

MeadowBrook Church | Spring 2024

lifeGROUP

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Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

For Freedom Christ Has Set You Free



MeadowBrook CHURCH

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Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

For Freedom Christ Has Set You Free

Paul's life was turned upside down when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus—a reality visually depicted by Caravaggio's painting of the encounter. Paul had tirelessly been at work trying to earn his righteousness before God—to no avail—and God in his mercy saved him from such an existence and made him Apostle to the Gentiles. Some false teachers, the Judaizers, were trying to make the church at Galatia embrace Paul's old way of thinking contrary to the gospel that had been preached to him.

Paul responded—inspired by the Holy Spirit—with the epistle of Galatians, a fiery letter that teaches us what faith is and how we live by our faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, Galatians is as relevant as it ever has been. Many such false gospels abound in which people seek to establish their righteousness before God on their own strength. We as the church of God at MeadowBrook, must stand firm in the ancient gospel of Paul, for there is no other gospel.

My prayer is that this curriculum will help us to do so.



Hunter Hindsman

Life Group Minister

Special thanks to Chad Kitchens, Matt Fike, Heather Clough, and Sarah Yarbrough for contributing to this curriculum in either their writing or editing. *If you are interested in writing or editing in the future, email hunter@mbchurch.com today.*

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*All lessons are edited for content and compiled by Hunter Hindsman

Cover Art: The Conversion of Saint Paul by Caravaggio

Introduction to Galatians

Galatians 1:1–10 | January 07, 2024

What are some true examples of legalism? (Remember, calling for holiness is not legalism.)

Additional Passages:

- **Acts 8–9**
- **Acts 15**
- **Luke 18:9–14**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

“We find no rest for our weary bones unless we cling to the word of grace.” – Martin Luther

Galatians proclaims with crystal clarity how we are to respond to the good news of the gospel revealed in Jesus Christ. *The message of Galatians is simple: We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.* In order to understand this teaching from the pages of Galatians, however, we need to take some time to establish the context of Paul's letter.

The Context: Judaizers

The Conference at Jerusalem in Acts 15 highlights the first significant threat to Christian Orthodoxy in the church, and the issue boiled down to the question: *Was the work of Christ enough, or was more needed?*

The Judaizers were a group who believed that for someone to become a Christian, they must become a Jew first—i.e. they must be circumcised, if male, and submit to the dietary laws of the Old Covenant. However, the problem with such a view was that they missed God's intent in the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was always meant to give way to the New Covenant. The Old was the shadow; the New was the substance.

Thus, such teachers denied that the Old Covenant was fulfilled in Christ and began to teach that in addition to believing in Christ for salvation, they also must do certain works of the law to be saved. In short, for the Judaizers, the active obedience of Christ on our behalf and his payment of the penalty of sin at the cross was not enough. More was needed.

Paul, of course, along with the entirety of the true church opposed this teaching. They proclaimed a gospel of grace, not one of works, a gospel of freedom, not of slavery. They proclaimed God's gospel; the Judaizers proclaimed a “gospel” of their own making—which in fact was not good news at all.

This difference of understanding led to sharp conflict between Paul and the Judaizers, which resulted in significant confusion in some churches like the one in Galatia. Paul sought to address this confusion via a letter.

Jeffrey Weima in his book, *Paul the Ancient Letter Writer*, does a great job of breaking down the structure of Paul's letters so that we, as the reader, can gain interpretive insight to what the Spirit is saying to us through Paul. One of the areas we might neglect sometimes is the opening of the letter. The opening of Galatians ought not be skipped over too quickly, because it helpfully introduces some key themes that shape and are developed throughout the entire epistle.

Paul's opening has four parts: (1) the identification of the sender, (2) the identification of the recipients, (3) the greeting, and (4) the rebuke in the place of thanksgiving (J. Weima). Let's break down each of these four parts.

The Sender: Paul the Apostle of God for the true Church

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me...

Paul gives an expanded description of his apostleship that directly counters the Judaizers' challenge that Paul is a false apostle who blasphemes God and ought to be ignored. This can be seen in three ways.

First, Paul makes clear that he did not receive his apostleship from a mere man, but through the eternal Son of God who was made human for us and our salvation from God the Father. While the Judaizers sought to posture themselves as defending the Father's glory, it was the Father through Jesus Christ who gave Paul his apostleship and approved his gospel message. For Christ said to Ananias when he was calling Paul into his Kingdom, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15 ESV). Paul was chosen by the Father in Christ to proclaim the good news to all. To oppose him and his gospel, Paul makes clear, was to oppose God and Jesus Christ himself.

Second, Paul includes the line "who raised him from the dead." Now, this may seem like a basic Christian truth—and it is. In fact, it is so basic that it finds its way into every known early Christian confessional statement that would have likely been recited at a person's baptism (J. Weima). So, Paul is not merely including a basic Christian truth, he is including a basic Christian truth that the members of the Galatian church confessed to be true when they themselves entered the church through baptism. Weima explains that this inclusion "adds weight to his words and so strengthens his relationship to his readers." They hold this in common, and despite the harshness of Paul's later words, he holds out hope that they will be persuaded to embrace their common faith.

Lastly, Paul strengthens his claim by including all the brothers (and sisters) who are with him. He's not just highlighting an individual like Silas or Timothy. No, he's highlighting everyone. The Galatians, by entertaining the false teaching of the Judaizers were in danger of cutting themselves off from the true church of God.

Key Context Question: What was Paul's testimony? How did that shape his outlook?

The Recipients: The Church (?) in Galatia

To the churches of Galatia.

Paul's identification of the recipients in Galatia is the shortest of all his identifications in his epistles and stands in sharp contrast to the expanded identification of who was sending the letter. "The misbalance . . . is shocking and places the sender in a privileged position in contrast to the recipients: Paul has the divine authority and ecclesial support, whereas the Galatian Christians have no authority or backing worth mentioning" (Tite).

The churches in Galatia were in a precarious position. There's a saying: Play stupid games, win stupid prizes. The Galatian's entertainment of false teachers was a stupid game, and it led to the stupid prize of nearing the point of not being a true church of God altogether.

How do we ensure our church remains faithful to the Scriptures?

The Greeting: Grace and Peace are only found in the work of Christ!

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

“To this standard, though enriched opening, Paul adds what appears to be a portion of an early Christian confession (v. 4), which speaks of Christ’s work and the purpose of that work for mankind’s salvation. In so doing, he highlights a further important theme in the letter-i.e., the full sufficiency of Christ’s work for mankind’s salvation, apart from any works of the Mosaic law.” (Martyn)

Paul still extends grace and peace to the Galatians, but such grace and peace would not be found through works of the law, but only through the finished work of Christ according to the will of the Father. Such doctrinal reflection leads to worship and concludes with “Amen,” or “so be *it/it* is true.” Paul extends grace and peace of the gospel to the Galatians while the Judaizers extend the slavery of works-based righteousness. The Galatians—and us today—must choose. Will we say Amen with Paul or with the Judaizers?

As a group, practice the H.E.A.R. Method on this greeting, using the questions provided, and discuss.

The Rebuke: O Foolish Galatians!

Typically, at this point in Paul’s letters, he gives thanks for the churches. Not so with the Galatians. Instead, he rebukes them for turning to a different gospel. Paul is very clear the stakes could not be higher. Paul is not in the business of flattering for the sake of the approval of man. His concern was being faithful to God. We would do well to follow in his footsteps.

So what?

Having examined the introduction, I want to draw some brief concluding statements that will help us study the book of Galatians.

There is no other gospel.

Many come along with new teachings and secret insights into God’s plan, but Paul is the Apostle of God and he, along with the other apostles, delivered the true gospel which declared the faith delivered once and for all to the saints. We do not need more than what we already have in the Scriptures.

False teaching is eternally dangerous.

Those who embrace false teaching forfeit everything. They have no leg to stand on and will fall on the day of judgment. False teaching is dangerous. We ought not tolerate it in our own hearts or in our churches.

Grace and peace are offered to you today.

