Galatians to understand that their

liberation from the law, sin, and death wasn't partial or temporary; it was full, final, now, always, and forevermore.

The world views freedom as "doing whatever you want," but biblical freedom is the power to become who you were made to be: sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, we are to stand firm. Paul uses a military image here. Freedom in Christ must be guarded. Christians must stand their ground. This is a call to courage, to endure and resist false teaching.

Lastly, do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. The image of a yoke recalls the heavy burdens placed on oxen. The Judaizers were trying to put the Galatians back under the burden of earning salvation, maintaining favor with God through works. That's slavery. Any time you try to earn what God gives freely, you step back into bondage.

5 : 2

Walking in freedom should look like freedom. Being forced to sign up for circumcision doesn't. Rightly so, Paul's tone becomes more direct. It's as if he's grabbing them by the shirt, shaking them awake: "Guys, listen to me. Pay attention to this. Don't miss it. If you do, you'll miss the entire gospel."

Circumcision here is not just a surgical act; it represents a return to the law as the means of justification, to the old covenant. Paul is not against the act itself (he even had Timothy circumcised for missionary strategy, Acts 16:3). What he's fighting is the theological

meaning attached to it by the Judaizers, who claimed circumcision was necessary for salvation.

In other words, Paul is saying that if you receive circumcision as a requirement for righteousness, you are rejecting the sufficiency of Christ. "Christ will be of no advantage to you." That doesn't mean Christ becomes "less helpful" or "disappointed." It means he will be of no benefit at all. Why? Because salvation is either by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, or it isn't salvation at all.

5 : 3

Paul continues addressing those considering circumcision as a requirement for being right with God. He's not attacking Jews or circumcision per se. "Paul doesn't despise circumcision. He understands the value and meaning of circumcision in the economy of redemption in the Old Testament" (Sproul 2022, 107). What he's confronting is the belief that external obedience can make you righteous before God.

James 2:10 says, "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." That's the point. If you want to play that game, you'd better bat 1,000—every day of your life—in thought, word, motive, and deed. But we are sinners by nature and by choice. There is no such thing as a righteous person apart from Christ (Rom. 3).

5 : 4

To be "severed" means to be cut off, nullified, disconnected, rendered void. "The original point of circumcision was

to be severed or cut off unto Christ. Now Paul warns of being cut off or severed from Christ" (Sproul 2022, 108).

If you insist on trying to earn your right standing before God, you're cutting yourself off from the only Jesus who can save you. We can't save ourselves! Paul's saying you're cutting the lifeline. He's not saying Christ walks away from you; he's saying you're walking away from him and declaring, "I can save myself."

He is specifically addressing those who think they can "be justified by the law." To be justified means to be declared righteous before God. Paul is saying that if you are trying to justify yourself by works, it's a false hope. The moment you turn to your own efforts, your theology becomes, "Jesus isn't enough." You place your faith not in the finished work of Christ but in your unfinished, insufficient work. The warning is clear: if you rely on the law to justify you, you step outside the realm of grace and disconnect yourself from Christ, your only hope.

5:5–6

In contrast, the Christian life is lived by faith through the power of the Spirit as we wait in hope for Christ's righteousness. That means we don't live with anxious striving but with confident anticipation.

The believer has already been declared righteous by faith (Gal. 2:16), yet still awaits the full realization of that righteousness when we see Jesus face to face. We wait, not because the outcome is uncertain, but because it's secure and yet still to come at final glorification (Rom. 8:30).

So, it's faith in Christ that matters, not circumcision or uncircumcision.

5:7–8

The Christian life is like a marathon; you win by finishing faithfully. The Galatians had started their race well, but now they'd been thrown off course. Paul says, "You were running well. Who hindered you?"

Whatever teaching they've embraced, it didn't come from God. Not all religious-sounding advice comes from the Lord. The voice of God calls sinners to Christ by grace alone, through faith alone. Anything else is a counterfeit gospel.

5:9

Even a little false teaching can corrupt an entire church. Like leaven spreading through dough, it only takes a small amount to affect everything.

5:10

Paul entrusts the churches of Galatia to the Lord. His confidence isn't in their strength or discernment but in God's power to preserve his people. Even though they've been misled, Paul believes that because they belong to Jesus, they will ultimately reject false teaching, and those who spread it will be held accountable by God. It is the Lord who opens eyes, guards hearts, and calls his people back to truth.

5:11–12

Paul points out the absurdity of the accusation that he still preaches circumcision. If that were true, he says, then why is he still being persecuted? The offense of the cross—which declares that salvation comes only through Christ's finished work, not human effort—would no longer be offensive if Paul were compromising.

He goes so far as to say that those troubling the Galatians with this teaching should "go the whole way and emasculate themselves." In other words, if they think more cutting equals more righteousness, why stop halfway? It's an intentionally shocking statement—but so is adding to the gospel.

5:13–15

Freedom is not a license for sin or selfishness but a call to serve one another in love. True liberty in Christ doesn't lead to indulgence; it leads to imitation of Christ.

Love fulfills the law. The gospel frees us to live in Christlike love toward others, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Application of Galatians 5:1-15

There's a scene in the movie Braveheart—arguably the most famous in the film—where William Wallace rallies a group of frightened, disheartened Scottish soldiers just before the Battle of Stirling. Many are ready to turn back, believing they can't win against the English. Wallace rides in unexpectedly, rejects the nobles' cautious diplomacy, and delivers a passionate speech that puts steel in the men's spines.

He tells them that running away might let them live a while longer, but they'll regret it for the rest of their lives. Then he delivers the iconic line: "They may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!" The moment unites the Scots, stirring them with a vision bigger than themselves. Instead of fleeing, they charge into battle—not merely for survival, but for the cause of freedom. Every time I read this section in Galatians, I think of that scene.

For Freedom

Imagine if Christians today lived with the same fire burning in their bones that Wallace stirred in his countrymen, that holy defiance against the tyranny of sin and the legalism that seeks to enslave us again. To the Galatians, this is Paul's freedom speech, his battle cry to the church: Christ has set us free—stand firm, and don't go back to slavery (Gal. 5:1).

Just like the Scottish soldiers tempted to trade freedom for temporary peace under English rule, believers are tempted to trade gospel liberty for looking the part, winning others' approval, or maintaining comfort.

