

NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Paul's Epistle to the

Galatians

Gene Cunningham

As Jesus Christ prepared to send the disciples for the first time throughout Israel with His message, He included in their instructions this admonition: “*Freely you have received, freely give*” (Matt.10:8). This six-word summary of grace explains the financial policy of the publications and audio ministries of Basic Training. All audio materials and publications are provided **without charge** to anyone who requests them. For a list of available material, visit our website.



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“Endure hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”
(2 Timothy 2:3)

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NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Preface

While I was teaching in Myanmar/Burma in March 2019, some of my long-term, advanced students suggested that I go through the New Testament and provide basic notes, which they could then be able to print as a study Bible. They specifically asked that I focus on issues that are a major area of confusion in the churches where they work. Therefore, the following commentary will focus on these five primary areas:

1. What is the nature of God's grace and how is it received?
2. What is God's plan of salvation and the clear message of the Gospel?
3. What is the Bible's teaching on the security and assurance of the believer?
4. How is the believer to live the Christian life and be effective in witness/service?
5. What does prophecy say about the last days and the order of end-times events?

Practical Suggestions

These notes are purposely brief in nature. This work is not intended to be a complete commentary. All through the work I have kept in mind those who live in remote areas of our world, who labor to both understand and to teach others the Word of God. They do not have access to Bible school or seminary training. Neither are they able to afford the vast array of books available to pastors and teachers who live in more advanced countries.

I encourage all who utilize these notes to study them with an open Bible. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21) as you study. Read the context of the passage carefully. Look up and compare the references that are provided. Above all, let the Word of God, and not these notes, guide your insight into God's Word. As I always tell my students: "Never take my word for anything; search the Scriptures and prove what is true" (Acts 17:10–12; 1 John 4:1).

Before you begin any study of the Word of God, take a few moments to make sure that you are in fellowship with God, filled by means of the Holy Spirit. Comprehension, like everything else in the Christian life, is a gift that can be appropriated only by faith. The Bible clearly lays out three requirements that must be met before we can expect to understand God's Word. All three require nothing from us but faith.

1. *We must be believers in Jesus Christ* (John 3:16).

It is impossible for unbelievers to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus declared to the leading religious leader of His day that apart from spiritual birth, man is blind to the things of God. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again*" (John 3:6-7).

2. *We must be filled by means of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. As believers, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but when we sin, we break fellowship with God and cease to function in the power of the Spirit. When we confess our sins, God is always faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The moment we confess, we are restored to fellowship and are again under the control of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, able to learn.

3. *We must approach in faith* (Hebrews 11:6).

Only when we approach in humility, with child-like faith, will the Word of God make sense to us (Matt. 18:4; Heb. 11:3). Where we find Scripture at odds with our ideas or our desires, we must submit to the authority of the Word. Intimacy, understanding, and power are reserved for those who are willing to do God's will (John 7:17).

DEDICATION

*“This will be written for the generation to come,
that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.”*

Psalm 102:18

While it is my hope and prayer that these notes will be helpful to all current students of the Word of God, I send them forth with a special dedication to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are yet to come on the scene of world history (Rev. 7:1–8). They will be the heroes of the faith in the coming time of Tribulation following the soon coming Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

To these brothers and sisters of the future, I want you to know you have been thought of, prayed for, and loved—before you even knew your mission. We of the Church Age salute you for the sufferings you will endure and the victories you will win. We bid you to be strong in the Lord, for your victory is sure in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the labor put into these notes by many hands and through many prayers, be a help to you as you boldly proclaim the name of Jesus Christ in a dark and dangerous time!

INTRODUCTION

Paul had first preached the Gospel to the Galatians on his first missionary journey with Barnabas, in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:13–14:31). These cities were the scene of some of Paul’s greatest persecution, and on his second missionary journey, he met Timothy in Lystra (Acts 16:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:10–12). The Gauls, also called Galitai, or Keltoi (Celts), migrated, according to some out of France, but others claim out of central Asia, into what we know as Galatia. This area is located in modern Turkey. They later moved northwest into what is today Britain, Ireland, and Scotland.

The letter to the Galatians is the most aggressive and combative of all of Paul’s epistles. This is because Paul was under a three-pronged attack from the Judaizers: His apostleship, his gospel message, and his conduct were all being challenged. Paul responds like the fighter he was—he counter-attacked.

In this epistle, Paul responds to the heresy of the Judaizers who challenged:

1. His ministry (Apostle to the Gentiles—Gal. 1:1; 2:7),
2. His message (the gospel of the grace of God—Gal. 1:6–9; 2:14–16; 3:1–9, 11, 22–26; 5:1, 13), and
3. His method (they accused him of being a “men-pleaser,” Gal. 1:10; see 1 Cor. 9:19–23).

In the minds of these zealots, no one could be saved apart from becoming a proselyte to Judaism through circumcision, and total dedication to the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1–5).

Paul’s shift from “The gospel of the kingdom” to the “gospel of the grace of God” shook the religious world of his day because they did not yet understand the Doctrine of the Mystery, or the great dispensational shift from the Age of Israel to the Church Age.

This letter was probably written from Antioch shortly after Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13–14). The same Judaizers who had come to Antioch and disputed with Paul (Acts 15:1–5), had followed him and sought to pervert his message in Galatia. The Galatian letter has many similarities in its emphasis with the epistle to the Romans.

Three Descriptions of the Galatians’ Defection

The phrase “*turning away*” in Galatians 1:6 speaks of a gradual and continual moving away from the truth of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works.

1. It was a defection from Christ, the Living Truth, to a lie (1:1–9).
2. It was a defection from the Spirit of God back to the Law (3:1–9). This was essentially a rejection of the New Covenant in favor of the Old Covenant:
 - Rejection of new wine in favor of the old,
 - Attempt to put new wine in old wineskins, and
 - Desire to perpetuate what God had abrogated (Heb. 7:18, 22; 8:6–7, 13; 9:15; 10:9).
3. It was a defection from freedom in Christ to spiritual slavery (5:1–6).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

GALATIANS CHAPTER 1

Paul rebukes the Galatian believers for their defection from the true Gospel (justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works) to a non-gospel, which sought to mix faith and works as the means of salvation. He uses the history of his own conversion and his independence from the other apostles to show that his apostleship and message were received directly from God, apart from any human interference.

Paul's Greeting: The Essence of the Epistle Galatians 1:1–5

In these first five verses, Paul sets forth his primary objectives in writing the letter:

1. To establish his apostolic authority, which came not from men but from God,
2. To show he did not stand alone, but had the support of many brethren,
3. To declare that only through the grace of God alone could one find peace, and
4. To clarify for them the essence of the Gospel, in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the only hope of eternal salvation.

1:1 *“Paul, an apostle.”* The term *“apostle”* originated in the Greek navy, and spoke of what we would call the Admiral—one in charge of a fleet. The root words *apo/stello* refer to “one sent with a commission from highest authority.” *“Not from men nor through man.”* Paul’s apostleship was derived neither from the source of human authority, nor through a human agency, such as a modern ordination board. *“But through Jesus Christ and God the Father.”* Jesus Christ was the agency (Acts 9:1–6), and God the Father was the ultimate source (Gal. 1:15–16; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1). *“Who raised Him from the dead.”* The same power that raised Jesus from the dead was at work in and through Paul’s apostleship (Eph. 3:7, 20).

1:2 *“And all the brethren who are with me.”* Paul will stress to them that he had the support, not only of many other noted believers, but of the apostles themselves (Gal. 2:6–10). *“To the churches of Galatia.”* This letter is unique in that it was sent, not to a single church, but to a group of churches in the province of Galatia. While it is argued that the letter to the Ephesians was also a circular letter, it is not addressed as such.

1:3 *“Grace to you and peace.”* While it is true that *“grace”* (*charis*) was the greeting used by the Greeks, and that *“peace”* (*shalom*) was the greeting of the Hebrews, Paul’s usage is more than just a blending of the two. It is the essence of his gospel message. Apart from receiving the unmerited and infinite grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, there can be no peace in the soul of man (Isa. 57:19, 21; Rom. 5:1; 8:6; Acts 10:34–36, 43; Eph. 2:8–9). *“From God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* This greeting expresses the desire of both the Father and the Son for these Galatian believers. The same source and agency of grace and peace to these Galatians was the authority behind the apostleship of Paul.

1:4 *“Who gave Himself for our sins.”* This phrase stresses both the voluntary, self-offering of our Lord, and also its substitutionary nature. He willingly went to the cross for the purpose of bearing the total penalty of our sins (John 10:18; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; 2 Cor. 5:19–21; Heb. 2:9–11). *“That He might deliver us from this present evil age.”* Not only is eternal salvation in view (Col. 1:13), but also present deliverance, which we call sanctification (1 Thess. 1:5–10; 4:3–4; 5:23; Titus 2:14). The Bible speaks of salvation in three phases: justification (initial), sanctification (gradual), and glorification (ultimate). *“According to the will of our God and Father.”* This is the outworking of the eternal plan of God in our lives (John 3:16; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7).

1:5 *“To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* Ultimately, all praise and glory go through Jesus Christ, the Agent of our salvation, to the Father, who is the Author of our salvation. Each member of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, receives praise and glory for the part they play in our salvation. Note that Ephesians 1:3–6 directs praise to the Father; Ephesians 1:7–12 directs praise and glory to Jesus Christ; and Ephesians 1:13–14 is directed to the praise and glory of the Spirit.

