GALATIANS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Justified by faith, set free in Christ:
stand firm and walk by the Spirit

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Galatians Bible Study

A Verse-by-Verse Study

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Galatians Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

Copyright 2026 by Andrew Dominguez.

I own the copyright to everything in this book. I freely allow anyone to read, copy, print, quote, share, and teach from it, and to hand out or post copies, at no cost, as long as the text is not changed and this notice stays with it.

Publishing this book, meaning releasing it as an edition of your own in print or electronic form, whether sold or given away, requires my written permission first. Requests go to andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

The full text can be read, printed and downloaded free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), with familiar English forms of personal names, copyright 2026 Andrew Dominguez. The complete SLB is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

Independently published.

A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Contents

Introduction....1
Overview of Galatians....5
Background of the Book....6
Chapter 1: No Other Gospel....8
Chapter 2: Justified by Faith in Christ....16
Chapter 3: The Promise to Abraham and the Purpose of the Law....25
Chapter 4: Sons and Heirs, Not Slaves....36
Chapter 5: Stand Firm in Freedom and Walk by the Spirit....47
Chapter 6: Bear One Another's Burdens and Boast in the Cross....57
Conclusion....65
Old and New Testament Links in Galatians....66
Bibliography....67

Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Galatians. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

Galatians is one of the shortest of Paul's letters, but it may be the most urgent one he ever wrote. In just six chapters Paul defends the gospel itself: a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by keeping the Law. Then he shows what that freedom looks like when we walk by the Spirit and serve one another in love. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Galatians. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Galatians. It is a letter written in the heat of a real fight. Teachers had come to the churches of Galatia saying that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be right with God. Every chapter of the letter answers that claim. When Paul says hard things about the Law, we need to remember who he is answering and why. He is not saying God's Law was bad. He is saying it was never God's way to make a sinner righteous. The letter also has a clear flow. Chapters 1 and 2 defend Paul's gospel and where it came from. Chapters 3 and 4 prove from Scripture that we are justified by faith. Chapters 5 and 6 show how free people should live. If we pull a verse out of that flow, we can make Paul say almost anything.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Galatians is a letter that teaches plainly, and this study takes Paul at his word: Christ really did redeem us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, a

person really is justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law, and those who belong to Christ really are called to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: six weeks. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- Half a chapter a week: twelve weeks. The Scripture for each chapter is already printed in two parts, and the start of the second part is a natural place to stop.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Galatians touch tender subjects. Paul's sharp words in 1:6-9 and 5:12 can unsettle people who have come out of churches that taught salvation by rules. Chapter 5 lists sins of the flesh plainly (5:19-21), and chapter 6 speaks about restoring a believer caught in sin (6:1). Some in your group may carry shame from their past, or hurt from a church that handled sin harshly. If

you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Galatians. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Galatians

Galatians is the ninth book of the New Testament. It sits between 2 Corinthians and Ephesians. It is one of the thirteen letters of Paul, and it is addressed to a group of churches spread across a whole region, not to one city or one person. Many Bible teachers have called it the Magna Carta of Christian freedom, because it sets believers free from the idea that we must earn God's favor by keeping rules.

Galatians is also the only letter of Paul that has no word of thanks or praise for its readers at the start. Paul goes straight from his greeting to his astonishment that they were turning away so quickly (1:6). That tells us how serious the problem was. The gospel itself was at stake.

Paul gives us the heart of the letter in chapter 2:

Galatians 2:16 (SLB)

"knowing that a man is not justified by works of law except through faith of Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith of Christ and not by works of law; because by works of law no flesh will be justified."

Galatians has 6 chapters and 149 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Paul's Gospel Came From God (chapters 1 and 2)

- Chapter 1: No Other Gospel
- Chapter 2: Justified by Faith in Christ

Part Two: Saved by Faith, Not by the Law (chapters 3 and 4)

- Chapter 3: The Promise to Abraham and the Purpose of the Law
- Chapter 4: Sons and Heirs, Not Slaves

Part Three: Living in Freedom by the Spirit (chapters 5 and 6)

- Chapter 5: Stand Firm in Freedom and Walk by the Spirit
- Chapter 6: Bear One Another's Burdens and Boast in the Cross

Background of the Book

Author: The letter names its author at the start: "Paul, an apostle" (1:1). He names himself again in 5:2, and near the end he says he wrote with "large letters" in his own hand (6:11). Paul was a Jew from Tarsus, trained as a Pharisee, who once persecuted the church before the risen Jesus met him on the road to Damascus (1:13-16; Acts 9:1-19). Almost no one, even among modern scholars who doubt some of Paul's other letters, questions that Paul wrote Galatians. The letter is full of his own life story, his strong feelings, and his personal ties to the readers. I take it at its word, as the early church did.

Who it was written to: Paul writes "to the churches of Galatia" (1:2). The readers were mostly Gentile believers, people who were not Jewish by birth (4:8; 5:2; 6:12). Paul had preached the gospel to them himself, and they had received him "as an angel of God" (4:13-14). Bible teachers hold two main views on which churches these were. The first view is the south Galatia view. In Paul's day the Roman province of Galatia reached south to include the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, where Paul and Barnabas planted churches on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:14 to 14:23). The second view is the north Galatia view. The name Galatia first belonged to the land of the Galatians, a Celtic people, also called Gauls, who had settled in the north central part of what is now Turkey, around cities like Ancyra (modern Ankara). Those who hold this view believe Paul planted churches there on his second or third journey (Acts 16:6; 18:23). Both views have able defenders. The message of the letter does not change either way.

The Judaizers: After Paul left, other teachers came to the Galatian churches. Bible teachers often call them Judaizers, from Paul's word in 2:14, which means to live like a Jew. They seem to have been Jewish men who claimed to believe in Jesus, but they taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, including its special days (4:10; 5:2-4; 6:12-13). They also tried to tear down Paul, saying he was not a true apostle and had gotten his message second hand. Paul calls their message "a different gospel" (1:6), and he answers them point by point. Acts 15:1 tells of men like them who came from Judea to Antioch teaching, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved."

When and where it was written: Bible teachers give two main dates. Many who hold the south Galatia view date the letter early, about A.D. 48 or 49, after the first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem council of Acts 15. If that is right, Galatians may be the first letter Paul wrote, and it would explain why Paul never mentions the council's decision, which would have helped his case. Others date it later, in the mid-50s, about A.D. 53 to 57, during or after Paul's long stay in Ephesus on his third journey, and they often note how close its teaching is to Romans. Those who hold the north Galatia view usually take this later date. Scripture does not tell us plainly where Paul wrote. Some suggest Antioch in Syria, and others suggest Ephesus or Macedonia.

Paul's visits to Jerusalem: In chapters 1 and 2, Paul lists his visits to Jerusalem after he came to faith, to show that his gospel did not come from the other apostles. His first visit, three years after his conversion (1:18), matches Acts 9:26-30. His second visit, "after fourteen years" (2:1), is harder to place. Some believe it is the famine relief visit of Acts 11:27-30, which fits the early date. Others

believe it is the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, which fits the later date. We will look at this in chapter 2.

Purpose: Paul writes to call the Galatians back to the gospel of grace. He defends his calling as an apostle, which came straight from Jesus Christ (1:1, 12). He proves that a person is justified, declared righteous by God, by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law (2:16; 3:11). He shows that the Law had a purpose, to guard God's people until Christ came (3:24). And he shows that freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin. It is freedom to walk by the Spirit and to serve one another in love (5:13, 16).

Chapter 1: No Other Gospel

Scripture

1:1-10 Paul, an apostle—not from men, nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God ***the*** Father, the ***One*** who raised Him out from ***the*** dead— and all the brothers with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God ***the*** Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, so that He might deliver us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom ***be*** the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting from the ***One*** who called you in ***the*** grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another, except ***that*** there are some who are troubling you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel out of heaven, should preach the gospel to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, even now I say again: if anyone is preaching the gospel to you contrary to what you received, let him be accursed. For am I now persuading men, or God? Or am I seeking to please men? For if I were still pleasing men, I would not be a slave of Christ.

1:11-24 Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught ***it***, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, that beyond measure I was persecuting the church of God and was destroying it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my nation, being more abundantly a zealot for my ancestral traditions. But when God was pleased, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called ***me*** through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, so that I might preach Him ***as the gospel*** among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days. But I did not see another of the apostles, except James, the brother of the Lord. Now ***as for*** what I write to you, look, before God, I am not lying. Then I went into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which ***are*** in Christ; but they were only hearing that the ***one*** once persecuting us is now preaching ***as the gospel*** the faith which he once was destroying. And they were glorifying God in me.

Chapter 1 Preview

Paul opens this letter in a way he opens no other. There is a greeting, but there is no word of thanks for his readers. Instead he says he is astonished. The churches of Galatia were turning away from the grace of Christ to "a different gospel," one that added the works of the Law to faith in Jesus. Paul does not soften it. He says that anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to the one they received, even an angel from heaven, is under God's curse.

Then Paul begins to defend his gospel and his calling. False teachers were saying that Paul had his message second hand from the apostles in Jerusalem. Paul answers with his own story. He was a zealous Jew who persecuted the church. God called him by His grace and revealed His Son in him.

Paul did not go running to Jerusalem to be taught. When he did go, years later, he stayed only fifteen days. His gospel came straight from Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *Paul, an apostle—not from men, nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God **the** Father, the **One** who raised Him out from **the** dead—*

Paul starts by defending his authority in his very first words. He is "an apostle," one sent with the authority of the one who sends him. And he says right away where his calling came from: "not from men, nor through a man." No group of men chose him, and no single man passed his office down to him.

His calling came "through Jesus Christ and God the Father." Notice that Paul puts Jesus right beside the Father, and sets both against mere men. Jesus is not a mere man. And Paul adds that the Father is the One "who raised Him out from the dead." The risen Jesus Himself called Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). That is why Paul's word carries weight.

1:2 *and all the brothers with me, to the churches of Galatia:*

Paul writes with "all the brothers with me." He does not name them, but they stand with him, so the Galatians know Paul is not alone in what he teaches.

He writes "to the churches of Galatia." This was not one church but several, spread across a region. In the Background I gave the two main views of where these churches were, in the south of the Roman province or in the north among the Galatian people. Either way, these were real congregations that Paul knew and loved.

Notice what Paul does not say. In other letters he calls his readers saints, or the church of God, or he thanks God for them. Here he just names them. The coldness is on purpose. Something was badly wrong.

1:3 *Grace to you and peace from God **the** Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"Grace to you and peace." This was Paul's usual greeting, but in this letter the word grace is the whole issue. Grace is God's favor that we did not earn and cannot earn. The Galatians were being taught to add their own works to grace, and Paul will show that grace plus works is no longer grace (Romans 11:6).

Peace comes from that grace. When we know we are accepted by God because of what Christ has done, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). As in his other letters, Paul names "God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" together as the one source of grace and peace.

1:4 *who gave Himself for our sins, so that He might deliver us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,*

Before he even gets to the problem, Paul states the gospel in one sentence. Jesus "gave Himself for our sins." No one took His life from Him. He gave it (John 10:18). And He gave it "for our sins," in our place, to pay what we owed.

Why? "So that He might deliver us out of the present evil age." The Bible speaks of this present age as a time when sin and Satan hold sway over the world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Christ did not die only to forgive us. He died to rescue us out of that kingdom of darkness.

And all of it was "according to the will of our God and Father." The cross was not an accident or a backup plan. It was God's will from the start. If Christ's death was enough to deliver us, what can circumcision or Law-keeping add?

1:5 *to whom **be** the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen.*

"To whom be the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen." Paul cannot speak of the cross without breaking out in praise. The phrase "to the ages of the ages" means forever, without end.

Notice who gets the glory. If we could save ourselves, even a little, we would get some of the credit. But salvation is God's work from start to finish, so all the glory goes to Him. That is one of the clearest tests of any message that claims to be the gospel. Does it give all the glory to God, or does it leave some room for man to boast? The false teachers in Galatia left man plenty of room. Paul gives it all to God.

1:6 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting from the **One** who called you in **the** grace of Christ, to a different gospel,*

"I am astonished." In his other letters, this is where Paul thanks God for his readers. Here he is shocked. They were "so quickly deserting." The word deserting was used for a soldier who leaves his post, or a man who changes sides. It is in the present tense. They were in the middle of turning away.

And look at what they were turning from. Not just a set of ideas, but "the One who called you in the grace of Christ." To turn from the gospel of grace is to turn from God Himself. They were turning "to a different gospel." The false teachers did not deny Jesus. They added to Him. But a gospel of Jesus plus the Law is a different gospel.

1:7 *which is not another, except **that** there are some who are troubling you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.*

Paul corrects himself. This different gospel "is not another." There are not two gospels. There is only one good news, and what the false teachers preached was not good news at all.

"There are some who are troubling you." The word troubling means stirring up or unsettling. False teaching always leaves God's people shaken and unsure. These men wanted "to distort the

gospel of Christ." To distort means to twist something into its opposite. That is what happens when we add works to grace. Good news becomes bad news, because now our standing with God depends on how well we perform.

You might ask, isn't Paul being too hard on people who only wanted Gentiles to obey God's Law? The answer is simple. They were not teaching obedience as the fruit of salvation. They were teaching it as the way to be saved (Acts 15:1). That changes everything.

1:8-9 *But even if we, or an angel out of heaven, should preach the gospel to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, even now I say again: if anyone is preaching the gospel to you contrary to what you received, let him be accursed.*

These are some of the strongest words Paul ever wrote. "Even if we, or an angel out of heaven, should preach the gospel to you contrary to what we preached to you, let him be accursed." The word accursed is anathema in Greek. It means set apart for God's judgment. Paul is not wishing them a bad day. He is saying that anyone who preaches a false gospel stands under the curse of God.

Notice that Paul includes himself. The message matters more than the messenger. If Paul himself changed his gospel, he should be rejected. And if an angel appeared with a new message, he should be rejected too (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Then Paul says it again so no one can miss it: "if anyone is preaching the gospel to you contrary to what you received, let him be accursed." Why so strong? Because souls are at stake. A false gospel cannot save anyone. This should make every preacher and teacher careful. We have no right to add to or take away from the good news.

1:10 *For am I now persuading men, or God? Or am I seeking to please men? For if I were still pleasing men, I would not be a slave of Christ.*

"For am I now persuading men, or God?" The false teachers seem to have said that Paul left out circumcision to make the gospel easier for Gentiles to accept. Paul answers that his strong words in verses 8 and 9 hardly sound like a man trying to please people.

