



LIVING BY FAITH in Christ alone

**A Bible Teaching Commentary
for personal or group study
Written by Fred Morris**



**GALATIANS
Chapters 1 to 6**

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GALATIANS Chapters 1 to 6

- **Paul's desire for church unity and love.**
- **Traditions and teachings which hinder faith.**
- **The new freedom we have in Christ.**

- **Ministering to others who have needs.**
- **Avoiding the sinful attractions of the world.**
- **We are children of God through Abraham.**

PAUL WROTE to the Galatian church with Holy Spirit guidance, concern and love: to *teach* the truth of God from the Scriptures; to *preach* salvation through Christ alone; to *reach* those who are open to the Holy Spirit. He loved the fellowships of believers and knew them personally. Paul wanted them to reject false teachers. He wanted to protect new believers from straying away from God's everlasting salvation in Christ. He knew that salvation could not be found just by following laws and traditions. Paul also knew that the church was at risk of following unbiblical laws and new ideas of some of the believers. His letter is a warning to us all that it is easy to go down the wrong path. Paul also warns us that being "free in Christ" through His costly sacrifice does not mean we are then free to do as we like. We must be prepared to listen to God's Bible truth for the wisdom of His Holy Spirit and not be enslaved by false teachings.

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THESE BOOKS will help you to come closer to Almighty God. He is worshipped by millions of Jews and Christians worldwide. These books will also help you to receive salvation and eternal life through God's Son, Jesus the Christ who is Israel's Messiah. They will help you to talk about your faith in God and to pray to Him. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God through the love and power of His Holy Spirit. This was promised to all who believe Jesus is the Son of God, who suffered death for our sins before returning back to Heaven. These are important teachings for these last days before His return.

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. Think about what Jesus taught and suffered 2000 years ago for our eternal salvation and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return.

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Bible reading: Where you see this, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading this book.



Talk about this: Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.



Think about this: Where you see this, the questions require more time for personal meditation.



Pray about this: Where you see this, ask God to help you understand and apply what you have read.



Additional text boxes: Where you see these, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible passage was written and helps to apply the teaching for today.

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God has enabled us to print this title in the following countries:

Revised Worldwide English edition first published in the UK in 2024

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GALATIANS: Chapters 1 to 6

INTRODUCTION

Galatia was a Roman province of Asia Minor. This is central Turkey today. It included the cities of Antioch-in-Asia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. The apostle Paul went to Galatia on his first missionary journey from Antioch-in-Syria. The church there sent him to teach the Good News about God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

We do not need to ask God if it is His will to spread the Good News. Jesus commands us to go in the power of the Holy Spirit! Paul's church in Syria supported him by praying for him.

When Paul preached the gospel message there, many people believed in Jesus. Groups of believers often met in their homes for worship. Also to share bread and wine together to remember the death and resurrection of their Lord and Saviour (Acts 2:42-46). These fellowships were made up of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus the Christ, known by the Jews as Yeshua the Messiah, which means Deliverer or Saviour.

Paul taught that faith in Christ's sacrifice as punishment for our sins brought salvation for all who believe this was God's plan for sinful mankind. Jesus took the punishment we deserve because of God's grace and mercy. This is all that we



need to save us from sin and gain a new life on Earth and eternal life in Heaven. "Jesus gave his life for the punishment of our sins to set us free from this evil world." (1:4)

Paul, a Jew, knew that God's forgiveness through His Son's sacrifice fulfilled all the requirements of God's Law. The sacrifices described in the Old Testament part of the Bible are now fulfilled through faith in Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross.

After Paul left the Christians in Galatia, some of the Jewish believers said they must still keep obeying the Law of Moses. Paul knew that just obeying the Law cannot save us. Paul also knew that the Pharisees had added many man-made laws to the Law that God gave to Moses. This made it even more difficult to receive forgiveness and salvation from sin.

People who were outside the fellowships of believers in Christ followed many false religions. They mistreated the believers as a 'Jewish sect'. This also meant they were persecuted by the followers of pagan Roman and Greek religions. Paul also knew there was the risk of false teaching within the Galatian church and within the other first-century fellowships of believers in Christ.

Paul dictated this letter for the Galatians to a scribe who was a true believer. Together, the Holy Spirit guided them to write down the truth of God and the spiritual guidance and warnings that were needed at that time. The church fellowships could then follow their warnings and advice when they met together.

It is also important to apply these Old and New Testament teachings for our own church fellowships today. This means living by faith in Bible teaching plus preaching the Good News of Salvation in Christ alone, whilst there is time before He returns.

THE OLD AND THE RENEWED COVENANT OF GOD

Abraham believed in the LORD God Almighty and God made His covenant with him. This agreement between God and Abraham became God's covenant with the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, called the people of Israel (Genesis 12:1-3).

Later, God gave the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel through Moses (Exodus 19:3-5). Moses said to the people, "Follow these commandments so that you may live... Do not add to what I command you and do not take away from it." (Deuteronomy 4:2)

The Jewish religious leaders and Pharisees kept their holy Law but later on added other laws. They made these laws harder to keep by adding more and more instructions. Jesus said that they held to these man-made traditions rather than obeying God's original commands (Mark 7:7-9). Jesus called the Pharisees "blind guides" and told the people not to do as they said or did (Matthew 15:13).

This did not mean that the Law of Moses was bad, but that the people were unable to keep the Law, especially laws not taught by God but taught by the Pharisees. "Everyone who sins breaks the Law because breaking the Law is sin." (1 John 3:4)



The Old Testament Law given to Moses and further teachings

God's Law given to Moses is good and still important today, especially the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments *and their application in the New Testament.*

Commandment One: WORSHIP GOD ONLY

"I am Yahweh, the Lord your God. Worship no other god." (Exodus 20:2,3) See Matthew 4:10.

Commandment Two: NO IDOLS

"Do not make statues [images, KJV] ... or worship them." (Exodus 20:4-6) See Luke 16:13.

Commandment Three: RESPECT GOD'S NAME

"Do not use the name of the LORD your God in wrong ways." (Exodus 20:7) See Matthew 5:34.

Commandment Four: REMEMBER GOD'S DAY

"Remember the Sabbath day. Keep it holy. Do all your work in six days." (Exodus 20:8-11) See Mark 2:27-28.

Commandment Five: RESPECT YOUR PARENTS

"Respect [honour, KJV] your father and mother, so you will live a long time." (Exodus 20:12) See Matthew 10:37.

Commandment Six: DO NOT KILL ANYONE

"Do not murder." (Exodus 20:13) See Matthew 5:21,22.

Commandment Seven: NO SEXUAL ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE MARRIAGE

"Do not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14) See Matthew 5:28.

Commandment Eight: DO NOT STEAL

"Do not steal." (Exodus 20:15) See Matthew 19:21.

Commandment Nine: DO NOT LIE

"Do not accuse anyone falsely." (Exodus 20:16) See Matthew 12:36.

Commandment Ten: DO NOT ENVY

"Do not wish for anything that belongs to your neighbour." (Exodus 20:17) See Luke 12:15.

Other laws given to Moses *and their importance for today.*

God gave 613 commandments to Moses, called the Torah, and told him to write these down. God repeated some of them to Ezekiel 900 year later and 600 years before the ministry of Jesus Christ on Earth (Ezekiel 18).



The extra teachings added to the Law of Moses by Jesus

Here are some examples:

- The Law says “do not murder” but Jesus also tells us to seek peace.
- The Law says “do not commit adultery” but Jesus also tells us to resist temptation.
- The Law says “a man can divorce” but Jesus tells us to be selfless and build a healthy marriage.
- The Law says “do not break a vow” but Jesus tells us to be truthful at all times.
- The law says “an eye for an eye” but Jesus tells us to be a blessing to others whether they deserve it or not.
- The Law says “hate your enemies” but Jesus tells us to love everyone and help them to stop doing wrong.

Thank you, Jesus, that although the Law says the payment for sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Your sacrifice on the cross as punishment for our sins (Romans 6:23).

We therefore put our trust in Christ and His punishment on the cross in our place (Acts 16:31). Under this renewed covenant, God forgives all who have faith in Christ. This is the Good News Paul preached in Galatia of salvation through Christ alone.

However, false teachers had come into many of the churches in Asia Minor. They encouraged the new believers to keep the traditions of the Pharisees. But if they did this, they could very easily leave the way of faith in Christ and go back to law-keeping (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Paul did not want them to be led astray in this way. He wanted them to know there is no other Gospel than the one he preached. For example, the false teachers said that Christ’s sacrifice was not enough. They said a person must continue to follow all the laws and traditions of Moses and the Pharisees.

Today’s Church of Christ must continue to follow the Ten Commandments as instructed by Jesus Himself. However, we must be careful not to add to or change any teaching or tradition that is not of God. Martin Luther in the 16th century helped establish the Reformation in Europe which was against the teachings and traditions of the Roman church at that time. Luther’s beliefs prepared the way for the Protestant churches of today around the world.

Jesus Himself said, “Repent and believe the Good News...” (Mark 1:15) Believing means having faith in God’s salvation promise, trusting His word and keeping His commands. “The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Those who follow Me will never walk in darkness. They will have the light that leads to life... If you obey [continue in, KJV] My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth and the

truth will set you free.” (John 8:12,31-32) This is God’s renewed covenant with mankind through Jesus our Christ and Messiah.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul explains the full Gospel or Good News of salvation in Christ. Salvation is through faith, not through good words and works, nor through obeying the laws of the Pharisees.