Summary Principles

1. Much of our confusion regarding the Galatian heresy stems from our failure to understand the term “Gospel” as it was understood by the first apostles, and then by the Apostle Paul.
2. The word “gospel” simply means “good news” or “glad tidings.” There are various kinds of good news throughout the Bible. For example, in Matthew, the gospel being proclaimed was “*the gospel of the kingdom*,” meaning in essence that the King had come, and the kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:1–2; Mark 1:14–15). This was a message specifically to Israel (Matt. 10:5–7) and was based on the covenant God made with Moses. It was never intended as a message for the Gentiles.
3. When the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, the message then went out to the Gentiles as the “*gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24; 28:23–31). The “*kingdom*” promised to the Jews was an earthly kingdom. The gospel to the Gentiles also speaks of a kingdom, but it is a heavenly one (1 Cor. 15:24, 50; Col. 1:13).
4. This transition of focus from the nation of Israel to the nations of the Gentiles marks also a transition of dispensations, from the Age of Israel to the Church Age. This age lasts from Pentecost (Acts 2) to the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13–18).
5. Because Paul was uniquely chosen to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, God also gave to him the revelation of the “*mystery*,” that is the nature of this age and the doctrines that pertain to it (Rom. 11:25; 16:25–26; 1 Cor. 2:7–13; Eph. 1:7–10; 3:2–9; 6:19; Col. 1:25–27). The word “*mystery*” signifies that nothing about this present Church Age, or the unique teachings or privileges belonging to it, was ever revealed to the saints in the Old Testament.
6. Such things as the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), His permanent indwelling (John 14:16–18; Col. 1:26–27), and our exalted position in Christ (Col. 3:1–4), were completely unknown to Old Testament saints. This is clear from what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9–10, that prior to his Spirit-inspired writings “no eye had seen, nor had any ear heard them, nor had they ever entered into any mind of prophet or sage. But these glorious truths have now been revealed to us through His Holy Spirit.”
7. Once we understand these points, it is easy to see how difficult it would have been for even believing Jews to transition from the rites and rituals of Judaism to the freedom of grace and truth that we Gentiles enjoy in Christ (Gal. 5:1, 13).

Paul’s Amazement at the Galatians’ Defection

Galatians 1:6–10

1:6 “*I marvel that you are turning away so soon.*” It was not just their defection from the true Gospel that amazed Paul, but how quickly it came about. “*Turning away ... from Him who called you.*” The word used for “*turning away*” was used of a soldier who deserted his post, or who fled in the face of the enemy. Their desertion was 1) from Jesus Christ their Savior, 2) defection from His grace to the law, and 3) a departure from the true Gospel. “*A different gospel.*” The word *heteron* speaks of a “*gospel*” that is totally different in nature than the true Gospel Paul preached.

1:7 “*Which is not another.*” In other words, it is not a gospel (“good news”) at all. “*But there are some who trouble you and ... pervert the gospel of Christ.*” The work of the false teachers was to distort the true Gospel, resulting in a troubling and disturbance of the faith of the Galatians. To add any work of any kind to the Gospel is to destroy the Gospel (Rom. 4:3–5; Gal. 3:1–3, 10–11; Eph. 2:8–9).

1:8–9 “*But even if we, or an angel from heaven.*” Whether the apostles, or even “*an angel from Heaven,*” were to pervert the Gospel, they would be judged by God. “*Let him be accursed.*” This does not refer to eternal

condemnation (John 3:19; Rom. 8:1), since Paul includes himself and the apostles. Those who pervert the Gospel, even though believers, will be judged by God in this life. Note that those who started this heresy were believing Jews (Acts 15:1–5). **“Any other gospel ... than what you received.”** Since these Galatians had “received” Paul’s gospel, they had eternal life, even if they followed false teaching (John 1:11–12; 1 Cor. 15:1–2; Eph. 1:13–14). It is possible for believers to be deceived by false teaching. They do not lose their salvation, but they will certainly lose eternal rewards (Heb. 6:9–12; 10:35–36; 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 John 8).

1:10 “Do I now persuade men, or God?” The false teachers accused Paul of preaching an easy salvation, to seek the favor of men. Possibly, they used his willingness to ignore non-essential issues as evidence of this charge (1 Cor. 9:19–23). **“If I still pleased men, I would not be the bondservant of Christ.”** Prior to his salvation on the Damascus Road, Paul had sought the approval of man (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:4–6). Once he became a servant of Jesus Christ, he suffered greatly for his stand on the free and full salvation of God, received by simple childlike faith alone (Matt. 18:3).

Paul’s Gospel Came Directly from Jesus Christ Galatians 1:11–17

1:11–12 “The gospel ... preached by me is not according to man.” In vv. 11 and 12, Paul makes it clear that his gospel message: 1) is not of human origin, 2) that he did not receive it from any man, and 3) at no time since his conversion was he taught this Gospel. **“It came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** Paul received his message directly by a revelation/vision from the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1–9), He also revealed the essence of the gospel message.

1:13–14 “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism.” Paul uses his own salvation experience to demonstrate both the authority of the Gospel, and its power to transform lives. **“I persecuted the church ... I advanced in Judaism.”** The more he persecuted the Church, the faster he rose in status among the Jews. **“Being more exceedingly zealous.”** Among the Pharisees, zeal for God is counted as one of the highest virtues. However, zeal without true knowledge has no value (Rom. 10:1–4; Phil. 3:6).

1:15–17 “But when it pleased God.” Paul sees his conversion coming at God’s perfect timing. It is worth noting the points made in Paul’s personal testimony:

1. It came at God’s perfect time;
2. It fulfilled the purpose God had for Paul from birth (Jer. 1:5);
3. It was God’s grace that initiated his salvation;
4. Jesus Christ was not just revealed **to** Paul, but **in** him, the work of the Holy Spirit in removing the blinding power of Satan (Psalm 146:8; Isa. 35:5; 42:7; Luke 4:18; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:18–20); and
5. Paul did not go to Jerusalem, or confer with other apostles, but spent three years in Arabia, under the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And returned ... to Damascus.” In Acts 9:20–22, we find Paul preaching the gospel given to him by Christ in Damascus, long before he met any of the other apostles.

Paul’s Independence from the Other Apostles Galatians 1:18–24

1:18–19 “Then after three years I went up ... to see Peter.” Paul received no new insight from Peter, as is made clear in Galatians 2:6. More than likely, Peter was confronted with the truths of Paul’s gospel. **“James, the Lord’s brother.”** Though not one of the original twelve, James was held in high regard, and is linked here with the apostles (1 Cor. 9:5). This first Jerusalem visit is recorded in Acts 9:26–28.

1:20 “Before God, I do not lie.” This statement, calling God as his witness, declares his truthfulness in the events he is relating (Rom. 9:1–3).

1:21–22 *“I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.”* Due to Paul’s bold preaching while in Jerusalem, the Jews sought to kill him, so the disciples sent him home to Tarsus (Acts 9:29–31). So, very early on, the Lord’s prophecy about the sufferings he would endure was coming true (Acts 9:15–16). *“I was unknown ... to the churches of Judea.”* Other than a brief time with Peter, James, and Barnabas (Acts 9:27), Paul was unknown to the Jewish believers in Israel.

1:23–24 *“He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith.”* What joy and relief it must have given to the believers in Judea to know that the fierce persecutor of the faith was now preaching it! Paul apparently began a ministry out of Tarsus, and later went with Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:19–26). *“They glorified God in me.”* Neither the churches of Judea, nor later the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:7–9), contradicted the gospel Paul was preaching. His point is that though he was independent of all others, he was not in conflict with them.

A Summary of Paul’s Apostleship and Gospel Message

1. His authority as the Apostle to the Gentiles came directly from God (Gal. 1:1; Acts 9:15–16).
2. The message that he preached was also given to him directly by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11–12).
3. His conversion from a zealous Pharisee who persecuted believers, to the gracious apostle and missionary of Christ, confirmed his message (Gal. 1:13–16).
4. He sought neither the approval nor the input of the other apostles regarding his apostleship or his message (Gal. 1:17–19).
5. His message was accepted and confirmed by the churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22–24), later by the apostles (Gal. 2:6–9), and specifically by the experience and vision of Peter in Acts 10–11, which Peter reaffirmed in Acts 15:7–11.
6. Therefore, anyone preaching any message other than salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone was preaching a false gospel (Gal. 1:6–9), and would be judged by God for doing so.

GALATIANS CHAPTER 2

Paul continues to demonstrate that his ministry and message were independent from the other apostles, being given directly from God. In vv. 1–10, he speaks of his visit to Jerusalem, at which time the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church—Peter, James, and John—affirmed his message of salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from circumcision or law-keeping. Then, in vv. 11–21, he shows that he was willing to rebuke Peter publicly in Antioch, because of his compromise with the Judaizers. No grounds existed for anyone to question Paul’s authority, message, or ministry.

Paul’s Authority and Independence Maintained

Galatians 2:1–10

2:1 *“After fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem.”* Scholars differ on whether this was the famine-relief visit of Acts 11:27–30, or the Jerusalem council meeting of Acts 15:1–29. I am inclined to believe it was the visit of Acts 15 for three reasons:

1. In Acts 11, Paul was still seen as subordinate to Barnabas (note the order of their names in Acts 11:30; 13:1–2, 7).
2. It was not until the first missionary journey that Paul took the lead over Barnabas (Acts 13:9–10, 13).
3. When Paul rebuked Peter in Galatians 2:14–21, he implied that Peter was rebuilding a theological position that had previously been destroyed (Gal. 2:16–18). This would refer to the lesson Peter learned in his vision and experience in the house of

Cornelius (Acts 10:10–43), which he defended against the charges of the legalists in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1–18), and which he referred to the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:6–11).