"If I were still pleasing men, I would not be a slave of Christ." The word slave means one who belongs completely to his master. Paul once lived to win the praise of men (1:14). Now he belongs to Christ, and only Christ's approval matters. Every believer faces this choice. We can fear what people think of us, or we can serve Christ. We cannot do both. When the truth of the gospel is at stake, pleasing Christ must win.

1:11-12 *Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught* ***it****, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Now Paul begins the long defense of his gospel that runs through the end of chapter 2. "The gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man." His message was not a human idea, and it was not shaped to fit what people wanted.

"For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ." A revelation is an unveiling, God showing what was hidden. Paul did not learn the gospel in a classroom or from the other apostles. The risen Jesus showed it to him.

This does not mean Paul knew nothing about Jesus before. He had heard the church's preaching, and he hated it. But what Jesus revealed to him was the meaning of it all: that the crucified Jesus is the Lord, and that a sinner is made right with God by grace through faith in Him.

1:13 *For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, that beyond measure I was persecuting the church of God and was destroying it;*

"For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism." Judaism here means the Jewish religion as it was practiced in Paul's day, with its strict keeping of the Law and the traditions of the elders.

Paul does not hide his past. "Beyond measure I was persecuting the church of God and was destroying it." He means it. He dragged men and women off to prison (Acts 8:3), and he approved of the killing of Stephen (Acts 8:1). He tried to wipe the church off the earth.

Why bring this up? Because no one talked Paul into the gospel. He was its enemy. Only God could have turned a man like that around. And if God could save Paul, He can save anyone (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

1:14 *and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my nation, being more abundantly a zealot for my ancestral traditions.*

"I was advancing in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my nation." Paul was a rising star. He trained under Gamaliel, one of the most respected teachers of the Law (Acts 22:3). He was a Pharisee, a member of the strict Jewish party that kept the Law and the traditions with great care (Philippians 3:5-6).

He was "more abundantly a zealot for my ancestral traditions." A zealot is someone burning with zeal. Paul knew the Law better than the false teachers in Galatia ever would. If anyone could have earned righteousness by the Law, it was Paul. So when he says the Law cannot save, he is not speaking as an outsider. He tried that road with all his strength, and it led him to fight against God.

1:15 *But when God was pleased, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called* ***me*** *through His grace,*

"But when God was pleased." Everything turns on these words. Paul did not find God. God found Paul.

God "set me apart from my mother's womb." Before Paul was born, before he did anything good or bad, God had a plan for him. This is the language of the prophets. God said something like it to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5), and the Servant of the Lord says it in Isaiah 49:1. And God "called me through His grace." Paul's calling was not a reward for his zeal. He was persecuting the church when God called him. That is grace, God's favor given to someone who deserved the opposite.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 1:5 (alluded to); Isaiah 49:1 (alluded to)

1:16 *to reveal His Son in me, so that I might preach Him* ***as the gospel*** *among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,*

Why did God call Paul? "To reveal His Son in me." Some take "in me" to mean an inner revelation in Paul's heart. Others take it to mean that God would show His Son through Paul's life to others. Both are true of Paul. The risen Christ appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:8), and from then on Christ was seen in him.

The purpose was "so that I might preach Him as the gospel among the Gentiles." The Gentiles are all the peoples who are not Jewish. Paul, the strict Pharisee who would not eat with Gentiles, became the apostle to the Gentiles.

"Immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood." "Flesh and blood" means human beings. Paul did not go to any man for approval or instruction.

1:17 *nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus.*

"Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me." Paul gave the Twelve their due. They were apostles before him. But he did not go to them to learn his gospel.

"But I went away into Arabia." Scripture does not tell us what Paul did there or how long he stayed. Arabia here most likely means the Nabatean kingdom, a region east and south of Damascus. Some think he went to be alone with God and think through the Scriptures in the light of what Jesus had shown him. Others think he began preaching there. Acts does not mention this trip, but it fits into the "many days" of Acts 9:23. Then "again I returned to Damascus," the city where he had come to faith.

1:18 *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days.*

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem." This visit matches Acts 9:26-30, where Barnabas brought Paul to the apostles. The three years most likely count from his conversion.

Paul went "to get acquainted with Peter." The Greek word gives us our word history. It means to visit someone in order to get to know them. Paul did not go to be taught the gospel. He already had it. He went to meet Peter, the leading apostle, and no doubt they talked a great deal about Jesus.

"I remained with him fifteen days." Two weeks is not long enough to be trained as an apostle. Paul is making a point: his gospel did not come from Jerusalem.

1:19-20 *But I did not see another of the apostles, except James, the brother of the Lord. Now **as for** what I write to you, look, before God, I am not lying.*

"But I did not see another of the apostles, except James, the brother of the Lord." This James was not one of the Twelve. He was the brother of Jesus. Jesus' brothers were the sons of Joseph and Mary, born after Jesus (Matthew 1:25; 13:55-56). Some churches hold that they were Joseph's sons by an earlier marriage or cousins. He did not believe in Jesus during His ministry (John 7:5), but the risen Lord appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:7), and he became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). He wrote the letter of James.

Then Paul says, "look, before God, I am not lying." This is like taking an oath. Paul's enemies must have said he was trained by the Jerusalem leaders and then changed their message. Paul puts his statement before God as his witness. He wants them to know he is telling the plain truth.

1:21 *Then I went into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia.*

"Then I went into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia." Acts tells us the believers in Jerusalem sent Paul off to Tarsus, his hometown, because his life was in danger (Acts 9:29-30). Tarsus was the main city of Cilicia, in what is now southern Turkey. Later Barnabas brought him from Tarsus to Antioch in Syria, where they taught the church for a whole year (Acts 11:25-26).

These were years we know little about. Paul was far from Jerusalem, far from the other apostles, preaching the gospel he had received from Christ. Once again, his message did not come from the leaders in Jerusalem. He was hundreds of miles away.

1:22-24 *And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which **are** in Christ; but they were only hearing that the **one** once persecuting us is now preaching **as the gospel** the faith which he once was destroying. And they were glorifying God in me.*

"I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which are in Christ." Judea was the region around Jerusalem. The believers there had never seen Paul's face. He could not have been their student.

But they had heard about him: "the one once persecuting us is now preaching as the gospel the faith which he once was destroying." What a change! The man who tried to destroy the faith was now preaching it.

"And they were glorifying God in me." They did not praise Paul. They praised God for what He had done in Paul. The churches of Judea, the very churches the false teachers claimed to speak for, rejoiced over Paul's gospel. That is how we should respond when God saves someone with a dark past. We should give God the glory.

Chapter 1 Summary

Paul greets the churches of Galatia as an apostle called not by men but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead. He reminds them that Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age. Then, with no word of thanks, he says he is astonished that

they are so quickly turning away to a different gospel, which is no gospel at all. Anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to the one they received, even Paul or an angel, is accursed. Paul then defends his gospel. He received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ, not from any man. He had been a zealous persecutor of the church until God called him by His grace and revealed His Son in him. He did not go to Jerusalem for three years, then stayed only fifteen days with Peter and saw only James, and then went to Syria and Cilicia. The churches of Judea did not know him by face, but they glorified God for him.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Where did Paul say his calling as an apostle came from, and where did it not come from? (1:1)

2. What did Jesus do for us, and why, according to 1:4?

3. What is missing from the start of this letter that we find in Paul's other letters, and why do you think he left it out? (1:6)

4. Why does Paul say the "different gospel" is not really another gospel? (1:6-7)

5. What does Paul say about anyone, even an angel, who preaches a gospel contrary to the one they received? (1:8-9)

6. How did Paul receive the gospel he preached? (1:11-12)

7. What was Paul like before God called him, and what does that tell us about God's grace? (1:13-15)

8. Why does Paul give the details of his visits to Jerusalem? (1:17-19)

9. Is there any part of your faith that has slowly become "Jesus plus" something else? What would it look like to rest in Christ alone? (1:6-7)

10. Where are you tempted to please people more than Christ? (1:10) What is one way you can serve Him this week, even if it costs you?

Chapter 2: Justified by Faith in Christ

Scripture

2:1-10 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, having taken along Titus also. And I went up according to a revelation, and I set before them the gospel which I proclaim among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were esteemed, lest somehow I should be running, or had run, in vain. But not even Titus, who ***was*** with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised; but because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us; to whom not even for an hour did we yield in subjection, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who were esteemed to be something—whatever they once were makes no difference to me; God does not receive ***the*** face of a man—for those who were esteemed conferred nothing to me; but on the contrary, having seen that I have been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter ***with that*** of the circumcision— for He who worked in Peter for ***the*** apostleship of the circumcision worked also in me toward the Gentiles— and having known the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, those who were esteemed to be pillars, gave to me and to Barnabas right hands of fellowship, so that we ***should go*** to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision; only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

2:11-21 But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to ***his*** face, because he was condemned. For before certain ones came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came, he was drawing back and separating himself, fearing those of ***the*** circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also joined in hypocrisy with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not walking straight according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before all, "If you, being a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, why do you compel the Gentiles to Judaize?" We ***are*** Jews by nature and not sinners of ***the*** Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by works of law except through faith of Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith of Christ and not by works of law; because by works of law no flesh will be justified. But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also have been found sinners, ***is*** Christ then a minister of sin? May it not be! For if I build again these ***things*** which I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor. For I through law died to law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and I live—no longer I, but Christ lives in me; and what I now live in ***the*** flesh, I live in faith, that of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness ***is*** through law, then Christ died for nothing.

Chapter 2 Preview

Paul goes on with his story. Fourteen years later he went up to Jerusalem again, with Barnabas and with Titus, a Greek believer who had never been circumcised. Paul laid his gospel before the leaders of the church there. False brothers tried to force circumcision on Titus, but Paul would not give in, not even for an hour. The leaders, James, Peter, and John, added nothing to Paul's

message. They gave him the right hand of fellowship and agreed that he should go to the Gentiles while they went to the Jews.

Then Paul tells of a painful day in Antioch. Peter had been eating with Gentile believers, but when certain men came from James, he pulled back out of fear, and even Barnabas followed him. Paul opposed Peter to his face in front of everyone. From there Paul states the heart of the gospel: a man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ. He has been crucified with Christ, and now Christ lives in him. If righteousness could come through the Law, Christ died for nothing.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, having taken along Titus also.*

"Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem." Bible teachers are not sure whether the fourteen years count from Paul's conversion or from his first visit in 1:18. Either way, a long time had passed.

Which visit in Acts is this? Some believe it is the famine relief visit of Acts 11:27-30, when the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with gifts for the believers in Judea. That fits the early date for Galatians, before the council. Others believe it is the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, since the same people and the same question of circumcision show up there. Both views are held by careful teachers, and the main point of the passage is the same either way.

Paul brought Barnabas, his partner on the first journey, and Titus, a Gentile believer who would become a trusted helper (2 Corinthians 8:23; Titus 1:4).

2:2 *And I went up according to a revelation, and I set before them the gospel which I proclaim among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were esteemed, lest somehow I should be running, or had run, in vain.*

"And I went up according to a revelation." Paul did not go because the Jerusalem leaders called him in to be checked. God led him to go. Acts 11:28 tells of a prophecy by Agabus that sent the famine gift, and some connect the revelation to that.

"I set before them the gospel which I proclaim among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were esteemed." He met with the leaders in private, to talk things through without a crowd.

"Lest somehow I should be running, or had run, in vain." Paul was not unsure of his gospel. He had it from Christ. But if the Jerusalem church rejected it, the church could split into a Jewish church and a Gentile church, and his work among the Gentiles would be torn apart. He wanted unity built on the truth.

2:3 *But not even Titus, who **was** with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised;*

Here was the test case. "Not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). The false teachers said Gentile believers had to be circumcised to be saved.

Titus stood right there in Jerusalem as a living answer. He was a Gentile. He believed in Jesus. And the leaders of the Jerusalem church did not require him to be circumcised. That settled it. If Titus was accepted without circumcision, then so were the Galatians.

Some wonder why Paul later had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). Timothy had a Jewish mother, and Paul did it to open doors among the Jews, not to make Timothy right with God. With Titus, the gospel itself was at stake.

2:4 *but because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us;*

"Because of the false brothers secretly brought in." Paul calls them false brothers. They claimed to be believers, but they were not on the side of the gospel. They "came in by stealth," like spies slipping into an enemy camp.

What were they after? "To spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us." This is the first time Paul uses the word freedom in this letter, but it will become one of its main themes (5:1, 13). In Christ, believers are free from the Law as a way to be made right with God. The false brothers wanted to bring them back under it. Paul calls that slavery.

Legalism always works this way. It watches, it measures, and it puts burdens on people that God never gave.

2:5 *to whom not even for an hour did we yield in subjection, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*

"To whom not even for an hour did we yield in subjection." Paul and Barnabas did not give an inch. They would not give in for a day, or even an hour.

Why be so firm? "So that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Paul was thinking of the Galatians and every Gentile believer. If he had given in on Titus, the message would have gone out that faith in Christ is not enough. The truth of the gospel would have been lost.

There are times to give way for the sake of peace, and Paul often did (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). But when someone adds a requirement for salvation to the gospel, we must stand firm. Love for people means guarding the truth that saves them.

2:6 *But from those who were esteemed to be something—whatever they once were makes no difference to me; God does not receive* ***the*** *face of a man—for those who were esteemed conferred nothing to me;*

Now Paul turns to the leaders in Jerusalem, "those who were esteemed to be something." He is not mocking them. They were real apostles and pillars of the church. But the false teachers seem to have held them up as higher than Paul.

"Whatever they once were makes no difference to me; God does not receive the face of a man." To receive the face means to show favor because of who a person is. Some of these men had walked with Jesus on earth. That was a great honor, but it did not make their word worth more than Paul's. God does not play favorites (Acts 10:34).

"Those who were esteemed conferred nothing to me." They added nothing to Paul's gospel. No correction, no extra rule.

2:7-8 *but on the contrary, having seen that I have been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter* ***with that*** *of the circumcision— for He who worked in Peter for* ***the*** *apostleship of the circumcision worked also in me toward the Gentiles—*

"On the contrary." Instead of correcting Paul, they saw that God had given him a work. Paul had "been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision," that is, to the Gentiles, "even as Peter with that of the circumcision," to the Jews.