Paul also teaches them to walk in the Spirit and to love one another. They must learn to share the fruits of the Spirit and avoid walking in the old ways and living with their old desires.

Paul wrote to the Galatians a wide range of instructions in holy living and righteousness based on:

- His conversion and calling from God.
- His desire for church unity.
- The danger of falling outside of God’s grace and mercy.
- The righteous lives of believers who live by the Spirit of Christ within.
- The freedom we have in Christ to become more like Him.
- Avoiding church traditions and teachings which hinder faith in Christ.
- Experiencing God’s blessings as we minister to others who have needs.
- Avoiding the sinful attractions of the world and society around us.
- Refusing to grow weary from sharing the love of Christ.



Outline of Galatians for Teachers

1. The Gospel defended (1:1-2:21)
 - given by divine revelation (1:10-24)
 - agreed with by elders in Jerusalem (2:1-10)
 - the reason for rebuking Peter (2:11-21)
2. The Gospel explained (3:1-4:31)
 - the Spirit given by faith, not by works (3:1-5)
 - Abraham justified by faith, not works (3:6-9)
 - justified by faith, not Law (3:10-4:11)
 - blessings received by faith, not by Law (4:12-31)
3. The Gospel applied (5:1-6:18)
 - standing firm in grace (5:1-12)
 - loving one another (5:13-15)
 - walking in the Spirit (5:16-26)
 - the struggle between Spirit and flesh (5:16-18)
 - the works of the flesh (5:19-21)
 - the fruits of the Spirit (5:22-26)
 - bearing each another’s burdens (6:1-5)
 - not growing weary in doing works of love (6:6-10)
4. Conclusions (6:11-18)



Pray about this: We must learn to do what Jesus did, to teach and apply the Old Testament Torah Law given to Moses. But we must also preach the new life in the purpose of God through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross for our salvation. Give thanks for the mercy and grace of God our heavenly Father who knows none of us are perfect enough to meet all the requirements of the Law. This is also the way forward to experience the provision of God's Holy Spirit at work in the lives of believers in love.



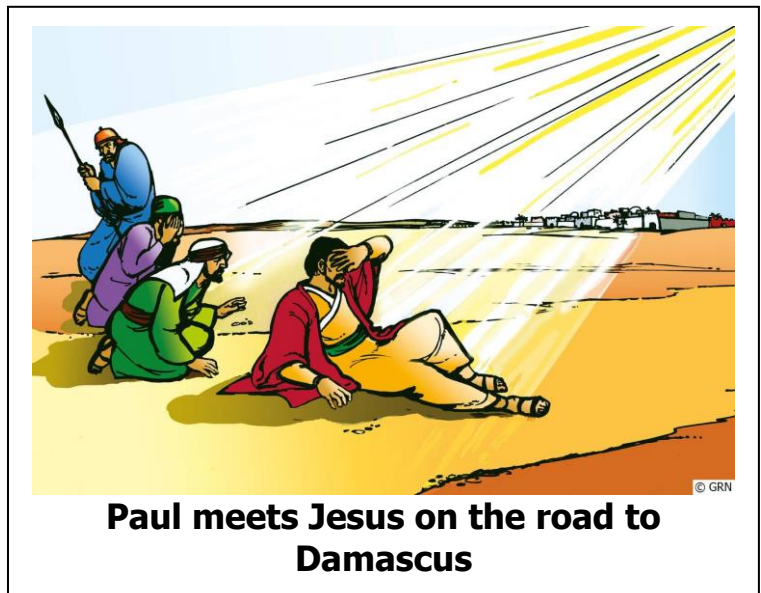
Bible reading: Galatians Chapter 1

PAUL'S MAIN MESSAGE

Paul, a Jew, said he was sent to Galatia not by any man. "I was sent by God the Father and by Jesus Christ... whom God raised from the dead." (1:1) Paul believed that Jesus Himself had called him as an apostle and sent him to preach to the non-Jewish peoples as well as to testify to his fellow Jews. This was indeed a very high calling.

On the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, Paul (called Saul at that time) had a vision of Jesus. He saw and heard Israel's Messiah speak to him. He was left temporarily blind and his friends lead him into the city (Acts 9:1-9).

In another part of Damascus, God spoke to Ananias to go to the house where Saul was staying: "This man (Saul) is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles (non-Jews) and their kings." Ananias went to the house where Paul was staying. He laid hands on him to heal his blindness and bring Holy Spirit power into his life (Acts 9:10-19). 'At once he began to preach in the synagogues, teaching that Jesus is the Son of God.' (Acts 9:20)



Galatia was one of the first places Paul visited when he began his preaching about God's salvation through Christ alone. He went to parts of Galatia on his first missionary journey after visiting Cyprus (Acts 14:6).

Many different people believed in Jesus, and met together in house churches. Paul wrote this letter to these churches in Galatia to teach them what was right. The word 'church' comes from the Greek word 'to assemble' or 'to gather' and refers to the people not to the building. That is why we call all believers 'the Church of Christ' which is 'the Body of Christ' on Earth, whatever our nationality or



Praying together as groups of believers in the Church of Christ

This was practised from the beginning of the New Testament period to invite God to answer:

- They “devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14) to wait on God for the promised Holy Spirit power.
- They met with others during times of persecution (4:23) to share their needs with each other and with God.

They met for worship and thanksgiving together (13:1-2) in hope of understanding their personal callings in spreading the Good News of salvation in Christ alone.

background. It is the same Holy Spirit that is at work in the lives of all Jewish and Gentile believers.

We are all united in the same hope of eternal life when we all trust in the same truth of God and the same Saviour. Paul’s letter was “from all the brothers (and sisters) who are with me” to “all the members of the churches in Galatia.” (Galatians 1:2) He tries to describe the huge importance that the believers he knew at home and overseas were “all one in Christ”. He then sends this blessing as a prayer of faith to each and every reader or listener: “May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.” (1:3) Remember, this is not just from Paul but “from all the brothers (and sisters) who are with me”. He puts himself on the same level as those in his church back in Antioch-in-Syria. In this way he avoids spiritual pride by regarding others as important to God as himself.

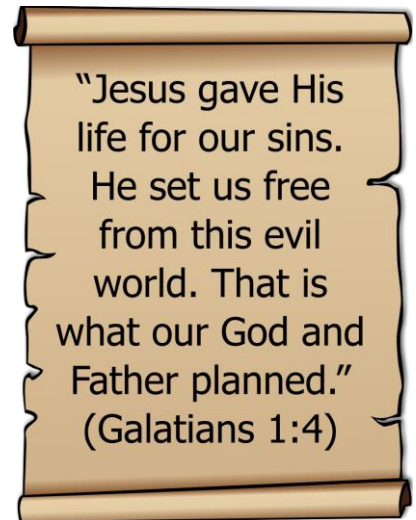
After he was called by Jesus, Paul went out to preach these two great main Bible truths:

1. *Jesus Christ gave Himself up to be punished for our sins, to rescue us from God’s punishment we deserve.* He came and died on the cross because man cannot save himself from being a slave to sin, or through trying to obey the Old Testament laws. Jesus was the perfect Son of God. “Jesus gave his life for our sins to set us free from this evil world.” (Galatians 1:4) All who believe that Christ was punished and died in their place, will be ‘saved’, that is, forgiven and given eternal life (John 5:24; 17:3).



Unity in the Body of Christ whatever the background.

2. *God the Father raised Jesus His Son from death to bring 'resurrection life' to all who believe.* If the body of Jesus had stayed in the grave, we would have no hope. Paul said that many people witnessed the resurrection of Christ, including himself (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Paul believed that "I have been sent by Jesus Christ and by God the Father (to say that) God raised Jesus from the dead." (Galatians 1:1) And because God raised Jesus from the dead, we all have this same hope of eternal life.



"Jesus gave His life for our sins. He set us free from this evil world. That is what our God and Father planned." (Galatians 1:4)

GOD'S WORD IS THE FULL TRUTH

Paul wanted the churches in Galatia to "Give glory to God for ever and ever. Amen." (1:5) But Paul needed to write to them about believing the truth of God in the whole of the Old Testament as well as the teachings of Jesus passed down by the Apostles. Paul heard that some believers had left the full truth and turned to keeping the former traditions (man-made rules and regulations) of some of the Jewish leaders.

"I am amazed. You are so quickly deserting the One who chose you because of the grace that Christ has provided. You are turning to a different 'good news'." (1:6) They heard and believed the Gospel of God's grace and mercy that Christ had provided. God forgave all their sins. But now they were turning to traditions that could not save them and rules that would lead them back into darkness and slavery to sin.

Paul said, "Anyone who preaches a 'good news' that is different from the Good News you accepted [received, KJV] should be rejected by God forever." (1:8) These were severe words used by Paul. We must always think carefully about how we are living in faith as we rejoice in His Good News of salvation through Christ alone.

MANY DID NOT BELIEVE PAUL

Paul asked the Galatians whether they thought he was trying to please God or men (1:10). These believers were a great burden on his heart and mind. He wanted them to hold onto the truth and teach it to others. Then they would become strong in their faith and be a blessing to their neighbours.

Paul had many enemies. Some said he was not a true apostle. They said that the Gospel he preached was his own idea. Paul answered their charges: "I received the Good News from Jesus Christ. He showed it to me [by revelation, KJV]." (1:12) God helped Paul to know the truth. It was revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Himself and His servant Ananias. It was not man-made nor given to him by someone else.