Note that Peter’s words in Acts 15:11 are very similar to Paul’s rebuke in Galatians 2:16. (See summary following v. 10). If we add the three years of Galatians 1:18 to these, we are now in the seventeenth year of Paul’s Christian life.

2:2 “*And I went up by revelation.*” The Lord Jesus Christ revealed to him the need to go and face the heresy that taught eternal salvation came by faith plus works. Some suggest that this was the revelation of the coming famine by the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28) that resulted in the famine-relief mission. However, Paul’s vision was specifically related to his defense of the Gospel. **“*Privately to those who were of reputation.*”** Paul first met privately with James, Peter, and John (see v. 9). **“*Lest by any means I ... had run, in vain.*”** Paul did not doubt his message. His concern was that they may have been influenced by the legalistic party. If the original apostles had been influenced by this perversion of the Gospel, Paul’s labor among the Gentiles would be undermined (Phil. 2:16).

2:3 “*Not even Titus ... was compelled to be circumcised.*” Titus was proof that salvation came by faith alone, apart from the Law. Paul did have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), because of his Jewish heritage (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5), and to give him credibility among the Jews. The issue was not salvation, but the removal of a possible hindrance in his ministry to Jews (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

2:4 “*Because of false brethren secretly brought in.*” This probably refers to the Judaizers who tried to infiltrate the Antioch church (Acts 15:1–5). Paul identified these heretics as 1) working in secret/stealth, 2) spies sent to undermine liberty, and 3) whose ultimate goal was to enforce spiritual bondage on the church. Tragically, there are many such people seeking to undermine the message of grace in our churches today.

2:5 “*To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour.*” This figure of speech is like our saying, “we did not tolerate it for a minute.” **“*That the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*”** Paul was fighting for the pure truth of the Gospel, but he was also fighting for the Galatian believers, who had now defected from that message!

2:6 “*But from those who seemed to be something ... added nothing to me.*” When Paul says, **“*whatever they were,*”** he is referring to the fact that Peter, James, and John had known Jesus and were eyewitnesses of His miracles and messages. His point is that they had no great theological truth to offer that he was unaware of. **“*God shows personal favoritism to no man.*”** Paul did not feel inferior to them in any way, as he sought only to please God and not men (Gal. 1:10).

2:7 “*The gospel for the uncircumcised ... the gospel for the circumcised.*” The gospel message was the same. The fields of service were all that differed. Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15–16; 22:21).

2:8 “*For He who worked effectively in Peter ... also worked effectively in me.*” This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The word “*worked*” is *energeo*, from which we get “energy/energize.” Only the Holy Spirit can make the gospel message effective in reaching the mind and heart of those who hear it (John 16:8; Gal. 3:5).

2:9 “*Who seemed to be pillars.*” Paul acknowledged their standing and authority in the Jerusalem church, but he was not inferior to them. He was focused, not on human “*pillars,*” but on Christ the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). **“*Grace that had been given to me.*”** Paul was an apostle by the calling of Jesus Christ, just as they were. **“*The right hand of fellowship,*”** a handshake of mutual respect and agreement (Acts 13:3, “laid hands on”).

2:10 “*That we should remember the poor.*” This most likely referred to the poor church in Jerusalem, which Paul often sent support to (Acts 11:27–30; Rom. 15:25–27; 2 Cor. 8:1–15; 9:1–15).

Summary: The Conversion and Spiritual Growth of Paul

1. God's plan for Paul to be an apostle existed in the mind of God from eternity past. At Paul's birth, that plan became operative as God worked in his life. However, like every believer, Paul received his spiritual gift at the moment of his salvation (Gal. 1:15–16) These gifts are given for the purpose of service (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7).
2. But, like all of us, Paul had to grow into the maturity (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18) to exercise his gift.
3. From the moment of faith in Christ, Paul was recognized as a **brother** (Acts 9:15–17) and a member of the family of God.
4. Immediately, he became a **witness/evangelist**, proclaiming Jesus Christ to others (Acts 9:20–22).
5. As he continued in growth and dedication, he was recognized as a **disciple**, one dedicated to learning and following Jesus Christ (Acts 9:26–28).
6. After some time, Barnabas found him in Tarsus, and took him to Antioch, where he became a **teacher** (Acts 9:22; 11: 25–26).
7. As the ministry in Antioch grew, Paul (Saul) came to be known among those called **prophets and teachers** (Acts 13:1), of which he was the last and least.
8. Then, with Barnabas, Paul (Saul) was sent out as a **missionary** from the church at Antioch (Acts 13:2). Note that Saul (Paul) is mentioned second to Barnabas, signifying a subordinate position.
9. Not until the crisis in Cyprus when Elymas the sorcerer opposed them did Saul/Paul take the lead and rise to full power and authority (Acts 13:1–12).
10. Immediately, the mission party was under the leadership and authority of Paul the **apostle** (Acts 13:13). Remember that the term "apostle" was used in the ancient world of one commissioned with full authority, like an admiral of a fleet of ships. From this point on Paul exercised the full office and authority of an apostle.

Paul Rebukes Peter for His Compromise

Galatians 2:11–21

2:11 "*I withstood him to his face.*" The word *anistemi* is used in Ephesians 6:13 for taking a stand against the wiles of the devil. It was at the Antioch church where Paul was called to his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1–3). It was the Spirit of God that elevated Paul to the position of authority over the mission team (Acts 13:9–13). Peter's hypocrisy (see below) demanded confrontation, or the gospel of grace would be compromised. "*He was to be blamed.*" The word "*blamed*" literally means "against knowledge." Peter sinned against his own conscience in what he did in Antioch.

2:12 "*Before certain men came from James.*" James was considered the leader of the Jerusalem church. Later, James would convince Paul himself into something of a compromise, which resulted in his imprisonment (Acts 21:18–33). "*He would eat with the Gentiles.*" Peter had learned from God, not Paul, that there was to be no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers (Acts 10:1–35). Peter had even faced accusations for this act and had successfully defended such actions previously (Acts 11:1–18). This meal probably involved the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42–46; 1 Cor. 11:20–33). "*He withdrew ... fearing those who were of the circumcision.*" Peter compromised under legalistic peer pressure.

2:13 "*The rest of the Jews ... played the hypocrite ... even Barnabas.*" Paul twice refers to hypocrisy, one of the worst religious sins (Matt. 23:13–29). Paul stood alone in defending the Gospel of the grace of God.

2:14 *“They were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.”* Paul shows here that our conduct, as well as our message, conveys what we truly believe. The conduct of Peter and the others conveyed the message that Jews who were circumcised and kept the law were spiritually superior to the Gentiles. *“I said to Peter before them all.”* This was a public rebuke for a public sin. In confronting Peter, he was rebuking them all. *“If you ... live in the manner of the Gentiles ... why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”* Paul put a spotlight on Peter’s hypocrisy. Peter had violated what God had taught him (Acts 10:28, 34–35), he had violated his own conscience and conviction (Acts 11:16–17), and he had violated the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:14). This was a serious breach and Paul boldly confronted it.

2:15 *“We who are Jews ... and not sinners of the Gentiles.”* This is a bit of sarcasm by Paul. Jews commonly referred to Gentiles as *“sinners.”* Paul is not saying that the Jews are not sinners (Rom. 3:23; 4:3), but that they, having the Old Testament, ought to know that salvation is not of works, but by faith (Gen. 15:6).

2:16 *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law.”* As Paul stresses repeatedly, the Old Testament example is Abraham, who was justified by faith (Rom. 4:3–5; Gal. 3:6–11). *“Even we have believed in Christ.”* Paul, Peter, James, and Barnabas had all been saved by grace through faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8–9). Three times in this verse, Paul speaks of being justified by faith, and three times he declares that no one is justified by the works of the Law. *“Justified”* is a term that means to be declared righteous by God through faith. It includes the idea of the righteousness of Jesus Christ being imputed by God to the believer (Rom. 4:3, 5, 11; 2 Cor. 5:21).

2:17–18 *“Is Christ therefore a minister of sin?”* Paul is saying to Peter, “If you turned from the law, under which you were cursed (Gal. 3:10), to trust in Jesus Christ, and now turn from grace back to the law, are you suggesting that Christ led you into sin?” Instead, Paul says, *“If I build again those things ... I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”* He is laying the fault fully at Peter’s feet. Peter, by his hypocritical actions, had made himself a transgressor.

2:19 *“For I ... died to the law that I might live to God.”* The Law of Moses can only condemn, it cannot save (Rom. 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:9). The purpose of the Law was to convict us that we are sinners, so as to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:22–26). Once we have trusted in Him, we are no longer under the Law (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 4:4–7).

2:20 *“I have been crucified with Christ.”* By the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:3–6; 1 Cor. 12:13), we share in the finished work of Christ (John 19:30). *“Christ lives in me ... I live by faith.”* Once we are saved by faith, it is the duty of the believer to live by faith (Rom. 1:17; 8:12; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; 11:6). *“The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* The debt of the believer is not one of compulsion, but rather of love and gratitude (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

2:21 *“I do not set aside the grace of God.”* The word Paul uses for *“set aside,”* was used in the ancient world for the cancellation of a debt. It meant “to cancel out what was due.” It can also mean “to reject.” By their actions, Peter and the others had cancelled out God’s grace in favor of legalism. By His coming, Jesus Christ had cancelled the work of the Law in those who believe (Rom. 3:20–31; Gal. 3:24–25). *“If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”* The message Peter and the others were implying by their actions was that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was not sufficient for eternal salvation.