This does not mean there were two gospels. There is one gospel, as Paul said in 1:7. It means two fields of work. Peter would focus on the Jews, Paul on the Gentiles, with the same message for both.

How did they know? Because they saw God at work. "He who worked in Peter for the apostleship of the circumcision worked also in me toward the Gentiles." The same God, by the same power, was blessing both men's work. The fruit proved the calling.

2:9 *and having known the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, those who were esteemed to be pillars, gave to me and to Barnabas right hands of fellowship, so that we* ***should go*** *to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision;*

"James and Cephas and John, those who were esteemed to be pillars." Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter. Both names mean rock or stone. A pillar holds up a building, and these three were leaders who held up the church in Jerusalem. This James is the brother of the Lord (1:19), not James the brother of John, who had been put to death by Herod (Acts 12:2).

They "gave to me and to Barnabas right hands of fellowship." Shaking hands was a sign of agreement and partnership. Fellowship means sharing something in common. They recognized Paul and Barnabas as partners in the same gospel.

"So that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision." They divided the work, not the faith.

2:10 *only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.*

"Only that we should remember the poor." This was the one thing they asked. The believers in Jerusalem and Judea were often very poor, and famine had hit them hard (Acts 11:28-29).

Paul says it was "the very thing which I also was eager to do." He did not need to be told. For years afterward Paul gathered an offering from the Gentile churches for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). It was a gift of love, and it was a way to show that Jewish and Gentile believers belonged to one family.

The true gospel never makes us careless about people in need. Grace that saves us also opens our hands.

2:11 *But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to **his** face, because he was condemned.*

Now comes one of the most surprising scenes in the New Testament. "But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was condemned." Antioch in Syria was the home church of Paul and Barnabas, a large church with many Gentile believers (Acts 11:19-26).

Peter was the leading apostle. He had walked with Jesus, preached at Pentecost, and opened the door to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Yet Paul says "he was condemned." His own actions stood against him.

This verse shows us that no church leader is above correction by the Word of God. Peter was a great apostle, and he was also a man who could be wrong. Paul did not go behind his back. He went to his face.

2:12 *For before certain ones came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came, he was drawing back and separating himself, fearing those of **the** circumcision.*

Here is what happened. "Before certain ones came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles." Jewish custom, built up around the food laws of Moses, kept many Jews from eating with Gentiles, because Gentile food was not prepared by those laws. But God had shown Peter to call no man common or unclean (Acts 10:28). So Peter ate freely with Gentile believers.

"When they came, he was drawing back and separating himself, fearing those of the circumcision." The tense suggests he pulled back little by little. Scripture does not tell us whether James sent these men with this message or whether they only claimed to speak for him. What drove Peter was fear. The same Peter who denied Jesus out of fear in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69-75) gave in to fear again.

2:13 *And the rest of the Jews also joined in hypocrisy with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.*

"And the rest of the Jews also joined in hypocrisy with him." Hypocrisy means playing a part, acting one way while believing another. Peter and the others still believed that Gentile believers were clean. But they acted as if they were not.

Leaders always take others with them. When Peter pulled back, the other Jewish believers followed. And then the saddest words: "even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy." Barnabas, the encourager, the man who first stood up for Paul (Acts 9:27), who had worked with him among the Gentiles, was swept along.

This was not a small matter of table manners. It split the church into two tables, and it told the Gentiles that they were second class unless they lived like Jews.

2:14 *But when I saw that they were not walking straight according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before all, "If you, being a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, why do you compel the Gentiles to Judaize?"*

"When I saw that they were not walking straight according to the truth of the gospel." Paul saw past the meals to the message. Their actions denied the gospel.

So he spoke "to Peter before all." The sin was public, and it had led many astray, so the correction had to be public too.

"If you, being a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, why do you compel the Gentiles to Judaize?" Peter had been living free of the Jewish food laws. Now by pulling away, he was pressing the Gentiles to live like Jews if they wanted full fellowship. To Judaize means to live as a Jew. Peter was asking of them what he himself had set aside. Scripture does not record Peter's answer, but Peter stood with Paul at the council (Acts 15:7-11), and he wrote warmly of "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15).

2:15 *We **are** Jews by nature and not sinners of **the** Gentiles,*

Paul's words to Peter now flow into the great teaching of the letter. Bible teachers are not sure where Paul's speech to Peter ends and his words to the Galatians begin. The thought runs straight on.

"We are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles." Paul speaks as a Jew to a Jew. Jews thought of Gentiles as "sinners" because they did not have the Law and did not keep it. Paul and Peter were born Jews. They had every advantage the Law could give. Paul is setting up his point. If even Jews, with all their privileges, had to come to Christ by faith, how could anyone think the Law was the way?

2:16 *knowing that a man is not justified by works of law except through faith of Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith of Christ and not by works of law; because by works of law no flesh will be justified.*

This is the key verse of the letter. "A man is not justified by works of law." To be justified means to be declared righteous by God, the Judge. It is a legal word. When God justifies a sinner, He declares him not guilty and right with Him, because of Christ. "Works of law" means doing what the Law of Moses commands.

How then is a person justified? "Through faith of Jesus Christ." Paul says it three times in one verse, and three times he says no one is justified by works of the Law. He ends with words drawn from Psalm 143:2: "by works of law no flesh will be justified."

The SLB reads "faith of Jesus Christ," a literal rendering of the Greek. Most read it as faith in Christ, which fits the middle of the verse: "we believed in Christ Jesus." Some read it as the faithfulness of Christ.

Old Testament links: Psalm 143:2 (alluded to)

2:17 *But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also have been found sinners,* ***is*** *Christ then a minister of sin? May it not be!*

Paul answers an objection. If we stop trusting the Law and trust Christ alone, don't we end up living like sinners of the Gentiles? Doesn't that make Christ a helper of sin? "Is Christ then a minister of sin? May it not be!"

"May it not be" is Paul's strongest way of saying no. Something like "never!" or "absolutely not!" Coming to Christ does show us that we are sinners, just like the Gentiles. The Jew who comes to Christ must admit that the Law never made him righteous. But that does not make Christ the cause of sin. Christ came to save sinners and to set them free from sin. Grace never gives us permission to sin (Romans 6:1-2).

2:18 *For if I build again these* ***things*** *which I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor.*

"For if I build again these things which I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor." Paul had torn down the Law as a way to be right with God. He had come to Christ alone. If he now built that wall back up, as Peter did by pulling away from the Gentiles, he would be the one doing wrong.

Notice how Paul turns it around. The false teachers said that leaving the Law made a man a sinner. Paul says that going back to the Law after coming to Christ proves a man a transgressor, someone who steps over the line. To rebuild what we once tore down is to admit we were wrong to trust Christ alone. That is the real sin.

2:19 *For I through law died to law, so that I might live to God.*

"For I through law died to law, so that I might live to God." How did the Law lead Paul to die to the Law? The Law showed him his sin and pronounced the sentence of death on him (Romans 7:9-11). Then in Christ, that sentence was carried out. Christ died under the curse of the Law (3:13), and Paul died with Him.

A dead man has no more obligations under the law. His debt is paid. To die to the Law means the Law no longer has any claim on Paul as a way to earn God's favor or to condemn him.

But the goal is not lawlessness. It is "so that I might live to God." Freedom from the Law does not mean freedom to do as we please. It means freedom to live for God.

2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ; and I live—no longer I, but Christ lives in me; and what I now live in* ***the*** *flesh, I live in faith, that of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

This is one of the best loved verses in the Bible. "I have been crucified with Christ." When Jesus died on the cross, every believer was joined to Him in His death (Romans 6:6). The old Paul, the proud Pharisee who tried to earn God's favor, died with Christ.

"And I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." Paul is still alive, but he is not living the same life. Christ now lives in him by the Holy Spirit.

"What I now live in the flesh, I live in faith." "In the flesh" here simply means in this earthly body. Paul still has a daily life to live, and he lives it by trusting "the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Notice the word me. Paul takes the cross personally. Jesus loved you and gave Himself for you.

2:21 *I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness* ***is*** *through law, then Christ died for nothing.*

"I do not set aside the grace of God." To set aside means to cancel or treat as worthless. That is exactly what adding the Law to the gospel does. It treats grace as if it were not enough.

"For if righteousness is through law, then Christ died for nothing." This is the bottom line. If we could be made right with God by keeping the Law, why did Jesus die? His death would have been a waste. But Jesus did not die for nothing. He died because there was no other way. The cross is God's answer that the Law could never save us. Every message that adds our works to Christ's death says, in effect, that the cross was not enough. Paul will not let that stand.

Chapter 2 Summary

Fourteen years later Paul went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus and laid his gospel before the leaders. Titus, a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised, and Paul would not yield to the false brothers even for an hour. The leaders added nothing to Paul's gospel. James, Peter, and John gave him the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that he would go to the Gentiles and they to the Jews, and asked only that he remember the poor. Later in Antioch, Peter drew back from eating with Gentile believers out of fear, and others followed, even Barnabas. Paul opposed him to his face before everyone, because they were not walking straight according to the truth of the gospel. Paul then states the heart of the gospel: a man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ. Through the Law he died to the Law so that he might live to God. He has been crucified with Christ, and Christ now lives in him. If righteousness came through the Law, Christ died for nothing.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Why was Titus such an important test case in Jerusalem? (2:3)

2. What did the false brothers want to do to the believers' freedom, and how did Paul respond? (2:4-5)

3. What did the Jerusalem leaders add to Paul's gospel, and what did they ask of him? (2:6-10)

4. What did Peter do in Antioch, and why? (2:11-12)

5. Why did Paul correct Peter in front of everyone instead of in private? (2:13-14)

6. How many times does 2:16 say that no one is justified by works of the Law? What does "justified" mean?

7. What does it mean that Paul "died to law" so that he "might live to God"? (2:19)

8. What does 2:20 teach about the life of a believer?

9. Peter gave in to fear of what others thought. Where does fear of people pull you away from doing what you know is right? (2:12)

10. Read 2:20 slowly and put your own name in place of "me." How does knowing that Jesus loved you and gave Himself up for you change the way you will live today?

Chapter 3: The Promise to Abraham and the Purpose of the Law

Scripture

3:1-14 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed among you ***as*** crucified? This only I want to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of law, or by hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in ***the*** Spirit, are you now being perfected in ***the*** flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain? If indeed ***it was*** even in vain. Therefore the ***One*** supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles among you—***is it*** by works of law, or by hearing of faith? Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Know then that those ***who are*** of faith, these are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, having foreseen that God justifies the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham: "In you all the nations will be blessed." So then those ***who are*** of faith are blessed with the believing Abraham. For as many as are of works of law are under a curse; for it has been written, "Cursed ***is*** everyone who does not continue in all the ***things*** written in the book of the law, to do them." Now that no one is justified by law before God ***is*** evident, because "The righteous by faith will live." And the law is not of faith; rather, "The man who has done them will live in them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it has been written, "Cursed ***is*** everyone who hangs on a tree"— so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through the faith.

3:15-29 Brothers, I speak according to man: even a man's covenant, once ratified, no one sets aside or adds to. Now to Abraham the promises were spoken, and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your seed," who is Christ. Now this I say: a covenant confirmed beforehand by God toward Christ, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance ***is*** by law, ***it is*** no longer by promise; but God has granted ***it*** to Abraham through promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom it has been promised, having been ordained through angels in ***the*** hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one. ***Is*** the law then against the promises of God? May it not be! For if a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would indeed have been by law. But the Scripture shut up all ***things*** under sin, so that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before the faith came, we were being held in custody under law, having been shut up for the faith which was about to be revealed. So then the law has become our child-guardian to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. But the faith having come, we are no longer under a child-guardian. For you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus. For as many ***of you*** as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is not Jew nor Greek, there is not slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you ***are*** Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise.

Chapter 3 Preview

Paul has told his story. Now he makes his case. He starts with the Galatians' own experience. Did they receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the Law or by hearing with faith? They began by the Spirit. How could they think they would be made complete by the flesh? Then Paul turns to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Those who are of faith are the true sons of Abraham, and they are blessed with him. The Law, on the other hand, brings a curse on everyone who does not keep all of it. Christ redeemed us from that curse by becoming a curse for us on the cross.

In the second half of the chapter Paul explains how the Law fits with the promise. God made His promise to Abraham and his seed, who is Christ, 430 years before the Law was given. The Law could not cancel the promise. So why was the Law given? It was added because of transgressions, to show sin for what it is, until Christ came. It was like a guardian who watched over a child until he grew up. Now that faith has come, all who believe are sons of God, one in Christ Jesus, and heirs of the promise.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed among you **as** crucified?*

"O foolish Galatians!" Paul is not calling them stupid. The word means without understanding, not thinking things through. They were acting as if they had forgotten everything they knew.

"Who has bewitched you?" To bewitch is to cast a spell, to cloud someone's mind. It was as if someone had put them under a spell.

What makes it so strange is what they had seen. Jesus Christ "was publicly portrayed among you as crucified." The word portrayed was used for a public notice posted for all to read. Paul had preached the cross so clearly that it was as if they had seen it with their own eyes. How could anyone who had seen the cross that clearly think it needed help from the Law?

3:2 *This only I want to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of law, or by hearing of faith?*

"This only I want to learn from you." Paul asks one question that should settle the matter. "Did you receive the Spirit by works of law, or by hearing of faith?"

The answer was obvious. The Galatians were Gentiles. They had never kept the Law of Moses. They heard the gospel, believed it, and received the Holy Spirit. Every believer receives the Spirit at the moment of faith (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:9). Nobody earns the Spirit.

"Hearing of faith" means hearing the message and believing it. That is how the Christian life begins. If the Spirit came by faith, why would they now think something else was needed?

3:3 *Are you so foolish? Having begun in **the** Spirit, are you now being perfected in **the** flesh?*

"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?" To be perfected means to be brought to completion, to be finished or made mature.

The false teachers did not tell the Galatians to give up on Jesus. They said, in effect, that faith is a good start, but you need the Law to finish the job. Paul says that makes no sense. The flesh here means human effort, what we can do by our own strength. If the Spirit began the work, the Spirit will finish it (Philippians 1:6). We do not get saved by grace and then grow by our own effort. We grow the same way we began, by faith, as the Spirit works in us.

3:4 *Did you suffer so many things in vain? If indeed **it was** even in vain.*

"Did you suffer so many things in vain?" The Galatians had paid a price for their faith. When Paul first preached in the cities of south Galatia, he and Barnabas were driven out, and Paul was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:2, 5, 19, 22). The new believers there shared in that trouble.

