

Know the Word
Galatians (Chs 5 - 6)

REVIEW

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a polemical letter, designed from front to back to be both a rebuttal of the Judaizers and a positive statement of the apostolic gospel. His arguments move on three levels:

- an autobiographical account of the origin of his call and gospel (1:10-2:21);
- a theological argument of the finality of the law in Christ and the adequacy of the gospel of grace in Christ (3:1-4:31);
- the practical application of his letter to show that God's new life is to be found in living in the Spirit (5:1-6:10)

The contrast:

Christ	Law
Abraham	Moses
Promise	Law
Faith	Observing the law
Spirit	Flesh
Blessing	Curse
Freedom	Slavery
Mature Son	Slaves, Minor
New Creation	Circumcision/Non-circumcision
Grace	Works/Merits
Christian Church	Jewish Nation

Source adapted from NIV Application Commentary

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5:1-12

In 5:1-12, Paul asserts that in Christ, the Galatian believers are free; therefore, they should not be enslaved under the Mosaic law. In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is faith expressing itself through love.

From 5:13-6:17, Paul moves from doctrine to ethics and focuses on the issues of freedom and its proper manifestation by means of the Spirit.

v1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” – the freedom referred to is freedom from the law as a means of justification..

v2-4 “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all...”. Paul warns them of the serious results in receiving circumcision:-

- v2 “Christ will be of no value to you at all” – an irreconcilable antithesis between circumcision and faith in Christ.
- v3 “he is required to obey the whole law” – Circumcision voluntarily undertaken as a legal obligation carries with it a further obligation – nothing less than the obligation to keep the whole law.
- v4 “you have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” – to seek to be justified by the law is to fall from grace.

v5 “But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope”

“... the hope to which the justification of believers points them forward” – Ronald Y.K. Fung (“The Epistle to the Galatians”)

v6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Like v5, the emphasis here is on “faith”. When a person is in Christ, nothing more is necessary. Circumcision or uncircumcision is irrelevant in the Christian life. “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” – the faith which justifies is of such a nature that it will express itself through love. Faith is the root; love is the fruit.

v7 “You were running a good race” – a Christian life is likened to a race in the arena. To “run a good race” – one obeys the truth, applying belief to behaviour; his creed is expressed in his conduct.

v8 “That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you” –this work of persuasion was not from God who called them in grace (Gal 1:6).

v9 “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” – the false teaching of the Judaizers is permeating and threatening to pervert the whole Christian community.

- v10 In spite of the Judaizers' efforts, however, Paul expresses his confidence concerning the Galatians that they would adopt no other view.
- v11 The allegation was apparently to the effect that Paul 'still' preached circumcision. He defends himself from the apparent charge that he was inconsistent.
- v12 Paul's point here is that the agitators are subverting the Galatians, undermining their faith.

Paul means "*they had better go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves!*"

Chapter 5:13-26

This segment is full of reference to the Holy Spirit. He is presented as our Sanctifier who alone can oppose and subdue our sinful nature and enable us to fulfill the law. The fundamental imperative of the Christian life is to live by the Spirit (5:16, 18, 22, 25), and not gratifying the desires of the sinful nature. Those who live by the Spirit will bear fruit pleasing to God.

- v13 "*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*"

Freedom from the law does not mean freedom to sin. Far from being lawlessness, such freedom brings its own obligation which is the proper use of freedom. Paul expresses this in 2 ways:

- (a) The first is not to indulge the sinful nature.

"The sinful nature" or "the flesh" – the fallen human nature with its appetites and propensities, and which if unchecked produces the "acts of the sinful nature" listed in v19. To live in the flesh is fundamentally living outside the realm of the Spirit.

"What Paul has in mind is the total person living outside of God's will and apart from God's guiding influence through the Spirit"

R.N. Longenecker

- (b) The second is "*to serve one another in love*". The goal of Christian freedom is mutual service through love.

v14 *“The entire law summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”” – Roms 13:9/10*

The principle of a working faith is now developed. Here he tells them how the whole law may be fulfilled – by loving one another. We are not justified by keeping the law but once we are justified by faith in Jesus, we shall keep the law out of love for Him, who loves us and has given His Spirit to enable us to keep it.

Loving our neighbor means seeking their good, not their harm, and “*as yourself*” means as much as we do in fact love ourselves.

v15 He warns of the danger that they may destroy each other by their mutual biting and devouring.

v16 *“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”*

The Spirit and the sinful nature are mutually exclusive. To be in Christ is to yield to the Holy Spirit and not to the sinful nature.

“Live by the Spirit” –to be under the constant direction, control and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit-sinful nature struggle, it is impossible for the believer to remain neutral: he either serves the sinful nature or he follows the Holy Spirit. As he learns to walk in the Spirit, the “*sinful nature*” becomes increasingly subdued. But the sinful nature and the Spirit remain, and the conflict between them is fierce and unrelenting.

