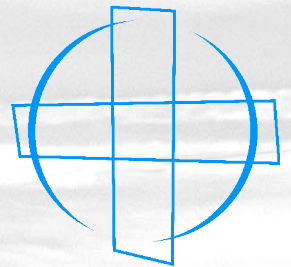


MAY  
2024

Donald J. Wills  
*Senior Pastor*

LIVE



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

Christianity should not be simply a label we wear, but the life we live. Too often, people add Christian to-dos to try to check all the boxes. However, being a Christian is not something you do; it is who you are. We cannot “do” ourselves into living the Christian life any more than we can into being a Christian. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes that pretty plain. It is out of the essence of who we are that we conduct ourselves. In this study of Galatians, you will see Paul’s point is best defined in 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It is Christ in you that works His way out as evident in our thoughts and actions because of the recognition of whose we are. We are His!

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

This second quarter of 2024 the theme is “Live.” The challenge is to live each day filled with the Holy Spirit as described in Galatians 5:25. May we leave no doubt in the minds of those we encounter in the coming days to whom we belong. It is Christ in you!

Blessings,  
Pastor Don Wills



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

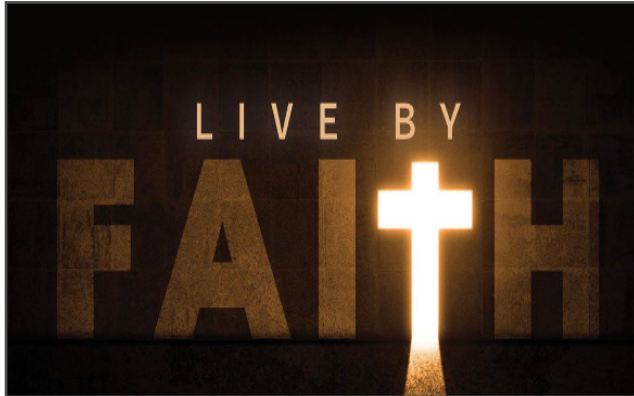
**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

*Contents*  
*May Lesson Plan*

3



May 5, 2024

Live by Faith

[Galatians 3:10-23](#)

19



May 12, 2024

Live as Family

[Galatians 3:24-4:7](#)

37



May 19, 2024

Live Fervently

[Galatians 4:8-20](#)

55

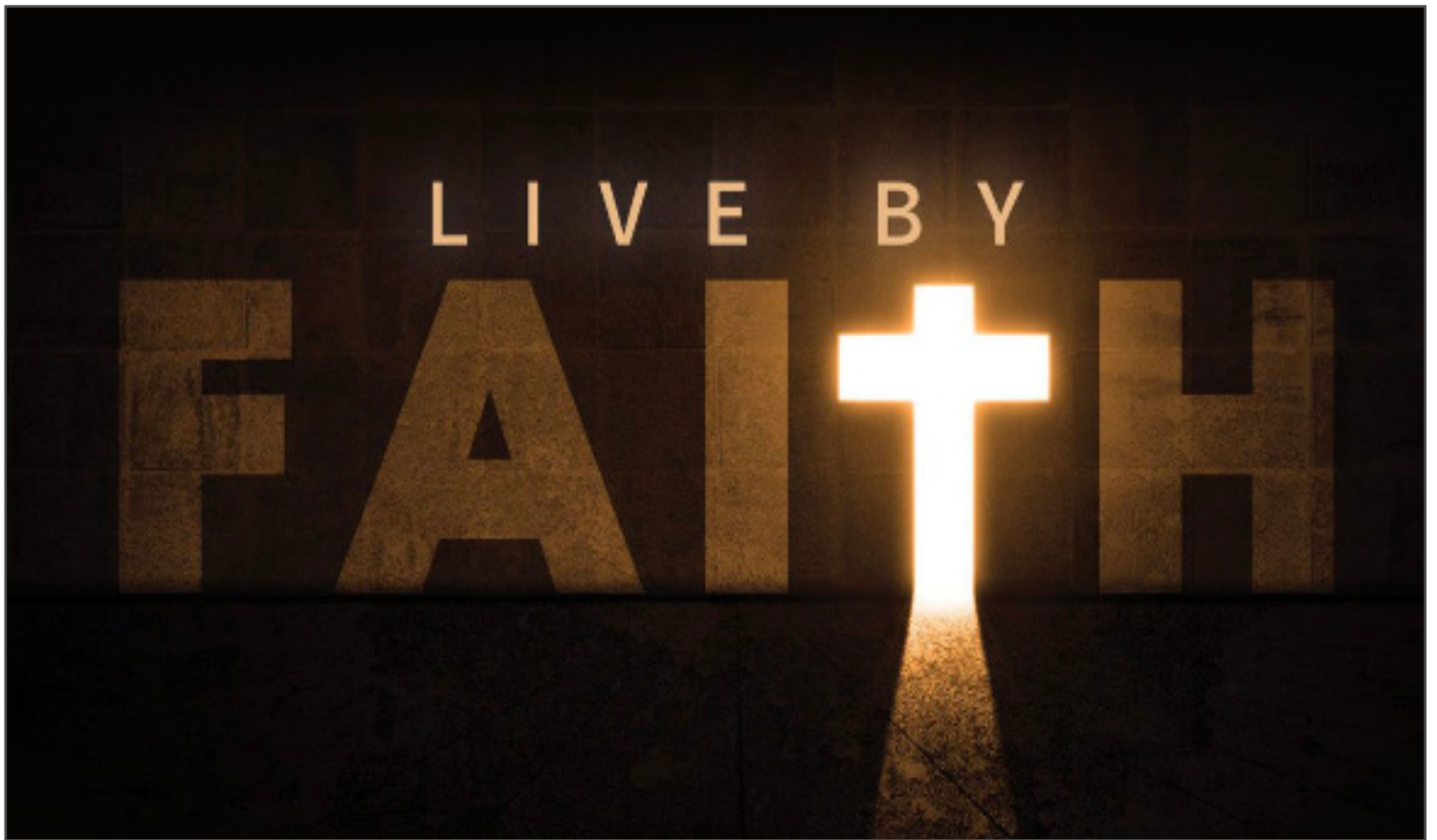


May 26, 2024

Live in Freedom

[Galatians 4:21-31](#)