Some read the word suffer here in a wider sense, to experience, meaning all they had gone through with God, the good and the hard. Either way, Paul asks whether all of it would be wasted if they turned back to the Law.

"If indeed it was even in vain." Paul holds out hope. It was not too late. They could still turn back to the gospel.

3:5 *Therefore the **One** supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles among you—**is it** by works of law, or by hearing of faith?*

Paul asks his question again, now about the present. "The One supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles among you, is it by works of law, or by hearing of faith?" God was still giving them His Spirit, and He was still doing mighty works among them.

Why was God doing it? Was it because they were now keeping the Law? No. God was at work among them before the false teachers ever arrived. He did it because they believed the message.

This is a good question for us too. When have we seen God most at work in our lives? It was not when we were proud of how well we were doing. It was when we were trusting Him.

3:6 *Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*

Now Paul turns to Scripture, and he goes straight to Abraham. The false teachers must have pointed to Abraham, because he was the first to receive circumcision. Paul goes back further. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." This is Genesis 15:6.

To reckon means to count or credit to someone's account. Abraham had no righteousness of his own to offer. He believed God's promise, and God credited righteousness to him.

And here is the key: this happened in Genesis 15, many years before Abraham was circumcised in Genesis 17 (Romans 4:9-12). Abraham was declared righteous by faith, not by circumcision, and long before the Law of Moses.

Old Testament links: Genesis 15:6 (quoted)

3:7 *Know then that those **who are** of faith, these are sons of Abraham.*

"Know then that those who are of faith, these are sons of Abraham." The false teachers taught that to be a true son of Abraham, you had to be circumcised and keep the Law. Paul says the real family of Abraham is marked by faith.

To be a son of someone in the Bible often means to share his nature or to follow in his steps. Those who believe God the way Abraham did are his spiritual children, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

This does not mean God is finished with Abraham's physical descendants, the nation of Israel. Paul makes that clear in Romans 11:1 and 11:25-29. It means that every believer, Jew or Gentile, shares in Abraham's blessing by faith.

3:8 *And the Scripture, having foreseen that God justifies the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham: "In you all the nations will be blessed."*

"And the Scripture, having foreseen that God justifies the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham." Paul speaks of Scripture as if it could see and speak, because Scripture is God's Word. What Scripture says, God says.

What did God tell Abraham? "In you all the nations will be blessed." This is God's promise in Genesis 12:3 and 18:18. The word nations is the same word often translated Gentiles. From the very beginning, God's plan was to bless people from every nation through Abraham.

That is the gospel in seed form. God always meant for the Gentiles to be saved, and to be saved the same way Abraham was, by faith.

Old Testament links: Genesis 12:3 (quoted); Genesis 18:18 (quoted)

3:9 *So then those **who are** of faith are blessed with the believing Abraham.*

"So then those who are of faith are blessed with the believing Abraham." Notice that Paul calls him "the believing Abraham." The false teachers would have called him Abraham the circumcised, or Abraham the obedient. Paul sees faith as the main thing about him.

Abraham did obey God, and his obedience was real (Genesis 22; James 2:21-23). But his obedience flowed out of his faith. It did not earn his standing with God.

Those who are of faith are "blessed with" him. We share in the same blessing. What is that blessing? Paul will tell us in verse 14: righteousness and the promised Holy Spirit.

3:10 *For as many as are of works of law are under a curse; for it has been written, "Cursed **is** everyone who does not continue in all the **things** written in the book of the law, to do them."*

Now Paul shows the other side. "For as many as are of works of law are under a curse." Those who try to be right with God by keeping the Law put themselves under the Law's curse.

Why? Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in these words: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things written in the book of the law, to do them." Look at the words all and continue. The Law demands perfect obedience, all the time, in everything.

No one has ever done that except Jesus. Break one command, and you are guilty (James 2:10). So the Law cannot bless a sinner. It can only curse him. Anyone who chooses to stand before God on the basis of his own Law-keeping chooses to be judged by a standard he has already failed.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 27:26 (quoted)

3:11 *Now that no one is justified by law before God **is** evident, because "The righteous by faith will live."*

"Now that no one is justified by law before God is evident." Paul says it is plain from Scripture. He quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in these words: "The righteous by faith will live."

Habakkuk lived in a dark time, when the Babylonians were about to sweep over Judah. God told him that the righteous person would live by trusting God. Paul draws out what that means. The way to life with God has always been faith.

Some read the phrase as the one who is righteous by faith will live, and others as the righteous will live by faith. Both are true and both fit Paul's point. Righteousness and life come by faith. If that is how the righteous live, then no one is justified by Law-keeping.

Old Testament links: Habakkuk 2:4 (quoted)

3:12 *And the law is not of faith; rather, "The man who has done them will live in them."*

"And the law is not of faith." Paul is not saying the Law is bad. He is saying that the Law works on a different principle than faith. Faith trusts God to do what we cannot. The Law says do this, and you will live.

He quotes Leviticus 18:5 in these words: "The man who has done them will live in them." The Law promised life to those who kept it. That is true. If anyone kept it perfectly, he would live.

The problem is not the Law. The problem is us. We have not kept it. So the Law's promise of life, as true as it is, cannot help a sinner. Its way of doing and living is closed to us. Only faith remains.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 18:5 (quoted); Nehemiah 9:29 (alluded to)

3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it has been written, "Cursed **is** everyone who hangs on a tree"—*

Here is the good news. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law." To redeem means to buy back by paying a price, as a slave was bought out of slavery. We were under the Law's curse, and Christ paid the price to set us free.

How? "Having become a curse for us." Jesus took the curse that we deserved. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 in these words: "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." In Israel, the body of an executed criminal hung on a tree was a sign that he was under God's curse. When Jesus hung on the cross, He took that curse on Himself (1 Peter 2:24).

This is the heart of the gospel. The innocent One took the place of the guilty. Jesus bore our curse so we could receive His blessing.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 21:23 (quoted)

3:14 *so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through the faith.*

Why did Christ take the curse? Paul gives two reasons, each starting with "so that." First, "so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus." The promise to Abraham was that all nations would be blessed in him (3:8). That blessing now reaches the Gentiles through Christ.

Second, "so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through the faith." The Holy Spirit is the promised gift that God spoke of through the prophets (Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Jesus promised Him too (Acts 1:4-5).

Notice how Paul comes back to where he started in verse 2. The Spirit comes through faith. It always has. The cross opened the door, and faith walks through it.

Old Testament links: Genesis 28:4 (alluded to)

3:15 *Brothers, I speak according to man: even a man's covenant, once ratified, no one sets aside or adds to.*

"Brothers, I speak according to man." Paul uses an everyday example. "Even a man's covenant, once ratified, no one sets aside or adds to." A covenant is a binding agreement. The Greek word can also mean a will, a legal document that sets out who will inherit.

Once a will or covenant has been signed and made official, nobody can come along later and cancel it or add new terms to it. Even among men, that would not be allowed.

If that is true of human agreements, how much more is it true of God's? God made a covenant with Abraham, and nothing that came after it could change its terms. The false teachers wanted to add the Law as a new condition. Paul says you cannot do that.

3:16 *Now to Abraham the promises were spoken, and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your seed," who is Christ.*

"Now to Abraham the promises were spoken, and to his seed." God made His promises to Abraham and to his descendant. God did not say "And to seeds," as of many, but "And to your seed," as of one, "who is Christ." See Genesis 22:18.

Paul knew that the word seed can mean many descendants. He uses it that way himself in verse 29. But he sees that the promise points finally to one Seed, the one great Descendant of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed. That Seed is Christ.

This reaches back to Genesis 3:15, where God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. The whole Old Testament looks forward to one Seed. Every promise of God finds its yes in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Paul's words "to your seed" are also God's words to Abraham in Genesis 13:15 and 17:8, where He promised "all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" to Abraham and his seed. Some teachers take Paul to mean that those promises now pass to Christ and the church in a spiritual way. I believe Christ is the one Seed through whom every promise is kept, including the land God promised to Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel. Christ will give it to them when He reigns.

Old Testament links: Genesis 13:15 (quoted); Genesis 17:8 (quoted)

3:17 *Now this I say: a covenant confirmed beforehand by God toward Christ, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul, so as to nullify the promise.*

"A covenant confirmed beforehand by God toward Christ, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul, so as to nullify the promise." God made His covenant with Abraham first. The Law came at Mount Sinai 430 years later (Exodus 12:40-41).

Bible teachers count these years in slightly different ways. Some count from God's promise to Abraham, others from the last time God confirmed it to Jacob before Israel went down to Egypt. Paul's point does not depend on the exact counting. The promise came long before the Law.

A later agreement cannot cancel an earlier one. The Law did not replace the promise, and it did not add new conditions to it.

Old Testament links: Exodus 12:40-41 (alluded to)

3:18 *For if the inheritance **is** by law, **it is** no longer by promise; but God has granted **it** to Abraham through promise.*

"For if the inheritance is by law, it is no longer by promise." These two ways cannot be mixed. An inheritance is something you receive as a gift because of who you are, not something you earn. If you have to earn it by keeping the Law, it is no longer a promise. It is a wage.

"But God has granted it to Abraham through promise." The word granted means given freely as a gift of grace. God did not hire Abraham. He made him a promise and kept it.

This is true for us. Eternal life is not a paycheck for good behavior. It is God's gift (Romans 6:23). If it depended on our Law-keeping, we could never be sure of it. Because it rests on God's promise, it is sure.

3:19 *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom it has been promised, having been ordained through angels in* ***the*** *hand of a mediator.*

Then why the Law? Paul knows we will ask. "It was added because of transgressions." A transgression is stepping over a line. The Law drew the line clearly, so sin could be seen for what it is (Romans 3:20; 7:7). It also held sin in check among God's people.

The Law was temporary: "until the seed should come to whom it has been promised." It was meant to last until Christ came.

It was also "ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator." Scripture tells us angels had a part in giving the Law (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2). The mediator was Moses, who stood between God and the people. The promise came straight from God to Abraham. The Law came through go-betweens.

3:20 *Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one.*

"Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one." This is one of the hardest verses in Galatians to explain, and Bible teachers have offered many explanations.

The plainest reading seems to be this. A mediator stands between two parties, and the agreement depends on both sides keeping their part. That was true of the Law at Sinai. Israel promised to obey, and the blessings depended on their obedience (Exodus 24:3, 7). But when God made His promise to Abraham, God acted alone. In Genesis 15, God alone passed between the pieces of the animals while Abraham slept (Genesis 15:12, 17). The promise rested on one party, God, and He cannot fail.

3:21 ***Is*** *the law then against the promises of God? May it not be! For if a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would indeed have been by law.*

"Is the law then against the promises of God? May it not be!" Paul has said the Law cannot give the inheritance. Does that make the Law an enemy of the promise? Absolutely not. The Law and the promise come from the same God, and they work toward the same goal.

"For if a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would indeed have been by law." The Law could not give life. It could tell us what is right, but it could not give us the power to do it. It could show us we were dead in sin, but it could not raise us up (Romans 8:3).

Only God's Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). The Law was never meant to save. It was meant to show us that we need a Savior.

3:22 *But the Scripture shut up all **things** under sin, so that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

"But the Scripture shut up all things under sin." Picture a prison with every door locked. Scripture, the Law included, declared the whole world guilty. No one was left out, Jew or Gentile (Romans 3:9-19, 23).

Why would God do that? "So that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." God shut every other door so that the only way out would be the door of faith in Christ.

That is good news, even though it starts with bad news. When we finally see that we are locked up under sin, with no way to free ourselves, we are ready to look to Jesus.

3:23 *But before the faith came, we were being held in custody under law, having been shut up for the faith which was about to be revealed.*

"But before the faith came, we were being held in custody under law." "The faith" here means the time of faith in Christ, now that He has come. Paul speaks of it as something that arrived in history.

Before that, Israel was "held in custody under law." The words picture a guard keeping watch. The Law held God's people under guard, kept them separate from the nations, and kept them from going their own way entirely.

They were "shut up for the faith which was about to be revealed." The Law was not the end of the story. It kept Israel under guard until God showed the way of faith fully in the coming of Christ.

3:24 *So then the law has become our child-guardian to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith.*

"So then the law has become our child-guardian to Christ." The Greek word is paidagogos. In wealthy Greek and Roman homes, a child-guardian was a trusted servant, often a slave, who took charge of a boy from about age six until he was grown. He walked him to school, watched his behavior, and corrected him, sometimes with a rod. He was not the boy's teacher or his father. His job was temporary.

That is what the Law was. It kept God's people under strict discipline until Christ came, "so that we might be justified by faith." The Law led us to Christ by showing us our need. Once we come to Him, we are justified by faith in Him.

3:25-26 *But the faith having come, we are no longer under a child-guardian. For you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus.*

"But the faith having come, we are no longer under a child-guardian." When the boy grew up, the guardian's job was finished. Now that Christ has come and we have believed in Him, the Law no longer stands over us as our guardian.

"For you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus." Paul speaks to the whole church, Jew and Gentile. All who believe are sons, not small children under a guardian. In the Roman world a son who came of age received the full rights of the family. That is our standing in Christ.

Being called "sons" is not about being male. It is about having the full rights of an heir. Every believer, man or woman, has that place in God's family.

3:27 *For as many **of you** as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." To put on means to clothe yourself, like putting on a garment. When we are joined to Christ, we are clothed with Him. God sees us in Christ.

Bible teachers read "baptized into Christ" in two main ways. Some take it as the Holy Spirit's work of placing every believer into Christ at the moment of faith (1 Corinthians 12:13). Others take it as water baptism, the public step by which a believer shows that he belongs to Christ. Paul has spent this whole chapter showing that we are justified by faith, so baptism here is not a work that saves. Water baptism follows faith as the believer's obedient public step, and it pictures the union with Christ that faith receives.

3:28 *There is not Jew nor Greek, there is not slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

"There is not Jew nor Greek, there is not slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Paul's day these were the great walls between people. Later Jewish writings record a morning blessing in which a man thanked God that he was not made a Gentile or a woman, and in some versions a slave. Many believe that attitude was already common in Paul's day. Paul says that in Christ none of those walls decide your standing with God.

What does this verse mean? In context, Paul is talking about how we become sons of God and heirs (3:26, 29). Every believer comes the same way, by faith, and every believer has the same full standing. No one is a second class Christian.