GALATIANS CHAPTER 3

Chapters 3 and 4 are one unit, in which Paul argues the case for grace versus law, and faith versus works. I have adapted Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe’s outline for these chapters. In chapter 3, Paul demonstrates the dangers and destructiveness of legalism. He begins by showing that it is a deception of the devil and is contrary to the gospel of grace. He goes on to show that it is contrary to the Abrahamic Covenant, as well as to the Law of Moses. He concludes this chapter by showing that the purpose of the Law was to bring us to Christ in faith. Having achieved this goal, the Law no longer has dominion over us.

Argument from Experience

Galatians 3:1–5

3:1 *“Foolish”* means “unthinking, without wisdom.” These Galatians became fools, due to accepting false teaching. *“Bewitched”* means to be “under the spell of an evil spirit.” The ancients called this the “evil eye,” which came from envy. Consider that the persecution of Joseph, Jesus, and Paul all came from envy (Matt. 27:18; Acts 7:9; 13:45; 17:5). The false teachers envied the Galatian believers for their freedom in Christ and sought to bring them into bondage (Gal. 2:4). *“Not obey the truth.”* All obedience to *“the truth”* begins with faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). The Thessalonians show the right response to the truth (1 Thess. 1:5–10; 2:13). Spiritual deception by false teaching results in disobedience to the truth of the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:4–5, 13–14; Gal. 2:5, 14) and denial of the truth they had first received. *“Clearly portrayed”* means publicly proclaimed. It was used of a public notice.

3:2 *“Did you receive the Spirit?”* Here, Paul appeals to their own experience of faith. They did nothing to receive the Spirit of God but believe. Compare this to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:43–45; 11:15–17). *“By the hearing of faith?”* This is how all believers receive eternal life and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13).

3:3 *“Are you so foolish?”* Paul will now define their foolishness. *“Having begun ... are you now made perfect.”* The words used here speak of the beginning and the ending of a sacrifice. *“Spirit ... flesh”* shows the contrast between a work of God and the work of man. Is it logical to go from the power of God to the energy of the flesh? *“Made perfect”* speaks of attaining spiritual maturity.

3:4 *“Have you suffered ... in vain.”* Some of Paul’s greatest suffering was in Galatia, and many of those believers had shared that suffering (Acts 13:45–51; 14:4–19; 2 Tim. 3:10–11).

3:5 *“He who supplies the Spirit.”* God the Father sends His Spirit to indwell all who believe (Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13–14). The word *“supplies”* was used of the provision wealthy citizens would make for public entertainment, or for supporting a war effort, or of the lavish provision a husband would make for his beloved wife. It carries the idea of abundant supply, without restraint. *“Works miracles among you.”* This would refer primarily to miracles worked among them by the Apostle Paul (Acts 14:3, 8–11). *“Works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* No honest believer could claim that God’s mighty deeds were dependent on their works or efforts. All faith comes by hearing and receiving the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

Summary: Spiritual contrasts (vv. 1–5)

1. Truth vs. error (v. 1).
2. Grace vs. law (v. 2).
3. Spirit vs. flesh (v. 3).
4. Faith vs. works (v. 5).

Argument from Scripture

Galatians 3:6–14

3:6 *“Abraham ‘believed God.’”* Here, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, which he also uses in Romans 4:3. *“It [faith] was accounted to him for righteousness.”* Abraham is the standard in the Bible for how all who believe are declared righteous before God. It is always by faith, never by works (Rom. 4:3–5; Eph. 2:8–9)

3:7 *“Those ... of faith are sons of Abraham.”* The true “Seed” of Abraham is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16), and those who believe in Him (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39; Rom. 2:28–29; 9:6–8; Gal. 3:26). This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, *“You must be born again”* (John 3:3, 7).

3:8 *“And the Scripture, foreseeing.”* Here, Paul speaks of the prophetic nature of the Word of God as an expression of the omniscience, or all-knowing nature of God. *“Justify the [nations] Gentiles by faith.”* God’s plan from the beginning was to offer salvation to all mankind on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16; Matt. 28:19). *“In you all the nations shall be blessed.”* This “good news” was given repeatedly to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

3:9 *“Those who are of faith.”* This refers to all who believe in Jesus Christ. *“Are blessed with believing Abraham.”* This is why Paul calls Abraham *“The father of all those who believe”* (Rom. 4:11), and *“the father of us all”* (Rom. 4:16). God’s blessings of eternal life and inheritance in His kingdom belong to all who receive Jesus Christ by faith.

3:10 *“Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things ... to do them.”* This is a quote from Deuteronomy 27:26. The Law declares all sinners to be under a curse. Paul’s point here is the same as that of James (James 2:10). All who want to be justified by the Law must keep the whole Law. If you fail in one point, you are condemned as a sinner (Rom. 3:23; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Since all men fall short of perfect obedience to the Law (Rom. 3:10–18, 23), our only hope of eternal salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1–11; 6:23). There are three things the law cannot do:

1. it cannot save,
2. it cannot make one spiritual, and
3. it cannot bring us to spiritual maturity.

3:11 *“No one is justified by the law in the sight of God.”* This is the same point Paul made to Peter in Galatians 2:16. *“The just shall live by faith.”* The way of salvation is declared in Habakkuk 2:4 (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38). It is by faith, and faith alone!

3:12 *“The law is not of faith.”* God did not give the Law to be believed in, but to be obeyed, which no man but Christ ever did. *“The man who does them shall live by them.”* This quote from Leviticus 18:5 shows that salvation could only come by the Law if one keeps the whole Law (Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11). The purpose of the Law was never to save us, but to show us that all are sinners in need of a Savior (Gal. 3:24).

3:13 *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.”* This He did by bearing *“the curse”* in our place (2 Cor. 5:21). *“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”* This quote from Deuteronomy 21:23 anticipates Christ, as our substitute, hanging on the cross in place of all sinful mankind. Redemption was illustrated at the first Passover by the slaying of the lamb, and the placing of its blood on the doorposts (Exod. 12:3–7). Then the lamb was eaten, as a symbol of faith, just as we do with the Lord’s Table (Matt. 26:26–28; John 6:54–56; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

3:14 *“The blessing of Abraham.”* The *“blessing of Abraham”* is to be declared righteous before God, and to have an eternal inheritance in His kingdom (Heb. 11:8–10; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). *“The promise of the Spirit through faith.”* All who believe in Jesus Christ receive the gift of the indwelling of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13–14).

Summary: Abraham the Example

1. Abraham is Paul’s favorite example from the Old Testament of God’s way of salvation by simple faith alone (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6).
2. Another of Paul’s favorite Old Testament passages is quoted in v. 11, *“The just shall live by faith”* (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38).

3. In Hebrews, the author (I believe it to be Paul), declares that “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Heb. 11:6).
4. He then uses Abraham as one of the great Old Testament examples of a believer who lived by faith (Heb. 11:8–19).
5. Like all of us, Abraham had to grow in his faith. He is a great example to each of us as to how we should live (Rom. 4:16–25).

Argument from Human Law

Galatians 3:15–18

3:15 “Brethren.” Despite their deception and defection from faith, Paul knows these are true believers. “*In the manner of men.*” That is, according to even normal human custom, covenants should not be tampered with or violated. “*No one annuls or adds to it.*” Once a legal covenant has been made, no one can alter it.

3:16 “To Abraham and his Seed.” Paul stresses that the word used in the Old Testament passages is singular (Heb. 11:17–18). “*To your Seed, who is Christ.*” The promise to Abraham would be confirmed in Jesus Christ—not the nation of Israel.

3:17 “The law ... four hundred and thirty years later.” This refers to the time Israel was in Egypt (Exod. 12:40–41). “*Cannot annul the covenant.*” The covenant of the Law, given through Moses, cannot make the Abrahamic Covenant void. “*That was confirmed before by God in Christ.*” All the promises of God to Abraham were dependent on the coming redemption through the Lord Jesus (Rom. 4:13).

3:18 “The inheritance ... God gave it to Abraham by promise.” Paul’s point is that you cannot mix Law and promise. Law demands work, promise can only be received by faith. “*The inheritance*” belongs to all who are children of God, and this inheritance involves sonship, life, and eternal possessions (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 3:26, 29).

Summary: Inheritance

1. All who believe in Jesus Christ are heirs of His promises and are kept secure by His grace (John 10:28; 1 Pet. 1:4–5).
2. But while all believers share in the inheritance of children, those who are faithful will receive extra rewards and inheritance. Note that in Romans 8:16–17, all children are heirs, but only if “*we suffer with Him*” are we “*joint heirs with Christ.*” We do this by entrusting ourselves to Him in all our sufferings (James 1:2–4, 12; 1 Pet. 2:21–23; 4:19).
3. The greater our growth and faithfulness, the greater will be our eternal reward in Heaven (Matt. 6:20–21; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27).
4. The greatest rewards are spoken of as “crowns” and are given to those who are “faithful to the end” (2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).
5. Each of us should live so as to be unashamed at the coming of our Lord (1 John 2:28–29; 2 Cor. 5:10).
6. When we fail, as all of us do, the grace of God provides us a way of cleansing through confession and correction, so that we can continue to aim for the prize of His approval and reward (Phil. 3:12–14; 2 Tim. 2:20–21; 1 John. 1:9; 3:1–3).

7. Keeping our eyes on the prize of eternal reward will help us to stay strong in faith and make wise decisions in life (Heb. 11:24–26).

