

GALA TIANS



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Welcome

Four Points Church wants to serve you. The best way we can accomplish this task is by instilling God's Word deep into your hearts and lives. By God's grace, His Word changes and transforms you into His disciple. Freely we have been given and freely we give to you. We love you and pray for you as we study together the beautiful book of Galatians. It is our prayer that through this study your affections for Jesus will increase, as His Word dwells richly in you (Colossians 3:16).

Blessings on you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

-Elders of Four Points Church

Contents

Intro	1
To The Churches in Galatia	8
1:1-5	
No Other Gospel	14
1:6-10	
Set Apart Before Birth	20
1:11-24	
Entrusted With The Gospel	26
2:1-10	
Conflict About Conduct	32
2:11-14	
Crucified With Christ	39
2:15-21	
By Works Or By Faith?	45
3:1-9	
Redeemed From The Curse	51
3:10-18	

Contents Cont.

Heirs Of The Promise	57
3:19-29	
Adopted By The Father	64
4:1-7	
Don't Turn Back	70
4:8-20	
A Tale Of Two Sons	75
4:21-31	
Stand Firm	80
5:1-15	
Walking By The Spirit	86
5:16-26	
Be A Burden Bearer	92
6:1-10	
The Object Of Our Boast	98
6:11-18	
Bibliography	105

GALATIANS INTRODUCTION

How can a sin-stained person stand righteous before a holy God? Paul's epistle to the Galatians is a short and powerful answer to man's attempts to cover bad works with good works: salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone. In Galatians, Paul argues that the keeping of Jewish law must not be added to faith in Christ crucified. Salvation is by faith alone. Although this specific addition is not a common issue in our time, his letter is no less applicable to us. If we add anything to the finished work of Christ to make us righteous before God, we lose the true gospel. Parenting well, having a great work ethic, maintaining self-discipline, making others happy and comfortable, having impeccable logic, being financially independent: none of these can justify us in God's courtroom. Galatians crushes our feeble efforts to curry God's favor and offers us the great jewel of salvation by grace through faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20).

A RECOVERING PHARISEE

If we look at Paul's life before he became a Christian, we can see a divine irony in God's choice to use Paul as the human author of this epistle. Originally Saul of Tarsus, Paul grew up with an impeccable pedigree, "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5) raised to follow Jewish law to the letter (and then some). A member of the conservative Pharisee party and propelled by a zeal for law-keeping, Paul was on his way to imprison Christians in Damascus when a light appeared from heaven, knocking him to the

ground, and a voice from heaven asked “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9) Though he sought to arrest Christians, it was Paul who was arrested by Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. A lifetime of airtight, ironclad righteousness was shattered in the light of the holiness of Jesus. Paul was called not only to follow Jesus that day but also to be His apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was later commissioned by the church at Antioch as a missionary and sent out (Acts 13:1-3) to preach the gospel throughout the Mediterranean. On his first journey, he preached the gospel in the Roman provinces of Pamphylia, Galatia, and Cilicia, planting churches as he went throughout Asia Minor (Acts 13-14). It is to some of these churches that Paul likely addresses his epistle.

GOOD NEWS GONE BAD

The churches in southern Galatia were visited multiple times by Paul in the book of Acts (16:6; 18:23), and Paul describes the Galatians as his children (Galatians 4:19), so we know that Paul had a close relationship with these churches. Paul was distraught then to hear that these churches were turning to the teaching of a group called the Judaizers. The Judaizers did not reject Christ outright, but insisted that in order to receive the blessing promised by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:3), a person had to become a convert to Judaism as well (Acts 15:1). The rite of circumcision (Galatians 5:2-11) as well as Sabbath and other holy days (4:10) had to be observed in order to make a person worthy of God’s blessing. This completely negated the message of the gospel and led the Galatians back under the weight of commandment-keeping to attain right standing before God.

Evidently, the Judaizers had followed along behind Paul and set up camp in the Galatian churches. Their teaching had at least three destructive consequences:

- First, the Galatian churches began to believe a different gospel, a “Jesus-plus-Jewish customs” religion that required works to be done instead of simply having faith in Jesus’ finished work (1:6-9).
- Second, we can infer that there was a disruption in the unity of the church. The church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles, who worshipped and fellowshiped together. Would those of Jewish background withdraw from their Gentile brothers and sisters in order to maintain ceremonial cleanliness (2:11-16; 3:28)?
- Third, the acceptance of the new teaching meant that their relationship with Paul was broken (4:12-20; 5:2-4). They had cut themselves off from his God-given ministry to them.

Paul begins by reminding the Galatians of the *origin* of the gospel, which is God Himself (1:1-2:21). He then describes the *distinctiveness* of the gospel, as he presses home the difference between salvation by law and salvation by grace through faith (3:1-5:12). Finally, Paul demonstrates the *implications* of the gospel, and shows us how the gospel alone frees us from sin and empowers us to obey God (5:13-6:18).

SPIRIT AND SANCTIFICATION

Although the main theme of Galatians is justification by faith, it is important to see Paul’s emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, as well as his emphasis on sanctification. First, the Holy Spirit is mentioned during Paul’s discussion of salvation by faith in Galatians 3-4. The Holy Spirit is given to those who

receive salvation through faith (3:3-7, 13-14) and He causes us to respond to the Father as true sons, confirming His adoption of us (4:4-7). The Spirit is also the means by which we walk out the Christian life (5:16), leading us and causing us to have new desires (5:17-18). He causes us to bear fruit that pleases the Lord (5:22-24) and helps us to decide to follow Jesus (6:7-10).

Closely related is Paul's teaching on sanctification in Galatians. Even though the words "sanctify" and "holy" are not used in the text, Paul speaks of what it means to be "crucified with Christ" (2:20; 6:14) and how that impacts the way he lives. Paul challenges us to turn from the flesh (5:13-21, 26; 6:7-8) and to walk according to the Spirit (5:16-18, 22-25; 6:8). Living according to the Spirit and "putting off" the flesh are important aspects of becoming more like Jesus (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9).

NO ADDITIVES

Even though Galatians is written as a corrective letter, so much about it encourages us. The crushing weight of trying to justify ourselves in the sight of God is lifted as Paul teaches us that *adding* to the gospel message actually *changes* it. If we have placed our faith in Christ, everything that *should* be done to make us right with God *has* been done. The message of the gospel is pure and simple: Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. No additives needed.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. As you begin this book, what is your understanding of the reason we cannot add our works to the work of Jesus?
2. Read Acts 9. How had Paul experienced the love of God in the gospel? Does the record of Paul's conversion register as "loving" to you? Why or why not?
3. Read Paul's description of his past in Philippians 3:1-11. How has Paul's position on justifying himself based on his works changed?
4. Read Acts 15:1. What was the message the Judean men brought? Now read Peter's response in 15:7-11. How does he explain the contradiction between their message and the message of the true gospel?

DEVOTION

5. What was the response of people to Paul's gospel as preached in Acts 13-14? What does it show you about the condition of their hearts?

PASSION

6. Read the version of Paul's salvation testimony in Acts 26:15-18. How was Paul's conversion linked with him being sent to the Gentiles? Why would this have been surprising to a Pharisee like Paul? Are we, like Paul, saved for the purpose of mission?

LEGACY

7. What might have been the effect on the church had not the Lord brought correction through Paul in his Galatian letter? Why is “truth in love” correction important? Read Ephesians 4:13-16 for more.

Prayer Emphasis

Great God, I pray that You prepare my heart to study Galatians. Show me Your goodness and righteousness in making me right before You. You have done everything that is needed for me to be saved. May I give glory to You each day for the new life I have in Jesus. May I be more in awe of You because of my time in Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

TO THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA

Galatians 1:1-5

We are fascinated with the origins of things we love. Documentaries cover the history of a particular style of music. Or they tell us about the younger years of our heroes and how their formative experiences shaped their great accomplishments. Shows for “foodies” visit the restaurant that is the “original,” the first to serve a particular dish. In the first few verses of Galatians, Paul introduces one of the important themes of the letter: the origin of the gospel message. Paul contends that both the origin of the gospel and the origin of his apostleship are found in God alone.

CENTERING ON GOD

In this short passage, Paul points his audience to the centrality of God in the gospel message. Each of Paul’s phrases is saturated with meaning and reveals God as the origin of our salvation. Let’s look at a few instances:

- *Not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father* (v. 1). Paul reminds the Galatians that his apostleship is through Jesus and the Father. The word “apostle” contains the Greek word apo “from.” Paul is a “sent one,” sent from God, not from men. He will contrast this later with the Judaizers, who seek only to please men (1:10; 4:17).
- *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 3). Although this is a common

salutation from Paul (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:2), it is fitting because Paul is set to prove that grace for salvation and the peace that accompanies it comes from God and not from our human effort.

- Who gave Himself for our sins (v. 4). Jesus gave Himself freely, without reluctance (John 10:11, 15, 17-18) for the payment of our sin debt. Jesus became our substitute on the cross. He was the only one capable of becoming our substitute. Every other human has their own sins that they should have to pay for, but Jesus alone lived a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15; 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19), which made His the only acceptable sacrifice to God.
- To deliver us from the present evil age (v. 4). Jesus delivers us from one age to the other, from the age of evil to eternity with God (2 Thessalonians 3:2). The present evil age is the time when evil is being allowed to flex its muscles (Matthew 13:23-30; Luke 22:53). We were held captive by sin and Satan until Jesus came to rescue us.
- *According to the will of our God and Father* (v. 4). Our salvation was God's will. If He had not made a plan to intervene in our lives, we would have been destroyed by the just punishment for our sin (Matthew 7:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Our will would have been to continue in our sin, but God's salvation plan was enacted in Christ instead.
- *To whom be the glory forever* (v. 5). We cannot give ourselves any credit for "wising up" and "turning over a new leaf" as far as our salvation is concerned. Our salvation plan was His, its execution was according to

His will, and the effort exerted was His as well. The work of our justification was His, start to finish, and our sanctification takes place with His strength (Exodus 15:2; Philippians 2:11; 1 Peter 4:11).

SETTING UP THE ARGUMENT

Note two ways in which Paul sets up some of his arguments in his introduction. First, he reminds his audience of the origin of his ministry. He preaches the gospel because he was sent “through Jesus Christ” (v. 1). His opponents were sent by men. Certainly, Paul was sent on his way around the Mediterranean by the church at Antioch, but the Holy Spirit is the one who called Paul and spoke to the church about him (Acts 13:1-3).

Second, Paul asserts that God is the originator of the gospel. The Judaizers carry a man-centered message, which puts its trust in works done by men instead of salvation through faith. When we hear the gospel message, we should expect it to *apply* to us, but it is not a message primarily *about* us. It is about God and what He has done on our behalf through Christ.

NO ADDITIVES

As Paul explains, his commission as an apostle came from God (v. 1). It was certainly not Paul’s idea! He was saved and sent to preach the gospel, a complete message of complete salvation. Our present passage explains that all of the elements of our salvation are accomplished by God, and all glory belongs to Him. When we try to add our good behavior to the gospel, we are actually trying to steal His glory. This is a wonderfully humbling truth, and it challenges our attempts to justify ourselves by our work. Jesus gave Himself for us, a

perfect sacrifice and His perfect salvation needs no improvement.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. What evidence do we see in these five verses that demonstrate the God-centeredness of the gospel message?
2. Verse 4 talks about the sovereignty of God in our salvation, that He has a plan to save people that we would not choose for ourselves. Why is this idea troubling to some people? How is it comforting?