What does this verse not mean? It does not erase the differences between men and women, or between Jews and Gentiles. Paul still speaks of husbands and wives, and of Jews and Gentiles, in his other letters (Ephesians 5:22-33; Romans 11). Bible teachers disagree about how far this verse reaches into roles in the home and the church. Some believe it opens every role equally to men and women. Others believe Scripture gives men and women different roles while giving them equal worth and equal standing before God. Both sides agree that this verse is first about our oneness and equal standing in Christ.

3:29 *And if you **are** Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise.*

"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise." This ties the whole chapter together. Christ is the one Seed of Abraham (3:16). If you belong to Christ, you are part of Abraham's seed too, because you are in Him.

And you are "heirs according to promise." The inheritance does not come by the Law, but by promise (3:18). Gentile believers did not need to become Jews to be heirs. They needed Christ, and they already had Him.

This does not mean the church has replaced Israel. God's promises to the nation of Israel still stand (Romans 11:28-29). It means that every believer, Jew or Gentile, shares in the spiritual blessing God promised through Abraham.

Chapter 3 Summary

Paul calls the Galatians foolish for turning from the crucified Christ. They received the Spirit by hearing with faith, not by works of the Law, and having begun by the Spirit, they could not be made complete by the flesh. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, so those of faith are his sons and are blessed with him. The Law brings a curse on all who fail to keep all of it, and no one is justified by the Law, for the righteous will live by faith. Christ redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse for us, so that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles and we would receive the promised Spirit by faith. The Law, given 430 years after the promise, cannot cancel it. It was added because of transgressions until Christ, the promised Seed, would come. The Law was our guardian to lead us to Christ. Now that faith has come, all believers are sons of God, clothed with Christ, one in Him, Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

I have tried to finish in my own strength what God began by His Spirit. Sometimes it worked for a while, and other times it was a hard fail. Paul's question in 3:3 still stings. What God started by grace, He finishes by grace.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What question did Paul ask to remind the Galatians how they received the Spirit? (3:2)

2. How was Abraham made righteous, and when did it happen? (3:6)

3. Who are the true sons of Abraham, according to Paul? (3:7-9)

4. Why are those who rely on works of the Law under a curse? (3:10)

5. How did Christ redeem us from the curse of the Law? (3:13)

6. Why can the Law not cancel the promise God made to Abraham? (3:15-18)

7. Why was the Law given, and how long was it meant to last? (3:19, 24-25)

8. What does 3:28 teach about our standing in Christ, and what does it not erase?

9. Have you ever tried to finish in your own strength what God began by His Spirit? (3:3) What did that look like?

10. If you belong to Christ, you are an heir according to promise (3:29). How does that change the way you see yourself when you fail?

Chapter 4: Sons and Heirs, Not Slaves

Scripture

4:1-20 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he differs in nothing from a slave, being lord of all, but he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. So also we, when we were children, were enslaved under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, so that He might redeem those under law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, also an heir of God through Christ. But at that time indeed, not knowing God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods. But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God, how do you turn again to the weak and poor elements, to which you desire to be slaves again anew? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, lest somehow I have toiled for you in vain. Become as I ***am***, because I also ***have become*** as you ***are***, brothers, I implore you. You wronged me in nothing. And you know that because of weakness of the flesh I preached the gospel to you at the first; and my trial in my flesh you did not despise nor spit out, but as an angel of God you received me, as Christ Jesus. What then was your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, having gouged out your eyes, you would have given ***them*** to me. So have I become your enemy, speaking truth to you? They are zealous for you, not well; but they want to exclude you, so that you may be zealous for them. But ***it is*** good to be zealously sought in a good ***thing*** always, and not only in my being present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you, and I was wishing to be present with you now and to change my tone, because I am perplexed about you.

4:21-31 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it has been written that Abraham had two sons, one of the slave woman and one of the free ***woman***. But the ***one*** of the slave woman has been born according to ***the*** flesh, and the ***one*** of the free ***woman*** through the promise. These things are spoken allegorically; for these are the two covenants: one indeed from Mount Sinai, bearing ***children*** for slavery, which is Hagar. For the ***name*** Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and she corresponds to the present Jerusalem; and she is a slave with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it has been written, "Rejoice, barren woman, you who do not bear; break forth and cry out, you who are not in labor; because many ***are*** the children of the desolate ***woman***, more than of her who has the husband." Now, brothers, like Isaac, we are children of promise. But just as at that time the ***one*** born according to ***the*** flesh was persecuting the ***one born*** according to Spirit, so also now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son; for the son of the slave woman shall certainly not inherit with the son of the free ***woman***." Then, brothers, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free ***woman***.

Chapter 4 Preview

Paul goes on with the picture of a child who is heir to a great estate. While he is young, he is no better off than a slave. He lives under guardians until the day his father sets. That is how God's people lived before Christ. Then, at just the right time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born

under the Law, to redeem those under the Law so that we might be adopted as sons. And because we are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba! Father!" So why would the Galatians want to go back to being slaves?

Then Paul's tone softens. He reminds them of how they welcomed him when he first came to them, weak and sick, and how they would have given him their own eyes. He asks how he could have become their enemy just by telling them the truth. He feels like a mother in labor, waiting for Christ to be formed in them. Last, Paul turns to the story of Abraham's two sons, one born of Hagar the slave woman and one born of Sarah the free woman. He uses it as a picture of two covenants. Believers are children of the free woman, children of promise, like Isaac.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-2 *Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he differs in nothing from a slave, being lord of all, but he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.*

"As long as the heir is a child, he differs in nothing from a slave, being lord of all." Paul goes back to the picture of the child-guardian from 3:24. Think of a young boy who will one day own his father's whole estate. On paper he owns it all. But as long as he is a child, he cannot make his own choices, any more than a slave in the house can.

"He is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father." Guardians cared for the child himself, and stewards managed his property. The father set the day when his son would come of age. In Roman law the father had a great deal of say over that day. Then the son would take his place as the heir.

4:3 *So also we, when we were children, were enslaved under the elements of the world.*

"So also we, when we were children, were enslaved under the elements of the world." Paul applies the picture. Before Christ came, God's people were like children under guardians.

What are "the elements of the world"? The word was used for the letters of the alphabet, the basic things learned first, and also for the basic parts the world was thought to be made of. Some take it to mean basic religious rules, the ABCs of religion, both Jewish and pagan. Others take it to mean the spiritual powers that the pagans believed ruled the world and their festivals. Either way, Paul says that life under these things was slavery. Jewish Law-keeping and Gentile idol worship were very different, but both left people bound.

4:4 *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law,*

"But when the fullness of the time came." God has a calendar, and He is never late. Jesus came at exactly the time God had set, as the father in verse 2 set the day for his son. Many have noticed how ready the world was. The Roman roads and the Roman peace made travel possible, the Greek language was spoken across the empire, and the Jews scattered among the nations had synagogues, local Jewish meeting places for prayer, where the Scriptures were read.

"God sent forth His Son." The Son existed before He was sent. He is the eternal Son of God. "Born of a woman" means He became fully human. "Born under law" means He was born a Jew, under the Law of Moses, and He kept it perfectly.

4:5 *so that He might redeem those under law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

Why was Jesus born under the Law? "So that He might redeem those under law." To redeem means to buy back, to set free by paying a price. Jesus lived under the Law and kept it, then died under its curse in our place (3:13).

"So that we might receive the adoption as sons." In the Roman world, an adopted son had the same rights as a son by birth. He took the family name, and he could inherit. Often a grown man was adopted so he could carry on the family line.

Notice that God did not just set us free from slavery and leave us standing outside. He brought us into His family as sons and heirs. Redemption sets us free. Adoption gives us a home.

4:6 *And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

"And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." In verse 4 God sent forth His Son. Now God sent forth His Spirit. The Father sends the Son to redeem us, and the Spirit of the Son to live in us. Here again we see the Trinity at work in our salvation.

The Spirit cries out, "Abba! Father!" Abba is the Aramaic word for father that a child would use at home. Jesus Himself prayed this way in the garden (Mark 14:36). The Spirit gives us the same close, trusting relationship with God that Jesus has. We do not have to come to God like a frightened slave. We can come like a child to a loving Father (Romans 8:15-16).

4:7 *So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, also an heir of God through Christ.*

"So you are no longer a slave, but a son." Paul now speaks to each reader personally. The word you is singular here. You, the one reading this, are no longer a slave if you belong to Christ.

"And if a son, also an heir of God through Christ." An heir receives what belongs to his father. God's heirs will share in all that He has prepared, including eternal life and a place in His kingdom (Romans 8:17; 1 Peter 1:4).

All of this is "through Christ." We are not heirs because of anything we have done. We are heirs because we are in God's Son. Why would anyone trade that for the life of a slave?

4:8 *But at that time indeed, not knowing God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods.*

"But at that time indeed, not knowing God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods." Paul reminds the Galatians of what they were before. They were Gentiles who worshiped idols. They served gods made of wood and stone, gods that were not real.

Paul says these false gods "by nature are not gods." They had no power to save. Behind the idols there were demons (1 Corinthians 10:19-20), and serving them was slavery.

That was the Galatians' past. And it is a picture of every person apart from Christ. We all serve something. If we do not serve the true God, we end up serving things that cannot satisfy us or save us.

4:9 *But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God, how do you turn again to the weak and poor elements, to which you desire to be slaves again anew?*

"But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God." Paul corrects himself. It is true that they came to know God. But the deeper truth is that God came to know them. He took the first step. To be known by God means to be loved and chosen by Him as His own.

"How do you turn again to the weak and poor elements?" These things were weak, because they could not save, and poor, because they had nothing to give. Yet the Galatians wanted to be "slaves again."

Notice that Paul says turning to the Law would be going back to slavery, the same as their old idol worship. The Law was not idolatry. But using it to earn God's favor would put them back in chains.

4:10 *You observe days and months and seasons and years.*

"You observe days and months and seasons and years." The false teachers were pushing the Jewish calendar on the Galatians. Days likely means the Sabbath. Months may mean new moon festivals. Seasons may mean the yearly feasts, like Passover. Years may mean sabbath years.

God gave these days to Israel, and they had real meaning. They pointed ahead to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). The problem was not the days themselves. The problem was keeping them as a way to be right with God.

Believers have freedom here. Some honor one day above another, and some treat all days alike (Romans 14:5-6). What we must never do is make keeping a holy day a condition of salvation.

4:11 *I fear for you, lest somehow I have toiled for you in vain.*

"I fear for you, lest somehow I have toiled for you in vain." Paul had worked hard to bring the gospel to Galatia. He had suffered for it. Now he feared all that work might come to nothing.

To toil means to work to the point of being worn out. Paul poured himself into these people. He was not a hired preacher who moved on and forgot them. He loved them.

His fear is honest. Paul did not pretend things were fine when they were not. Every pastor and teacher knows this feeling, and so does every parent. When someone we love starts to drift from the truth, it hurts, and it should.

4:12 *Become as I **am**, because I also **have become** as you **are**, brothers, I implore you. You wronged me in nothing.*

"Become as I am, because I also have become as you are, brothers, I implore you." Paul pleads with them now. He calls them brothers. When Paul came to them, he set aside his Jewish customs and lived like a Gentile among them, free from the Law (1 Corinthians 9:21). He wants them to be free like him.

"You wronged me in nothing." Paul is not taking their turning away personally. When he first came, they treated him well. This is not about hurt feelings. It is about the truth of the gospel. He is reaching out to them in love, not in anger.

4:13 *And you know that because of weakness of the flesh I preached the gospel to you at the first;*

"Because of weakness of the flesh I preached the gospel to you at the first." It seems Paul had not planned to stay in Galatia. Some kind of illness or weakness held him there, and he used that time to preach.

Scripture does not tell us what it was. Some think it was an eye problem, since he mentions their eyes in verse 15 and his "large letters" in 6:11. Others think it was malaria, or the lasting effects of his beatings and the stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19). Some connect it with his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). We don't know.

What we do know is that God used Paul's weakness to bring the gospel to Galatia. God often works through our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

4:14 *and my trial in my flesh you did not despise nor spit out, but as an angel of God you received me, as Christ Jesus.*

"And my trial in my flesh you did not despise nor spit out." Whatever Paul's illness was, it was hard to look at. It was a trial for them as well as for him. In that world people sometimes spat to ward off evil when they saw a sick person, as if the sickness were a curse.

But the Galatians did not turn away. "As an angel of God you received me, as Christ Jesus." They welcomed him as if he were a messenger from heaven, even as if he were Christ Himself. Jesus said that whoever receives the one He sends receives Him (Matthew 10:40).

What a change! The people who once welcomed Paul like that were now treating him like an enemy.

4:15 *What then was your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, having gouged out your eyes, you would have given **them** to me.*

"What then was your blessedness?" Paul means their joy, the happiness they had when they first believed. Where had it gone? When people turn from grace to rules, joy is often the first thing to go.

"If possible, having gouged out your eyes, you would have given them to me." This shows how much they loved Paul at first. They would have given him anything, even their own eyes. Some take this as a sign that Paul's illness was in his eyes. Others think it was simply a way of speaking, since the eyes were seen as a person's most precious part. Either way, their love had been deep. Now it had cooled.

4:16 *So have I become your enemy, speaking truth to you?*

"So have I become your enemy, speaking truth to you?" This is a painful question. Paul had not changed. His message had not changed. He was still telling them the truth. But now they saw him as an enemy.

This happens often. People do not always thank us for telling them the truth. Sometimes the friend who tells us what we need to hear is treated as a foe, while the one who flatters us is treated as a friend (Proverbs 27:6).

A true friend tells the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Paul was not their enemy. He was the best friend they had.

4:17 *They are zealous for you, not well; but they want to exclude you, so that you may be zealous for them.*

"They are zealous for you, not well." The false teachers were working hard to win the Galatians. They paid them a lot of attention. But their motives were not good.

"They want to exclude you, so that you may be zealous for them." To exclude means to shut out. The false teachers wanted to shut the Galatians out of the fellowship of grace, and maybe out of fellowship with Paul, so that the Galatians would depend on them and follow them.

This is a mark of false teachers. They want people to be devoted to them. They make you feel like an outsider until you meet their standards. A true servant of God points people to Christ, not to himself (2 Corinthians 4:5).

4:18 *But **it is** good to be zealously sought in a good **thing** always, and not only in my being present with you,*

"But it is good to be zealously sought in a good thing always." Paul is not against people caring about the Galatians. Zeal is good when it is for a good cause.