So many exhaust themselves by submitting to the yoke of slavery rather than receiving the freedom found in Christ. Receive the free gift of salvation offered to you in Christ. He did all the work. He paid the penalty. Rest in him, and live!

First and foremost, care about what God says.

Like Paul, we must be first concerned with our faithfulness to God regardless of what others might say. Now, this is not a license to be a total jerk, but it is a call to be faithful to the true gospel as we love God and our neighbor.

List some competing voices we might be tempted to listen to in our pursuit of the approval of others.

Stories of the Christian Life

Galatians 1:11–2:14 | January 14, 2024

What is your favorite story of all time (Book, Movie, TV Show, etc.)?

Additional Passages:

- **Daniel 4**
- **Mark 5:1–20**
- **Jude**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

After his fiery opening, Paul begins to narrate his experience with the Lord. People love stories. They always have and always will. It's just something hardwired into us. Stories, oftentimes, persuade and move the hearts of people more so than logical argumentation. So, when Paul seemingly breaks from his confrontational opening to tell his story, he's not ceasing his argument, but making his argument through his story.

If you recall, I highlighted three themes from the opening of his letter: (1) the divine legitimacy of his apostleship, (2) the common faith of the church centered around the work of Christ, and (3) the severity of the issue at hand. Each of these themes presents itself in Paul's narration, which can be broken into three episodes: (1) Paul's conversion, (2) the Jerusalem Council, and (3) Paul's opposition to Peter. Thus, Paul uses episodes from his own life to further the case he is making in this letter. These false teachers have gotten their claws into the Galatians, and Paul allows the vehicle of narrative to be what gets to the heart of the matter exposing the emptiness of the Judaizers' message and the superior nature of the gospel truth.

Let's look at each of these narratives and consider their implications for our lives today:

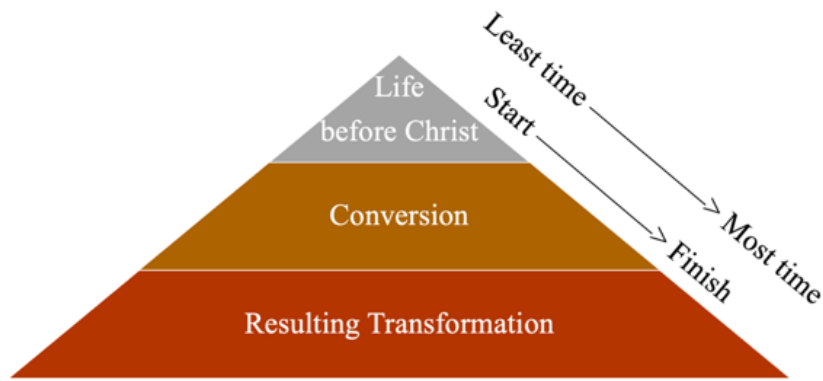
The story of the Spirit's transformation in your life is powerful. Share it!

I am pleased to tell you about the miracles and wonders the Most High God has done for me. (Daniel 4:2 CSB)

Jesus to the healed demoniac: "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19 ESV)

Few have undergone a transformation like Paul had—and that's OK! Your story is still powerful and effective for persuading the lost of the truths of the gospel. Ultimately, your story is not about you anyway. It's about what the Lord has done in you. He's the main character, not you.

The basic elements of a Christian testimony can be seen in Paul's recounting of his conversion. First, he talks about his life before Christ. Then, he talks about the time (or season for some) when he received Christ. Lastly, he talks about how he was different after Christ, which led to God being glorified. That's it. If you talk about those three elements of your own story, then you have your testimony that can be of great use in the expansion of God's kingdom. Here's a diagram of how these elements should fit together.



When crafting your story, you want to be careful not to glorify your sin, but keep the attention on the happiness of the abundant life with Christ. Ultimately, sin is boring and leads only to death, brokenness, and empty despair. We need not treat sin like it's something that it is not. Here are a few pointers as you craft your own story:

- Keep things short and concise with Christ-Centered and transformational tone that places low emphasis on the specifics of sin.
- Be prepared. Be clear. Be honest. Be an engaging storyteller.
- Use a verse of Scripture or two.
- Avoid vague Christian lingo and define any that you can't avoid.
- Pray.

Take some time to write out your own story

(1-2 sentences about life before Christ, 2-3 sentences about your conversion, 3-4 sentences about how life has been different since).

Take a stand for the truth when necessary.

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith... (1 Corinthians 16:13 ESV)

Paul picks up his story fourteen years later at the Jerusalem council spoken about in Acts 15. At this council, Paul came to the defense of the young Titus and refused to submit to the earliest Judaizers—to the approval of the other apostles.

We at times need to take such a stand for the sake of the gospel and the sake of the younger generation. So often, false teaching takes its aim at the young, and we must stand for the truth for their sake. Hear Paul's claim: "We did not yield in submission even for a moment." If we have the truth, we ought to not yield for the sake of others. As I mentioned in a previous lesson, Christians are not called to be "jerks for Jesus," but we're not called to be squishes with no backbone either. We are to stand for the truth, recognizing the difference between first, second, and third-order issues so that we might engage appropriately. Paul was dealing with a first-order issue. We might be called to take a similar stand in our generation. May we be faithful to do so!

What are some false teachings in our area that we should not yield in submission to even for a moment?

How can we love others whom we believe to be negatively affected by false teaching?

Genuine Christians still mess up and need to be corrected at times.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6 ESV)

Having recounted his encounter with the false brothers in Jerusalem, Paul retells his encounter with a genuine brother in Christ, Peter, who messed up. Peter was eating formerly unclean food with the Gentiles. Then, some Christians came from the church in Jerusalem, which was led by James, and probably kept up some of their old dietary habits for cultural reasons. At that point, Peter drew back from the Gentile Christians, fearing that his Jewish brothers and sisters might condemn him. This multiplied to others, even Barnabas, and caused a significant division in Antioch. Paul opposed Peter, in love but forthrightly in the presence of all, so that truth might prevail.

Notice the difference, however. Peter and the other Christians are not described in the same way as the "false brothers" from earlier. These are genuine Christians who just messed up. It happens. It happens to me. It happens to you. It happens to everyone. In those moments, we need faithful brothers and sisters to set us straight, which means we need to be bold enough to rise to the occasion and we need to be humble enough to receive such correction ourselves. It's harder to correct those closest to you, but the faithful wounds of a friend bring life.

Many people fall into this category—and Paul is hopeful that the Galatians are in this category as well. For whatever reason, they have entertained and been affected by false teaching. Such people need correction, not condemnation. May we be a church that is faithful to engage in such ministry with those around us with a boldness marked by the utmost humility and love.

Why is this difficult?

Why is this necessary?

Can you recount a time in your life when you benefited from correction?

By Faith

Galatians 2:15–21 | January 21, 2024

What are the various ways in which faith is used today in the broader culture?

Additional Passages:

- **(See Lesson)**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. (Isaiah 7:9 ESV)

“Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.” – Second London Baptist Confession of Faith

“The subject-matter of justification, I believe to be nothing of our own moral excellence, but the righteousness of Christ, alone, imputed to us, and received by faith.” – Andrew Fuller

“Saving faith is an act of the rational soul that consists in receiving God as the end and Christ as the Mediator that we may be united with him.” – Peter van Mastricht

We are justified through faith.

In this handful of verses, Paul states his overarching argument in a matter of sentences. We are justified by faith, not by works, and those justified by faith continue to live by their faith. Saving faith passively receives and rests in Christ and yields the active life of faith that daily crucifies the flesh with its desires and lives by Christ's power who lives in us.

So, what is saving faith? Peter van Mastricht helpfully identifies some defining marks:

- **Saving faith is more than a mere acknowledgment of historical fact.**

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19 ESV)

- **Saving faith receives Christ w/o condition.**

Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62 ESV)

- **Saving faith receives Christ himself, not just his gifts.**

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, (John 1:12 ESV)

- **Saving faith receives Christ entirely, i.e. both as Savior and Lord.**

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9 ESV)

- **Saving faith receives Christ exclusively.**

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. (Psalm 73:25 ESV)

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:24 ESV)

- **Saving faith receives Christ's cross in a denial of self.**

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (Luke 9:23-24 ESV)

Understanding that we are justified solely based on the righteousness of Christ—which we receive and rest in through faith—and not by any righteousness in and of ourselves is paramount. Christ has done it all. Receive him through faith!