*May 5, 2024*



*LIVE*

*By Faith*

*Galatians 3:10-23*

Focal Verse:

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

back to  
Table of  
Contents

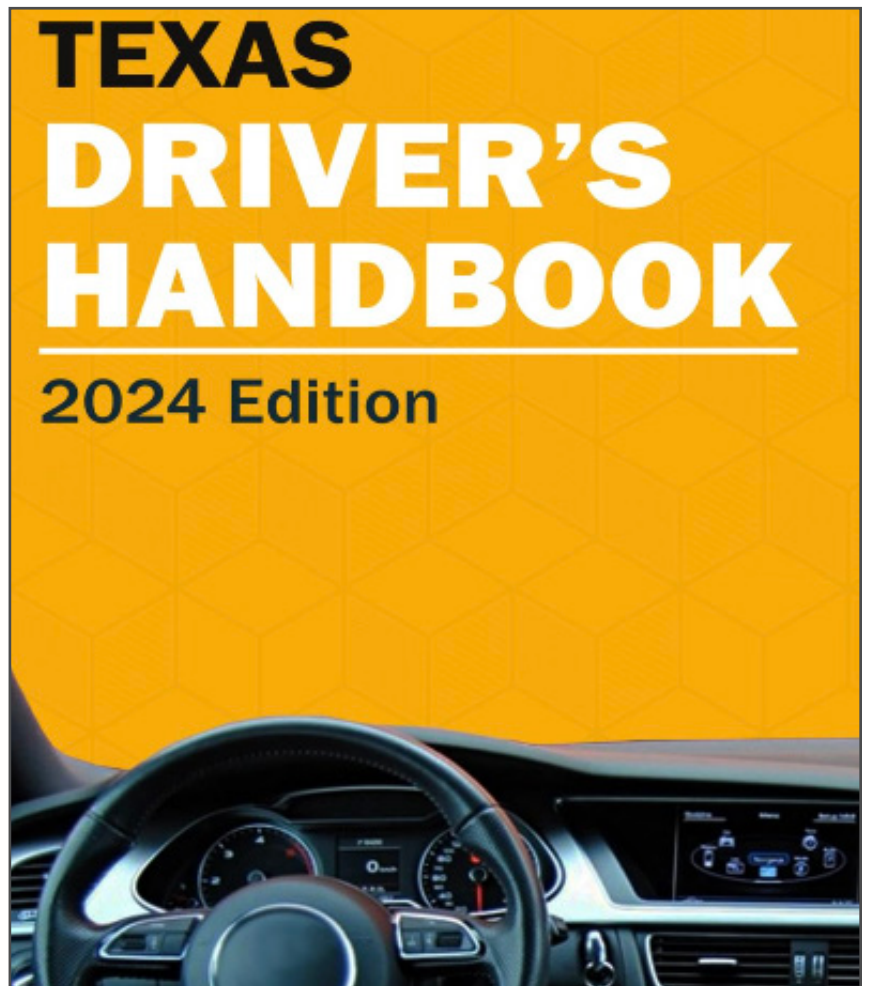
Galatians 3:24

## Introduce

Whether we have driven an automobile for years or started recently, we all had to learn the rules of the road and be able to apply them proficiently before we could legally obtain our license. It doesn't matter in what state we got our license; the process is generally the same. We begin by reading a book from the Department of Public Safety outlining the rules. We then take a written test to show that we cognitively understand them. Once we pass that initial written test, we take an actual driving test with an officer or instructor where we apply what we learned in the handbook in order to make sure that we follow those rules. Consequently, the instructor would grade us to the letter of the law, lowering our score for anything that we did not perfectly execute.

Imagine now, however, going back to take that same driving test once again. Would you score a perfect 100 on it? Probably very few of us even attained a perfect score the first time we took it. And most likely now, we have developed bad habits or become more careless over the years so that it would prevent us from ever scoring perfectly. Some of us may exceed the posted speed limit. Others of us may fail to use our turn signals when changing lanes. Still, others of us may drive over the single white line we find along ramps while merging onto or off the freeway.

What if keeping our license depended upon adhering to every rule perfectly and never once making a mistake? It doesn't matter whether we label it a major infraction or a minor one. It doesn't matter how much of a fine would be levied against us. We had to keep the whole law in order to retain our license. Could you do it? Honestly, we would live in a society without drivers! None of us could keep the rules of the road



## Introduce

flawlessly. At some point, even if only once, we have undoubtedly broken at least one traffic law either intentionally or accidentally.

In fact, we still break the law if we commit any infraction unknowingly or ignorantly. In the book that we read prior to taking the written test, it likely stated something to the effect of “obey all posted signs.” Perhaps, we unknowingly turned the wrong way down a one-way street. Maybe, we failed to notice a no U-turn sign posted at an intersection. Or we could have missed a do not enter sign and tried to enter through the exit. Ignorance of the law doesn’t absolve us from following it. Try pleading this defense with a police officer or judge. Most likely, they will respond by reminding us to pay more attention before issuing or upholding a citation. The rules of the road aren’t to take away the fun of driving, but to protect us and others who share the road with us.