We were set free, not to serve ourselves, not to work to maintain our standing before God, but to worship freely, obey wholeheartedly, love one another, live freely, and walk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Set Free to Worship

From the moment God breathed life into Adam, the human heart was hardwired for worship. We weren't made to worship; we were made worshipping. We

can't help but worship. The question is not will we worship, it's who or what we will worship.

Sin has derailed and distorted our worship. It distracts, deceives, and leads us astray into idolatry, rebellion, and ultimately slavery (Rom. 1:21–25). As we've seen throughout Galatians, sin enslaves us to false masters, whether legalism, lust, the approval of man, or pride. Jesus didn't just come to forgive us; he came to free us.

This has always been the story. In Exodus, God called Moses not merely to deliver Israel from Pharaoh but to lead them out so they could worship him in the wilderness (Ex. 8:1; 9:1). The same is true of our salvation; we were set free to worship.

Throughout the Bible, worship is expressed in both adoration and action. Adoration is the overflow of the heart: prayer, praise, silence, song, awe. As sons and daughters of God, we've been given something to sing about. We're no longer under Pharaoh's whip, sin's dominion, or the curse of the law. By grace, we've been brought into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Freedom transforms worship from obligation to delight, from routine to joyful overflow. We don't worship to get close to God; we worship because God came close to us.

But worship doesn't stop with adoration; it moves into action. It's our daily service, our obedience, our everyday "yes" to the Lord. As Joshua declared, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Jos. 24:15). This too is worship. In Christ, we are finally free to obey.

Before Jesus, we were in bondage to sin, unable to please God (Rom. 8:7–8). Now, through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live new lives, holy and set apart to God. Worship is the overflow of a freed heart. It's adoration that erupts into action. It's the song that becomes service. It's liberty that becomes loyalty. All of it is rooted in God's mercy and grace. The gospel sets us free to be who we were meant to be: worshipers.

Free to Obey

One of the great ironies of the gospel is that true freedom is found in joyful obedience. In the modern Western mind, freedom is often conceived as the absence of constraint, the power to do whatever one desires without restriction or interference.

Biblical freedom, however, is not the absence of boundaries; it is submission to the right King. You and I have no problem with obedience when we are our own king; we gladly submit to our lusts, our emotions, our desires. But sin has corrupted our hearts, and our desires lead us into the tyranny of sin's rule.

When it comes to freedom, the Bible presents a radically different vision than we Americans are used to: freedom unto something, not freedom from everything. We are now free in Christ to obey.

Before salvation, obedience to God was impossible. Paul writes in Romans 8:7–8 that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please

God." This is not mere disinterest; it's spiritual inability. Apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are enslaved to sin, dead in trespasses (Eph. 2:1), and utterly incapable of producing righteousness on our own.

Through the gospel, Christ not only secures our forgiveness, but he also grants us new life. This fulfills God's prophetic promise through Ezekiel: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezek. 36:27).

In Christ, we are set free from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), but not from the goodness of God's commands. Rather, we can now delight in the law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2), not as a ladder to climb for salvation, but as a light for our path (Ps. 119:105).

Freedom in Christ is not lawlessness; it's the liberty of new birth. It's freedom to live in alignment with the God who made us. We do not obey to earn God's love; we obey because we already have it. This obedience isn't fueled by fear but by affection. "If you love me," Jesus said, "you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Obedience, then, is not a condition of salvation but its evidence.

To be free in Christ is to be truly human again, restored to the image of the Son, walking by faith, bearing the fruit of righteousness. The chains of sin have been broken. The power of death has been defeated. And now, united with Christ, we are free, not just to believe, but to obey.

Don't Give Up Your Freedom

Paul's plea to the Galatians is that they would not give up their freedom: their freedom in Christ to worship, to obey, to live the life God has called them to.

So what if Christians lived for freedom? What if we took Paul's Braveheart moment seriously? What if we declared with roaring hearts and bold voices that we are free men and women, free to follow Jesus all our days, free to trust him in difficult seasons, free to walk in his word, will, and ways, free to submit to and obey God's word without editing, changing, or dismissing it?

Too often, Christians are known for what they're against. But what if we were known for our freedom? Who cares what the world thinks of us? They may take our reputations, our comfort, even our lives, but they will never take our freedom in Christ.

What if we lived that way? I believe we'd be a church the gates of hell couldn't touch. A church that doesn't bow to culture or tradition, doesn't fear men or institutions, and doesn't water down the gospel to make it palatable. A church that preaches the truth, breathes the fresh air of God's grace, and walks with courageous joy.

A church alive with the Holy Spirit, bold in holiness, tender in love, and fearless in bearing witness to all of Christ with all of our lives.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Living in Freedom: Paul says, "For freedom Christ has set us free." What does it mean that freedom is both the means and the end of the gospel? How does the world define freedom, and how does that contrast with biblical freedom? What "yokes of slavery" are Christians today tempted to return to?

The Danger of Legalism: Why is adding anything to the gospel (like circumcision) so dangerous, even if it seems minor? Paul says, "Christ will be of no advantage to you." What does that tell us about the seriousness of trusting in works instead of grace? How do Christians today unknowingly cut themselves off from the freedom of Christ?

Waiting in Faith: How does hope in Christ's righteousness affect our day-to-day living? Why is Paul emphasizing faith working through love instead of religious performance? What are signs that a person is living from faith rather than anxious striving?

Staying the Course: Paul says the Galatians were "running well." What might cause someone to get "knocked off course" in their spiritual walk? Why does Paul place such weight on even a small amount of false teaching? How does Paul's confidence in God's work among the Galatians challenge your view of spiritual maturity and perseverance?

The Offense of the Cross: What does it mean that the cross is offensive? Why would Paul be persecuted for preaching it? Why do you think Paul uses such strong, even

graphic, language in verse 12? In what ways is the modern church tempted to make the gospel more palatable?

Freedom to Love: Why is Christian freedom not permission to sin? What does it practically look like to "through love serve one another"? How does the command to love your neighbor as yourself fulfill the law?

Freedom to Worship & Obey: How do you personally experience the tension between worship as adoration and worship as action? What would it look like to live a life marked more by what we're free to do in Christ rather than what we're against?

Don't Give Up Your Freedom: What freedoms in Christ do you personally find easiest to take for granted? Why is it important that obedience is the overflow of our love for God and not primarily out of obligation? What would it mean for our church—or your life—to be marked by freedom in Christ?