We live by faith.

Take some time as a class to write Galatians 2:20 on the board and practice the H.E.A.R. Method as a class:

H. Highlight

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 ESV)

E. Explain

A. Apply (Be specific!)

R. Respond in Prayer

Paul continues his argument by stating that even the Christian life is one of faith. It's not like God says, ok, I've justified you by faith, now figure out the rest on your own. No! The same God that justifies us by faith, sanctifies us through our ongoing faith. The faith by which we were justified was passive; the faith by which we live is active alongside our works. For as James 2 states: You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; (James 2:22 ESV). This is not a contradiction to Paul's writings but exactly what Paul is stating in this chapter.

Paul is saying that saving faith produces the life of faith by which we live in a state of dependency, surrender, and repentance together with the church. Living faith that is revealed in works of love toward God and man does not nullify God's grace. Living faith would be impossible apart from God's grace. Living faith is grounded in our union with Christ and is motivated by his example. It does not come about through our adherence to the law. We depend on Christ who lives in us. We surrender ourselves to him such that it is no longer we who live. And we repent of our sins by crucifying—by the Spirit's power—the flesh with its desires.

- **Dependency = “I can’t do it on my own.”**

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5 ESV)

- **Surrender = “I am not in charge.”**

You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15:14 ESV)

- **Repentance = “I am wrong often.”**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9 ESV)

Which of the following sentiments is most difficult for you to embrace and why?

- ***“I cannot do it on my own.”***
 - ***“I am not in charge.”***
 - ***“I am wrong often.”***
-
-
-
-

Bewitched

Galatians 3:1–14 | January 28, 2024

Discuss a time—either funny or serious—when you were tricked by someone.

Additional Passages:

- ***Matthew 11:28–30***
- ***2 Corinthians 5:16–17***
- ***Colossians 3:1–17***
- ***Romans 8:1–14***

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

Having established the doctrine of justification by faith and the life of faith, Paul addressed the problem in the Galatian church. They had been bewitched, led astray by the doctrines of Satan. Paul sought to course correct. He did so by calling them back to when they received the gospel through the preaching of the Word.

What began in the Spirit, let not continue in the flesh.

Legalism is easy.

To be clear, to say that legalism is easy is not to say that legalism is not dreadfully burdensome. It is. Legalism gives you a burden that you can never carry, but it does so little by little by tempting you with an easier option than the life of faith.

The way of legalism says: “Do these five things, and all your problems will go away. Oh yeah.. here’s a yoke of slavery.” Christ says: “Crucify yourself. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden light. I have done all that is required.”

The killing of the flesh and its desires is no easy matter. So, we look for shortcuts. The Judaizers said it was circumcision. Today, many legalistic paths are offered. Legalism is not holiness—which we are to pursue with our entire self. Legalism is thinking that outward religious observance is enough to transform the soul. It’s not.

We need the operation of the Spirit, which is exactly what the English Puritan, William Perkins, taught from this passage nearly five hundred years ago, when he wrote:

“‘Spirit’ signifies the operation of the Spirit, whereby the inward man is renewed and made like to God; or, again, the exercises of the inward man. And ‘flesh’ signifies outward things or actions that properly pertain to the outward man, as circumcision and such like. Thus ‘flesh’ and the ‘new creature’ are opposed (2 Cor. 5:16–17).”

The flesh loves quick and easy solutions, and going through the motions of religious observance without the inward working of the Spirit is a quick and easy solution. We desperately need the Spirit who called us into the Kingdom to continue to work his sanctification in us as we walk by faith.

In addition to legalism, William Perkins highlighted two other ways that we can continue in the flesh that we ought to discuss:

- **We have a tendency to grow complacent as we age.**

“Aged persons that have begun in the Spirit must look that they grow up in the graces of the Spirit more than others that they may end in the Spirit. It is said of the angel of Thyatira that ‘his love, service, and works, were more at the last than at the first’ (Rev. 2:19); the same should be said of all aged persons. They which are planted in the house of God ‘bring forth fruit in their old age’ (Ps. 92:14). . . . When the outward man decays, the inward man should be renewed. . . . [Many] begin in the Spirit, but the affections of their hearts usually end in the love of this present world. But they must be warned that as they go before others in age, so must they also exceed in the graces of the Spirit. . . . An old man is to be regarded, but specially a good old man, who is more to be respected than twenty of younger years. Now aged persons when they grow in age and not in the Spirit, they lose their honor, for ‘age is a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness’ (Prov. 16:31). Let them therefore pray with David, ‘Forsake me not, O Lord, in mine old age’ (Ps. 71:9).” W. Perkins

Pause and Discuss:

What causes us to grow complacent in the Spirit as we age?

What attitudes do we need to identify and put to death?

How can we plan to glorify God as we mature?

- **We have a tendency to love the things of the world.**

“For there are three things which prevail much among us: the love of the worldly honor, the love of pleasures, and the love of riches. And where these bear a sway, there faith takes no place. It will be said that faith is much professed. Answer. Faith was never more professed, yet there was never less true faith. . . . faith conceived without the true means [the Word, prayer, and two ordinances], and faith joined with the purpose to live as we [please], is nothing but presumption.” W. Perkins

In saying this, Perkins is concerned about the nominal faith of his day divorced from the power of the Spirit working through the Word, prayer, and Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Chief among his concerns is that some claim faith yet purpose to live lives of lawlessness following the desires of the flesh. Such people do not have faith, but presumption.

Pause and Discuss:

How does the pursuit of worldly acclaim, pleasures of the flesh, and riches tempt us to continue in the flesh and not in the Spirit?

Christ lived for our righteousness and died for our sins that we might share in his blessing.

The Doctrine of Double Imputation: The doctrine of double imputation confesses that through Christ's substitutionary life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the active obedience of Christ has been counted to us freely by grace through faith and that in Christ's death in our place, the full penalty of sin was laid upon him as if he were the guilty party, satisfying the wrath of the Triune God that we deserved.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30 ESV)

"He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for those who are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! That the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors!" – Epistle to Diognetus, Second Century

"The one death therefore of our Saviour brought salvation to our double death [spiritual and physical], and His one resurrection wrought for us two resurrections [spiritual and physical]." – Augustine, Fifth Century

"He dies, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He makes Himself an offering to the Father for our sakes. For we had sinned against Him, and it was meet that He should receive the ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation." John of Damascus, Eighth Century

"Now, no one, not even an angel of heaven, could make restitution for the infinite and irreparable injury and appease the eternal wrath of God which we had merited by our sins; except that eternal person, the Son of God himself, and he could do it only by taking our place, assuming our sins, and answering for them as though he himself were guilty of them. This our dear Lord and only Savior and Mediator before God, Jesus Christ, did for us by his blood and death, in which he became a sacrifice for us; and with his purity, innocence, and righteousness, which was divine and eternal, he outweighed all sin and wrath he was compelled to bear on our account; yea, he entirely engulfed and swallowed it up, and his merit is so great that God is now satisfied and says, If he wills thereby to save, then there shall be a salvation." Martin Luther, Sixteenth Century

Those who are truly sons of Abraham are so via faith which rests fully on the finished work of Christ. Only through the life of faith can we know the blessedness of a walk with God. Christ took the curse upon himself, that he might share his blessed righteousness which is declared to be ours and worked in us by the working of the Holy Spirit as we mature in Christ. This comes about not through the external mechanisms of the Law, but by the promised Spirit who unites us to the risen and exalted Christ through faith. He is the beloved Son of God with whom the Father is well pleased, and we are in Christ—the one in whom all the promises of God find their "yes!"