Jesus said that His followers would know the truth when the Holy Spirit came upon them. He told His disciples, "He (the Holy Spirit) will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you." (John 16:14) The disciples waited for this promise in an upper room in Jerusalem. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:2-4).

When God's Spirit filled their lives, He gave them power to be Christ's witnesses in the world (Acts 1:8). He also opened their minds to understand the full truth of God. Paul received this same Holy Spirit power through the prayer and laying on of hands by Ananias whilst in Damascus.

GOD'S PLAN FOR PAUL'S LIFE

"You have heard of my earlier way of life as a Jew. With all my strength I attacked [persecuted, KJV] the church of God. I tried to destroy it. I was moving ahead in my Jewish way of life. I went beyond many Jews who were my own age. I held firmly to the teachings passed down by my people. But God set me apart from the time I was born. He showed me His grace by appointing me. He was pleased to show his Son (at work) in my life. He wanted me to preach about Jesus among those who are not Jews." (Galatians 1:13-16)

God led Paul at that time to a faraway place in the desert of Arabia. He went there to be alone with God and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit explaining to him God's truth from the Old Testament. He also began to experience the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim salvation through faith in the risen Christ. He said he did not go up to Jerusalem for three years where the leaders of the new Christian Church lived (1:17-18).

Whilst in Jerusalem, "I stayed with Peter for 15 days to get to know him. I did not see any of the other apostles, only James, the Lord's brother." (1:18-19) James was the church leader in Jerusalem.

"The churches in Judea did not know me in a personal way. They only heard others say, 'The man who used to attack us has changed. He is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they praised God because of me." (1:22-24)



Talk about this:

1. What are the first things that Paul wanted to remind the church members in Galatia (1:1)?
2. Describe how Paul avoided spiritual pride in his high calling to preach the Good News (1:2).
3. What was Paul's main message for the Galatians (1:4)?
4. What did Paul want for the believers (1:3)? What did he want for God (1:5)?
5. What were the things in Paul's life that proved he was an apostle (1:11-24)?



Think about this: Which part of Paul's message do you think God is inviting you to share with others (1:1,4 or 5)? What things in your life are giving glory to God? Are you careful to keep to the full truth about salvation through faith in Christ alone (1:7-8)? Can you, as Paul, live in God's grace and walk in the

power of the Holy Spirit for the rest of your life. Can you, as Paul, avoid hindrance by your sinful past life?



Pray about this: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for the many examples in Scripture that testify of Your faithfulness for those who put their trust in You and in Your Son our Saviour. Thank you that for those who do this, we “do not lose the grace of God”. Forgive us and our nation if we accept priests, ministers, teachers and leaders who are unbiblical. Thank You that the Bible is the only source of truth and help for today and hope for tomorrow. Amen.



Bible reading: Galatians Chapter 2

PAUL VISITED JERUSALEM

When Paul received Christ as his Saviour, he began to witness for God (Acts 1:8). He shared his belief and personal experience that Jesus is the Son of God and is Christ the Messiah (Acts 9:20,22). However, he also ‘waited on God’ and studied the Scriptures. He studied God’s word afresh with a newly opened mind. The Holy Spirit showed him special truths. Paul called this ‘a revelation’ from Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 1:12).

Paul had studied the Old Testament Scriptures under the great teacher, Gamaliel, but his eyes were blind to the full truth. Now his mind and heart were open so that God was able to show him truth he could not see before. In this way, the Holy Spirit guided Paul to his life’s work of preaching the Good News of salvation through Christ alone.

“Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem.” He went with Barnabas and Titus (2:1). They took a gift of money, collected by the new churches they had established, for the needy believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). Paul had learned to be obedient to God. “I went because God showed me what He wanted me to do. I told the people there the Good News that I preach among those who are not Jews.” (2:2)

The apostles Peter and John were leaders of the Church in Jerusalem under James. They received Paul as a brother in the Lord but wanted to be sure they trusted what he was preaching. When he told them, they agreed that it was not a different Gospel to the faith delivered to the Church. They also agreed that what the false teachers had taught was not true. “We wanted the truth of the Good News to remain with you.” (2:5)

“They saw that I had been trusted with the task of preaching the Good News just as Peter had been. But my task was to preach to the non-Jews. Peter’s task was to preach to the Jews. God was working through Peter as an apostle to the Jews. He was also working through me as an apostle to the non-Jews.” (2:7-8)

“James, Peter and John were considered to be ‘pillars’ in the church. They recognized the special grace that was given to me. So they shook my hand and the hand of Barnabas. They wanted to show they accepted us. They agreed that we should (continue to) go to the non-Jews. They would go to the Jews.” (2:9)

Many others accepted this calling of God in Paul's life. However, Paul, who at first persecuted true believers, was himself persecuted at times by those who could not or would not accept his calling!

Gradually, the separate ministries of the apostles became clear but they all agreed on one important thing: to continue to remember the needs of the poor. The church leaders then asked Paul to make sure that he and his helpers cared for the poor believers in the churches in Jerusalem. "It was the very thing I was eager to do." (2:10) Paul agreed to encourage this ministry for needy believers everywhere he went. So the New Testament believers began to care for their widows, orphans and poor people in the villages, towns and cities where they lived. This was in addition to sending gifts to the poorest believers in Jerusalem some of whom had lost their jobs because of their faith.

Thus there was agreement and unity among the leaders despite big differences in God's calling to each person.

PAUL TOLD PETER HE WAS WRONG

Back home in Antioch-in-Syria, the apostle Peter came to where Paul was living. When others arrived from Jerusalem, Peter refused to be seen eating with the Gentile Christians in that city (2:12). He feared the group that was led by James. They kept to the traditions of the Jewish elders. They belonged to the 'circumcision group' who said that all believers must be circumcised. Circumcision was the sign that God gave to Abraham, which was part of the old covenant.

Paul wrote, "Peter's actions were not honest. Even Barnabas was led down the wrong path. I saw what they were doing. It did not agree with the truth of the Good News. So I spoke to Peter in front of them all... 'Why do you force non-Jews to follow Jewish ways?'" (2:13-14)

"We who are Jews by birth... know that no-one is made fully right with God by obeying the Law of Moses. It is by believing in Jesus Christ. So we Jewish believers have also put our faith [belief, KJV] in Christ Jesus. That is so we can be made right with God by believing in Christ, not by obeying the Law. No-one can be made right with God just by obeying the Law." (2:15-16)

When Paul spoke to Peter in this way, God opened his eyes. God showed him that a man is saved by faith alone (2:16). Peter was sorry for doing wrong to his Gentile brothers. Paul was careful to teach these new believers that Jewish traditions were not the full Gospel of Christ. They would be judged by God (1:6,9). In Christ, we are freed from religious traditions.

Paul writes later, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (3:28)

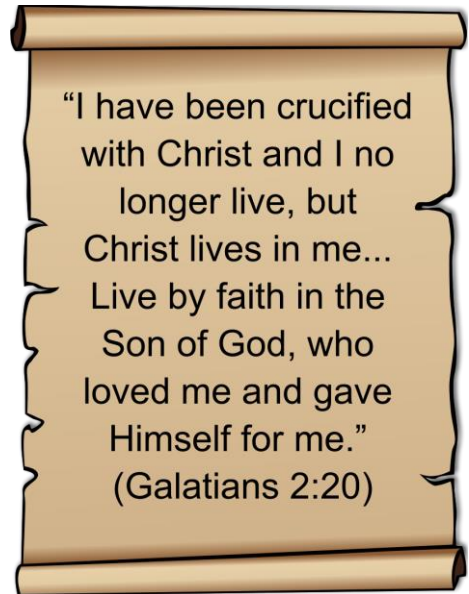
JUSTIFIED IN CHRIST

In his old life, Paul had worked hard to keep the Law but, like others, often failed. Now he trusted Christ alone to forgive his sins (Romans 7:14-25). Faith in Christ alone justifies, or makes a man right in God's sight. "We too have put our faith in

Christ Jesus," Paul said, "that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the Law..." Christians are made right (justified) by faith alone. They certainly do not need man-made laws and traditions in addition to their faith. They need only to obey the commandments given to Moses which Christ Himself taught and fulfilled and trust in God for salvation in His Son Jesus the Christ.

Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ. My old life no longer lives. Christ lives in me. My faith in the Son of God helps me to live my life in my body. He loved me. He gave Himself for me. What if a person could become right with God by obeying the Law? Then Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:20-21)

Paul lived his new life by the power of Christ's Spirit in him. All followers of Christ have His life living in them. To go back to religious traditions and laws would be to set aside the grace of God that had brought them salvation through Christ.



Talk about this:

1. Why did Paul return to Jerusalem several years after meeting Jesus (2:1-2)?
2. What did Paul agree with the leaders (2:9)?
3. What did Paul agree to do (2:10)? What was the result?
4. Why did Paul say that Peter was wrong soon after that time (2:11-14)?
5. What was Paul's declaration of truth to the Jewish believers (2:16)?
6. Describe Paul's personal faith (2:19-20).



Think about this: What traditions and religious views risked causing division in the church at the time of Paul? What traditions and religious views cause division today? How did Paul uphold the guidance of the church leaders in Jerusalem? How did he uphold the calling given to him by Jesus? Why is it important to seek unity with the ministry of others? How do we go forward in unity when our callings are very different?