DEVOTION

3. How do Paul's opening statements lead us to worship God? Which of His attributes and actions does this passage cause us to reflect on?
4. Verse 1 speaks of God raising Christ from the dead. Read Romans 4:24-25 and 6:1-14. What are some of the benefits of Jesus' resurrection described in these passages? Can you think of other benefits?
5. God the Father and Jesus Christ are mentioned together twice (and God the Father one additional time) in these five verses. Why do you think they are mentioned so many times here?

PASSION

6. How does Jesus' willingness to endure suffering for the sake of saving us (v. 4) inform our willingness to endure discomfort to share the gospel with others?
7. Paul offers grace and peace to the Galatians on behalf of God and Christ. How can you offer the grace and peace of God to others?

LEGACY

8. Paul is circling back in this letter to those he has led to Christ in the past. Who have you ministered to in the past that you might need to check in on?

Prayer Emphasis

Gracious God, how quick we are to neglect the fact that all of life is about You. Please forgive us for being man-centered. Help us to focus on glorifying You instead. You are the center of the gospel story, raising Jesus from the dead and accepting His payment on our behalf. Thank You for delivering us from this evil age, according to Your perfect will. You have done everything needed to save us and we have contributed nothing to our salvation but our sin. Thank You for generously saving us. In Christ's name, amen.

NO OTHER GOSPEL

Galatians 1:6-10

Most of the time, if you want to confront someone, you start with some good news first. A compliment or an affirmation of your relationship to them might precede the hard conversation. Paul often commends the churches he writes to for things he knows they are doing well. In Galatians, Paul moves directly from the brief reminder of the gospel message to the bad news: in listening to the message of the Judaizers, the Galatians have turned away from the gospel entirely! Paul responds with alarm to the spiritual threat that the Galatians don't see, in the same way that we would if we saw a friend stepping out into oncoming traffic. No time for pleasantries!

DESERTION AND DISTORTION

The change in the Galatians' beliefs has caught Paul completely by surprise. The Greek word *metatithemi* that Paul uses to describe the Galatians' sudden reversal is sometimes used to describe betrayers or deserters. Paul expected the Galatians to be contending for the faith at his side, but they have actually changed sides and joined the opposition. However, when Paul says that they have deserted "Him who called you," he does not mean himself. He means the Lord Jesus. We see Paul speaking similarly in 5:8, when he says "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you." Although Paul's was the human voice used to call the Galatians to faith in

Jesus, it is the call of Christ that the Galatians are walking away from.

Paul calls their newfound beliefs a “different gospel,” but this isn’t simply a different “take” on a non-essential issue. There is only one “good news” and the message that one has to return to the Jewish law in order to be justified before God is not good at all. Paul describes this “different gospel” as “contrary” (v. 8) and a distortion (v. 7). A distortion of the truth, even one that adheres to some aspects of the truth, is not true at all. The doctrine of justification by faith is not something that may be “enhanced” by adding anything to it. This distortion would corrupt the Galatians’ faith entirely, so Paul argues in the strongest possible language.

A CHRISTIAN CURSE?

Paul sets before the Galatians a hypothetical situation: what if an angel from heaven came and began to preach a distorted version of the gospel? Or what if it was me, your old preacher Paul? You might be impressed by an angel’s powerful appearance. You might be persuaded by my familiarity and trustworthiness. But don’t be, says Paul. Even an angel or an apostle who preaches a distorted “gospel” message is “accursed.” Paul is saying that such a person (or angel) would be cut off from the life of God (Romans 9:3).

Throughout Scripture, when something is under a curse, it fails to thrive. It shrivels up because its life source is cut off from it. Jesus curses the fig tree in Mark 11:14 and it shrivels up from the roots. The same is true of us when we are under the curse of sin. We are cut off from God, the source of life.

Although Paul uses the word “if” when he presents this hypothetical situation, he is clearly saying that those who are distorting the gospel *are* under a curse. Paul is stating that people who preach a false “gospel” are under the curse of God. Many in our world preach false gospels, including the “health and wealth gospel” and the “salvation by works gospel” of liberal churches. Interestingly, both Islam and the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) claim that an angel came and gave their “prophets” revelation that superseded or added to the message of the Bible. The repeated pronouncement of verses 8 and 9 should terrify anyone who would add to or take away from the true gospel.

NO ADDITIVES

Preaching an exclusive gospel in which salvation is found in Christ alone assured Paul of a lifetime of opposition from sinful men (2 Corinthians 4:7-14; 11:23-25; 2 Timothy 3:10-11). People hated him wherever he went. In Galatians 1:10, Paul says that it is not his objective to please men, but to please God. When we tell people that Jesus is the only way to be saved (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), we will likewise make enemies. But the gospel is too precious a message to compromise! Jesus died to save sinners, and there is nothing but His blood that is able to cleanse us of our sin and give us a right standing before God. When we look at the beauty of the gospel message, why would we want to please anyone but Jesus?

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Galatians 1:6 speaks of God's call to us in the gospel. What are some various ways that God calls to us, showing us who He is and what He has accomplished for us?
2. Can you think of things that people try to add to the true gospel? What are some things that people try to subtract from it? How do additions and subtractions to the gospel message distort it?

DEVOTION

3. In what way does man-pleasing oppose God-pleasing? How do we fight the impulse to please people instead of God? Read Isaiah 2:22; Matthew 10:28; Deuteronomy 10:12-13 and 31:6 to learn more.
4. Sound doctrine is important to Paul in this passage. Why is that? Why is it of great importance in the life of believers? Read 1 Timothy 4:16 and Jude 6 for more on this topic.

PASSION

5. How could sharing the gospel cost you, socially and relationally? How much does this matter to you? Does the desire for man's approval keep you from sharing the gospel?

6. Why does Paul repeat “let him be accursed” in verses 8 and 9? How do we square the apostle’s words with the frequent commands to bless (Romans 12:14), pray for (Luke 6:28), and love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-45)?

LEGACY

7. What does Paul risk in confronting the Galatian disciples so soundly? How can confrontation be an act of love? How can this help us to leave a good legacy with those we lead? Read Proverbs 27:5-6 and Ephesians 4:15-16 for more.
8. When those we are helping to grow in the faith have been “troubled” (v. 7) by false teaching or confusing circumstances, how can we help?

Prayer Emphasis

Jesus, there is no salvation outside what You have done for us on the cross. Help our understanding of Your salvation be firm so that when counterfeits come our way, we can see them clearly and avoid them. May our hearts be faithful and never desert You. We know that we cannot stand in our own strength, but You provide all that we need to persevere and be fruitful. Make our hearts steadfast and our footsteps firm. In Your name, amen.

SET APART BEFORE BIRTH

Galatians 1:11-24

ORIGINS OF THE GOSPEL

Men believe they know everything. God knows better. Jeremiah 10:14 reminds us that “Every man is stupid and without knowledge.” Paul, an incredibly learned man, would be seen as a sage among most of the Jewish population in the first century (Philippians 3:4-6; Acts 22:3), yet he denounces his own knowledge and ability when it comes to the gospel. The gospel is something far superior to anything man has ever produced. It takes a wise man to understand that truth.

Mankind *has* produced some wonderful things. We love to gaze and marvel at the creativity and artistic expression produced by individuals, or dig into the deep and historical philosophical thought that mankind from all nations has fabricated. Yet compared to the beauty and depth of the gospel, it all falls short (Romans 3:23).

The favorite saying of our generation is “live your own truth.” But history has shown that this has never worked. Humanity, in trying to define their own truth, has missed what is really true, something that is above us. Better than us. Higher than us. The good news of the gospel has no origin in the mind of man. It comes from God and God alone.

NO ONE IS OUT OF REACH

Before he was Paul, his name was Saul, and he was incredibly far from Christ. In fact, he hated Christ and all who followed Him. In today's language, Saul would be called a "militant activist" against Jesus and His gospel. At one point he violently "tried to destroy it [the church]" (Galatians 1:13). In this text we find someone who was so opposed to the message of Christ becoming the messenger of the very gospel he once fought against. How did the transformation occur? By the "grace of God" (v. 15). This is what God does: He changes people. He saves sinners, even the worst of sinners (1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Timothy 1:15). Think about the fact that this person—who hated Christianity the most—became the biggest influence for its original expansion. This gives us such hope! Mother, your child is not too far gone. Husband, your marriage is not over. Prodigal, realize "your truth" is not what you once thought (Luke 15:17). The words of Jesus ring absolute. "Come home" is the call of the gospel and it reaches the most derelict and broken-down people who are drowning in pride or despair. No one is out of the reach of God Almighty.

THE WILDERNESS

Dr. John Maxwell has a great story he tells at his conferences: A young man walked up to him after a lecture and said, "I want to do what you do." Dr. Maxwell replied, "But do you want to do what I've done?" Preparation is key for any worthwhile endeavor. No one wants to glean from an unlearned person. Paul preached immediately after his salvation (Acts 9:20), however, after his initial ministry, he spent three years in what many scholars call "the wilderness." Most believe this is where Paul received the gospel from Jesus Himself (1

Corinthians 15:3). Then, after his time in training, he presented himself before those apostles who had been called before him. Paul understood that he needed them. There are many who claim to speak for God, but their messages do not match. Paul, knowing that the message of the gospel is always constant, wanted to be sure that the message he received was not in contradiction with others who proclaimed the gospel before his time. This cooperation was a gift to the Galatians. It is also a gift to us today. The early church was not led by vagabond lone rangers only trying to benefit themselves. Rather, it was stewarded by chosen men who had met the resurrected Lord Jesus and were taught by Him alone (1 Corinthians 9:1). Paul was sure he was speaking the truth because he learned it from Jesus himself. And his message of truth aligned with the message of others who had learned from Jesus as well.

NO ADDITIVES

The same journey the apostle Paul experienced is also the one we have all walked.

- Why do we even know or love Jesus? Because of the grace of God!
- What happened after our salvation? Growth, due to the very words of God!
- How do we know we are saved? So many others have experienced the same salvation!

God is so good. He calls out “follow Me” (Matthew 4:19). He instructs and brings us from our own “truth” to His truth (Romans 12:1-2). He puts us in community with other believers for our own encouragement and confirmation, and for theirs (Acts 9:17; Colossians 3:12-17). This is the reality of Christ. This is the Church.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. How does the love of God shine through in Paul's salvation?
2. Is anyone ever too far gone to see the light of Christ shining through?

DEVOTION

3. Why is the revelation of God so important? Why can we not trust our five senses to bring us into absolute truth? Read Romans 10:13-15 for help.

PASSION

4. Have people ever treated you with suspicion because of your past sins? How do you think Paul might have handled that?
5. How does the gospel bring people together in spite of past sins?
6. Is there someone you continue to judge that you need to forgive and accept in Christ?

LEGACY

7. Verse 24 ends the chapter by declaring, "and they glorified God because of me." Discuss a time when you understood the glory of God through the salvation of someone who didn't seem savable.