Pause and Discuss:

Good doctrine is important and derived from the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

Why is this doctrine so important?

The Guardian

Galatians 3:15–29 | February 04, 2024

What is your favorite Old Testament story and why?

Additional Passages:

- **Genesis 3:15**
- **Hebrews 11–12**
- **Acts 7**
- **Ephesians 2:11–22**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

Having established the doctrine of justification by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone, Paul turns his attention to the nature of the Old Covenant. One of the Judaizers chief errors was their misunderstanding on this point. While there remains disagreement among good faith Christians on how exactly the Old Covenant relates to the New Covenant, there still exists widespread agreement on the most important aspects of this issue.

The Old Covenant was intended to lead us to Christ and his ways.

The Old Covenant was never God's "Plan A." Before the foundation of the world, Christ was God's "Plan A." Neither Adam's fall nor Israel's exile caused God to shift course. It was always moving toward Christ. Jesus is the true image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) and was proclaimed in the Garden to be the Messiah/Christ through whom Satan would be defeated. For Moses recorded this prophesy, saying:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

This Messianic hope frames the entire Old Covenant. Every aspect of the Old Testament cries out for another. Even Moses, in his re-giving of the Law just before the people entered their promised land, foretold of Christ saying, The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen. (Deuteronomy 18:15 ESV) The sacrificial system, the historical narratives, and the prophetic writings scream "this is temporary; there is a greater one coming." The Old Covenant was the guardian, the educator, that was to prepare the people of God to receive Christ.

So, when Paul shared the gospel message with the Bereans, they were able to search what we call the Old Testament and see that the Gospel was proclaimed there. Christ had removed the veil and proclaimed with clarity the mystery of the gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 3).

In making this case, Paul appealed to the Abrahamic covenant, which promised that redemption would come through his seed 430 years before God entered a covenant with national Israel at Sinai. Redemption was not accomplished by political Israel. They failed to meet the stipulations of the covenant and were cursed. Jesus is the offspring of Abraham who fulfilled God's Law to a tee and is the singular offspring through whom all the families of the earth are blessed and thus become offspring of Abraham through their faith in Christ.

Wolhart Muculus, a second-generation Reformer, explains this passage this way:

“The promises given to Christ were given to the only-begotten Son of God and our redeemer, so that by him and in him, we and Abraham too might be blessed. . . . The words “by your seed” must be carefully considered and interpreted with caution. The word seed here has two meanings. The first refers to the head from which flows all the grace of the blessing and inheritance that was promised to Abraham. It applies only to the person of Christ. The second refers to the members, that is, to the elect and faithful. It applies to the multiplication of the seed promised to Abraham as well as to the sharing of the blessing, from which comes our unity. In the head it is personal; in the members it is spiritual. Thus the seed of Abraham is one, whether you consider Christ the head or look at his members.”

So, then, what was and is the purpose of the Old Covenant?

Then, the Old Covenant, according to Paul, was intended to restrain evil, guide the people in how they ought to live, provide the means by which they could receive forgiveness of sins through faith that was lived out through participation in the sacrificial system before the death of Christ, and point forward to Christ as the fulfillment.

Today, the Old Covenant continues to declare Christ and guide us in the life of faith. Every time we read the Old Testament, *we ought to ask where is Christ in this passage and how it encourages the Spirit-filled life of faith*. The moral law of God revealed in the Old Testament is differentiated from some of the civil stipulations and ceremonies and has three usages today: (1) to reveal to the lost their sin and point out one’s need for a Savior, (2) to be a general restraint on evil in both the home and society, and (3) to be a helpful guide for the Christian to seek to live the holy life by their faith in Christ.

Adherence to the Law was never meant to be God’s plan for salvation. God’s provision for salvation was always by God’s grace through faith in Christ.

This point might seem a bit heady—and, frankly, it is—but Paul is making a precise argument that we need to make sure we grasp. Our salvation is based on God’s promise, not our obedience. We often miss it here and seek to live in the New Covenant as if it were the Old Covenant. This robs us of joy, assurance of salvation, and, honestly, the power to overcome the sin that resides in our flesh. We must get this right. If we are in Christ, then we have put on Christ. The work has been done; by God’s Spirit, we are simply laying hold of that which is already ours in Christ.

Why is it important to study the Old Testament?

How can we study it well?

Christ tears down walls of division constructed by pride.

Here’s the rub with these false teachers: their teaching was rooted in their pride. It maintained an ethic and gender hierarchy in which a certain class of people would be superior to others. The gospel of Christ tore such walls of division down. This is not to say that these verses deny God’s proper ordering of the home (husband as head) and church (male-only pastors) to depict gospel truths. However, it does say that there exists no hierarchy in God’s kingdom based on earthly categories of division.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:28-29 ESV)

Jews do not have a higher place than Gentiles—and among the Gentiles, various ethnicities do not outrank each other either (i.e. white, black, Hispanic, Asian, etc.). Slaves and the poor are not lesser in God’s kingdom than the free and the rich. Men do not have the edge over women either. No. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. No matter your background, wealth, race, or status, if you have faith in Jesus Christ, you are part of God’s unified people as a child of God, heirs according to promise.

In light of these truths, take some time as a group to discuss the concept of unity as it relates to Paul's argument in Galatians:

What divisions do you see in today's culture?

How does the doctrine of justification by faith lead the church to be unified?

Why is unity difficult?

What does unity require?

"Paul is not saying that just because they are Christians. There is no difference between Jews and Greeks, between freemen and slaves, between males and females. Christianity does not remove distinctions of race, social status or sex. What he means is that in Christ it is not necessary to be a Jew or a Greek, or free or a slave, or male or female, as if Christianity consisted exclusively of one or more of these. Paul meant that in Christ there is no difference between Greeks and Jews in the sense that Jews are not more privileged than Greeks, nor is a slave inferior to a freeman, nor are men more important than women." Wolfgang Musculus

"There is no distinction of persons because Christ makes everybody one. The grace of adoption and the hope of salvation apply equally to everybody." John Calvin

Heirs of the King

Galatians 4:1–31 | February 11, 2024

What does it mean to be free?

Additional Passages:

- **Colossians 2**
- **Genesis 16–17**
- **Proverbs 9**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

Christ sets us free and makes us sons and daughters of God.

But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. (Mark 3:27 ESV)

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:13-15 ESV)

The ESV Study Bible has a helpful study note on what Paul was describing when he says we were enslaved by the elementary principles of the world:

“Both in v. 3 and in v. 9 the expression refers to the elementary principles the Galatians previously followed, which for Jews would be the Mosaic law and for Gentiles the basic concepts of their pagan religions. But the additional overtones of demonic bondage in this phrase should not be ignored; they were, in terms of their mind-set and life situation, under a legalistic system and enslaved, and Paul explains in v. 8 that this enslavement was “to those that by nature are not gods.” Legalistic superstition and demonic domination are closely linked.”

Both the pagans and the Jews of Paul's day who had departed from God's Word for man made traditions had given themselves over to idolatry—which is the work of demons (cf. 1 Corinthians 10). Born with a sin nature, we too were enslaved to such sin. Our hearts were idol factories, and we could not help but to be led astray by the doctrines of demons.

But Christ, being rich in mercy and mighty in valor, overcame such forces of darkness, binding the strong man, so to speak, by putting them to open shame through his death in our place for the penalty of our sins.

Jesus set us free.

We cannot lose sight of such glorious news. Christ has set us free from sin's power over us. We now can walk in righteousness. That which used to cause us shame, we can leave behind. . . for good! The power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead operates in us now because of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. Do you feel defeated in sin? Do you worry that such and such sinful habits will never go away? Do you feel at the end of your rope?

I have good news for you. Jesus sets you free from sin and the elementary principles of the world. If you are in Christ, you are free. Satan has no ultimate power over you; sin has lost its grip; and the God of all righteousness will sanctify you completely. This does not mean we do not struggle or stumble. It does not mean the battle against sin will require effort, difficult, and a bit of bruising. But it does mean that the battle has been won and your position before God is not based on your performance. Because of Christ, you are an adopted son or daughter of God.