Likewise, God has given us the law not to take away our fun, but to protect us and help us live successfully. We can’t, however, obtain righteousness and life through the law. It’s impossible to fulfill it perfectly. We would all fail miserably. We have all broken at least one part of the law at some point in our lives (Gal 3:10; Jas 2:10). Therefore, God also designed it to help us recognize our sinfulness while at the same time to point us to His holiness (Gal 3:24). Fortunately, our eternal life doesn’t depend upon us keeping the whole law. God sent His Son to fulfill it perfectly on our behalf and then share His righteousness with us so we could have eternal life when we repent of our sin and surrender to Him. Although we cannot obtain life through the law, God still expects us to live faithfully by imitating the righteousness and holiness found in His Son who fulfilled the law perfectly and with whom we now have a relationship!

Key  
Question

How would you do on a driving test now after having driven for so many years? How could this help us understand our relationship to God’s holy law?



## Galatians 3:10-12

### THE REMEDY FOR THE CURSE :

Last week, our lesson concluded with Paul using Abraham as an example of how God graciously saves us—both Jew and Gentile—through faith in Him and not through our own good works. This week we will see a continuation of this same line of reasoning which shows how our good works fall woefully short of God’s perfect standard. Paul, therefore, explains that those who pin their hope on their own righteousness by doing **works of the law** will find themselves **under** its **curse** instead of attaining life (v. 10). In other words, we all stand guilty of sinning, or breaking **the law**, and deserve death—the original **curse** that accompanied man’s sin (Gen 3:19).

For further support of this principle, Paul appeals to Deuteronomy 27:26: **Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.** Through this quotation, the Apostle wants to emphasize the impossibility of perfectly fulfilling **all** the requirements of **the law** which means that



*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*

*James 2:10*

we find ourselves **under** its **curse**. Theoretically, if we could perfectly keep **the** whole **law**, then we could righteously stand before God and seek eternal life on the basis of what we have done. But we can’t. None of us can keep **the** entire **law** without fault. When we put our confidence in our ability to live by **the law**, we actually subject ourselves to its **curse** without hope of eternal life because we will fail!

Several years ago, I received a citation from the City of Fort Worth in the mail for allegedly running a red light at Beach Street and Western Center. Along with a fine of \$75.00, the letter included the name of the police officer who “verified” the infraction, a link to view the video feed from the camera, and instructions for either paying or contesting the ticket. After watching the video of the incident in question, I learned one thing. I stopped! It wasn’t a rolling stop, but a complete stop before turning right! So, I chose to contest the ticket.

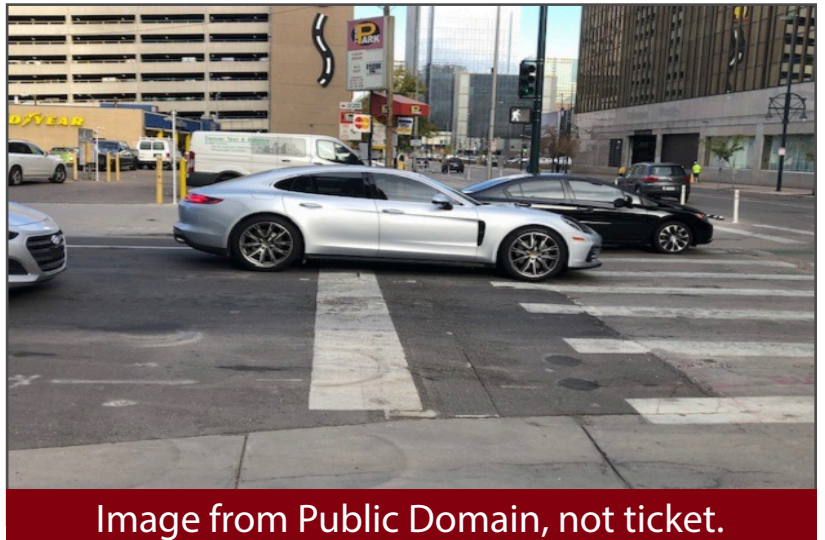
## Instruct

On the appointed day of the trial, I went to City Hall where I found a tiny, non-descript office that doubled as a courtroom. It barely had enough room for a desk with a computer monitor and the two men hearing the case. A single seat for the defendant faced the desk with no room to close the door. Having told me to take a seat, they immediately began to question why I was protesting the ticket. To which I responded, “Clearly, on the video linked to this citation, you can see that I stopped my vehicle. Had I not completely stopped, there would have been an accident because cars had already fully entered the intersection.” So, they cued up the video and less than two minutes later dismissed the ticket.

Although grateful for the dismissal of the ticket, I still inquired of the two gentlemen why I had to take off work, pay for parking, and come downtown for the ticket to be dismissed. Specifically, I asked, “Why did the officer issue the ticket if the video clearly showed me stopping?” They then explained that the officer

wasn’t looking at whether or not I had stopped, but only where I had stopped. He verified the ticket according to the letter of the law which stated that going beyond that white line in any way after the light had turned red constituted illegally entering the intersection. Therefore, he focused on the relationship of my front tires to that faded white line. Technically, by the letter of the law, I had illegally entered the intersection even though I still came to a complete stop.