CHAPTER 11

Walk By The Spirit

GALATIANS 5:16-26

Commentary

5:16

The life of freedom that Paul describes is the life of the Spirit. Before Christ, we were enslaved to the flesh, bound by its desires, impulses, and corrupt affections. The "flesh" here doesn't simply mean our physical body but our fallen nature inherited from Adam, which is bent toward self, sin, and rebellion against God. In this section Paul draws a contrast between life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit … " This is a command rooted in the believer's new identity. Those who have been justified by grace through faith in Christ are not left to walk out that new identity alone. They are given the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God dwelling within them. To

"walk by the Spirit" means to live moment by moment in dependence on, obedience to, and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who empowers us to live free from the dominion of the flesh and who produces in the Christian the desire for faith and good works.

Notice the order—walking by the Spirit comes first, and resisting the flesh follows as a result. Many people invert this, thinking they must conquer the flesh in their own strength before they can enjoy intimacy with the Spirit. But the only way to defeat the desires of the flesh is to live in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit doesn't just help us say "no" to sin, he gives us something better to say "yes" to: Jesus.

5:17

This verse is an invitation to fight. It describes the daily internal battle between what our flesh wants and what the Spirit desires for us. Yet we can rest assured in the fight because it's a war already won in Christ. The Spirit's presence is the guarantee of that victory. As we walk with him—yielding our will, trusting his power, and remaining near—we experience the freedom the gospel promises.

The desires and goals of the Spirit and the flesh are in opposition. They lead in two directions, one toward holiness, the other toward sin. One toward freedom, the other toward bondage. There is no peaceful coexistence between them. They are enemies at war within the believer, each pulling the heart in opposite directions.

Paul describes the internal conflict every Christian experiences: the flesh—our old, sinful nature—is

not annihilated at conversion. Though dethroned, it has not been destroyed. It still fights for dominance. The Holy Spirit, now indwelling the believer, is actively working to produce new affections, godly desires, and Christ-centered ambitions. These two powers clash constantly, not occasionally.

The phrase "to keep you from doing the things you want to do" reveals the tension believers live in. Sometimes what we truly want—to honor Christ and walk in godliness—is hindered by the pull of the flesh. Other times sinful impulses rise up, and the Spirit convicts, restrains, and redirects us. This conflict is not a sign of spiritual failure; it is evidence of spiritual life. Dead people don't wrestle. Only those made alive by the Spirit experience this war.

5:18

The life of the Spirit is not governed by legalism, as the Judaizers taught, but by grace. "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." This is the central point of Paul's argument throughout Galatians. The law, though holy and good, could never change the human heart. It could reveal sin but not defeat it. It could diagnose the disease but not cure it.

Being "under the law" means living under the crushing weight of works-based righteousness, trying to earn God's favor through performance and striving in the flesh, only to fall short. Being "led by the Spirit," however, means living in the new covenant reality where God himself indwells and empowers you to walk in step with his word, will, and ways.

5:19–21

"By saying the deeds of the flesh are obvious, Paul means that they are known to all; they are so self-evidently evil and abhorrent that even those who do them wish to conceal them. Or else it may mean that these deeds are obvious only to believers in Christ" (Jerome 2010, 229). Either way, they eventually erupt to the surface, no matter how well we try to hide them.

Paul gives a representative list of what life under the domination of the flesh produces. It includes sexual immorality (porneia in Greek), which refers to all forms of sexual activity outside God's design. Impurity and sensuality push the boundaries even further, showing that the flesh will take you farther than you ever intended to go, leaving you neck-deep in moral decay, shamelessness, and indulgence.

Paul also includes idolatry—placing anything above God in our hearts—and sorcery, which in the ancient world often involved substance use, manipulation, and false spiritual practices. Then he lists a whole cluster of relational sins that often get overlooked in churches: enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalry, dissension, division, envy—things that destroy unity and poison relationships. Finally, he names drunkenness, orgies, and "things like these," reminding us that this is not a complete list but a pattern. These are just as fleshly as sexual sins, because they stem from the same root: life lived apart from the Spirit.

Living according to the flesh has its consequences. Paul warns, "those who do such things will not inherit

the kingdom of God." The Greek verb tense refers to those who habitually practice these things, whose lives are characterized and dominated by the flesh. Paul is not saying a believer loses salvation every time they sin, but that a life consistently marked by the works of the flesh reveals a heart that is not walking by the Spirit and does not belong to the kingdom.

Once again, freedom does not mean doing whatever feels good. True freedom is not the absence of boundaries; it is the life God intends for his children, a life lived by the power of the Spirit. The flesh leads to destruction, but the Spirit leads to life and peace.

5:22–26

In contrast to the visible works of the flesh, Paul describes what the Spirit produces, the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that "fruit" is singular, not plural. These qualities are a unified whole, not a list of optional virtues. They are the organic outgrowth of a life rooted in the Holy Spirit. Just as an apple tree doesn't strain to produce apples, the believer doesn't force these traits into being through willpower. They grow naturally in a life lived in step with the Spirit.

Love leads the list; it is the essence of the gospel and the fulfillment of the law (Gal. 5:14). Joy and peace speak to the deep internal realities that flow from trusting Christ and being reconciled to God. Peace with God should govern all other forms of peace in a Christian's life. Patience, kindness, and goodness speak to how we treat others—graciously, gently, without demanding results or recognition. Faithfulness reflects Spirit-empowered loyalty

to God and others, especially one's spouse. Gentleness and meekness are strength under control, not weakness. Self-control is the Spirit-enabled ability to say no to sin and yes to righteousness, even when no one is watching.

Paul adds, "against such things there is no law." The law was made to restrain evil, but when someone lives by the Spirit and bears this kind of fruit, there is nothing to condemn. These qualities not only fulfill the intent of God's law, they surpass it. No one needs a rule to compel them to be loving, joyful, or kind when the Spirit is in charge. The law points toward these virtues, but only the Spirit can produce them.

Then Paul grounds all of this in our gospel identity: "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Crucifixion is not a temporary fix or behavioral tweak; it is an execution. To belong to Christ means to mortify the flesh, not manage it (Rom. 8:13). It means we no longer negotiate with our sinful desires; we put them to death. Paul isn't saying Christians never struggle with sin, but that true believers have decisively rejected the flesh as a way of life.

When we walk with the Spirit, we won't just avoid sin, we'll become more like Jesus. So let us keep in step with the Spirit and "not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (vv. 25–26).