No external force or sanction can compel the loving of a neighbor as oneself; such love must be generated from within – by the Spirit.

v17/18 *“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law” (v18)*

“the law and the sinful nature” are closely linked. The implication of 5:16 and 5:18 put together show us that the desires of the sinful nature cannot be overcome by the believer remaining under law. The real solution lies in being led by the Spirit.

For the believer, it is life in the Spirit – the life of one who is surrendered to letting the Spirit have complete control. The Christian life is a life of consistent surrender to the Spirit. One does not live the Christian life apart from the Spirit.

v19-21

What are the acts of the sinful nature?

The “*acts of the sinful nature*” may be grouped into 4 areas:

- (a) sexual sins : “*sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery*”
(*ie sensuality*)
- (b) religious sins : “*idolatry and witchcraft*”
- (c) social sins : “*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy*”
- (d) drinking sins : “*drunkenness, orgies, and the like*”

Most of the sins listed by Paul belong to the third group and this may suggest that the Galatians were having problem in this area of personal relationships. This suggestion is reinforced by the words “*biting and devouring each other*” in 5:15. In v26, he adds one final warning against conceit and envy.

“*Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (v21) – a stern warning that how one lives, whether by the sinful nature or in the Spirit, is important. Those who make a practice of doing such acts, as a pattern of life, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Their outward conduct indicates their inward spiritual condition: that they do not have the Holy Spirit within, and are not God’s children.

v22-26

What is life in the Spirit?

As Paul had listed the works of the sinful nature, so he specifies the kind of conduct that flows from communion with the Holy Spirit. He describes “sinful nature” under the term “acts”, while he sees the Spirit’s work as “fruit”. “Fruit” – the natural produce that appears in the lives of those who are Spirit-led. Some see in these 9 virtues (the fruit of the Holy Spirit) as consisting mainly of attitudes and actions that enhance personal relationships – “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control*”

v23 “*against such things there is no law*” – because living by the Holy Spirit is in principle fulfilling the law.

v24 “*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires*”

The words “have crucified” suggest that the thought here is of the believers’ participation in Christ’s crucifixion. But in another sense, believers need continuously to crucify the sinful nature—unceasingly seeking to live under the Spirit’s guidance and control.

v25 “*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*” – believers following a course with the Spirit as leader, or “*marching in line*” with the Spirit. Some bearing here on the mutual relations of believers.

Chapter 6:1-10

- Mutual help is the hallmark of the community of faith.
- Gentleness, not arrogance, is the way of Christ.
- The teacher deserves the support of those whom he teaches.
- There is a rule of sowing and reaping in life:
 - those who sow to please his sinful nature will reap destruction;
 - those who sow to please the Spirit will reap eternal life.

v1 “*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*”

In carrying out the task of restoring an offender, the ones who are spiritual (those whose life and conduct alike are controlled by the Spirit) should note 2 things:-

- (a) They are to set the offender right again – in a spirit of gentleness;
- (b) The second one is that they are to be watchful against falling into temptation themselves.

v2 Burden-bearing is a fulfillment of “the law of Christ”. The “*law of Christ*” is not essentially different from the commandment of love to one’s neighbor (quoted in 5:14), in which “*the whole law*” is comprehended.

v3 “*If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing*” – It is a warning against spiritual pride. If they did, they would be inhibited from fulfilling “*the law of Christ*” by bearing one another’s burdens or restoring those who had been overcome by some sudden temptation.

v4-5 Lest one becomes self-righteous or feels superior in dealing with the weaknesses of the others, Paul calls to mind the need and propriety of looking only at oneself for self evaluation.

v6 “*Anyone who receives instructions in the word must share all good things with his instructor*” – Those who are taught have a duty to make material

provision for their teachers (1 Cor 9:14) as a “*worker deserves his wages*” (Luke 10:7).

- v7 Applying a law of nature to human conduct – a man reaps what he sows; the principle of “*cause and effect*”. “*God cannot be mocked*” – God cannot be fooled/outwitted.
- v8 To sow “*to please the sinful nature*” is “*to pander to the sinful nature, instead of crucifying it. The seeds we sow are largely thoughts and deeds – the practicing of such things as are included among “the acts of the sinful nature” in 5:19-21. Such sowing reaps a harvest of destruction*” (John Stott).

Particularly in mind here are such “*acts of the sinful nature*” as discord, dissensions and envy, to which the Galatian Christians appear to have been specially prone (cf 5:15, 26); indulgence in such things would have disastrous results in their personal and corporate lives alike. To sow to the Spirit on the other hand, is to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit and reap eternal life (cf Rom 6:20-23).

- v9-10 “*Let us not become weary in doing good, ... we will reap a harvest. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good... especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*”

“*become weary*” – to lose heart, become discouraged, or to give up, in “*doing good*” – eg helping others, engaging in philanthropic activity especially in the community of believers (those who belong to the family of believers).

“*we will reap a harvest*” – of we persevere in doing good, then we will reap a harvest, just as in due season, a farmer will reap after he has sown.