Law and Faith Reconciled in Christ

Galatians 3:19–29

3:19 *“What purpose then does the law serve?”* This is a logical question if the Law was never intended to save us. *“It was added because of transgressions.”* The role of the Law is to magnify the sinfulness of sin (Rom. 5:20; 1 Tim. 1:9–10), *“till the Seed should come.”* The Law was only in force to Israel, until the coming of Christ. It was never given to the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14; Acts 15:24). *“Appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.”* Unlike God’s promises to Abraham, the Law came through angels to Moses (Acts 7:37–38; Heb. 2:2). The work of the Law then was to reveal sin, and point to the Savior.

3:20 *“Now a mediator does not mediate for one only.”* Moses was the mediator of a conditional covenant between God and Israel. The condition of the covenant was obedience in all things (Exod. 19:3–8), to which all Israel agreed. *“But God is one.”* Not only is this a fundamental truth to the Jewish people (Deut. 6:4; James 2:19), but it is also a critical point in Paul’s argument. When God made the promise to Abraham, there was no mediator. The covenant was unconditional, made within the Godhead. When God said, *“I will,”* with no conditions, it was a covenant with Himself (Gen. 12:1–3; 17:2–8). This puts the Abrahamic Covenant on a much higher plane than the covenant of the Law. Note: In v. 17, Paul said it was *“confirmed before by God in Christ,”* thus, under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ becomes the Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:13–15; 12:22–24). Jesus is the Mediator that Job cried out for in Job 9:32–33, and the Redeemer He longed for in Job 19:25–27!

3:21 *“Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not!”* Paul anticipates anyone taking a false conclusion from his arguments. *“If ... a law ... could have given life.”* If any possible way for salvation could have come through a law, God would have given such a law. It would have saved Jesus Christ from the cross. There was simply no other way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to receive the gift of eternal life (Heb. 9:22; 10:1–7). The Law of Moses is not contrary to grace, but it is not grace! Paul clearly shows us in Romans 8:1–4 that the weakness of the Law is our own sinful nature. We cannot measure up to the holiness of the Law!

3:22 *“The Scripture has confined all under sin.”* Because the Law shows all men to be sinners (Rom. 3:10–18, 23; 5:12; 6:23). *“The promise by faith in Jesus Christ”* is offered to all men. Because all are sinners, all may be saved by grace (Rom. 4:16; 5:12, 18; 11:32).

3:23–24 *“We were kept under guard by the law ... the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ.”* Here, Paul shows two roles of the Law: one was to restrain the sinful passions of men; the other was to guide and point men to faith in Jesus. *“Before faith came.”* No one comes to faith until they realize they are a helpless and condemned sinner. The work of the Law was to make that point clear. Men need to hear the bad news, that all are sinners, before they will receive the good news, that Jesus Christ saves sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)!

3:25 *“We are no longer under a tutor.”* Believers living in the Church Age are free from the Law for two reasons. First, because we are under the New Covenant—under a new High Priest (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Matt. 26:26–29; Heb. 7:12, 18, 22; 8:13; 10:9). Secondly, because we are now under the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:1–4; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:18).

3:26 *“Through faith in Jesus Christ.”* This is the key thought and basis of all of Paul’s theology. *“Sons of God.”* Only by faith are we born into the family of God (John 1:12–13; Gal. 4:7).

3:27 *“Baptized into Christ.”* This is not speaking of water baptism, for if it were, then we are not saved by faith alone (vv. 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 22, 24, 26). The baptism spoken of here is the one that actually unites us with Christ—the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3–5), which occurs at the moment we believe. *“Have put on Christ.”* We are clothed in His righteousness (Rev. 7:14).

3:28 *“You are all one in Christ.”* God makes no distinctions between those who trust in Christ—all have the same salvation, the same spiritual provisions, and the same spiritual opportunities. God’s plan for each of us is the same—to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). However, we are all gifted for different tasks. (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–31).

3:29 Since Jesus Christ is the promised *“Seed,”* *“if you are Christ’s,”* then you are also *“Abraham’s seed.”* This means that all who believe are *“heirs according to the promise.”* What an amazing thing to consider, that we share in God’s promise to Abraham! Therefore, we should also be looking for that city, *“Whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb. 11:10).

Summary: Law and Grace Reconciled

1. It is evident that the Law is not grace, and grace is not the Law (Rom. 4:14–16; 11:6; Gal. 3:12).
2. The Law declares all to be sinners (Rom. 3:10–18, 23; 5:12; Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:9–10), but grace declares all who believe to be righteous (Rom. 4:3; 5:8–9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:6, 11).
3. And yet, Paul declares that the Law is not contrary to the grace and promises of God (Gal. 3:21; Rom. 7:7, 12, 14, 22). It actually acts as a subordinate co-worker, to point men to Christ (Gal. 3:23–24).
4. Once the work of the Law is done, convicting us of sin and pointing us to Christ, we are no longer under the Law (Rom. 6:14; 7:4–6; Gal. 3:25–26).
5. Jesus Christ reconciles Law and grace by His life and His cross. In His life, He fulfilled the Law perfectly. On the cross, He paid the penalty for all the sins of mankind (1 John 2:2). Thus, the Law is satisfied both in its demand for righteousness and in its demand for judgment for sin. Now, Jesus Christ is able to offer His own righteousness to every sinner on the basis of faith alone (2 Cor. 5:21). Why is faith so important? *“He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true”* (John 3:33). To believe in Christ is to declare God alone to be true and, therefore, the only One to be trusted. How great is the grace of God!

GALATIANS CHAPTER 4

As in the last chapter, Paul offers three arguments, designed to free the deceived Galatians from their bondage to Jewish, legal slavery. I will continue to use an adapted outline from Dr. Warren Wiersbe.

A Dispensational Argument

Galatians 4:1–11

4:1 *“The heir ... does not differ ... from a slave.”* In Jewish custom, a minor, *“though he is master of all,”* did not assume his rightful place until he had gone through the training of tutors. This tutelage had been supplied to Israel under the guardianship of the Law of Moses (Gal. 3:23–24). But now the Age of the Law had passed, and the time had come to assume full manhood.

4:2 *“Until the time appointed by the father.”* God the Father had now determined that it was time for the Age of the Law to pass, and for mankind to enter into the full inheritance found only by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26–28).

4:3 *“Even so we ... were in bondage under the elements of the world.”* Though only the Jews were in bondage to the Law, Gentiles also held to their rules and the rituals designed to make them acceptable to whatever god or gods they worshipped (Col. 2:8). The time had now come for both to be set free from these chains and to find full freedom in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 12:2; Gal. 5:1).

4:4 *“The fullness of time”* refers to God’s perfect timing to bring the Savior into the world. *“Born of a woman.”* Jesus was the fulfillment of the age-old promise of the “Seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14). *“Born under the law.”* Jesus came into the world as a Jewish man, subject to the Law of Moses, which He alone could keep to the full measure of obedience.

4:5 *“To redeem those who were under the law.”* Since the Law condemns all who are sinners (Rom. 3:23; 1 Tim. 1:8–10), Jesus came to redeem mankind from being under its condemnation. He alone could pay the price/penalty for the sins of the world, because He was the *“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29). *“That we might receive the adoption as sons.”* All those who believe in Jesus Christ are adopted into the family of God, having all the rights and privileges of adult sons (Rom. 8:15–17; Eph. 1:5).

4:6 *“Because you are sons,”* that is, by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26). *“God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son.”* The coming of the Spirit of God to indwell every believer is proof that we are now under the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Matt. 26:26–29; John 14:16–18; Heb. 10:9; 14–17). *“Abba, Father!”* Jesus used this very cry when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).

4:7 *“If a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”* Every child of God has an eternal inheritance from God (1 Pet. 1:4–5). We can never lose this inheritance, but we can add to it by faithful living and service to God (Matt. 6:19–21; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 1:12).

4:8 *“When you did not know God.”* What was true of the Jews, being under the Law, was also true of Gentiles, who served pagan gods and idols (Rom. 1:22–23; Eph. 2:11–12). They were slaves to rules, rituals, and religious regulations.

4:9 *“After you have known God ... are known by God.”* Not until we come to know God through faith in Jesus does He know us as His children. *“How ... you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements ... to be in bondage?”* Having entered into the privilege of adult sons of God, they now want to return to the bondage from which Jesus Christ has freed them. By turning back to the Law, they were going back into slavery. Because the Law was unable to save, it had been set aside by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–4; Heb. 7:18; 8:13; 10:8–10).

4:10 *“You observe days ... months ... seasons ... years.”* They had begun to observe the Jewish calendar of feasts and festivals (Col. 2:16), things which were only a shadow of Christ’s coming (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1).

4:11 *“I am afraid ... lest I have labored ... in vain.”* He is not afraid regarding their salvation, which was secure in Christ (Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:28, 31). His fear is that they are throwing away great eternal reward (Matt. 5:12; 6:19–20; Luke 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:12). Paul not only wanted them to be eternally saved, but also to live faithful lives.

Paul’s Personal Argument

Galatians 4:12–20

4:12 *“Brethren, I urge you to become like me.”* Paul’s use of the word *“brethren”* shows that he has no doubts about their standing in Christ. He urges them to become imitators of his life of faith (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). *“For I became like you.”* He had left behind his life as a Pharisee in order to pursue a life of faith in Christ (Phil. 3:7–14). When he came to them, he adapted himself to their customs and culture (1 Cor. 9:19–23). *“You have not injured me at all.”* The harm done by their defection to the Law was not an injury to Paul, but to their own spiritual lives.