**The law** functions in much this same way. It establishes boundaries beyond which we must not go. If we go beyond them, for any reason whatsoever whether intentionally or unintentionally, we have broken **the law**. As such, **the law** only shows our transgressions. It doesn’t prove our innocence or righteousness because we have all gone beyond its boundaries at some point in life. Moreover, **the law** doesn’t take into account the circumstances or the reasons for our actions just like the officer who issued the ticket to me. It only indicates our failure to obey. Thus, **the law** plays much the same role as that white line at the intersection. When we go beyond its boundaries—even if only slightly and unintentionally—it means that we have broken

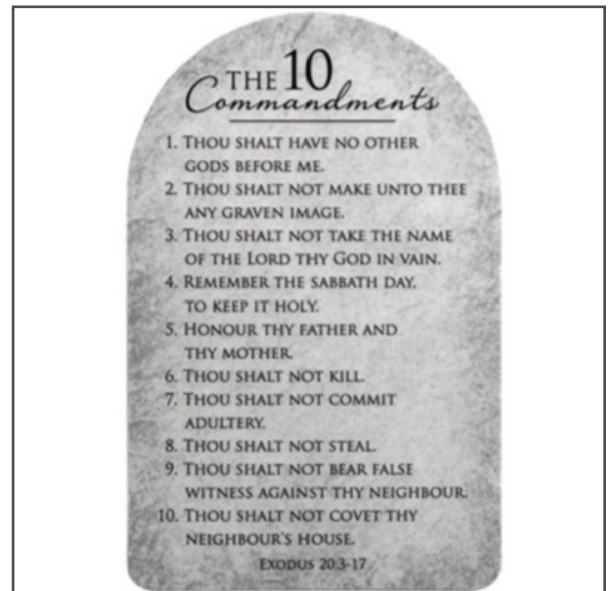


**the law** and we stand guilty before the Judge.

Question  
# 1

How does the world try to rationalize sin?  
What effect does this have on how we  
view God's law and our "goodness?"

Through Jesus' teaching and example, we see how far short we fall of God's perfect standard. When He clarifies the true intent behind **the law** and its lofty expectations while delivering His Sermon on the Mount, we get a dose of reality. None of us can ever meet God's expectation for holiness on our own! In one instance, Jesus explains the intent behind the command prohibiting adultery (Exod 20:14; Matt 5:27). Legalistically, one could possibly claim to have faithfully followed this commandment by not engaging in any improper relationships with married individuals. But when we examine the true intent of the command as defined by Jesus, we see the impossibility of maintaining God's standard! Jesus contends that even looking on another person with lust—daydreaming or fantasizing in any way—we have already committed adultery in our hearts (Matt 5:28). Jesus also makes a similar comparison between murder and becoming angry without cause (Matt 5:21-22). In either case, we've all exceeded God's boundary—that white line so to speak—because we have all lusted or become angry without just cause at some point in our lives even if it were just a glance or a fleeting thought!



Prior to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul viewed **the law** much like many other Jewish people in his day as a means to display his piety or holiness toward God and earn favor. He even regarded it possible to follow **the law** perfectly and thereby please God. In Philippians 3:6, he even described himself as "concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." To this point in his life, he had honestly thought that he had followed every part of **the law** perfectly! Yet, after Jesus appeared to him, Paul no longer pompously sought to declare his own righteousness before God, but rather he recognized his own need for grace and salvation. He now understood that "Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom

## Instruct

I [Paul] am chief" (1 Tim 1:15). What changed?

On the road to Damascus, Paul realized he wasn't serving God, but actually fighting against Him. Jesus had explicitly charged Paul with persecuting Him through his murderous actions directed against His people—the church (Acts 9:24). Whereas Paul had always fancied himself as adhering and upholding God's **law**, he now began to comprehend how he had actually broken it. He wasn't engaged in doing God's will to glorify Him. In fact, he could not even keep the first two commandments which specify that we must not make for ourselves idols or serve any other god except the Lord alone (Exod 20:3-5)! For Paul, **the law** and Jewish tradition had become those idols which misdirected his service. By serving **the law** and tradition instead of truly serving the Lord, Paul had actually misunderstood the Messiah whom the Father had sent because he initially rejected a relationship with Him.

### Question # 2

In what other ways can we help people to see the impossibility of being “good” enough to have eternal life?

Because we all have come **under the curse of the law** by our own sinful choices, Paul emphatically states that **it is evident that no one** can be **justified by the law in the sight of God** (v. 11). **Justified** is a legal term which means to be declared right or in good standing. Technically, it doesn't mean “not guilty” in this context. To illustrate, think back to my red-light ticket. During my defense in court, I tried to justify myself—declare I was in the right because I had stopped. Yet, according to the actual law, I was not in good standing because I had exceeded the line before stopping. In my own eyes, I fulfilled **the law**, but in eyes of **the law** I had broken its mandate!

Now, imagine standing in a courtroom with God as the Judge. **The law**, in this case, functions as the prosecuting attorney. It does not bend or budge; it accurately demonstrates whether we have obeyed it or broken it. As a result, our own actions serve as evidence that both indicts us and condemns us. Just as I could not say that I was in right standing to **the law** during my trial for illegally entering the intersection, we have no leg on which to stand to declare that we are in right standing with **the law** before **God**! Only the grace of the judge dismissed my ticket. And only the grace of God through **faith** in His Son can overcome our sin.

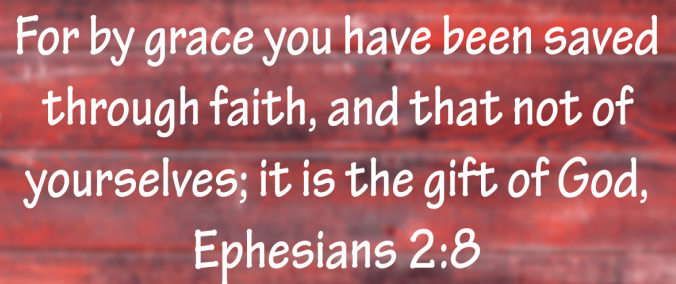
For proof that God has always operated on the principle of grace **by faith**, Paul

quotes Habakkuk 2:4 which states that **the just shall live by faith** (v. 11b). Although Paul leaves **faith** unqualified here, the larger context demands that we supply the words in God [Christ] in order to show the direction of our faith. Hence, our **faith** resides in what God has done for us rather than in what we can do for ourselves. This brings us full circle back to Abraham as an example (Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6). Abraham trusted that God would do the things which He had promised. On his own, the patriarch couldn't make himself a great nation; he couldn't be a blessing to all the families of the world. Even more importantly, without God's intervention, he couldn't even bear an heir which would multiply his descendants, making them too numerous to count. For when he ventured to do these things on his own, he failed; they ended in disaster and dysfunction (Gen 16). Abraham had to learn to solely upon the Lord alone!