"And not only in my being present with you." Paul may be saying that he was glad for others to show them care while he was away, as long as it was for the truth. Or he may be saying that the Galatians should be zealous for the good all the time, not only when Paul was there to watch.

Either way, the test of zeal is its cause. Being zealous is not enough. Paul himself was zealous once, and he used it to persecute the church (1:14; Philippians 3:6).

4:19-20 *my little children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you, and I was wishing to be present with you now and to change my tone, because I am perplexed about you.*

"My little children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." Paul pictures himself as a mother giving birth. He went through the pain once when he first brought them to Christ. Now he feels it all over again.

His goal is "until Christ is formed in you." He wants the life of Christ to take shape in them, so that they look like Jesus. That is the goal of the whole Christian life (Romans 8:29).

"I was wishing to be present with you now and to change my tone, because I am perplexed about you." Paul wished he could be there in person. A letter cannot carry the tone of a voice or the look on a face. He does not know what to make of them.

4:21 *Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not hear the law?*

Now Paul turns back to the Law, and he uses it against those who were pushing it. "Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not hear the law?"

The word law is used in two ways in this verse. First it means the Law of Moses as a way of life. Then it means the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, which include Genesis.

Paul is saying, if you want to live under the Law, at least listen to what it says. The books of Moses themselves will teach you about freedom and slavery, if you have ears to hear.

4:22-23 *For it has been written that Abraham had two sons, one of the slave woman and one of the free* ***woman****. But the* ***one*** *of the slave woman has been born according to* ***the*** *flesh, and the* ***one*** *of the free* ***woman*** *through the promise.*

"For it has been written that Abraham had two sons, one of the slave woman and one of the free woman." The story is in Genesis 16 and 21. Hagar was Sarah's Egyptian slave, and she bore Ishmael. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was free, and she bore Isaac.

"The one of the slave woman has been born according to the flesh, and the one of the free woman through the promise." Ishmael was born the natural way, when Abraham and Sarah tried to get God's promised son by their own plan (Genesis 16:1-4). Isaac was born when Sarah was long past the age to have children, because God kept His promise (Genesis 18:10-14; 21:1-2). One son came by human effort. The other came by God's power.

Old Testament links: Genesis 21:2 (alluded to); Genesis 16:15 (alluded to); Genesis 18:10 (alluded to)

4:24 *These things are spoken allegorically; for these are the two covenants: one indeed from Mount Sinai, bearing* ***children*** *for slavery, which is Hagar.*

"These things are spoken allegorically." An allegory is a story in which people or things stand for something else. This does not mean the story of Abraham's sons did not happen. Paul treats it as real history. He is saying the history also gives us a picture.

We should be careful here. Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, tells us plainly that he is using the story as a picture. That does not give us license to turn every Bible story into an allegory of our own making. We read Scripture plainly unless the text itself tells us otherwise, as it does here.

"For these are the two covenants." The first is "from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery, which is Hagar." The covenant of the Law given at Sinai produces slaves.

Old Testament links: Genesis 16:15 (alluded to)

4:25 *For the **name** Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and she corresponds to the present Jerusalem; and she is a slave with her children.*

"For the name Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia." Mount Sinai, where the Law was given, was in Arabia, the land where Ishmael's descendants lived. Some think the word Hagar was linked in Arabic to a word for rock or mountain, though that is not certain.

"She corresponds to the present Jerusalem; and she is a slave with her children." Paul means Jerusalem as the center of Judaism in his day, trying to be right with God by the Law. Like Hagar, it was in slavery, and so were its children, all who looked to the Law to save them.

Paul is not saying God has rejected the Jewish people or the city of Jerusalem. He wept over his people and longed for them to be saved (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1), and he taught that God still has a future for Israel (Romans 11:25-29).

4:26 *But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

"But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all." The Jerusalem above is the heavenly city, the city of God (Hebrews 12:22). It is the city Abraham looked forward to (Hebrews 11:10). One day the new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2).

This city is free. Its children are not slaves. And it is "the mother of us all," meaning every believer, Jew or Gentile. We belong to that city now. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Here is the picture. Hagar, Sinai, and the present Jerusalem stand for the way of the Law, which leads to slavery. Sarah and the Jerusalem above stand for the way of promise, which leads to freedom.

4:27 *For it has been written, "Rejoice, barren woman, you who do not bear; break forth and cry out, you who are not in labor; because many **are** the children of the desolate **woman**, more than of her who has the husband."*

Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 in these words: "Rejoice, barren woman, you who do not bear." In Isaiah, the barren woman was Jerusalem in exile, desolate and alone. God promised that she would have more children than ever before.

Paul sees in this a picture of Sarah. She was barren for many years, but God gave her Isaac, and through him she became the mother of a great people. In the same way, the family of faith, the

children of promise, would grow far beyond anything anyone could imagine. People from every nation would be born into it.

God specializes in doing what is impossible. Where people see only barrenness, God brings life.

Isaiah's promise still belongs to Jerusalem, and God will keep it when He gathers her children with great compassion (Isaiah 54:7). Paul uses its words to picture the growing family of promise, but he does not move the promise from Jerusalem to the church.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 54:1 (quoted)

4:28 *Now, brothers, like Isaac, we are children of promise.*

"Now, brothers, like Isaac, we are children of promise." Isaac was born because God made a promise and kept it. He was a miracle child.

Every believer is like Isaac. We are not children of God because of our birth or our efforts. We are born again by God's power, through His promise, when we believe (John 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:23).

This should give us great confidence and great humility. Confidence, because God's promise does not fail. Humility, because we did nothing to earn it. Isaac did not make himself. Neither did we.

4:29 *But just as at that time the **one** born according to **the** flesh was persecuting the **one born** according to Spirit, so also now.*

"But just as at that time the one born according to the flesh was persecuting the one born according to Spirit, so also now." In Genesis 21:9, Ishmael mocked Isaac at the feast for Isaac's weaning. Paul sees in that mocking the start of a long conflict.

"So also now." In Paul's day, those who trusted in the Law were persecuting those who trusted in the promise. The false teachers in Galatia and others like them stirred up trouble for Paul and the believers wherever he went (Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2, 19).

This is still true. Those who trust in their own goodness often look down on those who rest in God's grace. Do not be surprised by it.

Old Testament links: Genesis 21:9 (alluded to)

4:30 *But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son; for the son of the slave woman shall certainly not inherit with the son of the free **woman**."*

"But what does the Scripture say?" Paul lets Scripture speak. "Cast out the slave woman and her son; for the son of the slave woman shall certainly not inherit with the son of the free woman." Paul is drawing on Sarah's words in Genesis 21:10, and God told Abraham to listen to her (Genesis 21:12).

Paul's point is plain. The way of the Law and the way of promise cannot live together in the same house. Law-keeping as a way to be right with God has to go. Those who rely on the Law will not share the inheritance with those who rely on the promise.

For the Galatians, this meant they should not make room for the false teaching in their churches.

Old Testament links: Genesis 21:10 (quoted)

4:31 *Then, brothers, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free* ***woman****.*

"Then, brothers, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman." This sums up the whole allegory. Believers belong to the family of promise. We are children of Sarah, not of Hagar. We are free, not slaves.

Why would anyone who has been made free choose to go back to slavery? That is exactly what Paul will warn about in the next verse, the first verse of chapter 5: "stand firm therefore, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery."

This verse is a statement of who we are. When we remember who we are in Christ, children of promise and heirs of God, we will not want to go back to chains.

Chapter 4 Summary

Paul compares God's people before Christ to an heir who, while still a child, is no better than a slave, living under guardians until the time set by his father. When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law so that we might be adopted as sons. Because we are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So we are no longer slaves but sons and heirs. Paul asks why the Galatians, who once served false gods, would turn back to weak and poor elements and the keeping of days. He reminds them how they welcomed him in his weakness, as an angel of God, and how they would have given him their eyes. He has not become their enemy by telling them the truth. Like a mother in labor, he longs for Christ to be formed in them. Then he uses the story of Abraham's two sons as a picture of two covenants. Hagar stands for Sinai and slavery; Sarah stands for the Jerusalem above and freedom. Believers are children of promise, like Isaac, children of the free woman.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. How is a young heir like a slave, according to 4:1-2?

2. Why did God send His Son "born under law"? (4:4-5)

3. What does the Spirit of His Son cry out in our hearts, and what does that word mean? (4:6)

4. What does Paul say the Galatians were before they knew God? (4:8)

5. What does it mean to be "known by God"? (4:9)

6. How did the Galatians first receive Paul, and how had that changed? (4:13-16)

7. What is Paul's goal for the Galatians in 4:19?

8. What do Hagar and Sarah stand for in Paul's allegory? (4:22-31)

9. Have you ever been treated as an enemy for telling someone the truth, or treated someone that way yourself? (4:16) What did you learn from it?

10. Do you come to God more like a slave afraid of his master or like a child who calls Him "Abba! Father!"? What would help you rest in being His child?

Chapter 5: Stand Firm in Freedom and Walk by the Spirit

Scripture

5:1-15 In the freedom with which Christ set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery. Look, I Paul say to you that if you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law. You were severed from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you fell away from grace. For we by ***the*** Spirit, by faith, eagerly await ***the*** hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any strength, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love. You were running well; who hindered you, not to obey the truth? The persuasion ***is*** not from the ***One*** who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I am confident regarding you in ***the*** Lord that you will think nothing other; but the ***one*** who troubles you will bear the judgment, whoever he may be. But I, brothers, if I still proclaim circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are upsetting you would even emasculate themselves! For you were called to freedom, brothers; only ***do*** not ***use*** the freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be slaves to one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out lest you be consumed by one another.

5:16-26 But I say, walk by ***the*** Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out ***the*** desire of ***the*** flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are opposed to one another, so that the things which you wish, these you may not do. But if you are led by ***the*** Spirit, you are not under law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strifes, jealousies, outbursts of rage, rivalries, dissensions, factions, envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revelries, and the ***things*** like these, which I tell you beforehand, just as I also said before, that those who practice such things will not inherit ***the*** kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such ***things*** there is no law. And those of Christ crucified the flesh with the passions and the desires. If we live by ***the*** Spirit, by ***the*** Spirit let us also walk in line. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Chapter 5 Preview

Chapter 5 begins with a call to stand firm in the freedom Christ has won and not to be tied again to the yoke of slavery. Paul warns the Galatians plainly. If they accept circumcision as a way to be right with God, Christ will profit them nothing, and they will owe it to God to keep the whole Law. Those who seek to be justified by the Law have fallen away from grace. In Christ, what counts is faith working through love. Paul has hard words for the false teachers who were troubling the churches, because a little leaven spreads through the whole lump.

Then Paul shows that freedom is not a license to sin. We were called to freedom, but we must not use it as a chance for the flesh. Instead we serve one another in love, because the whole Law is fulfilled in one word: love your neighbor as yourself. The answer to the pull of the flesh is not the

Law. It is to walk by the Spirit. Paul lists the works of the flesh, which are plain to see, and then the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *In the freedom with which Christ set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery.*

This verse is the hinge of the letter. It sums up chapters 3 and 4 and opens the door to chapters 5 and 6. "In the freedom with which Christ set us free." Christ did not set us free so that we could be put back in chains. Freedom was the whole point.

"Stand firm therefore." To stand firm is to hold your ground, like a soldier who will not give way. The Galatians were being pushed, and they needed to push back.

"Do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery." A yoke was the wooden frame laid on the neck of an ox to make it pull a load. Peter called the Law "a yoke" that neither the fathers nor his own generation could bear (Acts 15:10). Jesus offers a different yoke, one that is easy and light (Matthew 11:29-30).

5:2 *Look, I Paul say to you that if you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.*

"Look, I Paul say to you." Paul puts his full apostolic weight behind what comes next. "If you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing."

Paul is not saying circumcision is evil in itself. He had Timothy circumcised for the sake of his ministry among Jews (Acts 16:3). He is talking about Gentile believers who accept circumcision because they think they need it to be right with God.

Why would Christ profit them nothing? Because Christ is either everything or nothing. If you add anything to Him as a way to be saved, you are no longer trusting Him. You are trusting yourself. You cannot rest half on Christ and half on your own works.

5:3 *And I testify again to every man who is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*

"And I testify again to every man who is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law." A debtor is someone who owes something. The man who takes circumcision as a step to be right with God takes on the whole Law with it.

The false teachers may have presented circumcision as a small step, just one more thing to add. Paul says you cannot pick one command and leave the rest. The Law is one whole. If you go that way, you owe God perfect obedience to every command, every day, for the rest of your life (3:10; James 2:10).

No one can pay that debt. That is exactly why we need Christ, who paid it for us.

5:4 *You were severed from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you fell away from grace.*

"You were severed from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you fell away from grace." To be severed means to be cut off from something, to have no more effect. Those trying to be justified by the Law have cut themselves off from Christ as the way of righteousness. They have stepped off the ground of grace onto the ground of works.

Bible teachers disagree on what this means for eternal security. Some believe it shows that a true believer can turn away and be lost. Others believe Paul is speaking of people who were never truly resting in Christ, or that he means falling away from grace as the way of righteousness, not losing salvation. I leave that question open here. What is plain is that grace and Law-keeping as ways to be justified cannot be mixed.

5:5 *For we by **the** Spirit, by faith, eagerly await **the** hope of righteousness.*

"For we by the Spirit, by faith, eagerly await the hope of righteousness." Here is the other side. The false teachers trusted in the flesh and the Law. True believers live "by the Spirit, by faith."

What do we wait for? "The hope of righteousness." We have already been declared righteous by faith (2:16). But there is a day still coming when that righteousness will be complete and on full display, when we see Christ and are made like Him (1 John 3:2). In the Bible, hope is not a maybe. It is a sure thing that has not happened yet.

"Eagerly await" pictures someone looking forward with longing. Believers are not anxious about whether God will accept them. We wait with joy for what He has promised.

5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any strength, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love.*

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any strength, nor uncircumcision." In Christ, circumcision does not help you, and being uncircumcised does not help you either. Neither one has any power to make you right with God. A Gentile believer should not be proud of having no rule to keep, any more than a Jew should be proud of keeping one.

What counts is "faith working through love." This short phrase answers the question of faith and works. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. It works. It shows itself in love for God and for others. Paul and James agree on this (James 2:17-18). Works do not earn salvation. Real faith produces them.