Application of Galatians 5:16-26

The Christian life is primarily about Jesus. The call to walk by the Spirit, to put sin to death, and to bear fruit is, at its core, a call to stay close to Jesus. Proximity to

Christ changes everything. If we stay near him—abide in him, look to him, listen to him, and love him—we will walk in the Spirit. When we walk in the Spirit, the power of the flesh is broken, sin is mortified, and the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow in our lives like fruit on a tree planted by streams of living water.

Follow Jesus (Walk by the Spirit)

To walk by the Spirit is to follow Jesus with our whole life, to go where he goes, love what he loves, and obey what he says. The Holy Spirit's role is to point us toward Jesus Christ, empower us to remain near him, and produce the fruit of Christlikeness in us. The Spirit alone gives life and power to our obedience. Without him, all our efforts to follow Jesus are like trying to row upstream with broken paddles.

Imagine a father teaching his child to walk. He doesn't send the child off alone. He holds their hand, steadies their steps, and lifts them up when they fall. That's the kind of relationship the Spirit gives us with Christ. He holds us up as we walk. He brings Jesus into our daily lives, not just in church or Bible reading, but in conflict at work, in moments of temptation, and in decisions about money, time, and relationships.

To walk by the Spirit means keeping Jesus in view. When your heart wanders, bring it back to him. When your thoughts scatter, fix your eyes on him. When you're tired, discouraged, or tempted to give up, run to him. The Spirit does not empower us apart from Christ; he empowers us through Christ.

In the 1999 film Fight Club, an unnamed narrator is at war with his alter ego, Tyler Durden. Played by Edward Norton, the narrator is weary of IKEA furniture, name-brand soap, and shallow friendships. He aches for something that matters, something real, something that hurts, something that feels alive. So he follows Tyler Durden, a charismatic figure who offers him what seems like freedom.

Durden famously says, "It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything." Durden embodies raw, uncontrolled desire; violent, selfish, and anti-order. He promises freedom but delivers destruction. What Norton's character finds is chaos, not peace; rage, not purpose. He realizes Durden isn't his savior but his jailer. That's what it looks like to follow the flesh: it promises life and thrill but delivers death. The way of Jesus leads in the opposite direction from the flesh, yet it still calls us to fight. Jesus doesn't hand us brass knuckles; he gives us the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

Fight Sin (Mortify the Flesh)

The war within the believer is not between two equal identities or dissociated personalities, a projection of suppressed rage or rebellion like Norton's character in Fight Club. For Christians, the battle is between the old man (the flesh) and the new man (in Christ). Our "fight club" isn't a secret society; it's a divine commission. Romans 8:13 says, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Christians must mortify the flesh to enjoy the life Christ has secured for them. We must fight sin, or else we will fall back into slavery.

Mortifying the flesh is not denying your true self but crucifying your false self so that your true identity in Christ can emerge. As the Puritan John Owen famously wrote, "Always be killing sin, or it will be killing you" (Owen 2004, 5). The flesh, left unchecked, will sabotage everything God wants to do in you. Sin is not merely a behavior; it's a hostile power that seeks to take your eyes off Christ and place them on yourself. The flesh whispers, "You don't need God. You can do this on your own." That's the same lie Tyler sells in Fight Club: liberation through self-rule, strength through chaos, identity through rebellion. It's also the lie the serpent told Eve in the garden, and it still poisons hearts today.

To mortify sin means to put it to death. We don't manage sin, tolerate it, or occasionally resist it; we declare war on it. Sin is never idle; it's either gaining ground or being put to death. There's no neutrality. And the only way to mortify the flesh is by the power of the Spirit, not the strength of the flesh itself. Self-help won't save you. Religious effort won't change you. Only the Spirit of God, applying the finished work of Christ to your heart, can break sin's power.

When Fight Club came out, it struck a chord with young men who were angry at the world, their fathers, or themselves. They felt weak and unmade. Today's young men are no different. Many follow figures who preach hard work, toughness, and self-mastery—men like Jocko Willink or Joe Rogan. But beneath the bravado, the same restlessness remains. The longing for purpose, freedom, and a fight worth fighting is real. Don't mistake it for rebellion; redirect it toward redemption. The gospel offers a different kind of fight; not one that destroys others or yourself, but one that crucifies the inward man so the true man in Christ can live.

This fight is real. You'll feel it in the quiet hours of the night when temptation knocks at your door. You'll feel it when pride rises after an insult or when envy sneaks in as you scroll through someone else's perfect life. The flesh never stops talking. We fight it by looking to Jesus, not ourselves. Fill your heart and mind with who Jesus is and what he's done, for only then will sin lose its charm.

Fulfill the Mission (Bear the Fruit of the Spirit)

The fruit of the Spirit is the external evidence that we've been with Jesus. When the Spirit is in control, love grows where bitterness once ruled. Joy abounds even in hardship. Peace reigns where anxiety once dominated. Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are not the products of sheer willpower. They grow when the soil of our heart is saturated with the presence of Christ. The world doesn't need more religious people; it needs Spirit-filled men and women so close to Jesus that his character saturates their lives.

The fruit of the Spirit isn't for our own display; it's for others to experience. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23) aren't spiritual medals to pin on our chests like badges at Vacation Bible School. They're gifts for the people around us. God doesn't need your fruit, but your neighbor does. Your spouse needs your patience. Your children need your gentleness. Your coworkers need your kindness. The anxious world around you needs your peace. None of it comes from you; it comes from staying close to Jesus.

Just as a branch can only bear fruit if it remains connected to the vine (John 15:4), we bear fruit only when we walk in fellowship with Christ. Stay near Jesus, and fruit will grow. Drift from him, and you'll wither. The Spirit grows fruit in your life not to make you impressive, but to make you a blessing.

If you want to walk by the Spirit, stay near Jesus. If you want to mortify the flesh, stay near Jesus. If you want to bear fruit that lasts, stay near Jesus. There is no substitute.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Follow Jesus: What does it practically mean to "walk by the Spirit"? How do we cultivate that daily? Why is the order—Spirit first, then resisting the flesh—so important to understand? In what areas of life do you find it hardest to keep in step with the Spirit? How has intimacy with Jesus empowered you to overcome temptation or grow in godliness? What does the analogy of the father holding a child's hand teach us about the Spirit's role?