Pray about this: Lord Jesus, help me to be caring (and patient) with other believers whilst pushing forward in the ministry of my calling. Help me to maintain unity among believers. Thank You Father God for Paul's understanding of the renewed covenant of God for all who put their trust in Israel's Messiah. Dear heavenly Father, thank you for the many examples in Scripture that testify of Your faithfulness for those who put their trust in You and in Your Son our Saviour. Forgive us and our nation when we copy man-made laws. Forgive us if we appoint priests and leaders who do not teach Bible truth or the full Gospel.



Bible reading: Galatians Chapter 3

"YOU FOOLISH GALATIANS"

Paul called the believers who followed false teachers "foolish". They believed that Christ had died for them, but now they were like blind people who could not see the truth. "When I preached, I clearly showed you how and why Jesus Christ had been nailed to the cross." (3:1)

When they believed in Jesus, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul asks them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the Law? Or did you receive the Spirit by [faith, KJV] believing the Good News you heard?" (3:2) Would they go back to that time before the Holy Spirit came from Heaven? Would they deny the Holy Spirit's work in their lives? "Are you so foolish? You began with the Holy Spirit. Are you now trying to complete God's work in you by your own strength?" (3:3)

Paul then asked, "Why does God give you His Spirit? Why does He work miracles among you? Is it because you do what the Law says?" Paul wanted them to agree with him that "it is because you believe what you have heard" from the beginning about salvation in Christ alone (3:5). He knew we cannot begin with the Holy Spirit (by being born again through Christ's work on the cross) and then continue to live in our own strength (by the Law given to Moses and other laws added by some religious leaders).

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

"Think about Abraham..." Paul told them. "Abraham believed God. God accepted Abraham because he believed. So his faith made him right with God." (3:6; Genesis 15:6) Paul says, "Those who have faith are children of Abraham." (3:7) God promised Abraham, "All nations will be blessed through you." (3:8; Genesis 12:3) God gave him this promise before He told Abraham to circumcise all the males in his house. (Genesis 17:10) The promise of God's blessing came first and the 'law of circumcision' came 13 years later.

Abraham's faith in God made him fit for Heaven, so that all those who believe can be called children of Abraham (3:7). In the same way, God said He would bless the Gentiles and make them children of Abraham by faith. Through Israel's Messiah, He would forgive them as if they had never sinned. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus. He warned the Jewish leaders, "Produce fruit that shows you have turned away from your sins. Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father and we are his children.' I tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham even from these stones." (Matthew 3:8-9)

It is faith in Christ that gives us everlasting life with Abraham (John 5:24). Paul also knew through Scripture that "God would make non-Jews (Gentiles) right with himself by believing in Him." (Galatians 3:8) God told Abraham this will happen. "All nations will be blessed by you." (Genesis 22:18)

Paul knew that "all who depend on obeying the Law are under a curse. For it is written, 'Anyone who does not obey the Book of the Law is under God's curse.'" (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26) Therefore, those believers in Christ who trust in the Law for their salvation come under God's judgment. However, those who are justified (made right with God) by faith, go forward in their faith in Jesus to eternal life with Him. The Law of Moses (Torah) is then written on their hearts with the Spirit of God as their teacher. They are set apart to be God's own people. They are made righteous by the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. And He teaches us how to obey God's will. Jesus promised His followers that this ministry of the Holy Spirit would follow his sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

God found fault with the people of Israel because they could not keep His Law (Hebrews 8:9). So He said, "A new day is coming. I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel." (Jeremiah 31:31) The Law made it clear that, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The Law could not make a man justified (right) before God. The Law is perfect but everyone who chooses to live by the Law will be judged by the Law. (Romans 2:22) However, Faith in the salvation of Christ alone enables true believers to obey God through the promised work of His Holy Spirit within.

Scripture promised, "Those who are right with God will live by faith." (Habakkuk 2:4) Christ set us free from the curse of the Law. He died as a criminal, hanging on a Roman cross. He took our punishment in His own body. Jesus did this so that we might all receive the promise of the Holy Spirit for us all by believing in Christ!" (Galatians 3:13)

"Christ Jesus set us free so that the blessing given to Abraham would come to non-Jews through Him. He did it so that all might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ" (3:14)

GOD'S PROMISE IS FOR US ALL TO ENJOY

Paul wrote, "The promises were given to Abraham. They were also given to his seed. It does not say, 'seeds' which means many people. It says, 'seed' which means one person. And that one person is Christ... The Law came 430 years after this promise. But the Law does not remove God's covenant and promise. The covenant had already been made by God. So the Law does not do away with the promise. The great gift that God has for us does not depend on the Law... God gave it to Abraham as a free gift through a promise... The Law was added because of human sin. And it was supposed to control us until the promised seed [Jesus the Christ or Messiah] had come." (Galatians 3:15-19)

Therefore, the Law was given to show God's people their sinfulness when they had failed to obey God's will.

The future blessing God promised to Abraham through his 'seed' was for everyone. All the prophets said that the blessing would come through 'the seed of Abraham'. This blessing remains for all to enjoy now. Paul wrote elsewhere, "Now is the time of God's favour (blessing). Now is the day of God's salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2) He knew this truth better than anyone. He proved for himself

that the promise of God to Abraham referred to salvation in Christ alone. This is for all who believe He is the Son of God.

On three long missionary journeys, Paul preached 'Jesus Christ and the resurrection' to both Gentiles and Jews (Acts 17:18). Many Gentiles as well as Jews believed in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon those believers as He had on the Jewish disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:4; 10:44-45).

Paul reported this blessing for the Gentiles to the leaders in Jerusalem. James, the brother of Jesus, said, "The words of the prophets are in agreement with this." (Acts 15:15) James took the words of the prophet Amos and used them to speak of the blessings of Abraham coming to Gentiles who believed in Israel's Messiah (Amos 9:11-12). The blessing that James spoke of was that Gentiles could be children of God and equal with God's people, Israel. All new believers are 'citizens of a new community' and come to God out of every nation.

Paul says that "the whole world was a prisoner because of sin... what was promised [to Abraham] was given to those who believe the promise through faith in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 3:22) "Before faith in Christ came... the Law was put in charge. He came so that we might be made right with God by believing in Him. But now faith in Christ has come." (3:23-25) Christ was without sin. He did what man could not do. He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice. God would not accept sacrifices that were not perfect. Only a perfect sacrifice could be offered to God to pay for mankind's sin.

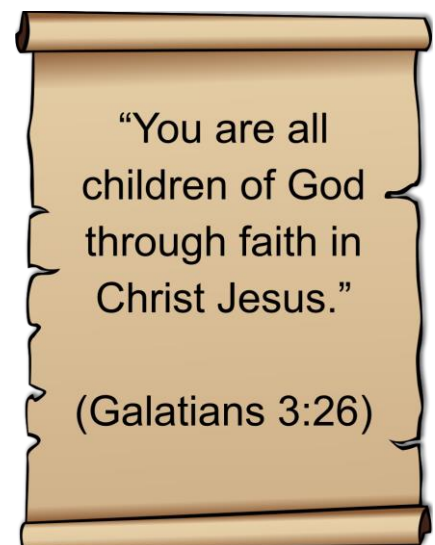
WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH FAITH

Galatians 3:26 to 4:7 includes Paul's famous words that children of God are no longer slaves to their old ways. "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (3:26)

"All of you were baptized into Christ... There is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free person. There is no male or female. Because you belong to Christ Jesus, you are all one. You who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed. You will receive [as heirs, KJV] what God has promised." (3:27-29) We are all one in Christ Jesus. This is a good reason for loving our Creator, especially since He first loved us!

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit first came upon the eleven disciples and followers of Jesus. Peter told the crowds of Jews from many parts of the world, "Repent and be baptised..." Those who believed and wanted to follow Christ were baptised in the name of their Messiah, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Baptism showed that they had given up their old life to follow Jesus.

Water baptism was an ancient Jewish sign of cleansing. For new believers, baptism was more than a sign. The act of being baptised is a witness to the world,



confirming our salvation for eternity. People watching know that the baptised person going under the water is a new believer in Christ. Their act of baptism is a way of showing everyone they are a follower of Jesus. They have faith to believe they are a child of God.

As children of God, the Galatian Christians called God 'Abba, Father' (Galatians 4:6). They heard His voice whisper in their hearts, "You are a child of God". They could use Christ's name when they prayed. They could also touch the sick in His name and cast out demons (Luke 9:1; John 16:24).

They were 'one in Christ' and one family. God does not see His children as Greek or Roman, Jew or Gentile, man or woman. In Heaven's book their names are written down as 'children of God' (1 John 3:1).



Talk about this:

1. How did the new believers receive the Holy Spirit (3:2,5,14)?
2. God promised to bless Abraham with a seed. What or who was this seed (3:16)?
3. Why did God give the Law (3:19)?
4. What were believers baptised into (3:27)?
5. What is Paul's teaching based on that gives unity among all believers (3:28)?



Think about this: How do we avoid the "foolish" laws and traditions of some of our religious leaders? How does God fulfil His promise to Abraham to bless the world today? Do we have the same love for Israel that prompted God to enable us all to become "children of Abraham"? What does public baptism by immersion witness to others?