Chapter 6:11-18

Before concluding his letter with a final benediction, Paul returns once more to the contrast of the cross and circumcision, setting them forth this time as representing respectively the true and the false ground of boasting, and thus carrying a stage further his polemic against the Judaizers and their way of legal observance.

- v12 The real reason why the Judaizers are persuading the Gentile Christians to accept circumcision is because they are afraid of being persecuted.
- v13 In spite of their claims, their obedience to the law is at best inconsistent and selective – their true purpose is to boast in the fact that they have placed a mark on the flesh of the Galatian believers.

- v14 Let others boast in things external or in themselves. Paul will boast in the cross of Christ, the instrument through which Paul and the world have been “*crucified*” – parted company from each other.
- v15 The ‘*new creation*’ (an idea developed in 2 Cor 5:17) in its fullness belongs to the future, but to those in Christ it is already realized through the Spirit who dwells in our hearts to regenerate and sanctify us – resulting in a new creation, a transformation that results in an entirely new being. By contrast, circumcision, standing for the outward and the human, is a formal external religion and our own efforts to save ourselves.
- v16 The true descendants of Abraham are those who believe in Christ and have been delivered from the law. Therefore the true Israel lives by a different principle from that of submission to the Mosaic law.
- v17 “*Let no one cause me trouble*”, says Paul, because I am the slave – the branded slave – of another. We may compare his words in Rom 14:4.

The “*marks of Jesus*” which he carried in his body are accepted by him as the marks of branding or tattooing which certified that a slave (especially a recaptured runaway slave) was the property of his owner. The wounds he has suffered for Christ because of his faithfulness to Christ show that Paul is sincere and that it is Christ whom he serves.

References:

1. John R.W. Stott, The Message of Galatians
2. TNIV Study Bible
3. New Bible Commentary
4. New Dictionary of Biblical Theology
5. The NIV Application Commentary (Galatians)
6. F.F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, NIGTC
7. Lecture Notes on Galatians by Dr Tan Kim Huat

Discussion questions

- (1) There is no way that as believers, we can even begin to live the Christian life unless we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

How then can we “*live by the Spirit*” (5:16), “*led by the Spirit*” (5:18) and “*keep in step with the Spirit*” (5:25) and “*sow to please the Spirit*” (v6:8)?

- (2) Share with one another:-
- In what ways is the Holy Spirit presently working in your life?
 - Is anything happening in your life that could only be explained by the working of the Holy Spirit?

Know the Word

Guided Answers to Discussion Questions

- (1) There is no way that as believers, we can even begin to live the Christian life unless we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Suggested Answer

- (a) “***Be filled*** with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18) – this issue of fullness is a question of whether the Holy Spirit has full, unhindered access to every part and area of our lives. Therefore, we must yield to His direction and control – it is an ongoing process, the continuous working out of what the Spirit is working into our lives. We must choose to surrender ourselves to Him daily, and daily we choose to remain surrendered. In every situation involving conflict between self and God’s will, we choose to make our decisions on the basis of our constant submission to Christ. He can only fill those who wish to be emptied of self.

We overcome the sinful nature only if we submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

- (b) “***Do not grieve*** the Holy Spirit...” (Eph 4:30). In Eph 4:20-32, Paul says that whatever is unlike Christ in conduct, speech, or disposition grieves the Holy Spirit. Therefore any sin in our lives grieves Him. When we grieve the Holy Spirit, we are out of communion with Him and we may experience an absence of joy and power in our lives until we renounce and confess the sin, and learn to put things right with God.
- (c) **Confess and repent** – It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sins (John 16:8). To “convict” is to bring something to the light, to show it up for what it is. Since sin blocks the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we must deal honestly and humbly with our sins when He convicts us of them – through confession and repentance. We should pray each day that God will help us see our sin and give us grace to repent. Pray also for the constant in-filling of the Holy Spirit.

- (d) “DO not put out the Spirit’s fire” (1Thess 5:19)-for eg not being open to the revelation of God’s will thru fellow believers exercising the gift of prophecy . (All prophecies must of course be tested.)
- (e) **Sow to the Spirit**.(adapted from *The Message of Galatians* by John Stott)
- “set our minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5), “set our hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col 3:1-2; Phil 4:8), for eg, we keep God always before our minds through meditation and memorization of Scriptures.
 - with the Spirit’s help, daily abide in Christ – foster disciplines for the spiritual life: prayer, Scripture study, fasting, service, worship, fellowship with believers, solitude and silence. Receive divine guidance by learning to hear God.
 - by the books we read, the type of friends we keep, the leisure activities we pursue, we can be “sowing to the Spirit”.
- (f) **Others** – eg exercising spiritual gifts in meeting the needs of others in the body and for God’s glory.

(2) Share with one another:-

- In what ways is the Holy Spirit presently working in your life?
- Is anything happening in your life that could only be explained by the working of the Holy Spirit?

Examples of the Holy Spirit’s working in our lives:-

- A love and hunger for God’s word and prayer
- A consciousness of sins and a desire to be holy
- A love for the people of God
- Compassion and courage to witness about Jesus
- Love for Christ – a desire to obey Him