Fight Sin: What are some lies the flesh tells us that sound like freedom but actually lead to slavery? What's the danger of trying to defeat sin in your own strength? Which "works of the flesh" listed in Galatians 5:19–21 feel most relevant to today's culture? How can we know if we're truly fighting sin or simply tolerating it? How does the quote "Be killing sin, or it will be killing you" challenge your daily life?

Fulfill the Mission: Why is the fruit of the Spirit described as a single "fruit" and not "fruits"? How does being near Jesus lead to bearing fruit? How does realizing fruit is for others (not for you) change how you view spiritual growth? Who in your life needs to "taste" the fruit the Spirit is growing in you?

Stay Near Jesus: What does "staying near Jesus" look like in your everyday life? Which of these three areas—Following Jesus, Fighting Sin, or Bearing Fruit—do you feel God is calling you to focus on right now? What practical step can you take this week to deepen your walk with

the Spirit? What's the danger in trying to manufacture fruit without remaining rooted in the gospel?

Bear the Fruit of the Spirit: How is the fruit of the Spirit different from natural personality traits or self-help virtues? How do your personal environments—workplace, home, social media—challenge or test the fruit in your life? Which fruit do you most desire God to grow in you for the sake of others?

Personal Reflection: When do you most feel the tug-of-war between the flesh and the Spirit in your daily life? Have you ever mistaken spiritual busyness for spiritual fruitfulness? What's the difference? Are there hidden areas of your life where the flesh is still in control? Do you expect spiritual maturity to happen instantly or gradually? How does that affect your walk? Who in your life has modeled Spirit-filled living in a way that made you want to know Jesus more?

CHAPTER 12

Don't Give Up

GALATIANS 6:1-10

Commentary

6:1

As the last chapter of Galatians begins, Paul turns from doctrine to practice, showing what life in the Spirit looks like within Christian community. At the end of chapter five, he contrasted life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. Now he explains how walking in the Spirit takes shape in our relationships with one another.

If anyone is caught in any transgression, meaning they have been overtaken or ensnared by sin, fellow believers are called to step in and help restore them. This assumes a close, caring relationship among Christians, where we're attentive enough to notice when someone is struggling. Paul is not telling us to go hunting for sin in others, but to be alert and compassionate when someone has clearly been overcome. "Caught" here does not mean "caught red-handed," but rather trapped like an animal in a snare, unable to free itself without help.

This is the reality of Christian life: we were not made to walk alone. Through shared relationships, we help one another stay close to Jesus and on mission. To restore a brother or sister trapped in sin is like resetting a broken bone; it can be painful, but it brings healing. The goal is restoration, not humiliation; wholeness, not shame.

Too often, churches either ignore sin or deal with it harshly. Neither approach is right. The mature believer, walking by the Spirit, is called to step in gently and restore. When Paul says, "you who are spiritual," he doesn't mean an elite class of Christians, but those walking in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). This should be the normal practice of every believer.

Finally, Paul warns, "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." Restoration requires humility. The moment we think we're invincible is the moment we're most vulnerable. The same sin that traps another could just as easily ensnare us.

Next, Paul calls believers to bear one another's burdens, and in doing so, fulfill the law of Christ. The Galatians had been pressured to observe the Mosaic law, but Jesus fulfilled that law perfectly on our behalf. Now, Paul points to a higher law, the law of Christ.

This "law of Christ" broadly encompasses everything Jesus taught and commanded. He summarized the entire law in two commands: love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37–40). He gave his disciples a new commandment: "Love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

To bear one another's burdens is to live out that kind of sacrificial love. It means getting close enough to others to feel the weight they're carrying and helping to shoulder it.

"Burdens" here may include sin struggles, emotional wounds, financial hardship, grief, illness, relational conflict, or spiritual doubt. Whatever threatens to crush a brother or sister, we are called to come alongside and help carry it, not in a way that fosters dependency or prevents growth, but through Spirit-led compassion that mirrors Christ, who bore our ultimate burden on the cross.

6 : 3

Paul warns against pride and self-deception. Coming immediately after the command to bear one another's burdens, he identifies one of the greatest obstacles to compassion: an inflated view of self. When someone imagines themselves morally or spiritually superior, they distance themselves from others' struggles and fail to recognize their own weakness and dependency on grace. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

Paul's language is blunt: "he is nothing." This is a sobering reminder of our utter dependence on God. Everything we have and are comes from him. Pride is incompatible with the Spirit-led life because it blinds us to our need for grace and prevents us from extending it to others.

6 : 4

Paul now offers a corrective to comparison. Instead of measuring ourselves against others—whether to feel superior or inadequate—believers are called to "test" their own work. This is an invitation to honest self-examination before God under the guidance of the Spirit.

When Paul says, "his reason to boast will be in himself alone," he is not endorsing self-congratulation. He's describing a quiet confidence that comes from integrity, a sense of satisfaction that one's life is lived faithfully before God, not in competition with others. This is not pride but accountability. Our "boast" is in what God has produced in us by his grace.

6 : 5

"For each will have to bear his own load." At first glance, this seems to contradict verse 2, where Paul said to bear one another's burdens. The key lies in the distinction between burden and load. "Burdens" refers to heavy, overwhelming weights that no one can carry alone. "Load" refers to personal responsibility.

Think of it this way: you can't move a couch alone; you need help. But you can carry your own backpack through the airport. That's the difference Paul draws here. "Our task is to carry our individual load, not someone else's, in a way that pleases God" (Keller 2024, 170). Each believer must bear responsibility for the life God has entrusted to them. Paul is defining the dimensions of Christian community:

we help one another in crisis, but each of us remains accountable to God for our own obedience and stewardship.

6:6

Commentators note that the connection between this verse and the surrounding passage is not entirely clear, yet its meaning is plain. Paul lays the foundation for supporting pastors and teachers. "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches."

As R. C. Sproul observes, "He is concerned because, already in the first century, there was a problem with those who were benefitting from the Word of God being reluctant to render support for those who were teaching the Word of God. This has been true in the church for all ages" (Sproul 2022, 129). Paul's instruction reflects a principle of mutual blessing: those who receive spiritual nourishment should provide material support in return.

6:7–9

Paul introduces the principle of sowing and reaping. Whatever a person sows will eventually grow and bear fruit. Those who sow to the flesh—living for selfish, sinful desires—will reap corruption and decay. Those who sow to the Spirit—living in alignment with God's Word, will, and ways—will reap eternal life.