Pray about this: Father God help us truly believe that faith in Christ alone brings freedom from the everlasting punishment we deserve and gives us eternal life with Him! We thank You for the Holy Spirit and freedom we have in Christ to worship You which He promised after taking the punishment for our sins. Help us to fulfil your promise made to Abraham centuries before to bless all nations. We thank You Father for the everlasting salvation promised in Your word and fulfilled through faith in Jesus Christ. Thank You for making us part of Your worldwide family on Earth. Make us faithful and loving disciples of Jesus to encourage others to become family members! Lord, help us to value other believers whatever their background. Help us to work with them in unity and in love and resist the temptation to control them or be controlled by them. Help us to be a blessing not only to our family and relatives but also to the whole family of God. Save us from following the foolish ideas of mankind.



Bible reading: Galatians Chapter 4

WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD (continued)

At the time of Paul, a son had no rights to his father's estate until he was an adult. While he was growing up, he was no better off than a slave or servant in the house, although he might one day own the whole estate (4:1).

Paul reminds his readers that before Jesus came, the people of Israel were like children. They knew something of God's grace, but much was hidden from them. They were under the care of parents, guardians, prophets and priests (4:2-3). This continued in this way until the right time decided by our heavenly Father.

"But when the right time came, God sent his Son. A Jewish virgin gave birth to Him and He was born under the authority of the Law of Moses. He came to set free those who were under the Law. He wanted us to be adopted as God's children with all the rights that children have to be free." (4:4)

Jesus came to give us the full rights of children of God (4:5). "Because we are now His children, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. He is the Holy Spirit." (4:6) "So you are no longer slaves. You are God's children. Because you are His children, He gives you what He promised to give His people." (4:7)

Those who walked with God in ages past had enjoyed many blessings as they obeyed His commands. But they were not given the promised position of sons and daughters in full fellowship with the Father. Now they could be heirs (sons and daughters) of God and co-heirs with Christ in all His glory (Romans 8:16-17). The Holy Spirit thus brought to Christ's Church the full inheritance promised to Abraham. Peter confirmed this news on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-39). Now the Holy Spirit comes to every believer when or soon after they are saved.

Some Christians in the Galatian church were weak in their faith. They were held back by trusting in man-made laws and traditions. Paul said, "At one time you did not know God... But now you know God. Even better, God knows you!" (Galatians 4:8-9) However, Paul was afraid that they would go back to their old religious ways before they knew the salvation of Christ and His fulfilment of God's laws and promises in their lives (4:10-11).

"WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR JOY FOR ME?"

Paul then appeals to the Galatian believers, "Become like me!" (4:12) He then thinks back to the time when he first knew them. "You welcomed me as if I were an angel of God. You welcomed me as if I were Christ Jesus Himself." (4:14)

Paul briefly mentions how ill he was at the time. "As you know, it was because I was sick that I first preached the Good News to you." (4:13) The Galatian church at that time would do anything to support him. But now Paul asks them, "What has happened to all your joy? You were ready to 'tear out your eyes' and give them to me!" (4:15) That was a common way to say that they would gladly suffer anything for Paul. Had they forgotten this? "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" he asks (4:16).

Paul knew that certain people “want to take you away from us. They want you to commit yourselves to them. It is good to be committed to something if the purpose is good.” (4:17-18) But Paul was not happy! He wanted them to understand that “I am afraid for you” (4:11).

Also he said, “My dear children, I am in pain for you. I have pain like a woman giving birth. And my pain will continue until Christ makes you like Himself. I wish I could be with you now. And I wish I could change the tone of my voice.” (4:19-20) Paul longed to be with his former flock. He was worried and fearful for them. He wanted them to live by faith and not by trusting in their own way of doing things or following false teachings.

THE EXAMPLE OF HAGAR AND SARAH

Jews honour Abraham because he is their ancestor. Their nation began with Abraham’s family through his son Isaac who was born to His wife Sarah. However, Paul used the story of Abraham and his son Ishmael, who was born before Isaac to a different woman (4:22).

Abraham and Sarah had faith in the living God. But after many childless years, Sarah could not wait any longer for God’s promised son. She persuaded Abraham to have a child by her maid, the slave woman Hagar. This was a common local custom at that time. Sadly, Abraham agreed and Hagar had a son called Ishmael. This was several years before Isaac was born to Sarah as God promised. Paul said that this was an example of the difference between living under customs or traditions and living by faith in God.

Sarah decided she was too old to have children, but God kept His promise and blessed them with a miracle baby. Isaac was therefore the son of God’s promise (Genesis 21:1-6; Romans 4:18-22). Paul explains this to the Galatian believers who were also tempted to follow local customs and traditions.


Paul reminds his readers, “Abraham had two sons. The slave woman gave birth to one of them, Ishmael. The free woman gave birth to the other one, Isaac. Abraham's son by the slave woman was born in the natural way. But his son by the free woman was born in a miraculous way because of God's promise.” (Galatians 4:22-23) Isaac was therefore born in fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 21:1-3). Paul said, “Those things can be taken as examples.” (Galatians 4:24)

Paul then briefly mentions that Hagar was like Jerusalem at that time (4:25). Many of the leaders in Jerusalem were not following the Law given to Moses but their own laws and teachings. It was from Jerusalem that the false teachers had come to Galatia. They were trying to turn the believers in the church to slaves of their own false customs and religion. Paul said they were like the son of Hagar the slave woman and his descendants.

Paul continued, “Brothers and sisters, you are God’s children because of God's promise, just as Isaac was. But at that time, the son born to the slave woman tried to hurt [persecute, KJV] the son who was born to Sarah.” (4:28-29)

When he grew up, Ishmael mocked Isaac. Many generations later, persecution by the descendants of Ishmael still happens to the descendants of Isaac and all who are adopted into the family of Abraham. However, Paul proclaimed, "Brothers and sisters, we are the free woman's children." (4:31) We must think of ourselves as children of faith in God and His purposes and provision.

This is the foundation for the renewed covenant of God through Christ our Saviour promised to Abraham and his descendants. This happened first through Isaac then through Jacob (called Israel). By the gift and grace of God, all who have faith in Israel's Messiah are "children of God's promise to the free woman", Abraham's first wife Sarah.

 SARAH's son	HAGAR's son
Isaac	Ishmael
son of a free woman	son of a slave woman
son of God's promise	son of local customs
persecuted	persecutor



Talk about this:

1. Who and what keeps men and women bound in darkness (4:3,8)?
2. How do you stop being slaves to sin (4:9)?
3. How and why could Paul say, "Be as I am" (4:12)?
4. What did Paul mean when he said that true believers are "children of God's promise to the free woman" (4:28,31)?



Talk about this: What do verses 4 to 7 mean to you regarding your covenant relationship with God? Is there anything in your life that worries your spiritual parents or mentors and hinders their joy for you? What does it mean to you to be a spiritual descendant of Abraham and Isaac?



Pray about this: Thank You Father God for the written records of Moses and Paul which help confirm our amazing inheritance. We are Your adopted children through Your promises to Abraham and Isaac and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah. Thank You God for this reminder of Your provision for the families of all true believers who are born into Abraham's family. We believe this happened through Sarah, and also Ruth, then King David's family and finally through their promised Messiah, Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ, born to Mary. Amazing! Hallelujah!



Bible reading: Galatians Chapter 5

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

"Christ has set us free. He wants us to enjoy spiritual freedom. So stand firm and do not let the chains of slavery hold you again!" (5:1)

- Jesus Christ has set us free from local customs or man-made religious laws and traditions.
- Christ has fulfilled the requirements of the Law given to Moses by suffering the punishment we deserve.
- We are now free to grow up into the full nature of Christ through faith in His sacrifice on our behalf.
- His resurrection from death has also brought us His promised Holy Spirit power.

Through His death, resurrection and promised Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ has set us free from the curse of failing to fulfil the requirements of the holy Law of Moses.

Paul wants his readers to stand firm in this promised freedom. Hold on to it! "As God's children, we will receive all that He has for us. We will share what Christ receives. But we must also share in His sufferings if we want to share in His glory." (Romans 8:17) Do not let your freedom in Christ be hindered by old sins or habits or traditions or local customs. Live free of guilt!

Paul then gives advice to the Gentile believers. "Do not let yourselves be circumcised. If you do, Christ will not be of any value to you. I say it again. Every man who lets himself be circumcised must obey the whole Law. And some of you are now trying to be made right with God just by obeying the Law." (Galatians 5:2-4)

Paul knew that if they continued to put their trust in God's righteous Law in their own strength, they would fail. They would also lose the freedom of salvation in Christ. It would result in rejecting His sacrifice for their sins.

However, as a devout Jew, Paul knew the importance of God's Law given to Moses. We need to understand God's truth He teaches us under the Old Testament covenant. We need to read it, understand it, and prove just how much we fail to live holy lives in obedience to God's Law. Both Jews and Gentiles need to prove just how much we need the Good News of God's salvation in Christ Jesus to meet the requirements of the Law of Moses today.

Our hope is to be made completely holy. Paul says we can expect this to happen "because of our faith in Christ. And through the promised Holy Spirit we wait in hope." (5:5)

Circumcision and obedience to the Law is nothing compared to faith in Christ. The most important thing is to have "faith that shows itself through love." (5:6) Paul believed that 'circumcision of the heart' is more important than circumcision of the body (Romans 2:29). This is why Paul advised Gentiles to reject circumcision in the flesh as a requirement of salvation.

"YOU WERE RUNNING A GOOD RACE!"