Prayer Emphasis

Father, it is astounding to me how good You are. Thank You for helping me to trust in Your sovereignty and salvation. Continue to teach me Your ways. I get lost in my own head so often, but Your paths are the ones I long to tread. Correct me with Your patient love as You always have. It is in the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

Galatians 2:1-10

BE WATCHFUL

False brothers exist (Galatians 2:4). Just because someone calls themselves a Christian does not necessarily mean they are. The Bible is full of false people. Almost every book of the New Testament has warnings against individuals who teach what is false. Jesus informs His followers about them (Matthew 7:14), Paul suffers because of them (1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:14-26), John encourages those who were afflicted by them (1 John 1:26; 2 John 1:9-11), and Peter brings false teachers to the attention of the church (2 Peter 2:1-3).

In the context of Galatians, the false brothers are known as Judaizers (see introduction to this study guide). These people are teachers who follow Paul to Galatia and begin to teach in the church after Paul leaves. They agree that Jesus saves but teach that Jewish rituals, like circumcision, are still essential to salvation. It is easy to see their basic teaching still in the church today: Jesus saves, but you have to give this much money, or do this much work. Christians do have a mission to accomplish, but our work is never what saves us. We are saved through the work of Jesus and not by our own efforts. This is the reality of the gospel according to Paul.

SOMETIMES YES, SOMETIMES NO

Paul's life and ministry are simply fantastic. We learn and glean so much from the thirteen books God allowed him to write. A little-known episode in Paul's ministry reminds us of the teaching that comes from the wisest person in the Old Testament, Solomon. He tells us that there is a time for everything under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3). Sometimes we laugh and sometimes we weep. In Paul's context, sometimes we circumcise and sometimes we don't.

One of Paul's sons in the faith was named Timothy. His mother was a believing Jew, but his father was Greek (Acts 16:1). Paul wanted Timothy to join his ministry and asked him to be circumcised so that Jews would not be offended by him (Acts 16:3). This aligns so well with Paul's efforts to be "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). However, there are also times to draw hard lines in the sand. Paul makes clear in Galatians that he did not require another of his sons in the faith, Titus, to be circumcised (Galatians 2:3). The reason is simple: the Judaizers were making circumcision a gospel issue. Paul's gospel is clear that circumcision profited nothing and only the work of Christ brings salvation (Galatians 5:2).

DIFFERENT STROKES

The man we know as Peter, who became an apostle of Jesus, began as a fisherman. By the grace of God, Peter became so much more than that, and challenged others to grow in Christ (1 Peter 5:10). It is clear that Peter was called and gifted to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people. Peter's ministry looked very different from Paul's,

who was primarily called to reach Gentiles (Galatians 2:9). Yet both were called and equipped by God.

We see this same reality in the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus. Though they both lived at the same time, their ministries were very different (Matthew 11:7-19). John the Baptist was isolated and dogmatic. He lived in the wilderness and his diet and attire were anti-societal (Matthew 3:4). Jesus was the complete opposite. He ate and drank with sinners (Matthew 11:19) and lived His life surrounded by people. The big idea in all this is that God has a purpose for everyone. Not everything that God is doing in the world looks the same or is accomplished by the same kind of people. God works among the rich. He also works among the poor. God has ways of reaching the soccer mom while also reaching the niche isolationist. We must be careful not to judge ministries we do not understand. As long as the gospel is proclaimed, fishermen and intellectuals alike will both be saved.

NO ADDITIVES

The gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't make religious slaves. It frees us to be the people that God has called us to be. Some people kneel and pray out loud. Others close their eyes and speak to God through their inward thoughts. Both are heard by God. The ministry of Peter was mighty and God-honoring. The ministry of Paul was also inspired by the work of the Lord and reached many. Peter and Paul were so very different, and yet so much the same. Peter came from working class and was a man of the people. Paul was the scholar and statesman. God used both. What matters is that people meet Jesus through their ministries. Because we're all different, we all hear and receive things differently. So God sends a

myriad of messengers to speak His gospel to us. God is so good!

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. How do the warnings against false teachers prove to us that God is good?
2. How do we see the gospel in the different ministries that God initiates?

DEVOTION

3. Think for a moment about the differences between Peter and Paul, and John the Baptist and Jesus. How do these differences expand our understanding of God's work in the world?
4. Circumcision was a necessity for God's people in the Old Testament. It is no longer necessary according to the gospel. Why is this? Read Romans 2:25-29 for help.

PASSION

5. We all have ways we do things, preferences, and reasons for those practices. Why is it ok for us all to do things differently? What are some things we should not negotiate? What are some things we can?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 9:22-23. Why should we care about "being all things to all people"?

LEGACY

7. Think about a time in your earlier walk with Christ when you understood things in a way that is very different from your current understanding. Share thoughts if you can.
8. If you are young in Christ, can you see your faith progressing and growing? Share a few reflections.

Prayer Emphasis

Father, You are so good. Thank You for reaching me where I was when You found me. Thank You for continuing to reach where I am today. Your Word is truly a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. May I never disparage the way You righteously work in so many different people. Help me to be more discerning and understanding of the many ways You reach me and my peers. I love You. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

CONFLICT ABOUT CONDUCT

Galatians 2:11-14

Can't we all just get along? Let's be honest: not many of us like confrontation. However, the gospel demands that we graciously confront other believers who are not walking in alignment with its message. Overcome by the fear of man, the Apostle Peter had to be confronted by Paul himself because of his behavior, which had severe implications for others and was incongruent with the gospel message. It's not that Peter's teaching of the gospel had erred, but his conduct contradicted what he knew to be true, and so he stood "condemned" (Galatians 2:11). This passage records for us one of the great conflicts in the New Testament. Here, two leading apostles square off in open conflict. This conflict was necessary to teach us not only about biblical confrontation but also about biblical justification.

PETER'S BEHAVIOR

Paul's aim thus far in Galatians has been to defend the integrity of the gospel that was given to him in a direct revelation from God. That gospel message is appropriated to sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, with no additives. In Jerusalem, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was welcomed with open arms by the other apostles. His message of grace alone through faith alone was affirmed by these early Christian leaders, including Peter (Galatians 1:9). But Paul's words of encouragement in the letter thus far take a sharp turn in the opening words of verse 11.

Paul recalls a public confrontation that occurred when Peter (Cephas) had previously visited Paul and the church in Antioch (v. 11). Antioch was a predominantly Gentile city located in ancient Syria, now modern-day Turkey. The city was also Paul's missionary base during his early years in ministry. When Peter first arrived in Antioch, he closely associated with the Gentile Christians in the city. Peter had no problem fellowshiping with Gentile believers, welcoming them, and eating with them (v. 12). In no way did Peter consider himself defiled by Gentiles. In fact, God had previously worked in Peter's heart, revealing to him that God's salvation was for the nations. In Acts 10, Peter was given a vision by God Himself, declaring that the gospel was not limited merely to the Jews, but extended to Gentiles as well (Acts 10:34-35). No longer should Peter consider the Gentiles as unclean (Acts 10:15). Peter even witnessed firsthand the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles, just as he had experienced himself in the upper room on the day of Pentecost (Acts 10:44-48).

After James sent a group of Jewish men to Antioch to visit the church, Peter's conduct slowly began to change. These were professing Christians of the "circumcision party." They were Pharisees who strictly observed the Jewish calendar, dietary restrictions, and ritual of circumcision. Luke records for us their teachings: "But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1). Their teachings greatly contradicted the gospel.

However, it is not the teaching of the circumcision party that Paul focuses on in this passage, but rather Peter's

behavior. The presence of these men in Antioch led to a drastic change in Peter. He slowly “separated” from the Gentiles (Galatians 2:12). He began to eat at another table, with only the Jews. Though Peter knew the Gentiles had been welcomed into fellowship by faith alone, he acted as if that were not true. And Peter’s behavior was contagious. Other Jewish Christians in Antioch joined him in his “hypocrisy” (v. 13). Even Barnabas, Paul’s partner in gospel ministry, joined in this conduct. Imagine what this did to these young Gentile believers. Surely they were tempted to believe that perhaps God looks more favorably on those of Jewish descent, or those who adopt the rituals and traditions of the Jews. Paul knew Peter’s conduct jeopardized the work of Christ and the fundamental message of the gospel. God’s favor on an individual is not based on ethnicity or works, but solely on the work of Christ.

PETER’S FEAR

Why did Peter do this? How could he behave in such a hypocritical manner towards these Gentile believers? He did this out of fear. Paul informs us that Peter “feared the circumcision party” (v. 12). If you think about it, Peter had no theological reasoning for distancing himself from the Gentiles in Antioch. Peter had no biblical basis for acting the way he did. His behavior—which contradicted what he knew to be true—was solely driven by the fear of man. But let’s not point our finger at Peter and ignore our own tendency to do this. How often do we cower away from our convictions because we fear our reputation could be jeopardized, a friend might be lost, or opinions about us could change? The fear of man is a sin we all struggle with!

PAUL'S CONFRONTATION

In love, Paul had to confront Peter. The gospel was in jeopardy, as well as the church in Antioch. Imagine the damage that would have been done had Paul not confronted Peter. He saw Peter as standing “condemned” (v. 11). This does not mean that Peter had somehow lost his salvation. But Peter’s conduct jeopardized the salvation of others who were confused about how one can be justified before God. Because Peter’s sin had public implications, Paul’s confrontation was done in public, “before them all” (v. 14). Paul looked Peter in the eyes and sharply addressed his hypocrisy: “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (v. 14)

Peter had previously allowed the doctrine of justification by faith alone to guide and steer his actions. He had grasped the mercy of God and embraced his acceptance based on the work of God’s Son. Peter realized that no action of his own, nor his personal ethnicity could merit favor with God. However, he allowed the fear of man to control his heart, and therefore his actions. He acted as if ethnicity, adherence to dietary laws, and circumcision added necessary ingredients to one’s salvation. But that is not the case. The work of Jesus alone is the basis of salvation. How dare we try to add anything to it by what we say or by how we live? Are you living as if you are justified by faith alone? Or do you feel that something else is needed, in addition to the cross, to make you right with God?

NO ADDITIVES

Paul's confrontation was necessary because of the doctrine named by the Reformers *sola fide*. We are justified—made right—with a holy God because of the finished work of Christ alone, and that justification is appropriated to us through faith alone. Nothing can be added to the finished work of Christ for our justification. Paul fought for this because he cared deeply about the church and the implications of this doctrine. We aren't told directly, but we can conclude that Peter repented and humbly received the correction from Paul. In his letter to the dispersed believers in Asia Minor, Peter begins with gospel encouragement, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The cause of our new life is not our efforts or labor, but rather the saving work of the Lord Jesus. May our lips and our lives declare this truth!

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Why was Paul's confrontation of Peter necessary for the church in Antioch and the church today? How was God glorified in this confrontation?
2. Why did Peter act the way that he did? List times when you have been controlled by the fear of man. How does the gospel help you combat this fear?

DEVOTION

3. What theological truths were preserved because of this confrontation? Why does this matter?
4. Though we might adhere to the gospel with our words, we often deny the implications of the gospel with our lives. This was true in Peter's behavior. How is this manifested in your life at times? What can you do to correct this?