Why is it important to keep such truths in mind as we wage war against the flesh?

Why do we often listen to the enemy's voice of accusation rather than God's voice that proclaims our adoption and freedom?

False teachers flatter you, but they are not your friends.

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. (Galatians 4:17 ESV)

The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. (Proverbs 9:13-18 ESV)

"Paul acknowledges that the false apostles burned with zeal for the Galatians, but their purpose was only to get them in their power." – Martin Luther

False teachers present themselves as being for your good. They flatter you and appear to build up yet sow their destructive seeds of divisive gossip along the way. They do not live according to their teachings nor do they give up power when they have it. False teachers present to be for the kingdom, but in reality are for themselves.

Do not be deceived.

Avoid those who sow division in Christ's body.

Avoid those who exchange the eternal for the temporary.

Avoid those who minimize sin.

Avoid those who are given to the love of money.

Avoid those who dismiss historic doctrines of the faith like the Trinity, the full deity of Christ, the Scriptures being the Word of God, and justification by God's grace through faith.

Avoid false teachers. Although they might flatter you from time to time, they are not your friends.

What is the difference between false teaching and theological disagreement?

The way of the slave child is the way of works righteousness.

Recall our lesson from Genesis 16–17, that touched on Paul’s teaching in this passage:

God’s promises are not secured through human scheming. He must graciously intervene. (Genesis 16:1-9, 17:15-27)

While we have only covered a few chapters of biblical text—maybe 20 minutes of reading time—it’s important to remember that a lot of time had passed since God promised Abram a son. We know from Genesis 15 that at least a decade has passed and even more depending on how long it took Abram to travel from Ur and flee to Egypt. That’s a long time to be waiting on a specific promise. Unfortunately, Sarah was barren and well beyond the years of childbearing. So, she—along with Abram—devised a plan to secure God’s promise. She gives to Abram her servant Hagar, whom Abram sleeps with and impregnates with Ismael. This was not God’s plan, and it yielded—like sin always does—more brokenness and sin and missed the goodness of what God had in store for Abram and Sarai.

Jumping to the end of chapter 17, we see God explicitly reveal that the child of promise will be born of Sarah. God would graciously intervene and provide a son who would carry forth God’s purpose of redemption. Now the significance of this episode is threefold. First, it reveals God’s sovereign purposes in advancing the history of salvation. Time and time again, we see God upending the wisdom of man as we see the development of the lineage through which comes the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. Whether it’s Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, David over his older brothers, and so on, God reveals again and again that his ways are higher than our ways.

Second, we see a picture of Christ in the birth of Isaac. As God miraculously intervened in history to enable an older woman to—outside the normal rhythm of life—give birth to a son who would further God’s redemption, so too would he intervene in the life of a young virgin who would—outside the normal rhythm of life—give birth to the Son of God made flesh who is the true child of promise who would redeem his people from the curse of sin and death. As with the birth of Isaac, we needed God to graciously intervene to provide for our redemption.

And third, we see the folly of works-based righteousness. As we saw in chapter 15, Abraham believed. Because of this, that faith was counted to him as righteousness. We see in chapter 16 the foolishness of trying to secure God’s promises on our own. As Reno put it,

“Though her desire is pointed in the right direction, Sarah’s mistake concerns the way forward. She devises her own plan to deliver herself and her husband from bondage to her barren condition. To use the theological vocabulary that has been so influential in arguments over the economy of salvation in Western Theology, the way of the slave child is the way of works-righteousness. . . . Works-righteousness is a spiritual disaster for us. When we try to devise our own ways forward into God’s promise, we end up slaves to our self-wrought schemes.”

Paul makes this same connection in Galatians 4 when he condemns those Judaizers who believed they could be justified on account of their works. Paul’s point is that those who seek to lay hold of God’s promises according to the flesh miss both the purpose and the promise of the Old Covenant and find themselves enslaved to sin, whereas those who receive the promise through faith are truly free.

For Freedom Christ Has Set You Free

Galatians 5:1–15 | February 18, 2024

Reflect on a time when you felt the contrast between living in freedom through the Spirit and being bound by the flesh or the law. What was that experience like?

Additional Passages:

- ***Matthew 11:28–30***
- ***John 8:36***

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

Throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul has made significant theological assertions, specifically regarding the false works-based concept of circumcision. In chapter one, he reminds them that the only true gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ; there is no room for circumcision (or any other works-based practice) in this gospel. In chapter three, Paul doubles down on his views of circumcision by urging his readers to live righteously by faith, not by works. Further, in chapters three and four, Paul draws upon his legal knowledge, reminding the Galatians that the Old Covenant and Mosaic Law were always intended to be fulfilled in Christ because the Abrahamic promise pointed to a singular offspring, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. Because that promise was established before the Old Covenant, the Old Covenant was simply to guard God's people until the appointed time for Christ's incarnation; it was never intended to save them. Because Christ has now come, we ought to submit to Christ by faith rather than attempting to gain salvation through various works like circumcision.

It is crucial that we grasp the gravity of Paul's words throughout this letter, especially in our text for our lesson today, because in chapter five, Paul makes it very clear that apart from Christ's saving work in our lives, we are spiritually dead. There is no amount of good works we could do to earn salvation. We cannot merit enough favor from God to deserve salvation. Instead, through Christ, we have been shown grace, which is intended to bring freedom to the believer's life. Paul's charge to the Galatian Church is simple: Christ has set you free, live therefore, in that freedom!

Let's look at this freedom and how we are to exercise it in our lives.

For freedom, Christ has set us free.

If there is a summarizing verse for verses 1-15, it is probably verse 1. Paul boldly proclaims, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." This sentence is charged with exhortation for the believer. First, those found in Christ can rejoice in the liberating salvation they claim only in Christ. Second, followers of Jesus are called to faithfulness. It is not merely that Christ has brought freedom so that we might live; it is ultimately that we would live unto Christ. We are to stand firm in our faith, living in bold contrast to this world's wicked foolishness as we exercise God's righteous wisdom. Third, while we are to stand firm, we are also called to not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The Christian life is lived by submitting ourselves to the yoke of Christ, which is easy or comfortable, as the NASB translates Matthew 11:30. This yoke isn't ill-fitting. Instead, it is an invitation to the flourishing life only found in sitting at the feet of Jesus. As believers, we have put behind us the days of trying to earn and achieve by working our fingers to the bone. We have traded those days out for abiding in Christ—resting in the reality that Christ has connected himself to us through the cross and is renewing us each day by his Spirit.

In verses 2-6, Paul makes it abundantly clear that if we seek to gain righteousness through a single act of the law, we must pursue righteousness through the entire law. Further, those who seek righteousness by the law are severed or separated from Christ. This is a hard truth, but one that must be reiterated time and time over. We cannot save ourselves. Christ is our only hope. As a youth minister once put it at a DNow I attended years ago: Jesus + Nothing = Everything, Jesus + Anything = Nothing. Our faith must be found squarely in Christ.

Faith, Hope, and Love

In verses 5 and 6, we see Paul mention a triad that is riddled throughout his letters. This triad of the Christian life is faith, hope, and love. These three virtues ought to be pursued daily by followers of Jesus. In the context of Galatians 5:5-6, our faith in Christ must be deepened as we are dependent upon the Spirit's leading. Our hope ought to be that one day, we will be made fully righteous as Christ is fully righteous. And our love ought to be toward others and not ourselves. The gospel shapes all three of these virtues, further reminding us that it is not our deeds, actions, or intentions that save us but the objective life and work of Jesus Christ. May our faith be found in Christ, our hope longing for his righteousness, and our love be shaped by how he has loved us.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

In verses 7-12, Paul provides practical advice that we must hear today: a little leaven leavens the whole lump. In the context of the passage, it is unclear whether Paul is speaking specifically about the false teachers espousing the teaching of circumcision or the false teaching of works-based salvation itself. Regardless, the point remains: when we open ourselves to false teachers and their teachings, we become vulnerable, and our doctrine can suffer tremendously.