As such, Paul's argument becomes crystal clear. We cannot be made in right standing with God by virtue of our own good works. Rather, we must trust that

God will make us in right standing **by faith** in Christ who did fulfill **the law**. For this reason, Paul points out that **the law is not faith** (v. 12). In short, we can summarize Paul's argument in these last two verses as follows. If we exchange **faith** in Christ for **works of the law**, we subject ourselves to following **the** whole **law** perfectly which Paul demonstrates by quoting Leviticus 18:5: **the man who does them shall live by them**. But Paul has already meticulously established that no one can keep it **all**. Just as if Abraham had trusted in his own ability rather than in the Lord, he would have failed miserably so also will we if we trust in our own ability to earn favor by following **the law** and doing good works rather than by placing our **faith** in Christ.

The direction of our **faith** matters! Our **faith** must rest in the Lord rather than in our own ability. When we trust in ourselves, we will be disappointed. As consumers, most of us probably do thorough research before buying a product. We either go online and read reviews or ask friends who have used the product to give us their feedback. How many of us would buy a product that we knew did not work at all? We would be foolish if we bought it, thinking that it would work for us when it hasn't



*For by grace you have been saved  
through faith, and that not of  
yourselves; it is the gift of God,  
Ephesians 2:8*

## Instruct

worked for anyone else. Unfortunately, many people do this with their own lives; they trust in a method that has a 100% failure rate when they trust in their ability to fulfill the requirements of **the law**. Whereas God, on the other hand, has a pristine track record; He never fails. His method of granting life by grace through **faith** in Christ works 100% of the time!

### Galatians 3:13-14

#### **THE REDEMPTION THROUGH CHRIST:**

Paul now explicitly states that **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law** (v. 13). The word **redeemed** refers to being bought with a price. Although not a perfect illustration, the modern concept of a pawn shop may help us better understand this principle. To pawn an item means that we allow someone else to take possession of it in exchange for a loan with a high interest rate. Technically, the item still belongs to us, but the pawn shop has taken possession of it as collateral. As long as we fully repay the loan, we can “redeem” the item and take it back into our sole possession. If we default, the pawn shop then takes complete control of it. In a sense, we—not God—have willfully pawned ourselves, allowing the evil one to take possession of our lives through our sin. God, through Christ, has paid the price in full to redeem us. This leaves us with a choice: do we accept Christ’s generous offer to buy us back granting Him complete control over our lives or do we fully sever that relationship and give our devotion to the devil whose end leads to destruction?



While on the cross, the words Jesus uttered to announce His imminent death communicate this very idea of redemption. The phrase, “it is finished,” is actually an accounting term in Greek which means “paid in full” (John 19:30). Through His substitutionary death, Jesus paid our debt (death) in full. Therefore, Paul notes that He **has redeemed us from the curse** by becoming **a curse** for us. Once again, Paul refers us to Scripture for support—this time to Deuteronomy 21:23 which declares, “**Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.**” In its original context, the verse focuses on the

requirement to bury those executed by hanging before nightfall so that the Jews would not defile their land. A criminal sentenced to this form of capital punishment was indeed **cursed** by God for breaking His holy **law**!

Notice, however, that Paul never said Jesus was **cursed** by God, but rather that He became **a curse**. To be **cursed** by God would imply that Jesus sinned. But Jesus did not break God's law in any way. He was and is sinless (Heb 4:15). He died an innocent Man! Pilate could find no fault in Him (Luke 23:4). One of the two thieves on the cross also echoed that same sentiment, admitting that the two of them deserved the death penalty whereas Jesus did not (Luke 23:41). To **become a curse**, therefore, simply means that Jesus took the place of the condemned, the one **cursed** by God—you, me, and every human being (i.e., **everyone**) who has ever lived because we have all broken God's **law** and deserve death. Consequently, Jesus became that perfect, unblemished sacrifice who graciously took our sin and its subsequent **curse** (death) upon Himself so that we could live and not have to face its penalty ourselves!

Question  
# 3

How does the reckless way in which many people use credit cards change the way the world views debt? What spiritual implications can we draw?