Paul warns believers not to be deceived: God is not mocked. The law of sowing and reaping is as certain as gravity. While the principle applies broadly to life—finances, relationships, habits—Paul's focus here is

eternal. The "reaping" he describes is not just temporal blessing or hardship but ultimate destiny: eternal life or ruin. Eternal life, as Jesus defined it, is knowing God and experiencing life with him now and forever (John 17:3).

That's why Paul urges believers not to grow weary in doing good. The Christian life demands endurance, and results are not always immediate. But "in due season," at God's appointed time, the harvest will come if we do not give up. Faithfulness is never wasted.

Paul calls us to active goodness as we await the promised harvest of righteousness and eternal life (vv. 7–9). He calls us to active goodness. The Christian life is not passive waiting but purposeful participation in God's work.

"Do good to everyone," he writes, "and especially to those who are of the household of faith." The command is universal, yet the priority is clear: the church is a spiritual family. Just as we naturally care first for members of our own household, we are called to prioritize the needs of fellow believers while still extending goodness to all.

Application of Galatians 6:1-10

There are no lone-wolf Christians because the Christian life is not a solo journey. From the moment someone places their faith in Jesus Christ, they are united not only to him but also to his people. To be a Christian is to be adopted into a new family, the family of God, called the Church.

The Church exists in two expressions: universal and local. The universal Church refers to all believers throughout history and across the world who have trusted in the finished work of Christ. This is the body of Christ in its global and eternal sense. The local church, however, is the visible, tangible expression of that universal Church. It is where believers gather in specific communities to worship, learn, serve, and live out their faith together. This is why so many New Testament epistles are addressed to particular congregations: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and others. God's design for the Christian life is to be lived within these local bodies.

Just as in a healthy home where needs are met, burdens are shared, and meals are enjoyed in fellowship, the church is called to embody the same kind of covenantal care. In a covenant family, members commit to one another. They walk through trials together, speak the truth in love, serve sacrificially, and celebrate God's goodness as one body. The church isn't just a place you attend; it's a people you belong to. It's not optional for Christian maturity; it's essential.

In the Trenches

The Christian life, as described at the beginning of Galatians 6, is not fought from a distance; it's fought in the trenches. Paul's entire letter unfolds in the context of conflict: truth versus error, grace versus law, Spirit versus flesh. This is not peacetime Christianity; it's spiritual warfare. Satan is real, he hates you, and he wants to destroy you. That's why we all need what Paul describes as someone to help us when we're trapped in the enemy's snare.

In Galatians 5, Paul outlines the war between the flesh and the Spirit: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17). That's daily, close-range combat. The traps the enemy sets are often like a spider's web: subtle, sticky, and difficult to escape. Believers can easily become entangled. Paul's exhortation to the churches in Galatia is to help one another live free in Christ.

So what do we do when the people in our local church are overtaken or caught in the web of sin? What do we do when others are weighed down, exhausted by the burdens they carry, the lies they believe, and the thoughts that torment them? Do we take to the internet for public condemnation? Do we ignore them or run away? No. We step up. Because they need us, and we need each other.

The Christian community—the local church—should be a band of brothers and sisters who know what it's like to fight, fall, and be lifted back up. The image here isn't of polished saints giving moral lectures or pontificating with empty platitudes. It's of soldiers dragging their wounded back to safety. It's of men and women restoring the broken, not with shame, but with gentleness. It's of spiritual medics, armed with the balm of the gospel, who know they too could be the next casualty.

And that's why you will reap what you sow.

Sowing and Reaping

The health of your church community will always reflect what is being sown and reaped within it. If we

sow gentleness, restoration, and brotherhood, we will reap healing, freedom, and spiritual vitality. But if we sow pride, gossip, or apathy, we will reap division, bitterness, and decay. Galatians 6:7–9 reminds us that we are always planting seeds by how we treat others, respond to sin, and walk with the Spirit. The church that sows with the seeds of the Spirit's fruit will become a place of health and transformation.

Paul told us in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. From that fruit, we're meant to gather seeds and sow them back into the soil of the church community.

Think of it this way: when a tree bears fruit, that fruit contains seeds designed to fall, take root, and multiply. Likewise, when the Spirit produces fruit in your life, that fruit isn't just for your benefit; it's meant to nourish others and multiply new growth. That's why Paul moves naturally from personal spiritual fruit (chapter 5) to life within the household of faith (chapter 6). You don't bear the fruit of kindness so you can admire it; you bear it so you can sow seeds of kindness into someone else's life. The same is true for patience, gentleness, and love.

When we sow the fruit of the Spirit into the lives of others, especially within the household of faith, we participate in God's design for multiplication. "God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). If you sow apathy, isolation, and selfishness, that's the harvest you'll grow. But if you scatter the

fruit of the Spirit into the lives of your brothers and sisters, you'll reap a community that reflects Jesus.

What seeds are you sowing in your home, your church, your friendships, your moments of correction and restoration? What harvest are you preparing for? Because one day, you will eat the fruit of the seeds you plant today.

Don't Give Up

Sometimes it doesn't feel like we're bearing much fruit. You show up to church, serve faithfully, love your spouse, parent your kids, resist temptation, confess sin, read your Bible, show kindness, pray for that friend again—and still, it feels like nothing is changing. No breakthrough. No visible reward.

There are seasons when fruitfulness feels far away: when you disciple someone who walks away, when your prayers seem unanswered, when you do the right thing and suffer for it, when your marriage feels stuck, when your kids push you away, when your private battles feel unwinnable. When the work is hard, the results are slow, and your soul is tired.

That's why Paul says, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9). That's a promise: you will reap, if you don't give up. So many people quit too soon. They abandon the field before the harvest. They uproot what's been growing just before the breakthrough. Some invest deeply in a church community, only to move on again and again, never staying long enough to see the fruit of what they've sown. The

ground may feel dry, but God is still working in the soil. He is never idle, even when we can't see the growth.

The best wine is vinted over time and from hard soil. That's not just true of grapes, it's true of godly character, faithful ministry, and long-term fruitfulness in Christ. The sweetest fruit often grows in the rockiest, harshest conditions. It's not in the easy seasons that your soul learns to trust God; it's in the long, quiet, hidden stretches of labor where he forms the kind of faith that tastes of his goodness.