The Christian life is like a race. Every runner has a 'running lane' marked out for him or her (1 Corinthians 9:24-26). "You were running a good race!" Paul told the Galatians. "Who kept you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7) Paul saw false teachers breaking into the Christian's 'running lane' and holding them back. Some

Christians even stopped running, which is like turning away from seeking and obeying God's truth. We must always remember that "the One who chose you does not keep you from obeying the truth." (5:8)

Paul then wrote, "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." (5:9) By this, Paul means that false teaching behaves like yeast. If it is not removed, it spreads quickly. So when we hear about new ideas, we always need to know the full truth. The Scriptures tell us to test what we hear. The apostle John warned, "Do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world." (1 John 4:1)

Paul was certain "that you will not think in any other way." (5:10) Preaching the 'cross of Christ' was not easy. Paul had suffered much for following the way of the cross of Jesus. But if he turned back to teaching Law instead of preaching salvation through the cross, then the 'way of the cross' would lose its power over sin (5:11). This is why he believed that Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised in the flesh.

Paul had nothing good to say about "the Jewish troublemakers who wanted to force Gentiles to be circumcised" like themselves (5:12). He was equally unhappy about those who taught a different 'Good News' based on man-made laws and traditions (1:6-7).

"YOU WERE CHOSEN TO BE FREE"

Paul had already made it clear in Chapter 4 that followers of Jesus are God's children. They are born into freedom, not slavery. Now he gives a different warning to the Galatian church. "My brothers and sisters, you were chosen to be free. But do not use your freedom as an excuse to live in sin." (5:13) Christians are free from slavery to God's holy Law but we are not free to ignore God's Law. We must choose to live holy lives through Christ's Spirit at work within us who writes God's Law on our hearts and minds.

Jesus said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.' This is the first and most important commandment. And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' Everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets is based on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40) This is why Paul adds the words "serve others in love" to Galatians 5:13. He also quotes more words of the Law approved by Jesus, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." (5:14; Leviticus 19:18)

This means that we are not free to do whatever we please. We have been 'chosen to be free' to love each other as servants of Christ. His sacrificial love at work within us enables us to obey the instructions of Jesus and love others. Christ has fulfilled the purpose of God's Law through us His children. We are 'chosen to be free' to do this. No-one else can love as Jesus can! But our love for others is through His Spirit at work within us.

Paul then warns us to stop upsetting and criticising others as in Isaiah 58:9. "Watch out! You might destroy each other." (Galatians 5:15) Do not hinder the Spirit of Christ at work in you!

LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

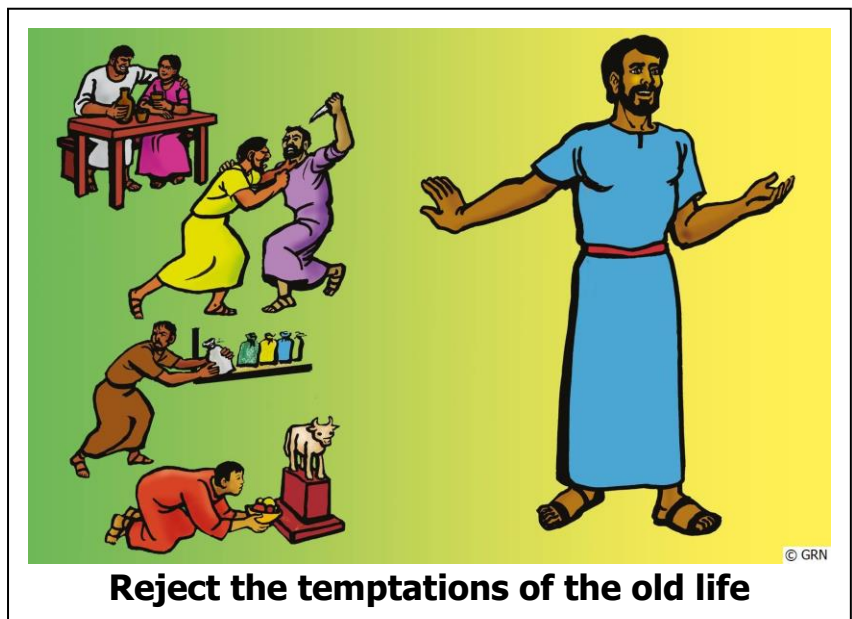
"Live by [walk in, KJV] the Spirit," Paul says. "Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do." (5:16) Let the Spirit work freely in your whole life. You can then depend on His power to keep you from sin. He will also help you and guide you, whatever your needs or the needs of others around you.

Paul explains, "The sinful nature does not want what the Spirit delights in. And the Spirit does not want what the sinful nature delights in. The two are at war with each other." (5:17) But we will find that the more room we give to the Holy Spirit in our lives, the less we will want our old nature in us. Halleluiah!

The old life still tries to rule us. We cannot fully get rid of our old nature. What we must do is allow the Holy Spirit into our lives more and more. Then ask God to make us more and more aware of His power, peace, wisdom and love. Ask Him to show you the little things and the big things that are happening in your new life. If you are led by the Holy Spirit you will fulfil God's Law without falling short of its commands (5:18). Neither will you yield to man-made religious laws and traditions or the temptations of the society we live in.

THE SINS OF THE OLD LIFE

The sins of the old life are plain for all to see. Paul makes a list of some of them (5:19-21). These include sins that are deep down inside our minds where no-one can see them. For example, sexual sins, unholy living, worshipping gods and evil spirits, hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, causing trouble and division, envying what others have, drunkenness and wild parties and many other things. "People who live like that will not enter [inherit, KJV] the Kingdom of God." (5:21) We must pray to avoid yielding to temptation and for others to do the same.



Paul warns us about many "old" sins we are all familiar with today. He also warns against trusting in old or new religious traditions and teachings which hinder our trust in God and salvation through Christ. Paul and his faithful friends promised to pray for the



Intercession: Prayers by and for the New Testament church

Today, our new life in Christ is tested more strongly than ever. So we must continue to pray for ourselves. Also to pray with others for our church as well as our nation. Pray in faith that Jesus will hear our prayers to seek Father God's mercy for forgiveness. Ask for His willingness to destroy the wicked control Satan has over some of our national leaders and church fellowships. When God reveals to us what is wrong, we must pray urgently to Jesus for His righteousness and deliverance. This is called 'intercession'. An 'intercessor' is someone who prays to help others or to forgive them or to invite God's touch on their lives. Intercessors are loving and kind and are even prepared to suffer for others. Our Lord and Saviour is our example. He prayed to His Father in Heaven for His followers and suffered much for them. He continues to 'intercede' in Heaven for His followers today (Hebrews 7:25).

The Holy Spirit also joins with us in intercession. Why? To prepare the way in these times of great trouble before Christ's returns to establish His Kingdom on Earth. We must therefore pray for the New Testament church to speak out against those who deny God and who fail to teach children the Bible truth from Genesis to Revelation. We must also preach and witness the purpose of God in creation and in marriage at a time when evolution is taught and marriage is not taken seriously. Also, we must pray against the use of drugs which is increasing, as are modern forms of slavery and immoral sexual behaviour. Pray for boldness in teaching Bible truth and preaching faithfully the Good News of salvation in Christ alone, even under threat of persecution. Jesus prays for his followers: "I do not pray that You will take them out of the world. I pray that You will keep them safe from the evil one." (John 17:15) Let us unite with Christ in prayer!

The 'ministry of intercession' requires understanding of God's warnings to us all as well as His love for us all. When we ask for mercy we do not deserve we must be ready to experience shame in repentance. Remember He is a God of justice, patience and compassion, longing to show mercy but also judgement on all things evil. This may include withdrawal of His protection from nations that publicly reject Christ. We must also keep in mind as we pray for others, the need to bring glory to God in all we say and do. Also remember that God allows Satan and his demons certain powers of freedom. Therefore, always seek advice when involved in spiritual warfare of any kind. As true believers, we are in a battle when we pray in the power of the Spirit! Therefore, learn how to protect yourself from the enemy (Ephesians 6) and pray in a group with others to limit Satan's works of evil.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what is right. Also when people make fun of you because of Me. Also when they tell all sorts of evil lies about you because of Me." (Matthew 5:10-11) This hatred can come from national leaders or local authorities and organisations. It can come from anti-Christian or anti-Jewish groups. Also from friends and family members who do not share our faith. Pray with the love and power of the Holy Spirit for Christ to intercede.

churches in Galatia. They wanted them to fully understand the purposes of God in the Old Testament scriptures and to enter fully into His new covenant based on the teachings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul reminded the believers to rejoice in the grace and mercy of God for their salvation through His Son. We too should follow Paul and his friends by praying for fellow believers to receive the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to overcome sins old and new within the church or country we live in.

The Holy Spirit gives us a new nature which says, 'No!' to sin. However, the old nature fights against our new nature. We can never fully win this war between our two natures in this world. But we must continue to ask the Holy Spirit to overcome in the name of Jesus. This enables Christ's victory on the cross to bring His wonderful resurrection power into our lives.

The old nature can take control when the Holy Spirit is ignored or not made welcome. This is why Paul wrote elsewhere, "Do not make God's Holy Spirit sad." (Ephesians 4:30) Remember that Satan seeks to control us but God's Holy Spirit does not. Instead, through the mercy of God and the sacrifice of His Son, we are free to choose to follow the new life under the new covenant and reject the old life of sin. God does not want to control us. He wants us to use the freedom we have in Christ to choose to do what is right. James warned us "Stand up to [resist, KJV] the devil, and he will run away [flee, KJV] from you." (James 4:7) Therefore, choose to submit to God!