5:7 *You were running well; who hindered you, not to obey the truth?*

"You were running well; who hindered you, not to obey the truth?" Paul often pictures the Christian life as a race (1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7). The Galatians had started strong. They were growing and following Christ.

Then someone "hindered" them. The word was used for cutting in on a runner, or for breaking up a road so no one could travel on it. Someone had cut in on their race.

Notice that the truth is something to "obey," not only to believe. The gospel calls for a response. To turn to another gospel is to disobey the truth. We should ask ourselves the same question. Is anyone or anything cutting in on my race?

5:8 *The persuasion **is** not from the **One** who calls you.*

"The persuasion is not from the One who calls you." God called the Galatians by His grace (1:6). The new teaching that was persuading them did not come from Him.

This is a simple test for any teaching. Does it fit with how God called us? God called us by grace through the gospel of Christ. Any message that pulls us away from that grace, no matter how convincing it sounds, does not come from God.

False teaching is often persuasive. It can sound wise and godly. That is why we must test everything by God's Word (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11).

5:9 *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Leaven is yeast. A small amount of it, worked into dough, spreads through the whole batch. In the Bible, leaven is often a picture of sin or false teaching that spreads (Matthew 16:6, 12; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The false teachers may have been few, and their message may have sounded small, just one little rule. But it would spread until it changed the whole church.

This is why Paul is so serious. False doctrine is never harmless. It does not stay in one corner. A church that tolerates a little error about the gospel will soon find that error everywhere.

5:10 *I am confident regarding you in **the** Lord that you will think nothing other; but the **one** who troubles you will bear the judgment, whoever he may be.*

"I am confident regarding you in the Lord that you will think nothing other." Paul's confidence is "in the Lord," not in the Galatians themselves. He trusts that God will bring them back to the truth.

"But the one who troubles you will bear the judgment, whoever he may be." Paul may have meant a leader of the false teachers, or he may have meant each one of them. Either way, God will judge those who trouble His people with a false gospel.

Notice the balance. Paul is gentle with those who are being led astray and firm with those who lead them astray. We should be patient with confused believers, but we must not be soft on those who twist the gospel.

5:11 *But I, brothers, if I still proclaim circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.*

"But I, brothers, if I still proclaim circumcision, why am I still persecuted?" The false teachers seem to have claimed that Paul himself preached circumcision when it suited him. Maybe they pointed to Timothy (Acts 16:3).

Paul answers with a simple fact. If he preached circumcision, the Jewish opponents of the gospel would leave him alone. But they kept persecuting him. That proved he was preaching the cross, not circumcision.

"Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished." A stumbling block is something people trip over. The cross offends human pride, because it says we can do nothing to save ourselves (1 Corinthians 1:23). Add circumcision, and the offense is gone. But so is the gospel.

5:12 *I wish that those who are upsetting you would even emasculate themselves!*

"I wish that those who are upsetting you would even emasculate themselves!" These are hard words. The false teachers were so eager to cut the flesh of the Galatians through circumcision. Paul says, in effect, if they think cutting the flesh makes them holy, let them go all the way.

In Galatia there were pagan priests of the goddess Cybele who castrated themselves in their worship. The Galatians would have known about them. Paul's point is that circumcision, used as a way to be right with God, is no better than pagan cutting.

Paul's words are sharp, and he means them to be. He is angry because people he loved were being led away from Christ. There is a right kind of anger at those who harm the flock.

5:13 *For you were called to freedom, brothers; only **do** not **use** the freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be slaves to one another.*

"For you were called to freedom, brothers." Now Paul turns to the other danger. Some might hear his message of freedom and think it means they can do whatever they like.

"Only do not use the freedom as an opportunity for the flesh." The word opportunity was used for a base of operations, a place from which an army could launch an attack. The flesh means our fallen nature, the part of us that still wants to sin. Freedom from the Law must not become a launching place for sin.

"But through love be slaves to one another." This is the surprise. We are set free from the Law to become slaves again, slaves of love. Christian freedom is not freedom to serve ourselves. It is freedom to serve others.

5:14 *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this." Paul then quotes Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said this was the second great command, after loving God (Matthew 22:37-40).

How can Paul say this after all he has said about the Law? Because love does what the Law aimed at all along. The Law said do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery. Love does not do those things to a neighbor (Romans 13:8-10).

Believers do not keep the Law to be saved. But when the Spirit fills us with love, we end up doing what the Law was really after. The Law could command love, but it could not produce it. The Spirit does.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 19:18 (quoted)

5:15 *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out lest you be consumed by one another.*

"But if you bite and devour one another, watch out lest you be consumed by one another." Paul pictures wild animals fighting until they destroy each other.

It seems the false teaching had stirred up fights in the Galatian churches. Legalism often does. When people try to be right with God by keeping rules, they start measuring each other, judging, criticizing, and tearing each other down.

This is a warning for every church. Biting words and gossip can tear a church apart faster than anything outside it. If we keep attacking each other, there will be nothing left. Love builds up. Fighting eats away until nothing is left.

5:16 *But I say, walk by **the** Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out **the** desire of **the** flesh.*

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh." Here is Paul's answer to the flesh. It is not more rules. It is the Holy Spirit.

To walk means to live day by day, step by step. To walk by the Spirit means to depend on Him, follow His lead, and obey what He shows us in God's Word, moment by moment.

The promise is strong: you "will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh." The desire of the flesh will still be there. But we do not have to give in to it. The way to win is not to stare at our sin and try harder. It is to keep in step with the Spirit.

5:17 *For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are opposed to one another, so that the things which you wish, these you may not do.*

"For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." Every believer knows this battle. Before we came to Christ, we did not feel much of a fight. We just followed the flesh. Now the Spirit lives in us, and He pulls us one way while the flesh pulls us the other.

"These are opposed to one another, so that the things which you wish, these you may not do." Bible teachers read this last phrase in two ways. Some take it to mean the flesh keeps us from doing the good we want to do (Romans 7:15-19). Others take it to mean the Spirit keeps us from doing the evil the flesh wants. Both are true in the life of a believer. The battle is real, and it is a sign that the Spirit is at work in you.

5:18 *But if you are led by **the** Spirit, you are not under law.*

"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." The Spirit leads us like a shepherd leads his sheep, or a father leads his son (Romans 8:14).

Those who are led by the Spirit are "not under law." The Law is not over them as a master or as a judge. This does not mean they ignore what is right. The Spirit leads us into the very righteousness the Law described.

This verse answers the fear of the false teachers. They believed that without the Law, people would run wild. Paul says no. The Spirit is a better guide than the Law ever was. The Law told people what to do from the outside. The Spirit changes people from the inside.

5:19 *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery,*

"Now the works of the flesh are evident." They are plain to see. No one has to wonder about them.

Paul starts with sins of sexual life. Adultery is sexual sin by a married person with someone other than their spouse. Sexual immorality is the Greek word porneia, a broad word that covers every kind of sexual sin outside of marriage between a husband and wife. Impurity is moral uncleanness of any kind. Debauchery means shameless lack of restraint, sin out in the open with no sense of shame.

God made sex as a good gift for marriage (Genesis 2:24; Hebrews 13:4). The flesh takes that gift and twists it.

5:20 *idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strifes, jealousies, outbursts of rage, rivalries, dissensions, factions,*

Next come sins of false worship. Idolatry is worshiping anything other than the true God. Sorcery is the Greek word pharmakeia, which gives us our word pharmacy. It was used for magic and witchcraft, which often involved drugs and potions.

Then Paul lists sins that tear people apart. Hostilities means hatred and enmity. Strife is fighting and quarrels. Jealousies are resentment at what others have. Outbursts of rage are flashes of temper. Rivalries means selfish ambition, pushing yourself ahead. Dissensions are divisions. Factions are groups that form around opinions and split off.

Notice how long this part of the list is. The sins of the tongue and the temper are just as much works of the flesh as the sins of the bed.

5:21 *envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revelries, and the **things** like these, which I tell you beforehand, just as I also said before, that those who practice such things will not inherit **the** kingdom of God.*

Envyings is wanting what someone else has and resenting them for it. Then come murders, and finally sins of excess: drunkennesses and revelries. Revelries were wild parties, often with heavy drinking. Paul ends with "the things like these." The list is not complete.

Then a serious warning: "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." The word practice speaks of a settled way of life. A believer can fall into any of these sins, and God forgives when we confess (1 John 1:9). But a person whose life is marked by these things, with no sorrow and no change, shows that he does not belong to God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

"But the fruit of the Spirit." Notice two changes. The flesh produces works, but the Spirit produces fruit. Fruit is not manufactured. It grows from a living thing. And the word is fruit, not fruits. It is one harvest with many sides, all growing together.

Love comes first, the self-giving love that God showed us in Christ. Joy is gladness in God that does not depend on how things are going. Peace is rest with God and with others. Patience means being slow to anger and putting up with people. Kindness is a good heart toward others. Goodness is doing good, even when it is hard. Faithfulness means being trustworthy, someone others can count on.

5:23 *gentleness, self-control; against such **things** there is no law.*

Gentleness is strength under control, the opposite of harshness. Jesus was gentle (Matthew 11:29), but He was never weak. Self-control means mastery over our desires. It is the opposite of the sins of excess at the end of the works of the flesh.

"Against such things there is no law." No law forbids these things. You will never break God's Law by being too loving, too kind, or too self-controlled.

Look at this list as a whole, and you see a portrait of Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ growing in us. We do not produce it by trying harder. We grow it by staying close to Him (John 15:4-5).

5:24 *And those of Christ crucified the flesh with the passions and the desires.*

"And those of Christ crucified the flesh with the passions and the desires." Those who belong to Christ have already dealt the flesh a death blow. In 2:20 Paul said he was crucified with Christ. Here he says believers have crucified the flesh.

When we came to Christ, we turned from our old way of life. We said no to the flesh and its desires. The flesh is still around, but it no longer rules us (Romans 6:6, 11-14).

Crucifixion was a slow and painful death. The flesh does not die easily. But its sentence has been passed. Every day we choose to treat it as dead and not to feed its desires (Romans 13:14).

5:25 *If we live by **the** Spirit, by **the** Spirit let us also walk in line.*

"If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk in line." Every believer has life by the Spirit. He gave us new birth (John 3:5-6). Now Paul says, let our walk match our life.

"Walk in line" is a different word from "walk" in verse 16. It was used for soldiers marching in rank, or for walking in a straight line behind a leader. We keep in step with the Spirit, following where He leads, not running ahead and not falling behind.

This is a call to live out what we already are. We are alive by the Spirit. So let us walk like it.

5:26 *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

"Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." Paul ends the chapter with a down-to-earth warning. Conceit means empty pride, thinking we are more than we are.

Pride shows itself in two ways here. Some people provoke others, looking down on them and challenging them, because they think they are better. Others envy, looking up at people they think are better off, and resenting them.

Both are signs of the flesh, even in people who think they are very spiritual. Those who walk by the Spirit do not need to compare themselves with others. They have nothing to prove, because they rest in what Christ has done.

Chapter 5 Summary

Paul calls believers to stand firm in the freedom Christ has won and not to go back to the yoke of slavery. A Gentile who takes circumcision as a way to be right with God gains nothing from Christ and owes God the whole Law. Those who seek to be justified by the Law have cut themselves off from Christ and fallen away from grace. Believers wait by the Spirit and by faith for the hope of righteousness, and in Christ what counts is faith working through love. Paul warns that a little leaven spreads through the whole lump, and he has sharp words for the false teachers. Freedom is not an opportunity for the flesh. It is a call to serve one another in love, for the whole Law is fulfilled in loving our neighbor as ourselves. The answer to the flesh is to walk by the Spirit. The works of the flesh are plain, and those who practice them will not inherit the kingdom of God. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh, and since we live by the Spirit, we are to walk in step with the Spirit.

The part of God's work I most want to see grow in my life is wisdom and discernment. The fruit of the Spirit grows when I stay close to Him. I cannot manufacture it. I can make room for it.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What does Paul tell believers to do with the freedom Christ gave them? (5:1)

2. Why would Christ "profit you nothing" if a Galatian believer accepted circumcision to be right with God? (5:2-3)

3. What does Paul say counts in Christ Jesus? (5:6)

4. What does "a little leaven" picture, and why is it dangerous? (5:9)

5. How should believers use their freedom, and how should they not use it? (5:13)

6. What is the answer to the desires of the flesh, according to 5:16?

7. What is the difference between the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit"? (5:19-23)

8. What does it mean to "walk in line" by the Spirit? (5:25)

9. Which part of the fruit of the Spirit do you most want to see grow in your life right now? What would that look like at home or at work? (5:22-23)

10. Do you lean more toward provoking others or envying others? (5:26) How does resting in Christ answer both?

Chapter 6: Bear One Another's Burdens and Boast in the Cross

Scripture

6:1-10 Brothers, if a man is even caught in some trespass, you who ***are*** spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, watching yourself, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks ***himself*** to be something, being nothing, he deceives himself. But let each test his own work, and then he will have the boast in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to the other. For each will bear ***his*** own load. And let the ***one*** being taught the word share with the ***one*** teaching in all good things. Do not be led astray; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the ***one*** sowing to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the ***one*** sowing to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not lose heart in doing the good, for in ***its*** own time we will reap, not fainting. So then, as we have opportunity, let us work the good toward all, and especially toward those of the household of the faith.

6:11-18 See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand. As many as want to make a good showing in ***the*** flesh, these compel you to be circumcised, only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised themselves keep ***the*** law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. But for me, may it not be to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as will walk in line by this rule, peace ***be*** upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one cause me troubles; for I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Chapter 6 Preview

Paul now shows what walking by the Spirit looks like in the life of a church. When a brother is caught in sin, those who are spiritual should restore him gently, watching themselves so they are not tempted too. Believers bear one another's burdens, and in that way they fulfill the law of Christ. Each one should test his own work and not compare himself with others. Those who are taught should share good things with their teachers. And over all of it stands a law God built into His world: whatever a man sows, he will also reap. So we must not grow tired of doing good, because the harvest will come.

Then Paul takes the pen in his own hand and writes in large letters. He exposes the motives of the false teachers one last time. They wanted to make a good showing in the flesh and avoid persecution for the cross. Paul will boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to him and he to the world. What matters is not circumcision or uncircumcision, but a new creation. He prays for peace and mercy on all who walk by this rule,

and on the Israel of God. He bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He closes, as he began, with grace.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *Brothers, if a man is even caught in some trespass, you who **are** spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, watching yourself, lest you also be tempted.*

"Brothers, if a man is even caught in some trespass." A trespass is a false step, a slip off the path. "Caught" may mean caught in the act, or overtaken by a sin before he saw it coming. Either way, a believer has fallen.