Remember, you can't do it alone. You need people who will remind you that the harvest is coming, that God's grace is sufficient, and that Jesus is better than the sin you're tempted to chase. You need brothers and sisters to pull weeds with you, water the dry places, and speak life when your hands are weak. God is still working. Fruit takes time. Keep sowing. Keep trusting. Keep showing up. Don't give up. Because in due season you will reap.

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Restoration & Responsibility: What does it practically look like to "restore" someone caught in sin? How does the image of someone "caught in a snare" rather than someone "caught red-handed" change the application? How do you personally respond when you see a fellow Christian struggling in sin? What are the dangers of ignoring sin vs. harshly condemning it? How does bearing one another's burdens fulfill the "law of Christ"? What are some examples of burdens we can carry for each other?

Pride & Personal Awareness: Why is pride such a barrier to Christian community and accountability? In what ways are you tempted to compare your spiritual life to others? How do verses 4–5 call us to both self-evaluation and personal responsibility? What's the difference between bearing someone's burden and carrying your own load? Can you think of examples of each from your life?

Generosity & Growth: Why do you think Paul includes the principle of supporting those who teach the Bible in this passage? How can we cultivate a culture of honor and generosity toward spiritual leaders in our church community? What are some "good things" (material or otherwise) we can share with those who disciple and shepherd us?

Sowing & Reaping: How have you seen the principle of "sowing and reaping" play out in your own life—either positively or negatively? Why does Paul warn us not to be deceived or think God can be mocked? What does it look

like to sow to the Spirit in your daily life? Paul says, "in due season we will reap if we do not give up." What causes you to grow weary in doing good? How does knowing that spiritual fruit takes time encourage you to keep going?

Mission & Priority: What does it mean to "do good to everyone, especially to those in the household of faith"? How can we prioritize fellow believers without neglecting kindness toward unbelievers? What are some specific ways your group or church can do good for the church family this week?

In the Trenches Together: How do you respond to others when they are wounded in battle (caught in sin, struggling emotionally, burned out, etc.)? Have you ever been "dragged to safety" by someone else spiritually? What did that look like? How can we as a group become a place of grace, restoration, and mutual strengthening?

Marks Of Jesus

GALATIANS 6:11-18

Commentary

6:11

Here at the end, Paul draws attention to the fact that he is now writing personally: "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." Up to this point, Paul likely dictated the letter to a scribe, but now he takes the pen himself. By mentioning the large letters, Paul may be emphasizing the urgency and importance of what he's about to say. It's as if he's underlining his words or writing in bold, making sure the Galatians understand that these final lines matter deeply. Some scholars also believe that the large handwriting hints at a physical weakness, such as poor eyesight, which Paul may have referenced earlier in the letter (Gal. 4:13–15). If so, this makes the gesture even more meaningful, showing his personal love and investment in these believers.

6:12

Paul begins his final critique of the false teachers who were pressuring Gentile believers to be circumcised. He

reminds the churches in Galatia of their true motives: "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." These men weren't promoting circumcision for righteousness but for reputation. They wanted to look impressive and avoid opposition. St. Augustine notes that the Judaizers sought to escape persecution from the Jews while boasting that they were winning converts (Augustine 2012, 233). Paul sees through their hypocrisy and helps other Christians do the same. Faithfulness to Christ may bring persecution, but any attempt to soften the message for comfort's sake empties the cross of its power.

6:13

Exposing the hypocrisy of the Judaizers, Paul writes, "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." In other words, the very ones demanding that Gentile believers adopt the law are themselves lawbreakers. They don't live in full obedience to the law they claim to uphold, which reveals that their motives are not about holiness but pride.

6:14

For Paul, the cross is everything. While others take pride in outward appearance or works-based righteousness, Paul refuses to find any confidence in the flesh. His only boast is in what Jesus accomplished through his suffering and death. The cross—an instrument of shame and weakness to the world—is, for Paul, the ultimate display of God's love,

power, and grace. Through it, the world has been crucified to him, and he to the world. This means Paul no longer lives for the world's approval, praise, or temptations. Likewise, the world regards him as dead, irrelevant, and unimpressive by its standards. This is the essence of the Christian life: we are not defined by status, works, or denominational affiliation, but by union with the crucified and risen Christ.

6:15

Paul reinforces his central message one last time: "Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." External religious rituals—whether drawn from the Old Testament law or elsewhere—have no power to save or define someone in Christ. What truly matters is faith in Jesus and, through him, being made new. Salvation is about being born again by grace through faith in Christ alone.

6:16

Paul pronounces peace and mercy upon those who live according to the gospel truth he has proclaimed. He extends that blessing to "the Israel of God," referring not to ethnic Israel but to the true children of God, those united to Christ by faith. "All who are in Christ make up the new Israel, the new creation that God has brought to pass" (Sproul 2022, 139).

6:17

"From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." Unlike the false teachers who sought to avoid persecution by boasting in circumcision,

Paul carried literal scars from suffering for Christ. These "marks" were physical reminders of his faithfulness, earned not through compromise but through costly obedience. Paul's body bore witness to the gospel he preached.

6:18

Finally, Paul closes with a pastoral prayer: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers." His desire is that the Galatians remain grounded in the grace of Christ, which alone can sustain and transform them. He ends just as he began, with brotherly affection and grace.

In the end, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is enough. What makes us right with God is his grace alone. We enter God's family through faith alone and remain secure because of Christ alone. As we've seen throughout this letter, Galatians is not only a defense of the doctrine of grace but also a summons to walk in freedom: to be led by the Spirit, crucify the flesh, and bear the fruit of a transformed life together in the community of the Church. The Christian life is about living from the love already secured at the cross. To belong to Christ is to be made new. So stand firm, walk in step with the Spirit, and don't turn back. You are free, now live like it.

Application of Galatians 6:11-18

Paul was more than a bold preacher or a brilliant theologian who wrote thirteen books of the Bible; he was a pastor who deeply loved the churches he planted, especially those in Galatia. Throughout our study, we've seen not only his frustration over their drifting but also the ache of a spiritual father watching his children be led astray.

In Galatians 4:19, he said, "I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." He carried that kind of burden for all the churches he planted. In 2 Corinthians 11:28, after listing the beatings, imprisonments, and dangers he endured, Paul adds, "And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." For Paul, ministry wasn't about planting and moving on; it was about carrying the people of God constantly and prayerfully in his heart.