PASSION

5. Why was Paul's confrontation done in public, "before them all"? How was this confrontation loving?

LEGACY

6. Paul cares deeply about the church and the gospel. How does this text provide us with a framework for the teaching of the gospel by the church, and for accountability between brothers and sisters inside the church?

Prayer Emphasis

Father thank You for Your mercy and the gift of Your Son. The work of Jesus is what justifies me! This is such good and freeing news. May I declare that with my lips and live it out with my life by the power of Your Spirit! In Jesus' name, amen.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

Galatians 2:15-21

After recounting his confrontation with Peter, Paul continues to establish his defense of his gospel. In this section, Paul lays the logical and theological groundwork for his message, perhaps summarizing what he spoke to Peter during their confrontation. His message is clear: salvation is not based on what we have done but solely on what Christ has accomplished for us. Our sins have been nailed to the cross with Christ, and we have died with Him. This changes everything!

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Just as Peter was a Jew by birth, so was Paul (Galatians 2:15). However, Paul understands that salvation does not come from one's ethnicity or adherence to the law. Paul informs us that "by works of the law no one will be justified" (v. 16). Like Paul, Peter was an apostle who adhered to the doctrine of justification by faith. To be justified, or *dikaioō* in Greek, means to be legally declared guiltless. When we are justified by God, we are *legally* declared innocent, though we are not *practically* innocent. This tension is resolved in Jesus, our Substitute. When we trust in Him by faith, He becomes our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), and we are credited with His spotless righteousness.

Paul's argument boils down to this reality: no amount of good works can cover up the sinfulness of the human heart. Peter knows this! To adhere to the doctrine of

being justified by works would mean believing that someone can establish his own righteousness before God based on how pious he presents himself (see Romans 10:3). And the Jews should know this! This doctrine is not just a New Testament doctrine. God revealed this reliance upon His mercy throughout the Old Testament. How was Abraham justified? Not by works (see Genesis 15:6)! What did David rely upon for forgiveness after his adultery, lying, and murder? Not his own merit, but God's mercy (see Psalm 51).

NO LICENSE FOR LICENTIOUSNESS

Paul anticipates critics who might say, "If God justifies sinners solely based on faith in Jesus, won't that encourage people to sin all the more?" This is the type of argument that Paul addresses in verse 17. Paul dealt with this same argument in his letter to the Romans (Romans 6). Paul doesn't cheapen grace. Christ didn't die to make us sinners! Christ died to transform sinners into saints. That doesn't mean that we won't sin after our conversion, but it does mean that we are now equipped to battle sin after our conversion. We now have the Spirit and can put our sin to death (Romans 8:1-17). This is something we could not do prior to conversion. Paul elaborates on this in the next verse. If Paul continues to sin after his justification, it's his own fault, not Christ's fault (v. 18). The same is true for us. Sin no longer reigns in us, but it does linger. Though we are justified by faith, we are still being sanctified. That work is a synergistic work. Our new self, equipped with the Spirit, must continually strive to practice righteousness.

OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

The law proved to be a prison for Paul. It exposed the sinfulness of his own heart and revealed his desperate need for a Savior. He realized that adherence to the Mosaic law would never free him from his guilt. In a sense, Paul died to the law (v. 19). He no longer relied on the law to be his means of receiving acceptance from God. He threw himself on the Lord's tender mercy. When Christ went to the cross, Paul went with Him (v. 20). This is the depth of our union with Christ. If we have trusted in the saving work of Christ to justify us, then we also died at the cross. But this death doesn't end in a tomb. This death leads to a new life. This is the point Paul has been laboring to make. When Christ saves us, our old self is gone. Through the powerful work of the Spirit, we are raised with Christ and made new by Him. Through His Spirit, Christ actually lives in us. Because of this, every second we live should be dedicated to His service for His glory.

NO ADDITIVES

Paul concludes this section with his main point, "If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (v. 21). If we could merit eternal life by our efforts, the cross wouldn't be needed. In the context of this letter, Paul is saying, "If circumcision, dietary restrictions, and strict observance of the law could rescue you from sin, then Christ didn't need to come!" But righteousness doesn't come through what we do. Praise God that's the case, because we couldn't do enough to tip the scales in our favor. We were actually "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). We had no heartbeat, no affections for Jesus, and no life. We were headed for hell and deserved our punishment. But

God sent His Son to bear our curse in our place. It is His work alone that makes sinners righteous. And that work doesn't merely get us out of hell; it gives us new life when we trust in Jesus by faith. This changes everything!

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Why is it good news that our righteousness is not based on works of the law? Use other Scriptures to prove your point (use some Old Testament references too!).
2. What does Paul mean when he says that he died to the law? How does one die to the law? See Galatians 2:19 for help.

DEVOTION

3. Christ lives in and through us. How does this reality provide a more robust understanding of the gospel? How can we daily walk out Christ living in and through us? Use other Scriptures if needed.
4. Galatians 2:20 is one of the most treasured verses in Galatians for memorization. What makes it such an essential verse for the life of the Christian? What about it causes us to lift our hearts in worship? Try to commit Galatians 2:20 to memory.

PASSION

5. Paul begins verse 16 with a statement, “We know...” Paul was certain that justification was by faith alone in Christ alone. What does the world believe justifies them? Explain. How does your certain knowledge of justification by faith alone spur you to tell others the good news?

LEGACY

6. Summarize the words of Paul in this passage. This isn't the only place in Scripture that Paul teaches these fundamental truths. List some other passages that teach the same. Why must these doctrinal truths be foundational to the church? What happens when they are not?
7. Every so often a Christian leader commits a very public sin, and the reputation of the church is harmed. Some begin to call into question the efficacy of the gospel if such a thing can happen in a life that seems so committed to the Lord. Reread Galatians 2:17-19. How does this passage speak to such a situation?

Prayer Emphasis

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be my perfect substitute. I am so grateful for His saving work. May I always rest in His gospel to justify me, and may I be strengthened by His power to work in and through me for Your glory. Amen.

BY WORKS OR BY FAITH?

Galatians 3:1-9

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Paul has already warned the Galatians twice in chapter 1 that if anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to the one he preached, they are to be anathema, accursed, considered outside the faith that was once-and-for-all delivered to the saints. At the end of chapter 2, Paul begins to get a little more specific about the problem that these churches are dealing with: their doctrine of justification. At the end of Galatians 2:16, Paul said “by works of the law no one will be justified.”

The Judaizers have found their way into these churches and are teaching that faith in the finished work of Christ is not enough to be justified, or made right with God. The heretical sect that has gained influence in Galatia is now teaching that all Christian converts must—along with having faith in Christ—also be circumcised in order to be justified. “If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Galatians 2:21), says Paul.

Unfortunately, the Galatian churches have fallen for this set of false beliefs. They’ve been “bewitched” (3:1), listening to the foolishness being taught by the Judaizers. The situation has become a matter of life and spiritual death (v. 1). We know this because the word “bewitched” can be translated as “being held spellbound by an irresistible power.” Certainly for Christians, demonic powers are not irresistible. But the picture Paul

is painting for the Galatians is clear: these Galatians are foolishly believing in a doctrine of demons. Paul, being the caring pastor that he is, does not just point out the problem within the churches, but gives them the solution to the spell that they are under: Look to the cross! Remember the gospel that I preached to you! Paul reminds the Galatians, “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (v. 1). It is the Son of God crucified that Paul has proclaimed to them, and it is to that very truth that the churches in Galatia must return.

PAUL’S QUESTIONS

One of the most effective teaching methods is to ask people thought-provoking questions. This method works because it requires the pupil to think critically about the topic that is being discussed. Paul uses this approach to point to the error of the Galatians’ doctrine of justification in verses 2-6.

Paul asks the Galatians a series of theological questions designed to lead them back to the true gospel that they had believed when Paul first preached it to them. All the questions relate to the movement and work of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s basic line of questioning is this: How did you receive the Spirit initially? Faith or works? How does the Spirit continue His work in you? Faith or works? How did the miraculous outworking of the Spirit take place? Faith or works?

Paul’s answer is found by looking at the example of Abraham. Genesis 15:5-6 says, “And He brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the

Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” Abraham’s story shows us that God saves through faith alone.

There is no amount of work—no amount of law-obeying—that could somehow assist the Holy Spirit in our salvation. Hear the words of Jesus Himself speaking to Nicodemus about the work of the Holy Spirit, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8). God alone saves us through the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts and the finished work of Christ.

NO ADDITIVES

If you grew up in church as a kid, you probably remember the song “Father Abraham.” The first line of the song went like this, “Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham.” But where did all of Abraham’s sons come from, and how did they become his sons? These many sons of Abraham came from all the nations of the earth. In Galatians 3:8, Paul explains that we are the sons of Abraham because gospel is for all the nations.

Like Paul, we must ask ourselves this question: does a sinner receive the gospel of Jesus Christ by doing works of the law or by simply believing what Christ has done for him? Paul actually answers the question for us in verse 9: “Those who are of faith are blessed along with

Abraham, the man of faith.” There is nothing that we can add to faith in Christ in order to be justified before a holy and righteous God. It’s hard to believe. But we see this truth taught throughout Scripture. “The righteous shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Let this be an encouragement to us today. There is nothing that we can do to add to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. In what ways is it difficult for you to believe that our righteousness is credited to us simply by faith in Christ and nothing else?
2. What does this passage teach us about the Holy Spirit’s role in our justification? In our sanctification? How does it relate to Paul’s teaching on the Holy Spirit in Galatians?

DEVOTION

3. Read Galatians 3:3. How are you tempted to try to be perfected by the flesh rather than by the Spirit?
4. What does Paul mean when he discusses “hearing by faith” in verse 2? Read Acts 28:23-27; Romans 10:8-17; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 4:1-2; 10:22-23 and James 1:22-25 for some positive and negative examples of hearing by faith.

PASSION

5. It's not an insignificant number of these Christians that have been bewitched. How can we help protect one another in the body of Christ from being bewitched? What are some of the false beliefs that threaten us today?
6. J.B. Phillips once translated the opening line of Galatians 3:1 as "O you dear idiots of Galatia." Paul's words are a severe confrontation of the Galatians and their desertion. Are there times when this kind of confrontation might be necessary? What are some other times in Scripture when someone had to be called out like this? Should we normally correct brothers and sisters this sharply? Read Galatians 6:1-2 for more perspective on confronting sin.

LEGACY

7. What are you doing personally, and what are we doing as the church, to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations? Where can you do better? Where is the church falling short, and how can it do better?

Prayer Emphasis

Jesus, may we rest in fact that there is nothing that we can add to our salvation in You. Holy Spirit, keep us in the faith and fix our gaze firmly on the Author and Perfector of our faith, Jesus. Sanctify us in Your truth. Your Word is truth. In Christ's name, amen.

REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE

Galatians 3:10-18

THE CURSE OF THE LAW

The one true and loving God is perfect and His law is also perfect. Therefore, God requires people to be in perfect obedience to His law in order for them to be found righteous. But there is an insurmountable problem that faces every single human who was born after the Fall in Genesis 3: not one person, in their fallen state, can perfectly keep the law of God. The law of God, then, cannot serve as a means of justification for sinful humanity. In fact, the opposite is true. “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’” (Galatians 3:10). Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that the heretics that have infiltrated the churches in Galatia are not leading the people to life, but to death. In Galatians 3:21, Paul continues making this point, “For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.” Then to drive his point home, in verse 11, he makes it crystal clear for them: “No one is justified before God by the law.”