What should the church do? "You who are spiritual restore such a one." The spiritual are those who walk by the Spirit (5:16, 25), not those who think they are better than others. To restore was used for setting a broken bone or mending a torn net. The goal is to make the person whole again, not to punish him.

How? "In a spirit of gentleness, watching yourself, lest you also be tempted." Gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit (5:23). No one is above falling. Pride is how we fall next.

6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*

"Bear one another's burdens." A burden is a heavy weight, more than one person can carry alone. It could be a sin someone is fighting, a loss, a sickness, or a load of trouble. God never meant for us to carry these alone. He gave us each other.

"And thus fulfill the law of Christ." The false teachers wanted to put the Galatians under the Law of Moses. Paul says there is a law for believers, the law of Christ. Jesus gave it to us: love one another as He loved us (John 13:34). Christ carried the heaviest burden of all when He bore our sins on the cross. When we help carry each other's loads, we are doing what He did. That is how love fulfills the Law (5:14).

6:3 *For if anyone thinks **himself** to be something, being nothing, he deceives himself.*

"For if anyone thinks himself to be something, being nothing, he deceives himself." This is the reason some people will not bear other people's burdens. They think they are too important, or too good, to bend down and help.

Paul is plain. Apart from God's grace, we are nothing. Anyone who thinks he is above other people has fooled himself, but he has not fooled God or anyone who knows him well.

Pride also keeps us from letting others carry our burdens. Some people would rather sink than admit they need help. That is pride too. The way of Christ is humility, both in helping and in being helped.

6:4 *But let each test his own work, and then he will have the boast in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to the other.*

"But let each test his own work." To test means to examine something to see if it is real, like testing gold in a fire. Instead of looking around at others, each believer should look honestly at his own life.

"And then he will have the boast in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to the other." If there is anything to rejoice over, let it be the work God has done in you, not how you stack up against someone else. It is easy to feel good about ourselves when we compare ourselves with people who are struggling. That is not the test. The test is our own walk before God.

Comparison is a trap either way. It leads to pride or to envy, the two sins Paul warned about in 5:26.

6:5 *For each will bear **his** own load.*

"For each will bear his own load." This may sound like it contradicts verse 2, but it does not. Paul uses a different word here. The burden in verse 2 is a crushing weight. The load in verse 5 was used for the pack a person was expected to carry himself, like a traveler's or a soldier's pack.

There are some loads no one else can carry for us. Each of us is responsible for our own walk with God, and each of us will give an account of ourselves to Him (Romans 14:12). Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not to be judged for salvation, but to receive what is due for what we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10).

So we help each other with the crushing burdens, and we each carry our own pack.

6:6 *And let the **one** being taught the word share with the **one** teaching in all good things.*

"And let the one being taught the word share with the one teaching in all good things." To share means to have fellowship, to give a part of what you have. Those who are taught God's Word should support those who teach them.

This includes money, but it is not only money. Paul says "in all good things." Teachers of the Word need prayer, encouragement, and help, and they often need food on the table too. Paul taught the same thing in 1 Corinthians 9:11, 14 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

The false teachers may have been drawing support away from the true teachers. Paul reminds the Galatians that those who feed them spiritually deserve to be cared for in return.

6:7 *Do not be led astray; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*

"Do not be led astray; God is not mocked." To mock is to turn up your nose at someone, to treat him with contempt. People may think they can ignore God and get away with it. They cannot.

"For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Every farmer knows this. If you plant corn, you get corn. If you plant weeds, you get weeds. And you always reap more than you sow, and later than you sow.

God built this law into His world. Our choices have results. This is not a matter of earning salvation. It is a matter of the kind of life we are growing. What are you planting today?

6:8 *For the **one** sowing to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the **one** sowing to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

"For the one sowing to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." To sow to the flesh means to spend our time, money, and energy feeding our sinful desires. The harvest is corruption, decay and ruin. Sin always promises life and always delivers death (Romans 6:23).

"But the one sowing to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." To sow to the Spirit means to invest in the things of God: His Word, prayer, worship, fellowship with believers, serving others.

Eternal life is God's gift, received by faith (Romans 6:23). Here Paul speaks of it as the harvest of a life lived by the Spirit, the full and final reaping when Christ returns. A life led by the Spirit is the life of someone who has been given eternal life.

6:9 *And let us not lose heart in doing the good, for in **its** own time we will reap, not fainting.*

"And let us not lose heart in doing the good." Doing good can be tiring. You help people and they don't thank you. You serve and no one notices. You pray and nothing seems to change. It is easy to want to quit.

"For in its own time we will reap, not fainting." God has His own time for the harvest. A farmer does not dig up his seeds every morning to see if they have grown. He waits.

Some of the harvest we may see in this life. Some of it we will not see until we stand before the Lord. But the harvest is certain. God does not forget the good done in His name (Hebrews 6:10). So don't give up.

6:10 *So then, as we have opportunity, let us work the good toward all, and especially toward those of the household of the faith.*

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us work the good toward all." Every day brings chances to do good, and they don't last forever. We should take them while we can.

We are to do good "toward all," believers and unbelievers alike. Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan to show that our neighbor is anyone in need (Luke 10:29-37).

"And especially toward those of the household of the faith." The church is a household, a family. Just as a man takes care of his own family first (1 Timothy 5:8), believers have a special duty to care for each other. When the world sees believers caring for one another, it sees a picture of God's love (John 13:35).

6:11 *See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand.*

"See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand." Paul usually dictated his letters to a helper who wrote them down (Romans 16:22). Then he would take the pen and write a few lines himself to show the letter was really from him (2 Thessalonians 3:17).

Here he writes "large letters." Some think it was because of poor eyesight (see 4:13-15). Others think Paul wrote large to underline what he was about to say, the way we might use capital letters or underline a sentence. Some think Paul wrote the whole letter himself. Scripture does not say which.

Whatever the reason, Paul wanted them to notice. These last words are his final, personal plea.

6:12 *As many as want to make a good showing in **the** flesh, these compel you to be circumcised, only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.*

"As many as want to make a good showing in the flesh, these compel you to be circumcised." Paul exposes the false teachers' motives. They wanted to look good. Circumcised Gentile converts would be something to show off.

"Only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ." Here is the real reason. Many of those who rejected Jesus hated the message of the cross, because it said the Law could not save. Believers who preached the cross alone were persecuted. But if the false teachers could say their converts were circumcised and keeping the Law, they could avoid trouble.

They chose the easy road. They were more concerned with avoiding persecution than with telling the truth.

6:13 *For not even those who are circumcised themselves keep **the** law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.*

"For not even those who are circumcised themselves keep the law." The false teachers did not keep the whole Law either. No one did (3:10; 5:3). They picked the parts they liked, like circumcision, and ignored the rest.

"But they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh." They wanted to brag about how many Gentiles they had brought into line. The Galatians were just numbers to them, notches on a belt.

This is a warning for every church and every ministry. It is easy to care more about numbers and outward show than about people's souls. Paul did not count converts to boast about them. He loved people and wanted Christ formed in them (4:19).

6:14 *But for me, may it not be to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

"But for me, may it not be to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." To boast means to glory in something, to take pride in it. The false teachers boasted in the flesh. Paul boasts only in the cross.

In Paul's world, the cross was the most shameful death there was, saved for slaves and criminals. No one bragged about a cross. But Paul saw it as the place where God's love and power were shown most clearly (1 Corinthians 1:18).

"Through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." The world here means life apart from God, with its pride and values. At the cross, the world lost its hold on Paul, and Paul lost his interest in the world's approval.

6:15 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." Paul says much the same thing as in 5:6. The outward mark does not matter. Being circumcised does not make you right with God, and being uncircumcised does not either.

What matters is "a new creation." When someone comes to Christ, God does not just improve the old person. He makes a new one (2 Corinthians 5:17). The new birth is a work of God from the inside out (John 3:3-7).

This is why rules can never save us. The problem is not that we need a little more effort. We need to be made new, and only God can do that.

6:16 *And as many as will walk in line by this rule, peace **be** upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*

"And as many as will walk in line by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy." The rule is what Paul has just said: what counts is a new creation in Christ, not circumcision. Walk in line uses the same word as 5:25, keeping in step.

"And upon the Israel of God." Bible teachers read this in more than one way. Many dispensational teachers believe it means Jewish believers in Jesus, the believing Jews within the church, set apart for a word of blessing because the false teachers claimed to speak for Israel. Elsewhere in his letters Paul uses the word Israel for the Jewish people, even when he speaks of a believing remnant within it (Romans 9:6; 11:5, 26). Others believe Paul means the whole church, Jew and Gentile together. Some take it as a prayer for Israel as a nation. Whichever reading one takes, this verse does not teach that the church has replaced Israel. God's promises to the nation of Israel still stand (Romans 11:25-29).

Old Testament links: Psalm 125:5 (alluded to)

6:17 *From now on let no one cause me troubles; for I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

"From now on let no one cause me troubles." Paul has said all he needs to say. He wants the arguments over his apostleship to stop.

"For I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The word for marks is stigmata. It was used for the brand burned into the skin of a slave to show who owned him. Paul's marks were the scars from his beatings, his stoning, and his sufferings for Christ (Acts 14:19; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

The false teachers wanted to put the mark of circumcision on the Galatians' bodies. Paul already bore the marks that mattered, scars that showed he belonged to Jesus and had suffered for Him. Paul's scars were his proof.

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

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen." Paul began the letter with grace (1:3), and he ends it the same way. Grace is the whole message of Galatians, from start to finish.

Notice the word "brothers." It is the last word before the amen in the Greek. For all his hard words, Paul still sees the Galatians as family. He has rebuked them, warned them, and pleaded with them, but he has never stopped loving them.

That is a good picture of how we should handle believers who stray. We tell them the truth, but we never stop calling them brothers and sisters.

At the end of the letter the SLB prints a short note saying the letter to the Galatians was written from Rome. This note is not part of the letter itself. It was added by later copyists and is printed in some editions of the Received Greek Text. Most Bible teachers do not believe Paul wrote Galatians from Rome. See the Background for the main views on when and where he wrote.

Chapter 6 Summary

Paul shows what walking by the Spirit looks like among believers. When someone is caught in sin, those who are spiritual should restore him gently, watching themselves. Believers bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, yet each one must test his own work and carry his own load without comparing himself with others. Those who are taught should share good things with their teachers. God is not mocked: whatever a man sows, he will reap, either corruption from the flesh or eternal life from the Spirit. So we must not grow weary in doing good, especially toward the household of faith. Writing in large letters with his own hand, Paul exposes the false teachers, who wanted to make a good showing in the flesh and avoid persecution for the cross. Paul will boast only in the cross of Christ, through which the world has been crucified to him and he to the world. What counts is a new creation. He prays for peace and mercy on all who walk by this rule and on the Israel of God, points to the marks of the Lord Jesus on his body, and closes with grace.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. How should a believer who is caught in sin be restored, and what warning does Paul give those who restore him? (6:1)

2. What is the "law of Christ," and how do we fulfill it? (6:2)

3. How do 6:2 and 6:5 fit together? (6:2-5)

4. What does Paul say about those who teach the Word and those who are taught? (6:6)

5. What is the law of sowing and reaping, and what are the two harvests Paul describes? (6:7-8)

6. What were the real motives of the false teachers? (6:12-13)

7. What did Paul boast in, and why? (6:14)

8. What does Paul say counts in Christ Jesus? (6:15)

9. Is there a burden you are carrying alone that you should let another believer help you with? Or is there someone whose burden you could help carry this week? (6:2)

10. What are you sowing in your life right now, to the flesh or to the Spirit? (6:8) What is one thing you can plant today that will bear fruit for God?

Conclusion

Galatians is a short letter written with great urgency, by a man who was afraid his friends were about to lose the gospel. In the first two chapters, Paul showed that his message came straight from Jesus Christ, not from any man, and that the leaders in Jerusalem added nothing to it. He stood firm when false brothers tried to force circumcision on Titus, and he stood firm when even Peter drew back from the Gentile believers. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul proved from Scripture that God has always made sinners right with Himself by faith. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. The Law came later, to show us our sin and to guard us until Christ came. In chapters 5 and 6, Paul showed that freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin, but freedom to walk by the Spirit, to bear one another's burdens, and to serve one another in love.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with Galatians, the message is hard to miss. We are not made right with God by what we do. We are made right with God by what Christ has done. Any message that adds our works to His cross is "a different gospel," and it is no gospel at all (1:6-7).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and help you rest in His grace. Many believers start with grace and then slowly slide into trying to earn God's favor by their own effort. If that is you, hear Paul's call: "In the freedom with which Christ set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery" (5:1). Then use that freedom the way God meant it, walking by the Spirit and letting Him grow His fruit in you.

Paul's message is the same for us today as it was for the churches of Galatia. "A man is not justified by works of law except through faith of Jesus Christ" (2:16). Jesus "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (2:20). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve with others who will help bear your burdens as you help bear theirs (Galatians 6:1-2).

Old and New Testament Links in Galatians

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1:15	Jeremiah 1:5	alluded to
1:15	Isaiah 49:1	alluded to
2:16	Psalm 143:2	alluded to
3:6	Genesis 15:6	quoted
3:8	Genesis 12:3	quoted
3:8	Genesis 18:18	quoted
3:10	Deuteronomy 27:26	quoted
3:11	Habakkuk 2:4	quoted
3:12	Leviticus 18:5	quoted
3:12	Nehemiah 9:29	alluded to
3:13	Deuteronomy 21:23	quoted
3:14	Genesis 28:4	alluded to
3:16	Genesis 13:15	quoted
3:16	Genesis 17:8	quoted
3:17	Exodus 12:40-41	alluded to
4:22-23	Genesis 21:2	alluded to
4:22-23	Genesis 16:15	alluded to
4:22-23	Genesis 18:10	alluded to
4:24	Genesis 16:15	alluded to
4:27	Isaiah 54:1	quoted
4:29	Genesis 21:9	alluded to
4:30	Genesis 21:10	quoted
5:14	Leviticus 19:18	quoted
6:16	Psalm 125:5	alluded to

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, about 1830. Public domain.

Cross-reference data in part from OpenBible.info, used under a Creative Commons Attribution license.