It is of utmost importance that we are sober-minded and intentional with what we allow to pass through our ears. False teachers gain footing by speaking in ways that sound good and right. They might even quote a few bible verses to justify their position. Still, if you listen closely, false teachers will inevitably place salvation on the backs of individuals and not on Christ. They say, "If you just work a little harder, tithe a little more, and do XYZ, you'll experience the fullness of salvation." Friends, hear me: the fullness of salvation is ours in Christ. It is only through Christ that we have redemption. As we will see in the next lesson, as the Spirit brings us in alignment with himself, we will experience a flourishing life.

If you have ever wondered, this principle of the leaven is why we do not play some churches' music and do not endorse some churches' teaching. At the very least, we find it unhelpful, and in the worst case, we might consider it heretical. As undershepherds of Christ's flock, we cannot in good conscience recommend some churches as we believe they do not align with the word of God. Our conviction is that if we expose our congregation to these teachings, what little leaven that is present will spread like wildfire throughout the entire body. We want ourselves and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ at Meadow-Brook to be found faithful to Christ and his word.

Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but to serve.

We have seen Paul lovingly remind us that we have been set free from sin so that we may be free in Christ. No longer are we bound to the sins of the flesh, constantly tormented by wicked desires. Now, by the Spirit's presence in our lives, we can walk by the Spirit (something we look at next week). So, we have been given freedom, and now, in verses 13-15, Paul tells us how to use our freedom. He tells his readers that though they are free, they should not use their liberty for the occasion of sin. Instead, we, as those who are made new by the blood of Christ, are to serve others through love.

The beauty of our salvation is that we can freely and genuinely love others so that it moves us to service. If we consider Romans 8:29 and the fact that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, we will also immediately be reminded that the Son of Man came to serve, not to be served. As we go deeper in our walk with Christ, by the Spirit, we will look more like Christ in his character, actions, and desires. In other words, because Jesus loved and served others, we can also love and serve others. Paul even quotes Leviticus 19:18, stating that the law of Christ is fulfilled in our love for our neighbor. Paul's words remind us that the gospel is not meant to be siloed or compartmentalized into our lives. No, the gospel is to be on full display in our lives, chiefly in how we display the love of Christ to all those around us.

Application

Let's briefly look at how we can move this text from our heads to our hearts in three ways:

Rest and rejoice in the freedom that Christ has afforded you.

The blood of Christ has saved you. That was not an accident, nor can that salvation be stripped from you. Do not wrestle with flesh, trying to earn your salvation any longer. Instead, rest in the Spirit, knowing that you are loved with an everlasting love and have been set free from the bondage of sin through Christ's sacrifice on your behalf.

Does our freedom in Christ offer us license to sin? Why not?

Make no provision for the flesh.

Resolve in yourself that you will not submit again to the yoke of slavery but will find rest and true life in the easy yoke of Jesus Christ. Practically, this means taking inventory of your fleshly desires. Ask, "Where does the enemy have a foothold in my life?" From there, attack those areas with Scripture, trusting that God will provide all you need in times of temptation. Jesus countered all Satan's attacks in the desert with rightly understood Scripture. We must do the same by filling our minds with the word of God.

Pray for compassion and look for ways to serve.

You have been given freedom so that you might serve one another. Consider individuals in your life group who might open up about a difficult situation they are experiencing. In those moments, pray that the Lord would grant you compassion for them, moving you to serve them tangibly. Praying for one another is a great way to serve, but the life of Jesus also reminds us that he not only prayed for his disciples, he also washed their feet.

Walking with the Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:16–26 | February 25, 2024

Reflect on a time when someone you know did something negative that you did not expect them to do. Why did you not expect them to do that?

Additional Passages:

- ***Romans 7–8***
- ***John 16:5–15***
- ***Matthew 5:1–12***
- ***Luke 4:16–30***

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

In the previous lesson, we saw Paul remind us that it is for freedom that Christ sets us free. However, this freedom that we are given is not so that we can go on sinning. On the contrary, Christ's freedom is meant to stir us to holiness. We have been released from the bondage of sin and can now walk in the newness of life afforded us by the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In today's passage, Paul dives deeply into the tension of existing in the flesh of our bodies while living in the Spirit. As Paul lays out his argument, we can see a central idea: do not give yourself to the desires of the flesh; rather surrender yourself to the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit.

While many seek to twist Christ's freedom into something that allows us to keep on sinning without remorse, we should know this is the exact opposite of what Paul has in mind. Unfortunately, it is commonplace to hear stories of individuals who "said a prayer" when they were younger, but now, as an adult, they live a wicked lifestyle. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (or preservation of the saints, as I prefer to call it) does not teach that one is saved by simply saying a prayer, as if we can get the right formula together to pray to win over God's approval. No, the doctrine teaches that those who are truly called of God will persevere in the faith (more so preserved in the faith by the Holy Spirit) throughout the entirety of their lives. All this to say, those who truly come to Christ in faith and repentance will never lose their salvation. Also, all those who truly come to Christ in faith and repentance will leave behind their lifestyle of sin. This does not mean that those who are truly saved will never sin; this simply means that when they sin, they are convicted and repent, longing not to make a practice of sinning. This foundation of perseverance/preservation leads us well into our text today.

The Spirit and the flesh are at war within you - to whom will you yield?

In the first two verses of our text, we see Paul lay out his primary argument: walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. The purpose of walking by the Spirit is so that we would not carry out the desire of the flesh. In other words, Paul is cluing us into two realities. First, the flesh brings wickedness and the Spirit brings holiness. And two, as followers of Christ, we recognize that for which we used to long only brings death; now, because of a changed heart, that which we long for is to look more like Jesus.

Paul teaches us in verse 17 that the desires of the flesh bring wickedness whereas the Spirit brings righteousness. Meaning all the flesh longs to participate in laughs in the face of the work of the Holy Spirit. That which is wicked is always attributed to the flesh; all that is righteous is attributed to the Spirit. Here, we see a glimpse into the doctrine of Total Depravity. Every aspect of who we are is depraved of holiness, leaving only wickedness. The flesh desires to act on such wickedness. However, for Christians, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, so the tension becomes a question of who we will yield to. As we posture ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will perpetually yield more to the Spirit. This does not mean we will never sin; it simply means that the trajectory of our lives will look more like Christ than not.

The deeds of the flesh are clearly opposed to the fruit of the Spirit.

It follows that if the flesh desires wickedness and the Holy Spirit is the bringer of holiness, the deeds of the flesh are contrary to the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In verses 18-24, Paul lays out just how much the flesh is opposed to the Holy Spirit, and in doing so, he comes back to the main point of the entire letter: to encourage and correct the Galatians back to a proper understanding of salvation - by grace, through faith, in Christ alone. Followers of Jesus are a part of a new and better covenant. The old law has been fulfilled in Christ and was never intended to be a means of salvation in the first place but a guardian until Christ came. Now that Christ has come, we would be foolish to place our hope in the law fulfilled in Christ and not Christ himself.

Paul provides a list of the “Deeds of the flesh.” This list is certainly not exhaustive, but it paints a clear picture - those desires of the flesh are contrary to God’s character - holiness. If we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, we must actively die to ourselves, putting the desires of the flesh to rest and seeking to live holy lives.

Paul then pronounces a warning that solidifies his point - those who walk by the flesh have not truly been regenerated. This is a gut check of sorts. We need to ask ourselves, “For what do we desire - the discomfort of holiness that will lead to eternal life with our Lord or the comfort of wickedness that will ultimately be why we miss the kingdom of God?”

Having painted a bleak but honest picture of the deeds of the flesh, Paul transitions to the fruit of the Spirit. Notice the difference between deed and fruit. One is an action that results in wickedness; the other is a passive production of something being done in you. In other words, the Holy Spirit is doing a work in our lives, changing us to conform to the image of Christ. As he is doing this, we bear the fruit of his work. The fruit is a result of his work, and as we know from John 15, the father is pruning that fruit constantly to allow us to bear even more good fruit. Notice also that it is the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruits of the Spirit. This tells us something about the nature of the fruit. Specifically, that we do not bear love, but not joy. Additionally, it is not that we are given kindness but have not been given a measure of self-control. In other words, it is not that we are given some of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but not all. Rather, the fruit that is mentioned is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. So, we have already been given love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We may just simply not walk in them as faithfully as we should. They are there and present in our lives by the Spirit, he is now calling us to exercise in this fruit.