The mercy of God's forgiveness of sins through Christ also covers innocent sins, as with Paul's former life in Jerusalem. He was a devout Jew and thought he was right to persecute those who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. But after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul prayed to God Almighty as never before! He had worshipped and prayed to God the Father daily all his life. But until he met Jesus, he had never prayed to God's Son to seek His forgiveness and filling of the Holy Spirit in his life. This was a new experience for Paul (Acts 9:5-12).

Paul in his old life was therefore guilty of praying regularly to God the Father and failing to worship God the Son, Israel's Messiah. Are we also guilty of praying regularly to God the Father and failing to worship God the Son, our Saviour? God has given us the freedom to pray to Him through His Son! Include Jesus in your prayer life then your daily worship of God will lead to more and more personal experiences of His Son and His Spirit in your life. Also in your ministry of love and Holy Spirit power to others.

The Galatian Christians had stopped worshipping heathen gods and practising witchcraft, but Paul knew that it would be tempting for them to go back to it. Their neighbours did it and when they worshipped demon spirits they often used drugs to put them into a trance. Some of their friends probably still had drugs and they would be tempted to use them.

God said these same sins will be common in the last days (Revelation 9:21). Along with occult practices, Paul listed many social sins which have attracted and divided Christian families to this day.

The fruits of the old nature are clearly seen (Matthew 7:15-16).

THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The fruit of God's Spirit living in us is also clearly seen. Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit. Love comes first. All the others flow from God's love at work in us (Galatians 5:22-23). Spend time each day with Jesus, to experience the spiritual gifts He has given: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The Holy Spirit is God Himself. He is the Breath of God and the Breath of Life (Genesis 2:7). He is loving, perfect in patience and kindness, goodness and faithfulness. He is gentle and full of grace. He is the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is why Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to all who believed in Him. He sent His Spirit at Pentecost after His resurrection and return to Heaven. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruits in our lives as we allow Him to work in us and all who believe. This is the purpose and provision of God to build His church, the Body on Earth of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit gives us gifts of God's grace because of His love and mercy. We can have more of God's grace if we let His Holy Spirit have more of us and put our old life behind us. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have 'crucified' their old life with its passions and desires. "They have nailed their sinful nature to His cross. They no longer want what their sinful nature loves and longs for." (5:24) They have "crucified the flesh" and now "live in the Spirit".

This happens in each life when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. Each time we are tempted by our selfish desires, we can look back and say that our old life was crucified with Christ on the cross. James wrote from Jerusalem to all the twelve tribes of Jewish believers "scattered among the nations" to warn them. "Your own evil longings tempt you. They lead you on and drag you away. When they are allowed to grow, they give birth to sin. When sin has grown up, it gives birth to death." (James 1:1,14-15)

Paul wrote, "Since we live by the Spirit... keep in step [walk, KJV] with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25) We cannot walk as God does, but He is loving and kind and walks with us. The Holy Spirit knows who you are. He knows every detail of what you can and cannot do. He also knows the great and wonderful calling in life you have been given and the gifts you have to fulfil them. He takes you by the



The fruits of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23

Paul writes that the Holy Spirit produces:

- love, joy and peace.
- patience, kindness [gentleness, KJV] and goodness;
- faithfulness [faith, KJV];
- gentleness and humility [meekness, KJV];
- self-control when tempted.

hand and leads you one step at a time. So let us walk and live by the Spirit of Christ within us.

When you are tempted to sin, the Holy Spirit is there to help you. "He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear... He will give you a way out." (1 Corinthians 10:13) Remember, the Holy Spirit is the One whom Christ promised to come alongside to help you (John 15:26; 16:7).

PAUL'S FURTHER WARNINGS

Paul adds further warnings. "Let us not become proud. Let us not make each other angry. Let us not want what belongs to others." (Galatians 5:24-26) Instead, "keep in step with the Spirit" day by day, walking by faith:

- reading God's word;
- praying and waiting for Him;
- meeting in worship and fellowship with local believers;
- sharing His love with our family, friends and neighbours;
- caring for the worldwide church in the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit is also our teacher. He teaches us the things of Christ (John 16:13-14). He 'turns our eyes' to look at what Jesus has done for us, as well as what we have done for ourselves! He knows that if we keep our eyes on Him, then we will know:

- the answer to temptations;
- the way He wants us to go;
- who He wants us to pray for;
- who He wants us to help;
- who we can go to for help.

The Spirit is patient with us. He does not hurry us. He will teach us the same lessons again and again if we fail to learn them well.



Talk about this:

1. Why do many people make a good start in faith, but not continue? Who or what hinders us from obeying God's truth (5:7-8)?
2. What freedom does the Holy Spirit give to true believers (5:18)?
3. How do the dangers of the flesh differ from the fruit of the Spirit? (5:19-23)?
4. What changes can we expect when we are led by the Holy Spirit (5:24)?



Think about this: What can we do to help others stand firm in their new freedom in Christ? How can we take Paul's advice to "live by the Spirit's power" and "march in step with the Holy Spirit"? Why are we so slow to learn the lessons of life? How can we be better learners? How can we pray for today's New Testament believers to fight sin if we find it in our churches and governments? What are the best ways to share the fruits of the Holy Spirit?



Pray about this: Ask for the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray to Jesus to intercede with our heavenly Father for

ourselves and others. Ask how to avoid misusing my “freedom in Christ” and instead “run a good race”. How should believers pray today for God’s people Israel whose Messiah brought true “faith through love”? (5:6)



Bible reading: Galatians Chapter 6

CHOOSE TO DO GOOD BY HELPING OTHER BELIEVERS

In serving Christ, we choose to help other believers. So share good words, thoughts and deeds with them. If someone is caught in a sin, pray for that person and try to help them. Also, when someone is not in sin but in trouble, pray for them also and try to help them. Encourage them with Scripture or a kind word or deed. Care for them spiritually, mentally and in practical ways. Help them if their work is hard or they have lost a relative or friend or they are saddened by sin, persecution or illness.

Paul asks, “Brothers and sisters, what if someone is caught in a sin? Then you who are guided by the Spirit should correct [restore, KJV] that person. Do it in a gentle way. But be careful since you could be tempted too. Carry each other's heavy loads [burdens, KJV]. If you do, you will give the law of Christ its full meaning.” (6:1-2) Jesus said, “Love others as I have loved you.” (John 15:12) Helping others in love is what Jesus would do even if it means suffering or carrying a ‘heavy load’ for them.

Do not judge others as you help them. Do not think you are better or more important than they are. Paul warns, “Each of you should put your own actions to the test. Only then you can take pride [rejoice, KJV] in yourself.” (Galatians 6:3-4; Lamentations 3:40; 2 Corinthians 13:5)

Choose then to watch over your own faith and actions. We must work hard to fulfil what God has called us to do (6:5) When we help other believers, we test our own thoughts, words and deeds. We prove God is faithful in the hard times and find His help is sufficient for all our needs and for those God calls us to serve.

Paul also reminds us to share what we have with our teachers and leaders. Those who freely give their time and gifts to teaching, preaching and planning must look to God to provide for their needs. However, “Those who are taught the word must share all good things with their teacher.” (6:6)

Paul then reminds us that we cannot deceive God. He knows the good things and the bad things we have done in life. “A man gathers a harvest from what he plants or sows.” (6:7) This is true for sowing seeds in the soil. This is also true in doing good things for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some people work to please their sinful nature. Doing that will harvest death. Others work to please the Holy Spirit. Doing that will harvest eternal life.” (6:8)

Therefore, “let us not become tired of doing good. At the right time we will harvest a crop if we do not give up. So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it, especially those who belong to the family of believers.” (6:9-10) The “right time” is God’s time, not our own choice of time!

Be brave under the guidance and compassion of the Holy Spirit. Be prepared for criticism, rejection or even persecution. Paul said elsewhere, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)



Galatians 6:9-10 encourages us in all these things:

- not to lose heart or get tired of doing good;
- not to give up but keep on running;
- not to fail in doing what is right in the family of believers;

Let us not give up our courage and faith and do these things in love.

A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST

Paul wrote the remainder of his letter in large letters in his own hand. This was probably to let them know how serious he was. He warned his readers once again not to yield to the false teachers who had come from Jerusalem. "Some people want others to think well of them. They are trying to force you to be circumcised." (6:12-13) These Jewish believers were also trying to seek favour and approval from the orthodox Jews living in Galatia. This would help them to avoid persecution. But they failed to understand that salvation comes through true faith in the perfect sacrifice of Christ their Messiah for their sins. This did not require Gentiles to follow old religious traditions or be circumcised.

Paul wrote, "I never want to boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through that cross the old ways of the world have been crucified... I too have been crucified." (6:14) Nothing we do can add anything to Christ's work on the cross. God's 'Suffering Servant' has borne our grief and carried our sorrows and the full weight of our sins (Isaiah 53:3-5, KJV) with much pain and suffering. Paul put his trust in the suffering Jesus experienced on a Roman cross of public torture and shame as punishment for our sins. Paul's old self had died on the cross with Christ. "Through that cross, the ways of the world have been crucified." (6:14) This was for himself and for others who believe in Jesus as their Saviour.

Paul added, "Circumcised or uncircumcised mean nothing. What is really important is the creation of a new nature." (6:15) This means a person who has been born again by God's Spirit. Paul also wrote to the Christians in Corinth: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

God looks at a person's heart. He wants a heart that is committed to Him. This is why Paul knew in his mind that 'circumcision of the heart' is more important than 'circumcision of the flesh' (Romans 2:29).