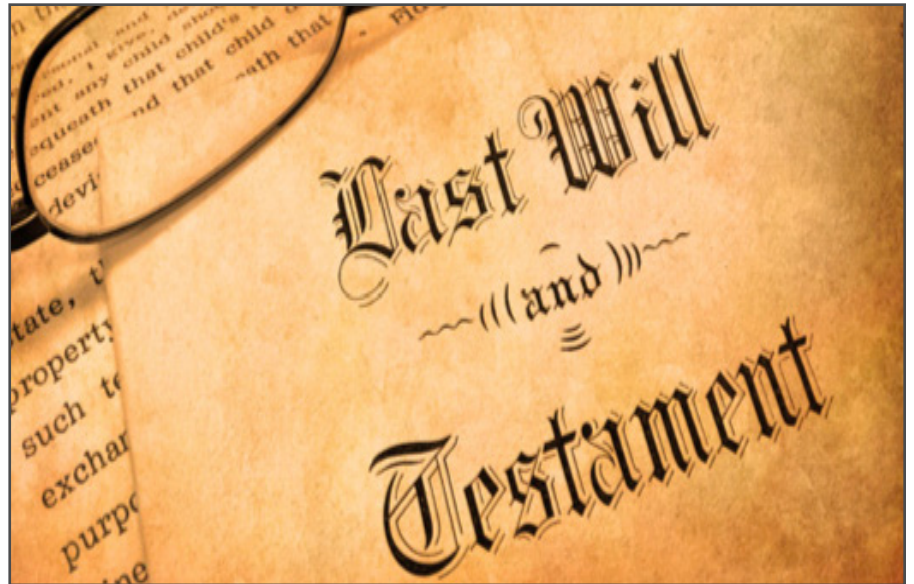
Paul further explains that Jesus died so **that the blessing of Abraham might** be extended to everyone in **faith**—both Jew and Gentile alike (v. 14). In verses 15-18, which we'll examine in the next section, Paul endeavors to explain more fully what this **blessing** entails. But here, in verse 14, he refers to that **blessing** as **the promise of the Spirit through faith**. From the very moment we repent of our sins and accept Christ as our Savior, **the Holy Spirit** takes up residence in our lives. He marks us as belonging to God (Rom 8:16) and serves as a down payment or guarantee of **the promise** of the eternal life to come (Eph 1:13-14). Therefore, Paul isn't referring to some mystical power whereby we can do great signs and wonders, but rather the promise of eternal life that God gives through His **Spirit** when we trust in what His Son did on the cross. Romans 8:11 can help us better understand when we hear Scripture plainly speak: "But if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Eternal life, therefore, is **the promise** to both Abraham and us—all those who believe and trust

the Lord.

### Galatians 3:15-18

#### THE PERMANENCE OF THE COVENANT:

Having established that redemption leading to eternal life comes through Christ alone, Paul now explains how this new **covenant** doesn't nullify the original **covenant** with Abraham. Christ actually fulfills it, bringing it to the fullest expression of which God had always intended. Those who demand that the Gentiles practice circumcision and follow Jewish tradition, however, see the **covenant** too narrowly in a way God never intended. As Paul will emphatically point out, the **covenant** with Abraham ultimately foretells the promised coming of Christ. Through these two covenants, therefore, we see the permanence of God's **promises**. Although Paul will use a common, everyday illustration to help the Galatians better understand (i.e., **I speak in the manner of men**), he takes care to remind them that it's not merely a man-made **covenant**, but a divine one which God Himself initiated (i.e., as **though only a man's covenant**).



The common illustration which Paul employs here is none other than what we would call a last will and testament. In fact, the word translated **covenant** bears this meaning and we could even substitute the phrase “last will and testament” whenever we see it in these verses. Just as in modern times, a will in the first century established the parameters for receiving a particular **inheritance**. It specified the conditions which must be met, the names of those who can receive it, and the item(s) to be received. The **covenant** with Abraham brought to fulfillment in Christ, in effect, becomes God's “will” which **no one can annul**—that is cancel or invalidate—or add **to it**.

Today, as in antiquity, only the testator or the one making the will can alter it. Paul uses this fact to affirm that God's **promises** are certain; He never goes back on His



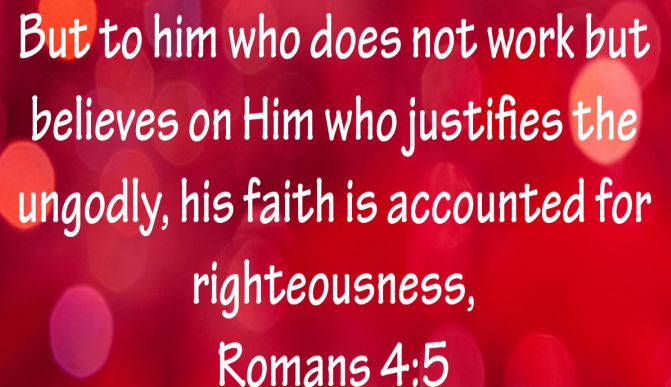
word. When **confirmed**—that is when the testator dies—neither the beneficiaries nor those excluded from the will can alter or change it to suit their own specific agenda or purpose. Instead, they must follow it exactly. Through the death of Christ, God has **confirmed** or firmly put into effect both covenants. No one can nullify or change them in any way from what God has spoken. Therefore, the requirements spelled out in God's **covenant** stand firm and must be met in order for one to receive an **inheritance**!

Question  
# 4

In what way(s) does the enemy try to change what God has said in His Word in order to cause confusion? What examples from Scripture can you cite?

Paul raises another interesting issue here. If Abraham lived **430 years** before God gave **the law** to Moses, then how could he have eternal life if our life depended upon following **the law** plus faith in Christ (v. 17)? Abraham would have no basis on which to stand before the Lord. Paul, therefore, reasons that **if** one's **inheritance** depends upon practicing **the law**, then it **no longer** functions as **a promise** (v. 18). By default, Abraham himself would have been excluded from the life God gives! He would have had no way to earn favor with God. On the contrary, this proves that the life God guaranteed Abraham came **by promise** not works. Our life comes in exactly this same manner through the faithfulness of God to His **promises** and not our own merit.

For this reason, Paul highlights the trajectory of God's **promises** in these two covenants—that is how they both ultimately culminate in **Christ**. To do this, Paul analyzes the language of the initial **covenant** God **made** with Abraham (v. 16). In this **covenant**, Paul points out that God spoke of Abraham's **Seed** in the singular rather than **seeds** in the plural. This shows that God's promise to Abraham goes well beyond mere physical descendants. God offers this **promise** of eternal life to all who believe in **Christ** (Gal 3:7-8). Thus, only the **Seed** promised to Abraham—Christ—could



*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,  
Romans 4:5*

## Instruct

become a blessing to all nations on earth by offering salvation to all and making the **covenant** effective.