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

If the law of God has no ability to make a sinner right before a holy God, then what is the purpose of the law? During the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin wrote

about this very question in what has become known as the “Threefold Use of the Law.”

- The first use of the law is to be a mirror. The perfect law of God reveals the sinfulness and weaknesses that entangle us, and leads us to see our desperate need for a Savior.
- The second use of the law is to be a restraint of evil. Until final judgment comes upon all wickedness when Christ returns, God’s law is a common grace to punish evil in this life.
- The final use of the law is to reveal what is pleasing to God. We, as regenerate people, should love the law of God because it reveals His very nature and character. Jesus told His disciples that if they loved Him they would obey His commandments. Calvin said that this is the highest function of the law because “it is an instrument for the people of God to give Him honor and glory.”

FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE

Every single person, in their natural state, is under the law and a curse. We are all born in this hopeless position. The question is, can this curse be removed? The good news—that Paul communicates to these churches—is yes! “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). The curse that was upon every single person was death. Romans 6:23 says “the wages of sin is death.” We inherited a sin nature from our first parents, Adam and Eve. And then we continued in the curse by sinning, just like our first parents.

But God, in His infinite grace and mercy, did not leave us to deal with the curse by ourselves. God sent His eternal Son to rescue His people from the curse of sin and

death. Christ became sin for us, Christ took on death for us, and Christ reversed the curse for us. Paul shows the Galatians this incredible truth by pointing their attention back to the book of Deuteronomy once again. In God's law, when people committed a crime and were punished by death, they were hanged on a tree, to serve as a warning to everyone else that the crime ought not to be done. That is what Jesus did for His people. He was punished, not for His own crimes, but for the crimes that you and I committed against God. Jesus carried our tree all the way to Golgotha. His hands and feet were nailed to that Roman cross, and He hung on that cross all the way to death. Redemption, justification, and salvation can be found in no one else. It is *solus Christus*: by Christ alone.

How then are we, and these Galatians, to receive this redemption purchased for us by Christ? In Galatians 3:14, these believers are told that the blessing of Abraham will come to them when they place their faith in the finished work of Christ. Paul asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" (v. 2) He then answers himself, "That we might receive the Spirit through faith" (v. 14). Righteousness will never come by any other means than through faith in the covenant promises of God.

NO ADDITIVES

The covenant promises that God gave to Abraham would ultimately be fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ" (v. 16). Those of us that are in Christ by faith are also the recipients of those

promises. And if Paul's point was not yet clear, he repeats it again in verse 17. God made His covenant to bless all of Abraham's offspring 430 years before He gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. In Genesis 15:9-21, God ratified His covenant with Abraham and nothing could ever annul it. "To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified" (Galatians 3:15). If nothing can be added once a man-made covenant is ratified, then how can anything possibly be added to *God's* covenant? No additives.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. In what ways do you still try to justify yourself by doing the works of the law? In what ways have you experienced freedom from having to keep the whole law perfectly by trusting in Christ?
2. Galatians 3:13 quotes Deuteronomy 21:22-23. According to Deuteronomy, Jesus' actions do not fit the punishment He received. Why did Jesus have to become accursed and forsaken? Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 53:4-11. How does this apply to your life?

DEVOTION

3. Obviously as believers we say we trust in the promises of God. In what areas of life are you not *living* in accord with the promises of God? (Examples might include fearing man, being timid about your faith, not killing sin, etc.)

4. God gave us the inheritance by promise (v. 18). How does this pertain to our walk with Christ when we are at our lowest, having disappointed ourselves and others? What are some Scriptures that reinforce that our salvation comes to us by faith in the promise instead of performance?

PASSION

5. Sometimes it is difficult to remember that our fellow believers are also covenant recipients in Christ. In what areas do you need to see others more clearly as being partakers of the same covenant as you?

LEGACY

6. What are you doing to see others come to be partakers of the covenant promises of God in Christ? How can you challenge yourself to be more active in that?
7. Summarize the contents of this passage in a way that a child or someone that is new to the faith could more easily take it in. What parts of the passage would be particularly helpful to a new believer and why?

Prayer Emphasis

Triune God, we acknowledge You as the covenant-establishing God. We thank You so much that all of the promises of Your covenant are yes and amen in Christ. We ask You to help us to walk in the freedom of being redeemed from the curse by Christ. May we share that freedom with others that are currently walking in bondage, under a curse. In Jesus's name, amen.

HEIRS OF THE PROMISE

Galatians 3:19-29

Some sections of Scripture can be read more quickly and understood more easily than Galatians 3. Paul is traversing 2000 years of God's covenant dealings with people, without breaking a sweat, so if you are trailing him, panting and out of shape, you are not alone! Here, Paul parries and counters arguments from the Judaizers while helping the Galatians to understand how much they have inherited by faith in Christ.

THE LAW'S PURPOSE

It is easy to imagine the Judaizers sneering at Paul after he discusses how God's promises to Abraham come to us in Christ instead of through the law (Galatians 3:7-18). What's the point of the law God gave us through Moses, Paul? Are you saying that God's covenant with Israel through Moses until Christ was simply unnecessary? Paul explains that the Mosaic law was added to the promise of Abraham in the time between Moses and Christ to show that the people of God were covenant-breakers. Despite God's careful instruction, His people continually broke His law (vv. 19-20). The Mosaic law could not give life because it was given to convict the people of wrongdoing.

Paul then uses two metaphors to explain the role of the law in the life of the people of God. First, the law is like a policeman and jailer who apprehend us red-handed as sinners and imprison us (vv. 22-23). Second, the law is

like a “guardian” or tutor (vv. 24-26). In ancient Rome, tutors would accompany children everywhere they went, instructing them and disciplining them whenever they did wrong. The purpose of such a tutor was to prepare them to inherit the family’s assets. God’s people were also prepared for freedom, and for inheritance, by the law. When Christ came, people knew they needed grace, and that faith—instead of perfect obedience—would set them free.

The law (God’s righteous requirements) is just as needed today, so that we understand what salvation means. When we do not proclaim the perfect standard of God’s holiness, people begin to think that they are close to the glory of God in terms of their obedience to God’s law. They may think their good works were a “photo finish” and that they fell *just a little* short. The more honestly we look into God’s righteous requirements and allow the Word of God to penetrate and scan our hearts, the more we see that we are in need of a great Savior. When we remember how great a salvation is ours, it actually provides us with the greatest motive for obedience: gratitude.

PUTTING ON CHRIST

The result of faith is that we have right standing before God (v. 24). Our baptism is a picture of us “putting on” Christ (Romans 13:14; Ephesians 6:14-18). We have taken off the filthy rags of our attempts at law-keeping (Isaiah 64:6) and have been cleansed through faith (Acts 15:9). We have clothed ourselves in His righteousness (Isaiah 59:17; 61:10; Ephesians 4:24).

Paul briefly discusses three powerful results of our justification. First, we are made sons of God through the

promise given to Abraham (vv. 26, 28). More will be said about this in Galatians 4.

Second, our background and ethnicity, social status, and gender are not reckoned by God in terms of our salvation. The Jews took pride in being God's people, and although they have a special place in salvation history, it did not make them "first-class citizens." What counts is the fact that we are in Christ. This does not mean that these parts of our lives have been erased. Our genders (male and female) are gifts from God, and there are roles we play in the church and family that are specific to each gender. Our ethnicities are also gifts from God that make us unique and yet one body and one family in Christ.

Third, we are inseparably united to Christ and to one another. Paul speaks often of being united with Christ in His death (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:3-11; 8:39) and in His resurrection (Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Colossians 2:12). Because He has united himself to us, we are chosen, regenerated, justified, sanctified and glorified. Every spiritual blessing we have is given to us because we are in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). We are also united to one another (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:1-6) as a body and as a family.

It is easy to forget that we have put on Christ. Sometimes we lapse into self-centeredness or we attempt to do good works as a means of earning righteousness. How precious are the truths of Galatians 3 to us in those moments! They remind us that we too were imprisoned by God's righteous standards, yet God gave us a new heart that responded to His free gift in faith. Christ united Himself to us and gave us a new life

—one that is incomparably rich with blessing—by grace alone.

NO ADDITIVES

What good would it do the Galatians to revert to law-keeping as a means of obtaining the promise? It never worked before. In Galatians 3:19-29, Paul wants his Galatian brothers to look back at the way the law had imprisoned them. The prison cell of their former life stood empty because Jesus rescued them (Galatians 1:4). The law's tutelage was complete. It had prepared them to respond in faith to Jesus' gracious offer of His righteousness in place of their failure. The law was perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who became the curse that we deserved (Galatians 3:13). By looking back at where we were before Jesus saved us, may we be encouraged to press forward in gratitude for the inheritance we have received in Him.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Paul wants the Galatians to look back at their past and see how the law had benefitted them. How had it helped them? Why was it useless to revert to obedience to the law to prove their right standing before God?
2. What does verse 21 teach us about law-keeping? How does the verse teach us the value of the gospel?

3. If people do not have God's law like Israel did, how will they be convicted of their sinfulness? Read Romans 1:18-20 and 2:14-16 to learn more.

DEVOTION

4. How does this passage cause you to worship Jesus and devote yourself more fully to Him?
5. How are we sometimes tempted to justify ourselves by reverting back to law-keeping? What sorts of things do you do to try to impress God into declaring you righteous?
6. Have you ever heard someone misuse Galatians 3:28 to argue that there is no difference between males and females in the kingdom of God? How would you use the context of the verse to explain what it really means?

PASSION

7. How does looking back at our baptism help us to press forward in obedience?
8. How does the idea that we are "one in Christ Jesus" encourage you to serve others in the body of Christ? Read 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Romans 12:5 to help you grow in this area.

LEGACY

9. Verse 29 speaks of us inheriting according to the promise. God uses others in our lives to bring us to a point of saving faith. How are you encouraging others towards saving faith? How are you praying for them?

Prayer Emphasis

Dear Lord, thank You for the way that You sent the law to convict me of my sinfulness. Without You I never would have grasped my great need for Your salvation. You have baptized me and given me new life. Help me to stop trying to impress You and to be grateful to You for all that You have done. Help me see the ways I am tempted to works-righteousness and give me grace to rest in Your finished work. In Jesus' name, amen.

ADOPTED BY THE FATHER

Galatians 4:1-7

One of the lures of social media is the promise of being able to raise your social status among your fellow humans. The places you go, the things you know, and even what you eat can all be displayed for the sake of picking up more approval in the form of “likes, shares, and subscribes.” But the most important status change is the one that, as sinners, we cared least about: our status with God. Interestingly, it’s the one status that we have no control over changing! In this passage, Paul further explains how we have become “sons of God,” and why we should never want to go back to our old status of slavery.

ELEMENTARY

As we discussed in the previous chapter, in Roman society, children who would later own an estate were placed under the care of tutors, usually trusted slaves who made sure that they learned what was needed so that they could eventually manage their estate well. Even though the child is an heir, he was ruled over by household managers. Paul uses this comparison again in Galatians 4:1-3 to say that such heirs are like prisoners until the appointed time for them to assume their role of ownership.