The Marks of Jesus

Paul bore physical marks on his body from his sufferings for Christ, scars from lashes, stones, and shipwrecks. In Galatians 6:17, he says, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." These weren't just wounds; they were evidence of his deep commitment to the mission of preaching the gospel and making disciples. He was a shepherd in the trenches, a man who literally bled for the church and kept showing up anyway. He had tenacity and a grit that kept him pursuing his calling and carrying the weight of the mission gladly.

In our day, we may not carry the same physical scars, but we still bear the marks of Jesus in our lives. These marks are the proofs of faith and obedience that often show up in deeply personal ways. They may come through relational wounds from the pain of losing friendships or being misunderstood for standing firm on God's Word. They may appear through sacrificial love that goes unnoticed: quietly serving, forgiving, and giving when it costs us something. We carry them in the perseverance formed through suffering, like walking through illness, loss, betrayal, or hardship while staying close to Jesus.

Some marks are invisible but no less real, like the unseen sacrifices of obedience that only God notices.

If you walk with Jesus, love his people, stay rooted in Scripture, and remain committed to your local church, you will inevitably bear these kinds of scars etched into your heart. Every tear-filled prayer, every act of dying to self, every step of obedience when it would've been easier to turn back, each one is evidence that you are in the fight and on the mission.

Loving Jesus

The key to endurance in the Christian life is staying close to Jesus. Through every high and low, when the road gets hard, when pain feels unbearable, when you're tempted to tap out or turn back, stay close to Jesus. Process your pain with him. Endurance isn't about suppressing your struggles or ignoring the weight you carry; it's about learning to cast your burdens on Jesus. Walk with him and with other Christians, doing as Paul taught the Galatians: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

I've seen too many believers burn out or break down because they tried to carry their burdens alone. Jesus isn't distant in our suffering; he meets us in it. He understands betrayal, exhaustion, grief, and loneliness. We endure by staying close to our Savior, letting him keep our hearts soft so we can continue to love him and love his people. Everyone wants community until they realize community is messy. You can't manufacture true Christian community, but you can cultivate it. It's something the Spirit produces as we remain near to Christ and committed to his church.

This is what we see in the Apostle Paul, and it's the posture he holds as he closes his letter to the Galatians. As he puts pen to parchment with his own hand, he's saying, "I'm still here. I still care. Let's endure with Jesus to the end." The marks on his body, the tears he's cried, the miles he's walked, and the prayers he's prayed are all part of his calling to shepherd God's people.

Future Legacy

What if we lived with that kind of burden for Jesus and his people? What kind of church could we become—not just in the next twelve months but in the next fifty years—if we walked with that same long-term faithfulness? What if we committed to walking by the Spirit, helping others do the same? What if we became cultivators instead of consumers, sowing the seeds of the Spirit's fruit and building a culture of grace that's brutally honest about both the Bible and the human experience? What would our city look like if "what if" became "what is"? What if we were people who carried the marks of Jesus and built a legacy that pointed others to him?

"Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," Paul says, "by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." That's the starting place. If we build from there—if we stay near Jesus, stay honest, stay faithful—we might hand to the next generation what Paul and the disciples in Galatia handed to theirs.

This is what I hope, by God's grace, we can cultivate, that decades from now, we'll look back and testify with joy to the harvest we've reaped because we didn't quit. That we

pressed on through disappointment, spiritual drought, pruning, and pain, and stayed faithful. We didn't give up on Jesus, we didn't add to the gospel, we didn't give up on each other, and we didn't give up on the church.

Personally, I can feel the shift in my own heart even as I've studied and written this commentary. I've been preaching the Bible in various contexts since 2008, and I've come to know intimately the pains and turbulence of ministry. By the grace of God, I'm becoming more tender. Even as I write, I feel God giving me a tender heart like a spiritual father. I sense a deepening affection for the flock God has entrusted to me and the city I've been called to.

I'm asking God to give me fifty more years of faithful ministry. I'm praying that we'll see a generation of faithful men and women who love Jesus, and that I'll be tender toward the sheep and tough for them. This is what I see in the Apostle Paul at the close of his letter to the Galatians. I don't want to be harsh or hardened. I want to be gentle with the sheep but fierce against the wolves, willing to bleed for Jesus' church, fight for her, protect her, and keep going when others quit.

That's what I want for all of us, that we would grow into disciples who love the church like Jesus does. That we would build something that lasts. That we would be a people marked by both compassion and courage, with tender hearts and tough shoulders, and an unwavering faith in the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen." —Galatians 6:18

Study Guide

READING AND RECORDING

What does the Bible say? Copy key verses or statements that stand out to you.

INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING

How do these verses impact how you see God, yourself, and others?

APPLYING AND OBEYING

In light of what God is teaching you, what will you do?

Group Study Questions

Paul's Personal Penmanship: Why do you think Paul felt it was important to write this last part himself? What might the "large letters" signify? How does this personal touch deepen your sense of Paul's care for the Galatians?

Exposing False Motives: According to Paul, why were the false teachers pushing circumcision? How does Paul contrast their desire to "make a good showing in the flesh" with the way of the cross? In what ways are we still tempted today to soften the message of Jesus to avoid discomfort or rejection?

Boasting in the Cross: What does it practically mean to "boast in the cross" instead of your own works? Paul says he has been "crucified to the world, and the world to [him]." What does that kind of detachment from the world look like in real life? What are some things you've stopped boasting in since following Christ? What things are still hard to let go of?

A New Creation: Paul says what matters is "a new creation." How do you know you've been made new? Share a moment when you experienced the Spirit making you new in a specific area of life.

The Marks of Jesus: Paul says he bears the marks of Jesus on his body. What kind of "marks" do every day Christians bear today? What spiritual scars or "marks of Jesus" are you carrying right now?

Final Blessing: Why do you think Paul closes with a prayer of grace? How do you need God's grace right now? How has the grace of Jesus sustained you this past year? This past month?

Looking Back and Looking Forward: How has your view of Paul changed after studying Galatians? What has God exposed, corrected, or encouraged in you through this letter? Where do you hope to be 5, 10, or 50 years from now in your walk with Christ? What legacy do you hope to leave?

Appendix

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Galatians

STANDING FIRM IN FREEDOM

Stand firm in freedom. Cling to the cross of Christ. Refuse to go back.

Counterfeit gospels had crept into the churches of Galatia, threatening to distort the truth and destroy the faith of those who followed Jesus.

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