Paul’s beautiful picture of life in the Spirit is framed with the promise that the law does not condemn these actions. Why? Because they are indicative of the character of the one who fulfilled the law. Each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is seen ultimately in our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether love for the broken, joy in the suffering, peace in the garden, patience with his disciples, kindness toward children, gentleness toward the hurting, or self-control in the temple while braiding the whip, we see every aspect of the fruit of the Spirit displayed in Christ.

Paul closes his discourse on the deeds and fruit by simply stating an honest truth. Those who belong to Christ have left their sinful lifestyles behind for the better way of Jesus. They no longer desire to make a practice of sinning. When they sin, they feel conviction from the Spirit, leading them to repentance. Those who truly know the Lord ought to expect to see a change in their lives brought about by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Follow the Spirit

Paul bookends his overarching argument with a simple and clear call: live by the Spirit. Do not give yourself to the flesh, but as one who has tasted and seen the goodness of Jesus, may we give ourselves over more and more to the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We can think of the Holy Spirit as our guide. Would you leave your jungle guide in the middle of the Amazon, assuming you know the path better than him? Absolutely not! He is your only chance of getting out of the forest. So why would we ever leave our Guide who is navigating us through the wilderness of this dying world as we traverse to the celestial city? Instead, may we press into the Spirit's presence in our lives, allowing him to change us and conform us to the image of our savior.

Application

Let's briefly look at how we can move this text from our heads to our hearts in three ways:

We surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we commune with the Triune God through studying his word and prayer.

We believe that the Bible is God-breathed and profitable for the formation of the person of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This means that we believe that when we read the Bible, God speaks to us by his word. God is communicating with us in that moment. And when we pray, we are communicating back to God. We would do well to couple those two together as we seek to walk by the Spirit.

How is your personal time with the Lord? What, if anything, needs to change?

Take inventory of your desires - what is it that you long for more?

Ask yourself, "Would you rather settle for the comfort of this world and miss the kingdom or live in the discomfort of holiness so that you would spend eternity with Jesus?"

An aspect of the Christian life is to be sober-minded. Essentially, we are to be honest when we assess our lives. As we seek to walk by the Spirit, we must constantly be taking accurate inventory our desires. Disordered desires yield disordered lives. Any desires of the flesh need to be repented of and put to death. As we repent, we must pray that the Spirit will help us to exercise in the fruit that he has made available to us.

What makes sober-mindedness difficult?

Walk by the Spirit.

Finally, we must realize that a walk comprises intentional steps forward. We cannot expect to flourish in our faith if we are not actively taking steps to grow in our faith. Plugging into the regular gathering of the saints on Sunday morning, Life Group, and other opportunities that provide community and accountability all help us grow in our relationship with Jesus. How will you take your next step?

Life Together

Galatians 6:1–10 | March 03, 2024

Reflect on a time when you were hurt or struggling and a close friend helped you in the situation. How did that make you feel?

Additional Passages:

- **Romans 15:1**
- **1 Thessalonians 5:14**
- **John 13, 17**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

As we see throughout Paul's letters, he inevitably moves from a theological foundation to a practical application. In other words, Paul always applies his theology to specific situations or occasions. In Galatians 6:1-10, we see this theological application firsthand. This passage comes on the heels of chapter five where Paul has charged the Galatians to think critically about the gospel they were initially given as compared to the "gospel" they had imbibed from the Judaizers who were seeking (successfully, we should note) to persuade the Galatian church to tack on circumcision as a requirement for salvation. Paul would argue that doing so would submit them to a yoke of slavery, something that the true gospel of Jesus Christ relieves them from. Thus, Paul's main thrust in chapter five is simple: flee from false doctrine and cling to Christ in order to experience his freedom. However, as we noted over the last two lessons, the freedom we experience in Christ is not intended to be abused so that we might continue sinning but leveraged so that we might walk by the Spirit. This gets us into our passage today.

In Galatians 6:1-10 Paul urges the Galatian believers to consider carefully their relationship with others in light of Christ's calling on their lives. Specifically, Christians are called to fulfill the law of Christ, a tangible expression being to bear one another's burdens, and as we seek to do so we will sow to the Spirit and thus reap eternal life. With that point stated, let's dive into the text.

Bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ.

Paul opens the passage with three exhortations. First, the family of God should be quick to restore one another in the faith. Two, Christians are to keep watch over themselves so that they would not fall into temptation. Third, Christians ought to bear one another's burdens because in doing so they will fulfill the law of Christ. These three appeals work together to communicate the singular framework of discipleship. One aspect of discipleship is not being afraid to step into the muck of another brother or sister's life. We all have things we struggle with and are ashamed of. Discipleship is an opportunity for us to gain a community centered around the word where we can be vulnerable with one another, confess sin to one another, seek wisdom, and walk in freedom.

Paul's command in verses 1 and 2 is clear: enter into life with one another. Those who are spiritually mature (those who are walking by the Spirit) ought to consider it both a duty and a privilege to restore their brothers and sisters in the faith. Further, Paul uses the phrase "any transgression" to communicate that no matter how small or big, the family of God should wrap its arms around a fellow church member.

Paul argues that when the family of God rallies around a struggling brother or sister, they are fulfilling the law of Christ. In this statement, we are reminded that by the New Covenant of Christ we are given a new law. No longer are we held to the old law, for it is fulfilled in Christ. Now, as new covenant believers, we are held to an even higher standard, one that can only be met by the Spirit's work in our lives. This is what Jesus indicates in his, "You have heard it said...but I say to you," statements in his famous Sermon on the Mount. By Christ's authority, his law goes deeper into the heart of the individual requiring authentic heart change. Such change can only take place by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In other words, it might be easy to not kill someone, but it is much harder to not hate someone. It takes the radical grace of God the Father shown to us in the Son and applied to us by the Spirit for us to truly and authentically forgive and love those whom the world might tell us to hate. By the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can experience true love for God and for our neighbor, thus fulfilling the greatest commandment and the law of Christ.

What are some tangible ways your Life Group could bear one another's burdens right now?

Be sanctified, not deceived.

A running theme within this text is that those who think they are spiritually mature must be careful, lest they will fall into the same sin as those who are deemed less mature. In verse 1, Paul says that Christians are to keep watch on themselves so that they would not be tempted. In verse 3, he tells the Galatian Christians that if they think they are something, meaning that they boast in themselves because of how holy they seem to be, then they are deceived.

Paul's charge is clear: if anyone thinks he is capable of being holy apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, he is deceived. This does not mean that we are not called to be watchful of our actions and desires. On the contrary, each individual is responsible for their actions. Regardless of the situation or circumstance, we are held accountable for the decisions and actions we make. In other words, we are responsible for our burdens. While brothers and sisters are called to come arm in arm with us in the midst of our pains, we are not called to rely on them to get us out of our issues. We are responsible for seeking the Lord through all of it.

In verse 4, Paul says something rather odd if we merely gloss over it. He says, "But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor." If we miss the context of this verse, we will misinterpret the verse altogether. We must remember that Paul is fighting against the destructive teaching the Judaizers. These false teachers were attempting to gain honor and authority over the church as a way of displaying their own holiness. This is not much different from how the Pharisees acted in Jesus' day. These false teachers loved being able to show others that they got people to believe in their teaching as opposed to true understanding of the Scriptures. Because of this issue, Paul is arguing in verse 4 that any boasting of holiness ought to be done on the basis of the individual's personal life, not their influence over someone else's. To put it simply, we ought not go around saying, "Look at how holy I am, I disciplined x amount of people." Instead, if we are to say anything we would say, "Look at what the Lord has done in my life. He has pulled me out of darkness and into marvelous light! By his grace I was once blind, but now I see; I was lost, now I am found; I was dead, now I am alive in Christ!" Paul is not arguing that we boast in ourselves. Rather, he is arguing that we should not find our holiness in any other person but Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. May we be sanctified, not deceived.