Paul says that we likewise are enslaved to the “elementary principles” of this world. The Greek word *stoicheia* originally referred to the elements of fire, air,

water, and earth. In this context, elementary principles refers to the Mosaic law, which imprisoned us (Galatians 3:23) until the Abrahamic promise was to be fulfilled. Although, the law had its good purposes, it was only a set of “ABCs” and a shadow of the forgiveness and intimacy with God that was to come (Hebrews 10:1-4).

More broadly, the elementary principles can represent anything that we use to attain a righteousness apart from faith. Our consciences demonstrate that we are lawbreakers because God’s law is written on every human heart (Romans 2:14-15). When we say that we should love our neighbor or forgive others, yet we become sinfully enraged at other drivers in traffic for example, we reveal our own hypocrisy. We all violate the very “laws” we say should be obeyed when it comes to how we are treated. We are all born under law and enslaved to it.

FROM SLAVES TO SONS

Just as there is a “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) for a mother to bring forth a baby into the world, there was an appointed time that God had chosen to send Jesus to redeem people from their sin. Jesus was born under the law: not only the Mosaic law, but under all of God’s righteous requirements. When Paul uses the word “redeem” in verse 5, his readers would have thought of the slave market. To redeem meant to pay the full price for a slave from his master. We were “mastered” by the law, and the only way for us to be set free was for the full price to be paid for our sin. Since the price for us was “life for life” (Deuteronomy 19:21), an innocent life had to be given for ours. Jesus was in every way a human, yet He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15), so He was able to pay for our redemption (Galatians 1:4; 3:13).

The astounding result is that we have been redeemed in order to be adopted into God's household, so our status changes from property to family. The Holy Spirit enters into our hearts and causes us to cry out to our Father. This means we have an intimate, familial relationship with the God of the universe. Just as your children can cry out to you and be assured of help, God promises to be our help (Psalm 34:17; 40:17; Hebrews 4:16). He promises to do us good when we ask Him (Matthew 7:11) and when suffering befalls us, we can be assured that He will work it together for our good (Romans 8:28). Just as your children are assured that your heart is with them, our Father counts us His beloved (Ephesians 5:1; Colossians 3:12; 1 John 3:2) and we can be assured of His love.

NO ADDITIVES

In all time travel movies, there is an evil character who wants to change the present by jumping back in time and preventing good things from happening. The Judaizers likewise want to "turn the clock back" by having the Galatians revert back to Mosaic law-keeping. The law has been fulfilled in Christ, yet they want to go back to the time of enslavement to the law. Paul's words recalled the Galatians to the pure gospel message, that there has been a complete sacrifice given for our sins, the spotless lamb Jesus Christ (Exodus 12:5; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19). Why would we want to revert to being slaves, Paul cries, when we have become sons?

We are tempted just as much today to forget that the message of the gospel is not one of "do and be accepted," but that we are accepted even though we could do nothing. How often do we dwell in shame over

our sin, thinking we can pay for our sin by wallowing in self-pity? All we have to do is cry out to God our Father and He hears us, forgives us, and cleanses us, because of the covenant we have with Him in Christ. Nothing more is needed.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. In what way was the law a “guardian” or “manager” for us before Christ came? What good did it do us? Review Galatians 3:19-24 and read Romans 4.
2. How is God sending His Spirit into your heart like a spiritual “heart transplant”?

DEVOTION

3. How does this section relate to the overall argument Paul is making throughout the book of Galatians?
4. How does this passage strengthen your confidence in prayer?
5. Read Romans 8:14-17, 23, 29; John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1. How do these passages better help us see the doctrine of adoption presented in Galatians 4?

PASSION

6. How could you use the truths of this passage to help a Christian friend who feels condemned by the weight of his sin?

LEGACY

7. Why would this be a good passage to share with a new believer that you are helping to disciple? What in particular would you draw his attention to?
8. How does the doctrine of adoption in this passage shape our understanding of the Church? Read Mark 3:31-25; Romans 8:29 and 1 Timothy 5:1-2 to help you see this relationship more clearly.

Prayer Emphasis

Good Father, thank You for sending Your Son to redeem us, and Your Spirit into our hearts so that we could cry out to You as Father. You have done all of the work to bring us into Your family. The truths of this passage are deep and we cannot take them all in and apply them without You. Help us to grow in the privilege of prayer. What a great inheritance we have in You. In Christ's name, amen.

DON'T TURN BACK

Galatians 4:8-20

KING OF KINGS

Entering a dark room can be an uncomfortable experience. You don't know where the furniture is and the danger of hitting a knee or a toe on the corner of a bed or dresser is a real problem. So what do you do to alleviate this situation? You turn on the light. Light exposes all things that are hidden by darkness. You no longer have to fear the bumps in the night when you can see clearly. This is the point that Paul makes to God's people in this passage.

There are plenty of folks still out there selling snake oil that is supposed to save eternally. Rub a little here or there to gain God's favor. However, once God's people see the light—the truth of the gospel—they can never go back to the ancient ways of trying to earn salvation. There are plenty of natural and “elementary” forces that exist in the world (Galatians 4:9), but to put the weight of your entire eternal future on them is simply foolish. There is one King who rules all other kings (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14). Who would want to go back and serve a lesser god? Once you meet King Jesus, there should never again be another power that usurps His rule and authority in your life. To quote Bob Dylan, “You're gonna have to serve somebody.” Will you serve a lesser being than God Almighty who is Lord of Hosts and Creator God? What can a career, a relationship, a bank account, or a nationality do for you? We know Yahweh God! Once

the light comes on, the darkness should never again be tolerated. This is Paul's plea to the Galatians.

PAUL'S REALITY

It becomes evident when we read the text of Galatians that Paul's ailment is what causes his stop in Galatia (4:13). Paul does not waste opportunities and decides to preach and proclaim Christ in the city. Chapter 4 gives us insight into both Paul's infirmity and the willingness and empathy of the Galatians to support and thank him for his service. Several scholars believe that Paul's apparent lack of vision may be the "thorn in the flesh" that God put upon him via a messenger from Satan (Galatians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 12:7-9). We cannot be sure of this, but it is clear from the text that Paul's vision is less than 20/20, and God's people would have given him their own eyes to help him. A final clue that clarifies that the ailment has to do with Paul's eyesight comes in Galatians 6:11. Paul compels the Galatians to notice with what large letters he writes this inspired book. This seems to emphasize the vision-related disability Paul has as he writes this letter. While Paul's injuries are vast and perplexing, his vision seems to top the list in this letter (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). As modern Christians we should be thankful that the road of gospel salvation laid before us was paved in the blood of faithful men and women who truly endured many trials. The message of the gospel is stronger and more purposeful than all opposition. May this encourage us as we move forward in the gospel. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and nothing should deter us from our gospel ministry (Romans 8:31-39).

NO ADDITIVES

All Christian parents know that their children are immature and sometimes disobedient. And yet they keep fighting for their children, proclaiming truth and being examples of those who follow Christ. They keep building up their kids, speaking truth to them regardless of whether or not the children want to hear it (Galatians 4:16). This is what Paul is doing for the Galatian church. He is fighting to keep them in the gospel they first believed, and he said his fight for them is like the anguish of childbirth (v. 19). This is a picture of what Jesus does for us. He keeps pursuing. He keeps proclaiming. He keeps holding our hand when we are not holding His. We have an amazing Savior! His name is Jesus!

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. How do we see the gospel in this portion of Galatians?
2. How do the themes of knowledge and ignorance play into this text to teach us?

DEVOTION

3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and discuss Paul's thorn in the flesh. Why would God send a messenger of Satan to one of His own servants?
4. How should God's people react when terrible things happen to His people?

PASSION

5. How do we mature and become more godly people ourselves as we raise up the next generation to serve and follow Christ?
6. Whether you are a parent or not, the work of raising up the next generation falls to you as it does to every Christian. Why is discipleship a noble endeavor?

LEGACY

7. Who has helped form Christ in you? Let us celebrate and honor those who have sacrificed to help us grow in Christ.
8. Whom have you helped to grow in Christ? Whom should you be helping?

Prayer Emphasis

Father, You have raised up others to help us in our journey towards You. Thank You for being better than we are. You should turn Your back, but instead You grow us and give to us everything we need. Continue to give grace to me as I follow You and Your ways. Bless You dear Father. It is in the name of Jesus, Your Son, that I pray, amen.

A TALE OF TWO SONS

Galatians 4:21-31

IDENTIFICATION

We live in a world that values personal identity. We identify ourselves and others by pronouns, tattoos, sexual preference, political party, color of skin, and a hundred other varieties of differentiation. However, all these self-identities are frivolous and vain. Identity politics is the force that draws people away from each other instead of pulling us together. “I’m this, and you’re that, I’m from here and you’re from there...” Can you see us cannibalizing ourselves? But we are more than we think we are and we always have been. Our deepest identity can only truly be found in one place: Jesus Christ! The entire book of Ephesians is a testimony to this truth. We are no longer defined by things that fragment us from each other, but by being one new creation and one new humanity in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:14-19). Only in Christ can we truly find ourselves. We might have all kinds of struggles and engage in all types of sin, but God is constantly calling us upward and home. This is the gospel. This is the call of Jesus: repent of sin and turn towards Him. Any other form of identity will be our demise. Only in turning to Jesus will we find our salvation.

HAGAR AND SARAH

God promises Abraham a son who would bring about a great nation (Genesis 15:13-14). However, it had been

many years and Abraham's wife, Sarah, had no promised son. In desperation, as people sometimes do, Sarah takes matters into her own hands. She asks her husband to take her servant, Hagar, and have a child with her (Genesis 16:1-2). This event is problematic in many ways. First, in listening to Sarah, Abraham shows that he does not believe the Lord, but rather agrees with his wife who turns his eyes from God and places them on human solutions. Second, man-made theology and practice becomes the norm as Abraham tries to fulfill God's promise through his own power. Third, and most devastatingly, another race is created that continue to rage and fight to this very day (Genesis 16:12).

The big idea in this passage of Galatians is that one woman (Sarah) represented promise and freedom while the other (Hagar) represented slavery. Sarah and Hagar are examples of God's sovereignty versus man's design. Man tries to manipulate the will of God. Yet it is God who speaks what will come and His words never return void (Isaiah 55:11). We may try to take things into our own hands, but Jesus is the one who makes all things secure and according to the will of God.

The examples of Sarah and Hagar and Isaac and Ishmael are to be interpreted here allegorically in reference to Christians and non-Christians in Galatians (4:24). Not all Scripture is allegorical or should be interpreted in this manner. However, when Scripture commands us to see things allegorically then we should absolutely listen and respond accordingly.

NO ADDITIVES

Some people just can't see the truth in the life and work of Jesus. These are non-believers. Others, through the

power of the Holy Spirit, see Jesus and His work clearly and absolutely. This is the way it has been and the way it will always be (Acts 13:48; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 1:5). The question remains for each of us: “Are we descendants of Hagar or Sarah?” Do we see the promise through Sarah of salvation and righteousness? Or are we among the sons and daughters of Hagar, born into the slavery of darkness that cannot see the way forward? If we’re in Christ, Paul gives us the answer: “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman” (Galatians 4:31). Praise be to Jesus Christ who helps us see His work and the coming of His Kingdom.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Who desires to be under the law? Evidently some do (4:1). How does this make them slaves to the law and not recipients of the benefits of faith in God’s Son?
2. Read Galatians 4:28-29. Why is “promise” better than “flesh”?