Neither Abraham, his physical descendants, nor we could fulfill our end of these covenants. We needed a Savior to do it for us—the **promise** God had in mind from the very beginning! Thus, God's **covenant** with Abraham was not based on what the patriarch himself did, but what God would do for him and successive generations through **the promises** that He **made**. We also relate to **the law** in the same way. It's not about what we can do to fulfill **the law**, but rather about what God has done to fulfill His **promises** to us through **the law**. What Paul writes in the next few verses will further guide our understanding of this point.

### Galatians 3:19-23

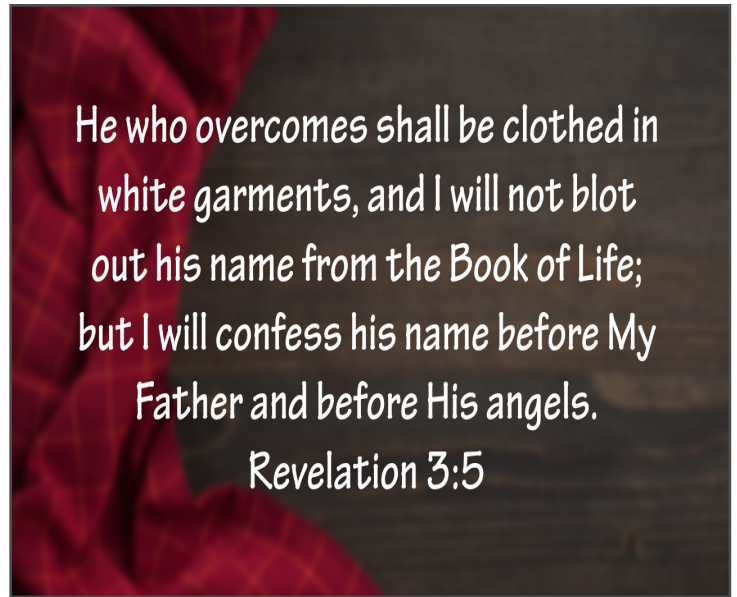
#### THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMANDS:

If God never intended **the law** to save and give **life** (v. 21), then Paul asks **what purpose does it serve** (v. 19)? He asserts that **the law was added because of transgressions** until **the Seed should come**. Based on these verses, we can identify two primary purposes of **the law**. First, God designed it to define what constitutes sin and establish the consequences for engaging in sin in hopes of restraining evil until **Christ** could **come** to deal with it permanently by transforming the heart—something **the law** could never do (see also Heb 10:1-4). Hence, Paul concludes that **Scripture has confined us all under sin** (v. 22). In other words, we **all** stand guilty before the Judge for breaking **the law** and now we must face the consequences for our choices.

Second, **the law** reveals our personal imperfections and shortcomings, pointing us to Christ. In other words, it shows our need for a Savior. This is why Paul argues that **we were kept under guard by the law** and calls it our **tutor** or guardian (vv. 23-24). We will deal much more with this point in our lesson next week. For now, we must realize that Israel had a long history of moral failure; we need only look at the prophets whom God repeatedly sent to warn them to repent. But the Gentiles also had this same propensity to sin because God had also given them a conscience to know right from wrong despite not having **the law** (Rom 2:14-15). Neither then was without excuse. Both stood condemned. God, therefore, needed to **come** Himself—not just speak through a human **mediator** like Moses who distributed **the law** to the people (v. 20). Christ needed to **come** and usher in salvation through His death because only He can

save. Only He has the power to change people's hearts.

To conclude and help us better comprehend Paul's rather complex argument in these verses, let us return to this illustration of the last will and testament we began earlier. Paul essentially answers this basic question: How do we receive the inheritance or promised eternal life that God offers? How do we get our names written in God's will? To answer this, we must first identify the conditions which we must meet in order to be named in His will. To be in right standing with Him, God requires us to be righteous or holy—something we cannot accomplish on our own by what we do. And something



that **the law** cannot produce within us either on its own (v. 21). In fact, we only stand condemned or **cursed under the law** because we cannot perfectly keep it (vv. 10, 22).

Christ, as we have seen, has met this condition for us by obeying **the law** perfectly without ever sinning (v. 13). As a result, God only requires **faith** in His Son whom He sent to share His **righteousness** with us (v. 14). To say that we must follow **the law** in order to have eternal life, like these misguided opponents in Galatia, attempts to change the conditions set by the testator—God Himself (vv. 16-17). We would say they “shifted the goal posts” from Christ to our good works. But we cannot **annul** or change any part of the **covenant** God has established from the beginning (v. 15). He alone sets the conditions and requirements which He **confirmed** through Christ's death (v. 20). And we must follow those requirements if we wish to receive our inheritance—eternal life. He provided that way for us to have life through a personal relationship with Christ based on grace through our **faith**.

As you drive this week, truly pay attention to the rules of the road and how well you follow them. Most likely, it will prove illuminating. We probably won't have just one infraction, but many. We may not see those red and blue flashing lights in our rearview mirrors to alert us to our mistake, but chances are we will have broken the law in some way. At times, our violation may not register with us immediately. Whereas at other times we will recognize it instantly. If you somehow manage to escape violating any law this week, congratulations. Keep it up! But be wary because at some point you will likely fall short of its expectations. In life, only Christ can help us overcome shortcomings like these!