When God's Spirit changed Paul's heart, he rejected the unholy world within and around him. He did not want the pleasures and traditions of the world anymore because he knew that sin put his Saviour on the cross.

"What is really important is the creation of a new nature." (Galatians 6:15) A new creation does not have a past life. God promised Jeremiah 600 years before

the time of Christ that He would forget all past sins when we trust in His Messiah (Jeremiah 31:34).

God planned that sending Jesus on Earth meant:

He would be willing to live as a human being who needed food and water and a place to sleep in hot or cold weather. He also had to work hard as a carpenter to support his mother and her children.

He would teach the truth of God His Father and yet suffer persecution, opposition and hatred.

He would experience a most terrible death plus much suffering leading up to it. This was in order to take on the punishment for the sins of all who have been deceived by Satan, who even tempted Him to disobey God's word.

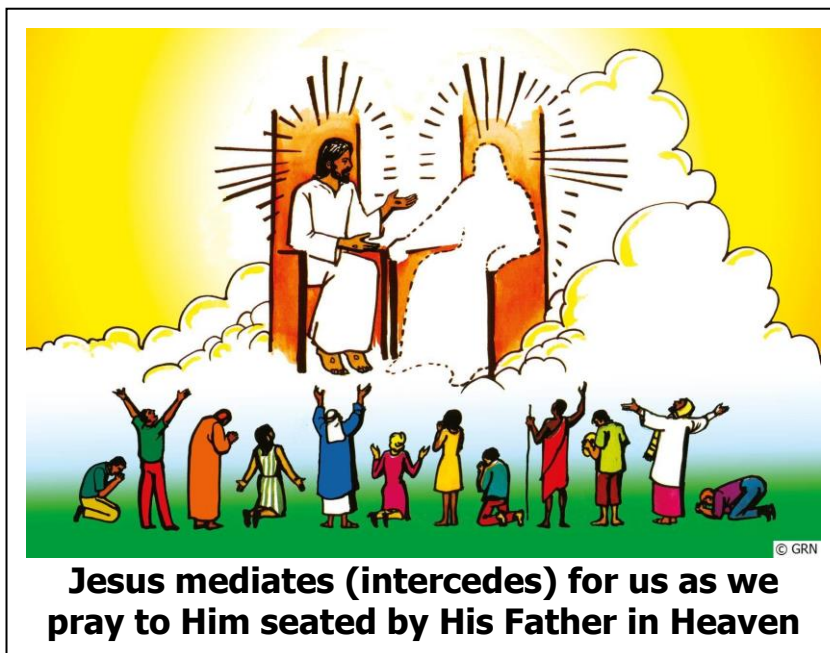
Thanks to God that Jesus now mediates for us when we pray to Him as He sits at His Father's right hand. Amazing love! Amazing grace! Amazing sacrifice!

PAUL'S FINAL WORDS

Paul finishes his letter, still in his own hand writing:

- ***Paul prays:*** "May peace and mercy be given to all who follow this teaching. May peace and mercy be given to them and to the Israel that belongs to God." (6:16) What Paul had written is the Good News or Gospel of Jesus Christ. If they followed the teaching Paul had given them, they would all become the 'true Israel of God'. The 'true Israel' means God's chosen people. Not only Jewish believers, but all who truly love God and His Hebrew Messiah. They are the true family of God. They are all adopted as descendants of Abraham through faith in Israel's Messiah.
- ***Paul requests:*** "Let no-one cause trouble for me. My body has marks that show I belong to Jesus." (6:17) Paul had the "marks of Jesus" from the whippings He had received. Before Jesus was crucified, Pilate added to the punishment of Jesus by ordering Him to be whipped. The leather whips had pieces of metal in the tips. Today, many of the followers of Jesus are persecuted. God is Creator of our amazing universe. But He knew salvation could come only by sending His own flesh and blood to suffer on our behalf so that we may know His salvation and resurrection glory. "He was pierced for our transgressions." (Isaiah 53:5) This 'mystery of Christ' reveals God's eternal love for those who believe. Anyone who opposes Paul also opposes Christ. Paul truly wanted them to turn away from false teachers and follow his own teaching. He knew that God had revealed this same teaching to Isaiah 750 years earlier.

- **Paul blesses:** “Brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” (6:18) Paul had accused the Galatians of doing wrong. However, he had forgiven them and wanted to bless them. They were like sheep that had gone astray. They had followed false teachers and leaders. But he still loved them and he gave them God’s highest blessing of all, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”.



Talk about this:

1. What five things does Paul mention when helping someone who rejects God’s truth or has been “caught in sin” (6:1)?
2. What do you think Paul means by “the law of Christ” (6:2)?
3. What do you think Paul expected for himself from those whom he taught (6:6)?
4. What does Paul add to his previous warnings about circumcision (6:12-13)?
5. What is Paul’s chief teaching and testimony (6:14)?
6. What does Paul say about the way forward for those who have been tempted to trust in circumcision under the old covenant (6:15)?
7. Describe Paul’s final prayers, requests and blessings (6:16-18).



Think about this: Do you know God’s forgiveness and blessing in Christ? Are you ready then to take up your own cross to follow Jesus so that He is seen in you, even if it means persecution? What are the wrong teachings in some of the churches today? Are you prepared to stand up publicly against error and risk persecution for Christ’s sake? Are you prepared to help someone personally to follow God’s truth and reject sin? What are your own prayers, requests and blessings?



Pray about this: Heavenly Father, thank You for planning ahead for our salvation through the amazing sacrifice of your own flesh and blood in Jesus, Your Son, our Saviour. Thank You again for Paul’s reminder of Your provision for the families of true believers born into Abraham’s family through Sarah, Ruth and David and ultimately through Your Messiah, Jesus Christ, born to Mary.

CONCLUSIONS

Paul wrote to the Galatian church with Holy Spirit guidance, concern and love:

- to **teach** the truth of God from the Scriptures;
- to **preach** salvation through Christ alone;
- to **reach** those who are open to the Holy Spirit.

He loved them and knew them personally. Paul wanted them to reject false teachers and protect new believers from straying away from God's salvation in Christ alone.

Paul was a devout Jew with a personal experience of Jesus Himself. He valued the Ten Commandments and the Hebrew Old Testament laws (Torah). But after listening to the voice of Jesus, he knew that salvation could not be found just by following the Law God gave to Moses. And certainly not by obeying man-made religious laws and traditions. It is through God's grace we are saved which is given when we put our trust in His resurrected Son. Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of God's Law through His faultless sacrifice in our place for the punishment we deserve under the old covenant. This one sacrifice prepared the way for God's new covenant of faith in Yeshua, Israel's Messiah, and His promised Holy Spirit for all who believe.

In the first century after Christ, Paul knew that the church was at risk of following unbiblical laws and traditions of some of the Jewish believers. Around 15 years after writing his letter, Roman rulers ordered Jerusalem to be destroyed but they could not destroy the worldwide spread of the Christian faith. However, in the sixth century after Christ, the church was at risk of following the unbiblical rules and traditions of some of the Roman church leaders. Today the church is also at risk of following the unbiblical ways of the world through modern media and ungodly leaders.

Paul helped to avoid wrong teaching and confusion. It is faith in Jesus alone who makes true believers right with God. Paul's letter is a warning to us all that it is easy to go down the wrong path. He describes this as living as children of the slave woman and not the free woman, as with Ishmael and Isaac. He also describes it as being circumcised in the flesh instead of the heart.

But Paul also warns us that being "free in Christ" through His costly sacrifice does not mean we are then free to do as we like. We are set free to hear and obey the Spirit of God. The Spirit teaches and guides us into the full meaning of the Law given to Moses which Christ completely fulfilled. We must follow this guidance of the promised Holy Spirit which will enable us to worship God Himself and live in obedience to Him and produce 'the fruit of righteousness'. This is possible only when we confess and believe the sacrifice of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, was for the punishment of our sins.

The Jewish and Gentile believers in Galatia were in danger of rejecting this grace of God that they first received. We must all ask the question if we have unwisely followed false church teachings and traditions instead of following Jesus.

He loves us and has created a door into Heaven for sinners great and small.
Through faith in Christ, we can pass through that door!

Paul loved the Galatian fellowships even though they were beginning to depart from his teaching and preaching. Paul was now reaching out to those who were still open to the Holy Spirit. Like Paul, they must be prepared to stand firm in their faith in Christ and the holy Scriptures which predicted his birth, death and resurrection. They must be prepared to listen to God's truth and not be enslaved by false teachers. They must be prepared to reject pressure to change their beliefs and not fear the risk of being persecuted. This remains very true today. This is why Paul prayed in the last verse for them to receive the blessing of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" within their spirits. He wanted them to find the true nature of Christ's compassion and power at work in their lives.

"Lord Jesus, we thank You that You are the Way, the Truth and the Life and that we can come to the Father through You. We have eternal life because of what You did for us when You died and rose again. You were victorious over sin and death, and we praise you for taking our punishment and sharing Your glorious resurrection power with us. Thank You for Your promise that in Heaven every follower will have their tears wiped from their eyes. May Your provision for today and wonderful hope for the future strengthen our Christian brothers and sisters living under poverty, persecution, conflict, disasters, grief and loss of homes and family members." (Barnabas Aid UK, 31st March 2024)

Published by:
Manna Publications (UK)

Typeset by:
MissionAssist (UK)

Distributed by:

Printed by:

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