DEVOTION

3. What can we learn from the births of Isaac and Ishmael from their mothers Sarah and Hagar?
4. Read verse 28. Why is it ironic that Paul is speaking this to an audience that is part Gentile?

PASSION

5. What does it mean for us that we are free sons and daughters and not slaves?
6. Are we living correctly in ways that show sonship and not slavery? How do we sometimes act like slaves instead of like sons?

LEGACY

7. This passage expands the definition of “sons” from biological sons to anyone who has been brought into the family of God. How could you communicate this truth to a new believer?

Prayer Emphasis

Father, thank You for allowing me to see Your gospel. I would not be able to see it without Your help. Strengthen me in my walk with You. I need You more and more each and every hour. Thank You for Sarah and the long-awaited son she bore in Your name. Forgive me of my impatience in wanting to thwart Your ways and designs. I want You and You alone. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

STAND FIRM

Galatians 5:1-15

What does it look like to live in the freedom of the gospel? Galatians 5 answers that question for us. Paul begins chapter 5 with a powerful truth: “Christ has set us free,” followed by an urgent appeal: “stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (v. 1). In continuing his defense of the gospel, Paul emphasizes that if the church in Galatia insists on adding circumcision as a necessary requirement for justification before God, then the work of Christ will be of no advantage to them. They will be falling back into slavery, back into legalism. Walking in freedom means resting in the finished work of Christ and loving others well as a result.

THE SLAVERY OF LEGALISM

There is a plea in verse 2. Paul wants the church in Galatia to understand that if they add adherence to the Mosaic law to faith in Christ as requirements for justification, then the work of Christ will be pointless (v. 2). It will be of no advantage to them. Paul is targeting legalism. Legalism involves adding to God’s law in an attempt to avoid breaking it. It goes beyond mere belief in salvation through good works; it is a heart posture rooted in pride. It presumes that if I perform certain acts or demonstrate enough piety or generosity, then God will overlook my sin and extend His favor toward me. This mindset contradicts the gospel! This is why Paul says, “...you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (v. 4). Legalism overlooks grace and binds us in the chains of the law. The fundamental

problem with legalism is that it attempts to conceal our sin by relying on our “good works.” Paul highlights that if the church wishes to “accept circumcision” as a means of justification, then they must be prepared to uphold the entire law (v. 3). Paul recognizes the issue: we cannot keep the whole law! What is the use of circumcision if one continues to steal, lie, cheat, commit idolatry, etc.? Legalism enslaves us to the law, and this underscores the liberating nature of the gospel. The law cannot save us! Paul emphasizes, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith!” (v. 6)

THE HINDRANCE OF LEGALISM

Paul transitions in verse 7 with a question, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” The Galatians had previously accepted the gospel of grace alone by faith alone—with joy. By faith, they believed wholly in the finished work of Christ for their righteousness. However, they have allowed others to hinder them from progressing in the gospel. Justifying faith is more than mere belief in a set of doctrines. Biblical faith is a reorientation of one’s life around what God has promised. Biblical faith results in obedience to truth, as we apply the truth of the gospel to our lives. The Galatians had allowed this obedience to be hindered by the teaching of works-based righteousness. False teachers had caused the Galatians to abandon the core doctrine of faith alone, throwing an obstacle in their path of sanctification. This belief was not from God, and it was persistently spreading throughout the church (vv. 8-9).

THE CALL TO FREEDOM

Despite the alarms that Paul has been sounding, he is confident that the Lord will open the eyes of this church, leading them to repentance and resistance of the false teaching that has snuck into the church (v. 10). Paul is also confident that the people who are responsible for the destructive teaching of adding to the finished work of Christ will have to pay the price of God's judgment. It's important to note that God cares about His flock, and He is concerned with what is taught to His flock. This is why we should be concerned with teaching and being taught sound doctrine. These false teachers are accusing Paul of changing his message to fit his audience. But that is not the case at all! Paul was persecuted for his offensive message of the cross. Remember, circumcision was a culturally accepted practice by Jews. But the cross was a shameful instrument of humiliation and torture reserved for the worst criminals. If Paul preaches that circumcision is needed for salvation, he would be negating the relevance of the cross and all its implications. Paul is not willing to do that in his preaching (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

His next words are shocking, but needed. The false teachers who are hindering these believers by teaching the necessity of circumcision for salvation should emasculate themselves! The word "emasculate" means to "cut off." In a sense, Paul wishes they would not only cut off their sexual organs but that they would cut themselves off from contact with the Gentile believers in Galatia. It is well-known that zealous worshipers of the pagan goddess Cybele would cut off their genitalia in an act of devotion. In the cultural context of Paul's time, his mention of genital mutilation was not as culturally offensive as it would be in modern society. Seen in this

light, Paul's message is that the false teachers' emphasis on circumcision is comparable to the meaningless mutilation seen in pagan religious rituals.

NO ADDITIVES

Paul's main point now becomes clear in verse 13. These believers were called to freedom, not to slavery to the law. This freedom, which comes from the work of Christ alone, is a gift that needs no additives. Nevertheless, this freedom should not lead to selfish licentiousness, trampling on God's grace. Rather, the freedom of the gospel should lead to selfless love for others (v. 13). In fact, the whole of God's law is concerned with others (v. 14). And this is what Jesus saves us to. He doesn't just save us to get us out of hell but to change and transform us to be able to serve and honor Him through obeying His Word. If this is true, then all forms of selfish behavior and unnecessary factions are out of bounds in the church (v. 15). Jesus' work alone saves His people. And His work leads to a life transformed by the gospel, displayed in selfless love toward others. This is what true freedom looks like.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Summarize Paul's arguments in the first few verses. What core doctrines of the faith are being solidified and reiterated in these words?
2. What are the consequences of seeking to justify one's self through the law? How does the gospel free us from these efforts?

DEVOTION

3. Knowing the thrust of Paul's argument, what does it look like for Christians to stand firm and to not submit again to the yoke of slavery? (v. 1). What does this look like for the church as a whole?
4. What forms of legalism tend to sneak into the church? How is legalism unloving towards God and others? How does it lead to division in the church as verse 15 suggests?

PASSION

5. Why does Paul shift his argument from self-righteous legalism to loving others? What does this say about the transforming power of the gospel? Where else in Scripture do we see these connections?

LEGACY

6. Paul is concerned about the health of a church being corrupted by the incorrect doctrine of the church. Explain the significance between sound doctrine and a healthy church. Use other Scriptures to justify your answer if needed.

Prayer Emphasis

Father, thank You for the freedom I have in Jesus. I am not bound to the law, but I have been freed to obey it! Empower me to live a life of freedom in the gospel, loving others well, because You have loved me so well. Amen.

WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-26

The amazing reality of the Christian life is that God Himself indwells all those who have looked to His Son by faith through His Holy Spirit. This is truly remarkable if you take a moment to think about it. No other religion in the world believes this. Consider it for a moment: God not only condescended to come from the infinite heights of heaven's throne to the earth He made in order to redeem sinners through His Son's work, but He also indwells those same individuals through the power of the Holy Spirit, to transform them to be more like Jesus. We call this sanctification. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus by faith, the Spirit of God dwells in you; you are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). Are you walking by the Spirit? Paul wants the believers in Galatia to live out this new reality. His thesis statement for this section is found in verse 16, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Let's compare the works of the flesh with walking by the Spirit.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

Freedom is found in loving others and pursuing obedience to the law (See Galatians 5:13-14). The only way to truly walk in the freedom of the gospel is to walk by the Spirit, not the flesh (v. 16). This is Paul's point in verses 16-26. Two questions arise:

1. What does Paul mean by "flesh?"
2. What are the "desires of the flesh?"

The word “flesh” in Greek is *sarx*. It can mean our literal human flesh, and it can also refer to our fleshly, sinful desires. In our text, Paul is referring to the latter. He is speaking of the indwelling sin that remains in a believer even after he or she has been saved. This means that Christians have to make a conscious effort every day to not gratify or satisfy these sinful cravings. So what are these cravings, or as Paul calls them, “the desires of the flesh” (vv. 16-17)? Paul answers that question in the next few verses. Fleshly desires oppose the desires of the Spirit—which lead to freedom, obedience to Jesus, sanctification, and true satisfaction (v. 17). They try to imprison us under the law (v. 18), and they are evident, easily spotted in the patterns of our lives.

It’s important to note that these desires don’t originate on our lips or with our hands; they begin in our hearts when our affections are misplaced. Paul provides an extensive list of these desires in verses 19-21. According to Paul, these desires include sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and similar things. It’s easy to look at this list and say to yourself, “I don’t struggle with these. I don’t practice sorcery. I’m not a drunkard. I’m not involved in sexual misconduct.” However, the point isn’t to create a checklist to boast about. The point is to inspect our hearts. Maybe you don’t struggle with some of the more extreme temptations listed, but do you struggle with lust or envy? Do you harbor bitterness towards others? If we are honest, we will likely find traces of these desires in our hearts. For this reason, we should confess our sins, repent of them, and throw

ourselves on the mercy of God, who is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:9).

Paul makes a startling statement at the end of verse 21: “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Wait, Paul! Are you telling me that sin disqualifies me from heaven? Are you promoting a works-based righteousness? No! That’s not what Paul is doing. He’s making sure the Galatians understand that true salvation produces true change. The word “do” in verse 21 is *prassō* in Greek, often translated as “practice or commit.” Paul is informing us that any individual who habitually and practices sinful behaviors, without remorse or repentance, is not a genuine believer. Why not? Because this consistent, sinful behavior provides evidence that the Holy Spirit has not indwelt them.

WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

Instead of gratifying those sinful desires that remain in us, we are to walk in step with the Spirit who indwells us. What does that look like? Paul gives us the answer in verses 22-23. He provides us with a list, known as the fruit of the Spirit. Note that it’s not “fruits”—the word “fruit” is *karpos*, and it is in the singular form. In other words, all of these characteristics should be evident, to some degree, in our lives if we are believers indwelt by the Spirit. We should see evidence in our life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I want to be perfectly clear: This does not mean that we will see all of these in our life equally, nor will we see them perfectly. However, they should progressively become apparent over time. Why? Because the Spirit indwells believers, and the Spirit produces this fruit in us.

Think about it. The Spirit is making us look like Jesus after we are saved. Who perfectly embodies this list? Who perfectly displays this fruit? Jesus! The freedom of the gospel leads to the fruit of the Spirit. Does your life reflect this fruit in any way? Praise God! If you are struggling to display love, to find joy, to be patient, to be gentle, or to be self-controlled, then be honest with the Lord. Confess that and ask His Spirit for strength to walk out what He is working in you!