4:13 *“Because of physical infirmity.”* Some illness or injury, not recorded in Acts, kept him from traveling on, so he stayed, and preached the Gospel to the Galatians.

4:14 *“My trial ... you did not despise.”* Though Paul preached to them in illness, yet they received him with kindness. *“As an angel of God ... as Christ Jesus.”* Their reception of him was enthusiastic and full of honor and respect.

4:15 *“If possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.”* This statement, along with Paul’s large handwriting (Gal. 6:11), has led many to suggest that Paul’s *“thorn in the flesh”* (2 Cor 12:7–8) was failing eyesight. However, it was common among Greeks to use this figure of speech as if saying, “You would give up anything for me.”

4:16 *“Have I ... become your enemy?”* The love they showed at first for Paul had now turned to hostility. *“Because I tell you the truth?”* The truth not only sets us free (John 8:32), but it can also make people angry. This is because the truth cannot compromise with what is untrue or evil.

4:17 *“They zealously court you.”* False teachers will use flattery and deception to win followers. Here, they are seeking to *“exclude”* or separate these Galatians from Paul, so that they will *“be zealous”* to follow these teachers of the law.

4:18 *“It is good to be zealous in a good thing.”* When it comes to the truth of God’s Word, the problem is never zeal, but rather zeal without knowledge (Rom. 10:1–4). We Christians should be zealous to serve Jesus Christ in every way (Titus 2:14)!

4:19 *“My little children.”* Paul grieves over them like a father or mother would their wayward children. *“I labor in birth ... until Christ is formed in you.”* Though he had brought them to faith in Christ, now he was suffering birth-pang like pain, to see them grow up to spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness.

4:20 *“I have doubts about you.”* Again, these doubts were not about their salvation, which he is sure of (Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:6). His doubts are whether they are standing firm in the grace of God or have been totally led astray by the false teachers. In Galatians 5:1–9, he details some of the spiritual damage that can result from false teaching; but he will also express his confidence that their faith will prevail (Gal. 5:10).

An Allegorical Argument Galatians 4:21–31

4:21 *“You who desire to be under the law.”* He is speaking to those who would willingly surrender Christian freedom (Gal. 5:1, 13) for slavery to the Law. *“Do you not hear the law?”* Paul is referring here, not to the Law of Moses, but to the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses. The story he refers to is in Genesis chapters 16–17 and 21.

4:22–23 *“Bondwoman ... freewoman.”* These references are to Hagar and Sarah. *“According to the flesh ... through promise.”* That is, Ishmael came by human works, but Isaac was a miracle birth according to the promise and power of God (Gen. 17:15–21; 21:1–12; Rom. 4:16–21; Heb. 11:11).

4:24–25 *“Which things are symbolic.”* The word Paul uses here is *allegoreo*, from which we get “allegory.” Paul was a trained rabbi and knew the various uses of allegorical interpretation. Some disregarded the importance of the historical account, claiming that it was only a “parable” to be interpreted (the Alexandrian method). This gave rise to endless, fanciful, and unbiblical interpretations. Paul is taking the story as historically true and is using it to illustrate a spiritual truth. This method of interpretation was used in Antioch and was faithful to Scripture. *“Two covenants ... Mount Sinai ... Jerusalem.”* Paul is contrasting the covenant of the Law, given at Mount Sinai, and the Abrahamic Covenant, which is fulfilled in the New Covenant, given by the Lord Jesus Christ (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Matt. 26:26–29; Heb. 7:22; 8:6, 13; 10:9; 14–17). Paul is simply saying that Hagar illustrates those under the Law, because she was a slave, and Ishmael was the result of a work of the flesh (human effort). Sarah, however, illustrates the Abrahamic Covenant, which is based on God’s promise, fulfilled by His power.

4:26 The reference to *“Jerusalem above”* looks forward to the city Abraham waited for—the New Jerusalem (Heb. 11:9–10; Rev. 21:1–7).

4:27 “Rejoice, O barren.” This quote from Isaiah 54:1 anticipates the joys of those who, like Sarah (Heb. 11:11) trust in the faithfulness of God. We should note that Isaiah 54 follows the amazing chapter of Isaiah 53, where Isaiah describes the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the basis of our faith and rejoicing.

4:28 “Now we, brethren ... are children of promise.” The miraculous birth of Isaac is a picture of the supernatural, “new birth,” called “regeneration,” in those who believe in Christ (John 3:3, 7; Titus 3:5). When we believe in the promise of eternal life through Christ, we become children of that promise (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Rom. 3:24–26; 9:6–8; 1 John 3:1–2).

4:29 “He who was born according to the flesh.” This refers to Ishmael, who was born not only by natural means, but in an attempt by human effort to aid in the fulfillment of the plan of God (Genesis 16). **“Persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit.”** This incident occurred in Genesis 21:8–12, when Ishmael mocked/scorned Isaac. This illustration should not be used to argue that Hagar and Ishmael were unbelievers, as both appear to have come to faith (Gen. 16:7–14; 21:15–21). Instead, Paul is using historical events as a parable to illustrate spiritual truths.

4:30 “What does the Scripture say?” The words of Sarah to Abraham, in Genesis 21:10, were affirmed by God as the right course of action for Abraham to take. The phrase **“shall not be heir”** introduces the idea of eternal inheritance (see Gal. 3:18; 4:1, 7), which Paul will develop further in chapters 5–6.

4:31 “So then, brethren.” Paul now reaches the conclusion of all of his arguments in chapters 3–4, that those who seek to be justified by works are **“children of the bondwoman,”** and, therefore, are slaves, while those who receive justification before God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ are children **“of the free.”** This introduces the subject of spiritual freedom developed in Galatians 5:1, 13.

Six Arguments Against Works-Salvation

Again, these points are based on an adaptation from the outline of these chapters by Warren W. Wiersbe.

1. The argument from experience (Gal. 3:1–5). The Galatians came to Christ by simple faith and received the indwelling Holy Spirit. Not only could the Law not save them, but also, it could not bring them to spiritual maturity.
2. The argument from Scripture (Gal. 3:4–14). As in Romans 4:3–5, Paul uses Abraham as the example for justification by faith alone.
3. The argument from human law (Gal. 3:15–29). Once a covenant or legal agreement is made, it cannot be undone or amended by a later covenant. Therefore, the covenant of the Law (works) cannot annul God’s covenant with Abraham (faith). In Galatians 3:19–29, Paul reconciles the purpose of the Law in its role leading to faith in Jesus Christ.
4. The dispensational argument (Gal. 4:1–11). Building on the role of the Law as guardian and tutor (Gal. 3:23–29), Paul uses the custom of child-training in the ancient world, before the son could fully enter into his rights of inheritance. The world before Christ came was like a minor under the care of a guardian. After the coming of Christ, anyone who will believe can enter into the sonship and inheritance of God.
5. The personal/compassionate argument (Gal. 4:12–20). Paul pleads with them here, as a father to his child, to remember the sense of blessing they had when he first came to them. How could they forsake their spiritual father in favor of the legalists and false teachers who were influencing them?
6. The allegorical argument (Gal. 4:21–31). The contrast in the manner of birth between Isaac and Ishmael, and the position of Sarah as a free woman, versus Hagar as a slave woman,

provides a parable of the contrast between human works and simple faith as the way to find approval from God.

GALATIANS CHAPTER 5

This chapter begins the practical section, which closes the book. Paul always teaches that what we know and believe should affect our life and conduct. The keys to this section are freedom/liberty (5:1, 13), walking in the Spirit (5:16), being led by the Spirit (5:18), and the fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23).

Freedom versus Bondage

Galatians 5:1–15

5:1 *“Stand fast ... in the liberty ... Christ has made us free.”* The finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross has liberated all who believe from any system of works or merit (Rom. 4:1–4). All works and fruit of the Spirit are the product of faith, and the result of freedom from sin (Gal. 2:20; 5:22–23; Eph. 4:1; 5:1–2, 8). For a believer to turn back to the Law as a way of life is to submit to *“a yoke of bondage.”*

5:2 *“Christ will profit you nothing.”* From the moment any believer chooses to live by Law/works, all spiritual assets are neutralized. This is because works are contrary to faith, Law is contrary to grace, and the flesh is contrary to the Spirit. The believer who chooses the path of legalism forfeits spiritual power and illumination from God’s Word (Eph. 4:17–19; Col. 2:8, 16, 18; Heb. 3:12–19).

5:3 *“He is a debtor to keep the whole law.”* One cannot pick and choose which parts of the Law to uphold. Either you keep the whole Law, or you stand condemned as a transgressor of the Law (Acts 15:1, 5; Rom. 2:25; James 2:10–11). As believers, we are under the *“royal law,”* which is the *“law of liberty”* (James 1:25; 2:8, 12).

5:4 *“You have become estranged from Christ ... you have fallen from grace.”* These statements in no way speak of a Christian losing salvation/eternal life. Rather, he is speaking of loss of abiding/fellowship with Christ (John 15:4–5, 7; 1 John 1:7). Turning from grace to Law brings loss of joy, peace, and power in the Christian life (Heb. 5:12–14; 12:12–15).

5:5 *“We through the Spirit.”* For the believer living in the Church Age, reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit is the key to the spiritual life. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and makes it alive in our lives (Gal. 2:20; 4:19). I take the *“hope of righteousness”* to include not only the future righteous reign of Jesus Christ on this earth in His kingdom, but also our desire to live a righteous life (Rom. 5:1–5; 8:4–11; Col. 1:27).