Sow to the Spirit and do good.

Following in the discussion of not being deceived, Paul writes in verse 7, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” Here, Paul provides some extremely practical wisdom to the church. Those who give themselves over to the flesh will inevitably reap wickedness and death. Those who give themselves over to the Spirit will inevitably reap righteousness and eternal life. In other words, we will look like what we give ourselves to; either the flesh and all its decay or Christ and all his righteousness.

In the last lesson, we provided a point of application entitled “walk by the Spirit” where we stated that following Jesus is a walk comprised of intentional steps forward. In this passage, we see nothing different. If we desire to be holy yet we give ourselves continuously over to wickedness, we should never expect to experience all the flourishing that the Lord has for us in Christ. Following Jesus, then, is not merely a prayer said at a young age, but a life long surrender to Christ as Lord and Savior of your life. This is why Paul adds the qualifier in verse 9 of, “if we do not give up.” The commitment we make when we first come to Christ ought to shape the rest of our lives. If we do not walk in that commitment throughout our lives, we will prove 1 John 2:19 to be true, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

So, as we live our lives, we are called to sow to the Spirit, or give ourselves over to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we will do to those around us, especially those in Christ; and by doing good, we will model the character of Christ.

Application

With these takeaways provided, let’s briefly show to apply this text.

Let your life reflect the character of Jesus.

As Paul would write in Romans 8:29, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. This means that as we walk this life and are giving ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we ought to expect to look more like Christ in our character, desires, and actions. This takes intentionally living in light of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Don’t miss the log in your eye for the speck in your brother’s.

It is easy to see other individual’s sins and yet down play or justify our own sinful behavior. The Christian walk is one of sober-mindedness. We are to be honest with ourselves, repenting where we need to and from a place of genuine communion with God and love of neighbor do we then seek to carry our brother’s burdens.

Let your confidence of salvation be in the object of your faith, not the strength of your faith.

At the end of the day, our confidence ought not to be our holiness, but in the one who has made us holy. If our confidence of salvation is in the strength of our faith, we might question our salvation entirely when we are experiencing a dark night of the soul. Conversely, in moments of great triumph we might become aggressive and judgment of the seeming “lack of faith” in others. When our confidence is in the subjective feeling of the strength of our faith, bad things happen. Rather, we need to be reminded of Hebrews 12:1, that Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith and by his blood we have assurance of salvation (Hebrews 11:19).

Boasting in the Cross

Galatians 6:11–18 | March 10, 2024

What is your most funny repair story?

Additional Passages:

- **Romans 3:21–23**
- **Isaiah 53**
- **Philippians 4**

H. Highlight a Key Passage

E. Explain the Passage

- What's going on in the text?
- How does it relate to Christ and his gospel?
- How does it instruct me to live?
- How does it stir me to hope?

A. Apply the Passage

- What specific situations does this text apply to in my life?

R. Respond in Prayer

How do you feel when the “check engine” warning lights up in your car? For some, the “check engine” light brings an instantaneous response of panic. For others, this light doesn’t bring a lot of emotion at all. Wherever you may land in your response, one thing remains true about the check engine light. It exists to alert you to a problem under the hood that could cost you greatly in the future if you don’t address it now.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is like a huge, bright “Check Engine” light to the church! He has made it abundantly clear that Jesus plus circumcision equals nothing at all. No, the gospel is that Jesus came and lived a perfectly righteous life that no one could ever live and then died on the cross taking on the punishment that sinful humanity deserved. What He did, humanity could have never done for themselves. Therefore, the “Check Engine” light Paul sends says : “Why do you think the Gospel is about you and what you can do?” That’s like putting regular gas in a diesel. It won’t work! (Okay, Paul didn’t say that about gasoline but you get the point) As Paul closes out the letter, takes the pen from his literary assistant (vs 11), and leaves the Galatians with one big takeaway:

The Gospel is not primarily about you but about God!

The Gospel is about God’s glory not ours. (vv. 12-13)

Doesn’t it strike you as interesting that Paul closes out this letter with an analysis of the motives of the false teachers?

In these verses we have the most straightforward summary of what drives these false teachers. The driving motivator for them was the fear of man and their own fame. Ultimately, they were afraid of the Jews who were persecuting Christians and wanted to put on a show by getting big numbers of gentiles in the church circumcised. Beware of any ministry where there is greater emphasis on the show rather than the truth of God’s word!

Moreover they weren’t even practicing what they were preaching about observing the law. Of course, Paul has already shown that no one ever could fully obey God’s righteous law (Gal. 3:10-13). Which illustrates one of the big burdens on sinful humanity. God’s standard to be in a right relationship with Him is perfect obedience and we all fall way short. Here is where the Gospel of God, not man-made religion, demonstrates such a glorious truth:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22

Bottom line is that motives matter. John Piper said, “The really wonderful moments of joy in this world are not the moments of self-satisfaction, but self-forgetfulness. Standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon and contemplating your own greatness is pathological. At such moments we are made for a magnificent joy that comes from outside ourselves.” When we see the magnificence of the work of God in the Gospel, the only right response is to praise Him and seek to live our lives to proclaim His greatness...not to make a claim that we are great too.

The Gospel brings a miraculous transformation (vs. 14-16)

Paul turns from the false teachers and turns the lens to his own heart. It is quite significant to the original readers of this letter to see the word “cross” in such a positive light. When Paul writes “far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he isn’t just saying he wears a cross necklace or has some decorative crosses in his home. The word “boasts” meant “glory in, trust in, rejoice in, revel in, live for” (Ryken, 274). It’s the difference between something being a hobby or it defining your life. So what does Paul say defines his life?

The Cross. Roman society would not even speak the word in public because it carried such a degrading and disgusting picture. Phillip Ryken adds that it would be similar to the word “lynching” in our culture today (Ryken, 274). The cross was intended to be a horrific picture of what was in store for any slaves who dared to rise up against the authority of Rome. So what transformed this detestable word which represented such an unspeakable action to become the only thing that the Apostle Paul would boast about? Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. His death on the cross and His resurrection means God has died in the place of sinful man, paying the penalty that we deserve. “To glory in the cross means to stop trusting in our own merits—our church attendance, worship style, devotional habits, social involvement, theological orthodoxy or number of converts—and start trusting in the merits of Jesus Christ alone.” (Ryken, 275)

Just as the word “cross” transformed from being disgusting to being celebrated, Paul reminds the reader that there has been a turnaround in his life. The world no longer has power over him. He has been set free from the bondage of works-based righteousness. He is no longer burdened with the fear of man and what man can do to him. He is no longer trapped on the deceptive, empty task of trying to build his own legend and fame! And because of the transforming work of Christ on the cross, Paul walks in the peace and mercy of God. What a refreshing truth!

The Gospel brings grace, even in the suffering (vs. 17-18)

While these verses might be easy to just read with your eyes without really thinking about it, I encourage you to consider what he says.

When Paul says he has the marks of Jesus on his body, he isn’t saying that in a metaphorical sense. He had suffered physical persecution that brought real scars upon his body. Followers of Jesus will suffer in this life. For some it may be friendships that ended because of your faith in Christ. The pain may be different than Paul’s but it’s still painful. Yet, Paul serves as a reminder that this pain will not compare to the great joy to come when we are fully with Christ.

As Paul signs off, he ends as he began. We begin with grace (the unmerited favor of God) and we continue each day with a dependency on his grace!

ESV Study Bible Note

The Israel of God

Which sense is best here must be decided with reference to the larger context of Paul’s thought both in Galatians and in his other epistles. That is, in contrast to the children of the “present Jerusalem” (4:25), the true people of God are the believing children of Abraham (3:7, 29), who belong to “Jerusalem above” (4:26–27).



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