NO ADDITIVES

When Jesus went to the cross, we did too—if He is our Savior. This is why Paul writes, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v. 24). Because Jesus was crucified for our sinful desires, our sin was crucified with Him. Any trace of those desires in our life presently must be crucified. Or as Paul told the church in Colossae, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you...” (Colossians 3:5). Because of the work of the Spirit, we constantly kill or crucify those desires. We confess them, we repent of them, and we run to the merciful arms of Jesus.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. What is the goal of our salvation? Use this passage and others to help you answer.
2. How does the indwelling work of the Spirit in our lives provide evidence of God’s love for us? How does it provide assurance for our doubts?

DEVOTION

3. Why does Paul give a list for both the “desires of the flesh” and for “the fruit of the Spirit”? What is his goal? What desires of the flesh still linger in you?
4. What fruit of the Spirit is less evident in your life than the others? What are you doing about this?

PASSION

5. Without others in our lives, it would be difficult to see the fruit of the Spirit manifested in our lives. Discuss how the fruit of the Spirit is others-oriented. Where else in Scripture do we see the work of the Spirit playing out into our relationships?

LEGACY

6. What disciplines of the Christian life can help us put to practice what this passage is teaching? How does the church facilitate many of these disciplines?

Prayer Emphasis

Father, thank You for the indwelling presence of Your Spirit in my life. I want to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. Help me do that. Put to death what is earthly in me, and empower me to keep in step with Your Spirit as You conform me into the image of Jesus. Amen.

BE A BURDEN BEARER

Galatians 6:1-10

GENTLE AND MINDFUL RESTORATION

As Paul has just written to the Galatians about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, he understands that we will not always display the fruit of the Spirit perfectly in our lives. Sometimes we or those around us will give in to the works of the flesh. Paul instructs us in two ways that we should approach a fellow believer who is in sin. First of all, we should approach with a spirit of gentleness. Part of this, of course, would be in accordance with Matthew 18 in approaching our brother or sister alone to discuss their sin. In addition, note that we are not to just approach them for the sake of revealing sin but for the purpose of restoring them.

Secondly, we should take care to follow Paul's instructions for several reasons. One of these is so that we do not get caught up in this sin ourselves. This is an application of Leviticus 19:17-18, the passage about loving your neighbor as yourself: "you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him." In addition to this, we should be mindful to have a humble spirit, knowing that we should "test our own work" and that we "each will have to bear his own load" (Galatians 6:5). In approaching a fellow believer to restore them, we should do as we would want them to do for us. Augustine stated it nicely when he said that "we must never undertake the task of correcting the sin of another person but when, after having interrogated

our conscience, we have responded with clarity before God that we do it out of love.”

GUARDED SANCTIFICATION

Paul states the truth that “whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (v. 7). As we recall again the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, Paul tells us that sowing the works of the flesh will cause us to reap corruption while sowing the fruit of the Spirit will allow us to reap eternal life. With this being the case, he encourages us in our sanctification to “not grow weary of doing good” (v. 9). This is how we are to continually guard our sanctification process—by endurance in good works. However, these good works do not come with any saving merit. In other words, we are not saved because we are doing good works. As we read in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we are encouraged to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12). We, as believers, are not saved to sit on the sidelines but rather to actively be doing good works as we are led by the Spirit in our sanctification process.

THE OBJECTS OF OUR GOOD WORKS

In what sounds like a rather odd statement, Paul tells us in Galatians 6:10 that “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” In some ways, Paul is exhorting us to give a higher priority to our fellow believers as we are doing good. But he also wants to be sure that we are doing good to everyone else. In other words, Paul would not be telling us to only do good to fellow believers to the neglect of the world around us. Paul’s life was one of

doing good for unbelievers as he preached the gospel to them.

NO ADDITIVES

In the previous chapters, Paul has been firm in saying that there is nothing that can be added to Christ's finished work. No works can be done to give us right standing before God. However, in this section, Paul tells the Galatians what God requires of them in terms of the way they treat one another. Is this a reversal on Paul's part? Not at all. We are still not justified by our works. However, we still belong to the Lord, and everything we do should be with an eye towards pleasing Him (2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:10; Colossians 1:10).

Thankfully, God's Word is given to us for instruction in His ways. We aim to please God and obey Him because we are grateful for all that He has done. This results in our sanctification, and we become more like Jesus. We sow to the Spirit to reap new life (Galatians 6:8). We are, as Paul taught in Ephesians 2:10, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." We are justified by the grace of God and sanctified by His Spirit as we follow Him in grateful obedience. Our sanctification also paints a picture of the gospel for others. We come alongside brothers and sisters who are bearing burdens because Jesus bore our burdens (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 11:28-30). Likewise, the gentle way in which we restore others can remind them of the kindness of God which led them to repentance in the first place (Romans 2:4). Our works do not add to Jesus' work, they just point to it.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. Have you expressed thanks to God when He has placed someone in your life to help hold you accountable in word and deed?
2. Galatians 6:8 talks about reaping eternal life as we sow to the Spirit. We know that Paul is not talking about self-justification here, so what does he mean? Use Galatians 5 to help you understand.

DEVOTION

3. Read Galatians 6:1-5. In what ways can you “test your own work” as you are discussing sin with your fellow believers?
4. Read Acts 2:42-47. List a few examples of what the early believers did to demonstrate devotion to God and one another. How does this passage compare with Galatians 6:1-10?

PASSION

5. In verse 6, Paul urges those who are taught to “share all good things with the one who teaches.” How can you encourage those who are teaching you in the faith?
6. How would these demonstrations of the gospel at work make the gospel attractive to outsiders? (Matthew 5:16: John 13:34-35)

LEGACY

7. While “doing good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (v. 10), you are leaving some type of legacy behind. What are some practical ways that you can ensure that this good you are doing will have a lasting impact in your home, church, and community?
8. The phrase “household of faith” in verse 10 refers to a family unit. How does our understanding of our sonship in Galatians help us understand why this family language is used here?

Prayer Emphasis

Our heavenly Father, You have called us to be as iron sharpening iron, and we understand that this can sometimes mean confronting those who are in sin. We ask that You will guard our hearts whenever we need to do this, and cause us to remember this passage that Paul wrote to the Galatians. May we always do this humbly and in the name of doing good to our fellow believers. Help us to always point to You with all of our actions. Help us to seek to do good to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We ask this in the name of Christ, amen.

THE OBJECT OF OUR BOAST

Galatians 6:11-18

AN APOSTOLIC AUTOGRAPH

Paul previously mentioned false brothers in Galatians 2:4, and then he discussed the fact that he had been in direct communication with other apostles like James, Peter, and John. In Galatians 5:2, he specifically states that “I, Paul, say to you...” And here in Galatians 6:11, he draws attention to his own handwriting. It is likely that the recipients would have been able to recognize his handwriting and they could be assured that this letter of such strong rebuke against the Judaizers was indeed from Paul. This is also an example of Paul wanting to openly and honestly take ownership of these statements. This surely would be an encouragement to the recipients and it should be so for us today to stand behind what we say and write.

BOASTING EXCLUDED

As Paul is constantly the apologist of God's grace, he gives a final reminder here that all boasting is to be absent among God's people. He says that even those who are trying to convince the Galatians of the need and efficacy of circumcision are wanting to “boast in your flesh” (Galatians 6:13). Yet Paul, the Hebrew of Hebrews, disregards any meritorious works of the flesh and states that he can only boast in Christ. He knows firsthand that faith in Christ is the only thing that can save him. While

the Judaizers boast in their own works, Paul only boasts in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

A GENERAL CONCLUSION

Unlike most of his other epistles, Paul does not end this letter to the Galatians with giving any mention of, thanks to, or commendations of specific believers. Instead, he offers a general statement in verse 18 that “as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.” He understands that the recipients are all under severe pressure to return to works of the law and he assures them that they are objects of the peace and mercy of God as they walk as new creations. Paul’s “rule” is the fact that the gospel is something that transforms us from the inside out. We do not act our way into righteousness. Jesus declares us righteous, which transforms our hearts. Heart-change always results in changed behavior. Paul’s remarks about the “Israel of God” are aimed not as those of Jewish ethnicity, but at those who “put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3) and who have placed their faith in Christ, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

In this polemical letter against the Judaizers who would boast in their flesh and make much of themselves, Paul does not make much of any specific people in his conclusion. And just as he calls for peace and mercy to be upon those original recipients who followed the gospel by faith alone, we can be encouraged that God’s peace and mercy is upon us today as we boast not in ourselves but in the cross of Christ.

NO ADDITIVES

Paul ends his letter the way that he began it, demonstrating that the gospel message is not of human

origin, nor does it glorify men. God is the author of the gospel and Paul accordingly boasts in Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 2:20). The cross was the only means by which Paul had been freed from pride and works-based righteousness. If it had not been for the intervention of Jesus on the Damascus road, he would have continued in his sin. Paul's salvation was all grace. The gospel is not about pleasing man (1:10; 6:12) but about the glory of God.

At the time of the writing of Galatians, Judaism was a protected religion within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The ancient history of the faith was honored by the Romans. Christianity, however, was considered a sect of Judaism, and enjoyed no such protection. When Paul speaks in verse 12 about the Judaizers trying to avoid persecution, he is referring to the fact that circumcision would have tied the person to Judaism and provided safety. By contrast, Paul mentions a different set of marks on his body, those scars left on him as he was persecuted for preaching the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 11:24-25). Living for Jesus, Paul implies, is not a path of comfort and "winning" by the world's standards. It is us decreasing and even "losing" a fight sometimes so that He may be exalted (John 3:30; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). What does a life well-lived look like? It looks like pleasing God even when the world around you isn't pleased. Paul's closing remarks call us to live like people who are dead to the world, but fully alive in Christ.

Small Group Questions

LOVE

1. We know that God has demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus Christ to fulfill the Law and take our sin upon Himself (Romans 5:8), and we are included among His people only by grace through faith. We have seen that the Judaizers in Galatia have added works to this, thereby undermining the true love of God. How do we see this still happening today?
2. What does it mean to be “crucified to the world” (v. 14) and how does the ongoing work of the Spirit accomplish this in your life as a believer?

DEVOTION

3. Although we do not earn our salvation by any works, so that there is nothing about which we can boast, we do have the opportunity to boast about the cross of Christ. When you have boasted about the gospel in this way, how have you seen it received by others?
4. Paul briefly mentions his sufferings in verse 17. How do the testimonies of others strengthen your faith? How has God used the trials that others have experienced to encourage you?

PASSION

5. We often find it difficult to serve other people for a variety of reasons. Do you have an example of a time when you had difficulty serving? How did focusing

on the purpose of your service for God's Kingdom help you overcome some of those difficulties?

6. Reread Galatians 6:12-13. How do we see the "man-centeredness" of the false gospel of the Judaizers lived out in their actions? What are they striving for? Do some of these same things lure us off the path of serving others?

LEGACY

7. Paul literally made sure that this letter to the Galatians was known to be part of his legacy by signing it with his own hand. As there are ample opportunities to speak to the false doctrines and unbelief in our world, how are you leaving a legacy by making your mark on others through the gospel?

Prayer Emphasis

Our heavenly Father, we know that it is all too easy to be wrapped up in what we are able to do for Your kingdom. Help us to always remember that the only thing in which we should boast is the finished work Christ has done for us on the cross. And as we are discussing the gospel of peace and mercy with others, we ask that You would help us always remember that You are with us now and forever. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask these things. Amen.

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