5:6 *“In Christ Jesus.”* Only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ are *“in Christ.”* *“Faith working through love.”* Our faith in Christ makes us a recipient of the love of God (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–11, 19). This love creates in us a love for those around us (John 13:34–35; 2 Cor 5:14–15; Gal. 5:22–23; 1 John 3:16–19).

5:7 *“You ran well.”* They began their Christian lives by faith, but now they had stumbled over the obstacle of the Law. *“Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”* Those false teachers who were promoting Law-keeping were at fault for side-tracking them from the truth of the Gospel. See Hebrews 12:1–3.

5:8 *“This persuasion ... not ... from Him who calls you.”* The teachings of these Judaizers/legalists were not from God. Ultimately, their teachings were of the devil in an attempt to keep them from powerful witness and service to God, which would result in great eternal reward (Matt. 6:19–21; 2 Tim. 4:6–8).

5:9 *“A little leaven.”* Here, leaven is a symbol for the permeating and spreading power of evil. What may seem like a small and harmless departure from the truth of God’s Word will, in time, corrupt a life or a church.

5:10 *“I have confidence in you, in the Lord.”* Paul’s confidence is not in the Galatians (Gal. 4:19–20), but in the power of God, by His Spirit, to deliver them from deceptive, false teaching. *“He ... shall*

bear his judgment.” God would bring judgment on the false teacher, both now in time, and in the future judgment (Matt. 7:15–23).

5:11 “Then the offense of the cross has ceased.” Someone apparently accused Paul of still teaching the necessity of circumcision. But if Paul still taught that circumcision was essential to salvation, as he had once thought, he would not suffer persecution. The message of the cross, which teaches the all-sufficiency of God’s grace for sinners, is offensive to those who love the Law and works (Luke 18:13 cf. 2 Cor. 3:5). The message of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) is an offense to the pride and arrogance of man.

5:12 “I could wish ... would even cut themselves off!” If the false teachers are so fond of physical circumcision, why not go all the way and castrate themselves? This practice was actually used by the pagan religions of Paul’s day, as a sign of total dedication.

5:13 “You, brethren, have been called to liberty.” It is evident that there is no doubt in Paul’s mind that these Galatians were believers. Their struggle was not over the way of salvation, but rather how one is to be spiritual. They thought that having begun by faith, they should now reach maturity by works (Gal. 3:3). The “liberty” Paul speaks of refers to the power of the indwelling Spirit to bear fruit in our lives (vv. 22–23), not by our efforts, but by our faith. **“Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”** Christian liberty is not freedom to sin, but freedom from sin (1 Cor. 8:9; 1 Pet. 2:16). **“Through love serve one another.”** The true way to reflect Jesus Christ in our lives is to imitate His love and servant attitude (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27; John 13:3–5, 13–15; 1 Cor. 9:19; 11:1; Phil. 2:7).

5:14 “All the law is fulfilled in one word.” To love God above all and to love our neighbor as ourselves, fulfills all the Law (Matt. 7:12; 22:37–40; Rom. 13:9–10). This is “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), “the law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12), and “the royal law” (James 2:8). Following the way of grace produces humility and a servant-mentality. Meanwhile, following the way of Law-keeping produces arrogance, bitterness, and division.

5:15 “If you bite and devour one another.” The end result of legalism is competition and self-promotion. Those who seek to keep the Law exalt themselves, while they judge others (Luke 18:9–14). **“Beware lest you be consumed by one another!”** Once legalism takes hold in a church, division and conflict will spread until the whole church is destroyed!

The Victory of the Holy Spirit over the Flesh Galatians 5:16–26

5:16 “Walk in the Spirit.” To “walk in the Spirit” means to live by faith and dependence on the Spirit to do what He came to do. He is our Helper (John 14:16), our Teacher (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10), our support in witnessing (John 15:26–27), the source of power for a new life (Rom. 7:6; 8:4) and our aid in prayer (Rom. 8:26–27). He gives us spiritual gifts for service (1 Cor. 12:4–11) and bears spiritual fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22–23). He is always at work to transform us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:17–18). **“You shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”** It is not possible to be under the control of the Holy Spirit and the old sinful nature at the same time. As believers, we must choose to live by faith, under the filling and control of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:18), or to choose to be carnal, and live as unsaved men (1 Cor. 3:1–3; Heb. 5:13). I will give a summary of walking in the Spirit at the end of this chapter.

5:17 “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit.” Every believer experiences this inner conflict between the sinful nature and the new nature, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:14–25). **“These are contrary to one another.”** There can be no peace between the sin nature and the Holy Spirit, and each strives for dominance in the life of the believer. **“You do not do the things that you wish.”** Paul makes this very point in Romans 7:19–23. The only solution is when the believer chooses to submit to the reign of the Spirit within. Since the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of truth” (John 4:24; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), He leads us to study God’s Word and enables us to apply it in our lives.

5:18 *“If you are led by the Spirit.”* As stated above, the Spirit leads us into the Word of God as our guide for what we believe and how we ought to live. By faith, we rely on the Spirit to empower us to live faithful lives. *“You are not under the law.”* The purpose of the Law is to condemn (Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Jesus Christ came not to condemn, but to justify and purify (John 3:17–19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21).

5:19–21 *“Now the works of the flesh are evident.”* They are “evident,” both because they violate the law of God and of conscience (Rom. 2:14–15; 3:10–18), and because they are blatantly flaunted by this world. *“Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Believers who live in these sins will lose eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:11–15; Rev. 3:11). God intervenes in the life of a sinning believer with discipline, which will either correct them, or in extreme cases, remove them by premature death (Prov. 3:1–2; Heb. 12:3–11; Acts 5:1–10; 1 John 5:16–17). The unsaved world demonstrates, by the lifestyle mentioned here, that they are not *“Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Gal. 3:29). See Note on Galatians 6:8.

5:22–23 *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love.”* All the “works of the flesh” violate the law of love (Matt. 22:37–40; Rom. 13:9–10; Gal. 5:6, 13–14). Here, Paul contrasts “works” with “fruit.” In John 15:1–5, John explains that fruit is a **result** of the “branch,” “abiding” “in the vine.” The Spirit Himself produces the “fruit” as a result of a living/vital relationship to Jesus Christ—who is the Seed (Gen. 3:15), the Root (Rev. 22:16), and the Vine (John 15:1). In this passage, the other eight qualities are expressions of love in the character and conduct of the growing believer. Paul also defines love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. These qualities are all a picture of the perfect character of the Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly life. *“Against such there is no law.”* Although earthly powers will persecute believers who reflect these qualities, no human law can overrule the law of God, which is *“the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2).

5:24 *“And those who are Christ’s.”* This refers to every believer in Jesus Christ. *“Have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* In a very real sense, every child of God has been united with Christ in His crucifixion, which was God’s judgment on all sin (Rom. 6:3–6). The choice facing every believer each day is whether we will choose to live by faith, in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20). The next two verses make it clear that this is a decision we must make (Phil. 3:10).

5:25–26 *“If we live in the Spirit.”* This statement is true of everyone who has trusted in Jesus Christ. We share in the resurrection life of Christ because of the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). *“Let us also walk in the Spirit.”* The first statement speaks of our **position** in Christ. The second is an exhortation regarding our **practice**. The daily challenge of every believer is whether or not we will live up to our true identity in Christ. The means of accomplishing this is given in Romans 8:4–7. We must learn to have a spiritual mindset—a daily discipline of spiritual focus and thinking. *“Let us not become conceited ... provoking ... envying one another.”* Paul would not include this warning if it were not possible for Christians to fall into these sins. In v. 25, we have the exhortation to spiritual living. In v. 26 we have a prohibition against self-centered, carnal living.

Summary: Walking in the Spirit

The idea of walking in the Spirit is simply a way of saying that we are to live by faith. The following examples and illustrations will clarify what a spiritual walk or lifestyle should look like, and what it should not include.

1. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). The context (**vv. 25–26**) shows that sin in the life of a believer is a cause of grief to the Spirit of God.
2. Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Again, the preceding context (**vv. 11–18**) gives a list of things the Spirit wants to produce in our lives. If we resist, or are indifferent and apathetic to spiritual growth, the Spirit is quenched and will be unable to produce Christ-likeness in us.
3. Walk in or by means of the Spirit (**vv. 16, 25**). This is simply to live by faith, sensitive to the leading of the Spirit (**v. 18**; Rom. 8:14;).

4. Be filled with, or by means of, the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). This simply implies that we should be in the habit of daily submission to the Spirit of God, allowing Him control over our lives. It is the life of obedient fellowship (1 John 1:7). When we fail, sin should be confessed to God (1 John 1:9), and correction made in our attitude and life, so that fellowship is restored (Heb. 10:19–25; 12:12–15; James 1:21–25).
5. Believers need to be attentive (sensitive to the “*still small voice*,” 1 Kings 19:11–13) and obedient to the leading of the Spirit (v. 18; Psalm 5:8; 25:5; Rom. 8:14).
6. The believer who walks in the Spirit will produce good works, according to the Word and will of God (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14).
7. The spiritual walk will be worthy of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:1–6) in that it will promote unity among fellow believers.
8. The spiritual walk will reflect the love of Christ to others (Eph. 5:1–2).
9. The believer who walks in the Spirit will reflect the light of the Word of God in their life (Matt. 5:16; John 8:12; Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 5:8–10).
10. The one who walks in the Spirit will walk in wisdom, knowing and doing the will of God (Eph. 5:15–17). All of the above qualities are what it means to be “*filled with the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:18).

GALATIANS CHAPTER 6

Paul concludes this epistle with practical counsel on restoring a fellow believer from sin, the law of sowing and reaping, and a final warning against the Judaizers, who seek to impose circumcision and law-observance on the Galatian believers. Every principle in this chapter is an expression of the “law of love” (John 13:34–35; Rom. 13:8–10; 15:27).

Restoration from Sin and Burden Bearing

Galatians 6:1–5

6:1 “*If a man is overtaken in any trespass.*” The word “*overtaken*” means to “come upon unexpectedly.” If a fellow believer is discovered in some sin, each of us has a duty (provided we are “*spiritual*”) to restore them to obedience and fellowship. This would include bringing rebuke from God’s Word (1 Tim. 5:19–20; 2 Tim. 3:16–17), confession of the sinning person to God (1 John 1:9), and support in overcoming that specific temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). “*You who are spiritual.*” This refers to obedient and maturing believers (1 Cor. 3:1–3; Heb. 5:12–14). “*In a spirit of gentleness.*” This is an evidence of true spirituality (Gal. 5:22–23), and is the opposite of a judgmental spirit. “*Considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*” The danger here may be of falling into the same sin we seek to rescue another from, or the temptation to judge and feel superior to the fallen brother.

6:2 “*Bear ... and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” Just as Christ bore our sins at the cross (1 Pet. 2:24), so we ought to bear the weaknesses and faults of others (Rom. 15:1). The “*law of Christ*” is the law of love and service (John 13:12–15, 34–35; 15:12). There are two burdens in this passage: those of others (v. 1), and that of our own calling (vv. 4–5).

6:3 “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something.*” This confirms that the temptation Paul warns of in v. 1 is that of pride—thinking we are superior to one who has fallen. “*When he is nothing.*” Paul includes himself and all of us, as being nothing without Christ (2 Cor. 12:11; see John 15:5). “*He deceives himself.*” We certainly will not fool others, who can easily see our faults and failures.

6:4 *“Let each one examine his own work.”* The word “*examine*” means to “put to the test for purity, to prove through testing.” We will only give an account of our own lives and service to God (Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 10:12–18). *“He will have [cause for] rejoicing in himself alone.”* The joy of serving our Lord well is a blessing in time and will be a cause of reward in eternity (2 Tim. 4:6–8).

6:5 *“Each one shall bear his own load.”* The word “*load*” is the concept of “portion.” In Paul’s day, it referred to the pack of the Roman soldier. Each of us has a work of service allotted to us by God (Matt. 25:15; Mark 13:34). For this task, we receive a spiritual gift to enable us to do the work (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Each of us will give an answer to the Lord for how well or poorly we have served (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

Galatians 6:6–10

6:6 *“Let him ... share in all good things.”* Most commentators only emphasize financial support in this passage. But here, Paul says, “*all good things.*” Certainly, this would include the student sharing of their finances or possessions with those who teach (Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:9–11; 1 Tim. 5:17–18), as well as providing lodging and food (Phi. v. 22; 3 John 5–8). But, as a pastor of 50 years, I would say there are many things more important to share than just money. The first would be consistent prayer support. Sharing spiritual victories that result from the teaching of God’s Word is also a great encouragement to the teacher. Another would be to bring an unbelieving friend into the assembly to hear the Gospel, or a new convert who needs to grow in grace.

6:7 *“God is not mocked.”* The idea here is that, though we may deceive ourselves, God cannot be fooled. *“Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”* The fundamental law of agriculture is that what you plant is what grows. This applies both to sowing spiritual seeds of faith and service, and also to disobedience and sin. While we rejoice in the full and free forgiveness of God through Christ, that does not remove the cost and consequences of sin (2 Sam. 12:7–23; Judg. 16:13–31).

6:8 *“He who sows to his flesh ... to the Spirit.”* Paul is simply confirming that we choose whether to sow in our lives selfishly (Gal. 5:19–21) or spiritually (Gal. 5:22–23). One brings corruption, discipline from God (Heb. 12:3–11), and sorrowful consequences; the other results in blessing in this life and reward in eternity. *“Reap everlasting life.”* Paul is addressing believers here. The issue is not the gift of eternal life, which we receive when we believe in Jesus Christ. Rather, he is speaking again concerning eternal inheritance (Gal. 3:18, 29). While all believers have an inheritance from God, which cannot be diminished (1 Pet. 1:4–5), greater inheritance, including reigning with Christ, can be won or lost (Rom. 8:16–17; 2 Tim. 2:11–13).

6:9 *“Let us not grow weary ... in due season we shall reap.”* The harvest will occur at the Bema/Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 15:58; 2 Cor. 5:10). All service done in faith and obedience to God’s Word will be remembered and rewarded by God. If we live in the light of Jesus’ return, we will be motivated to serve and not lose heart (2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; James 5:7–9; Rev. 22:12). Good works do not save us (Rom. 4:3–5; Eph. 2:8–9; Gal. 2:16), nor do they produce spiritual growth/sanctification (Gal. 3:1–3). Instead, they come from the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and give life and animation to our faith (James 2:14–26).

6:10 *“Therefore ... let us do good to all.”* In this way, we reflect our Lord and Savior in the way He lived and served (Acts 10:38). *“Especially ... the household of faith.”* Special care should be given to treating our fellow believers with grace, compassion, and love. It is a shame and disgrace when believers treat their unbelieving friends better than they treat other believers!

Boast in Nothing but the Cross of Christ

Galatians 6:11–18

6:11 *“See with what large letters.”* Some scholars believe Paul suffered with poor eyesight from the blinding light of Jesus’ appearance to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3–9). Paul typically signed his epistles after they were written by a scribe (2 Thess. 3:17).

6:12 *“Desire to make a good showing in the flesh.”* There will always be people who pretend to be spiritual, not to please God, but to impress others. Some of the Galatians had followed the teachings of the Judaizers, being circumcised and seeking to keep the Law (Acts 15:1–5) so as to please the false teachers. *“That they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”* From the beginning of the Church Age, those who follow the path of grace and faith have been persecuted by those who want to make Christianity just another religion, with rules, regulations, and taboos.

6:13 *“Not even those ... keep the law.”* The Judaizers promoted law-keeping as a requirement for salvation but did not keep it themselves (Rom. 3:10–18; James 2:10–11). *“That they may boast [glory] in your flesh.”* The false teachers would look on everyone they deceived as a validation of their teaching and ministry and boast in the number of their followers.

6:14 *“Except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul gloried in the fact that he was united with Christ in His crucifixion. Paul exulted in the fact that Jesus loved him and sacrificed Himself for him (Gal. 2:20), as He did for us all (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:2).

6:15 *“In Christ Jesus ... a new creation.”* Those who believe in Jesus Christ are *“a new creation”* (2 Cor. 5:17). Our new life in Christ is not a matter of religious observances or rituals, but of genuine spiritual life and purpose (1 Cor. 7:17–24).

6:16 *“Walk according to this rule.”* New birth, regeneration (Titus 3:5), is the rule and standard by which believers are to live. We are to live by the power of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). *“Peace and mercy ... upon the Israel of God.”* Paul makes it clear that the Church does not replace Israel in God’s plan (Rom. 11:11–31). Here, he refers to believing Jews as the true Israel (Rom. 2:28–29; 9:27–28). The Church and Israel have separate roles to play in the plan of God.

6:17 *“Let no one trouble me.”* Paul wants the troublemakers in Galatia to cease their evil work. *“I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”* The scars of his many sufferings (2 Cor. 11:23–33) were the true evidence of his obedience and loyalty to Jesus Christ. His many persecutions had branded him as a slave of Christ (1 Cor. 7:22).

6:18 *“Brethren.”* Throughout the epistle, Paul had never doubted that these were true believers in Christ. His only concern was that they were being deceived and their spiritual lives hindered. *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”* The true motivator of the Christian life is always the matchless grace of God—not the Law. Paul was not only the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15–16; 22:21; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:7–8), and the most effective of all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9–10), he was above all the apostle of the grace of God! This epistle ends on the keynote of his life—the grace of God.

Summary: Five Great Lessons from this Chapter

1. Each of us has a duty to restore a fallen brother to fellowship and obedience (**v.1**).
2. We all must be willing to bear with the faults of others, even as we strive to faithfully carry the burden of our own gift and service to God (**vv. 2–5**).
3. The law of sowing and reaping is especially relevant in relation to the pastor and members of his congregation, (**vv. 6–8**). Those being fed spiritual truths have a duty to support the physical and material needs of the pastor and his family (1 Cor. 9:11, 14; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).
4. We need to remember that what we faithfully sow in this life will bring a harvest of eternal reward in the next life (**vv. 9–11**). This truth can motivate us to be steadfast and faithful in our service to the Lord.

5. Paul's closing warnings (vv. 12–18) should remind us all that Christians live not by the law, but by grace (Rom. 6:14).

CONCLUSION

Galatians is Paul's proclamation on Christian freedom. We could almost imagine that he uses the defection of the Galatian believers from the faith as an opportunity to write a treatise on Jesus' words in John 8:31–32 and 36, "*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free ... Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'*" In the book of Galatians, we learn that once we are united with Jesus Christ by faith, we are truly free. We are free from the Law and its condemnation because we are free from all sin. Jesus Christ—the great Liberator—has paid our debt, and made us righteous in the sight of God the Father. Galatians teaches us that every child of God can boldly say, in the famous words of Martin Luther King Jr., "*Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, I am free at last!*"