While this lesson primarily dealt with our initial response to the gospel by grace through faith in Christ, it still has implications for those of us who have already accepted His gift and have eternal life. In Christ, God has called us to a high standard. He has called us to perfection. He has called us to imitate the pattern we visibly saw in His Son while He lived on earth. With that same keen eye we used while driving, let us examine ourselves by the standard Christ has set for us to follow. How well did we do? Although our eternal life doesn't depend upon what we do because we will always fall short, God will help to practice righteousness and holiness if we would only allow His Spirit to guide us. In faith, may we rely on Christ to help us learn from our mistakes and continually allow Him to transform us into His image.

## ***Incorporate***

If you are a parent, why did you set boundaries for your children to follow? What did you do when they broke them? How does this help us relate to the perspective our heavenly Father has about the boundaries He has set?

In what ways does the world try to justify sin? How can we help them see that such justification does not work with God as a holy and righteous Judge?

Although we cannot attain life through good works or by following the law, why is this still not a license to live however we want? In other words, if all Scripture is profitable still today (2 Tim 3:16), what relationship do we have to God's law?

*May 12, 2024*



*LIVE*

*as Family*

*Galatians 3:24-4:7*

Focal Verse:

“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Galatians 4:7

See  
Table of  
Contents

## Introduce

Today, most of the large warehouse retailers which specialize in selling bulk items require a membership to access their stores. They offer their memberships to any person without discrimination as long as he or she follows their requirements, which in business usually consist of paying a fee. Therefore, everyone has the same opportunity to receive the benefits of membership. But they have a personal choice to make: Do I choose to purchase a membership or not? All those who choose to purchase the membership have the same rights and privileges. However, those who choose not to purchase it have no access to the store at all. When they come to the store, they will be refused entry.



These memberships come with certain privileges, but they are the same perks for every member. The hours don't suddenly change or the prices fluctuate from one member to the next. The products in-stock won't be available to some members, but not to others—even though the store may limit the quantity each person can buy. While these stores treat all members equally with regard to products and prices, each member is still responsible to abide by the store's policies. At the same time, however, the store does not force them into the same mold with regard to how they exercise their membership as long as they abide by those stated policies. As a result, members maintain their distinctiveness; they can shop when they want, purchase the things they need, and use different methods to pay.

When it comes to Scripture, no human illustration can perfectly capture the status we have as members of God's family. Most of us can identify with these memberships to warehouse stores, but let's not press the example beyond what is written here as we compare the two. Membership, for example, in God's family requires a payment (death). Christ paid it all on our behalf (crucifixion). All we must do is accept His gracious gift (repent). When we accept it, we will have all the rights and privileges associated with being His children (eternal life and His spiritual blessings). Although God treats us all the same with respect to eternal life and expects us all to abide by the

## ***Introduce***

boundaries He has set (Scripture), He still designed us with distinctive roles and gave us various spiritual gifts with which to serve Him. According to His will, God allows us to exercise our membership distinctively through the roles He has assigned us and the gifts that He has given us. Even though we are equal with respect to salvation, yet distinct in Christ in terms of our giftedness, roles, and personalities, we should all follow Him with one purpose, seeking to do His will as His children.

Key  
Question

What benefits do we have as God's family?  
What responsibilities has He given us specifically?



### **THE GUARDIAN APPOINTED:**

Last week, our lesson ended with a much-too-brief discussion about the purpose of **the law**—the theme to which we will now return. By way of a reminder, we learned that **the law** had two primary purposes. First, God used it to establish the boundaries by which we must live and the consequences we would face when we transgressed them. Because we all have broken its requirements, Paul described **the law** as a prison which “confined” us (3:21) and as a prison warden who “kept us under guard” (3:23). Our sin condemned us to face its penalty. **The law**, therefore, became our “death sentence” and we were on “death row” so to speak. Second, **the law** pointed us to Christ. Through it, God revealed our imperfections and shortcomings which demonstrated our need for a Savior. Thus, Paul referred to **the law** as **our tutor** which **brought us to Christ that we might be justified by faith** (v. 24).

The word **tutor** is best translated as “guardian” in this context. Although we get our modern words pedagogue or pedagogy from it, in the first century it connoted more of a supervisory role than a teaching one. It specifically referred to a servant tasked with the supervision of his master’s child. The servant would go everywhere with that child, attending to all his needs until he matured enough to be trusted to make his own decisions. Until that time, the servant protected the child from the foolish mistakes of youth by setting boundaries and enforcing them through proper discipline. This guidance would then help the child to develop the necessary skills to think logically and act morally, leading him to the point in life that he could make the right decisions.



To help us better understand its function, think of **the law** as a guide. There are some guides who teach survival skills that will take their clients into some of the most remote and inhospitable environments in the world to show them how they

## Instruct

can successfully get back to “civilization” alive and well. At first, the guide will do everything for his client. He will show him what to do and what not to do. As the client matures in both his thinking and physical capabilities, the role of the guide will change slightly. No longer does he do everything for his client. Now, the guide leads and his client follows, doing things for himself. Even though the client will act on his own, the guide will still protect him from danger. He won’t let any harm come to him. He will intervene, for example, if he sees him trying to eat something poisonous or navigate an obstacle in an unsafe manner. Yet, at some point, the guide will have taken his client as far as they can go together. He will no longer stay by his side. The client must then act completely on his own and make the right decisions which lead to life rather than peril.

**The law** functions somewhat similarly. It brings us to a point of decision whereby we must choose wisely and correctly about the course of our lives. As a guide, **the law** shows us both the right and wrong way to conduct ourselves. To a certain point, it can protect us from making foolish choices while we are under its care. But it cannot save us. **The law**, as designed by God, can only take us so far. Through the holy boundaries it sets, **the law** can only show us the way to salvation and life by leading us to Christ. On its own, it cannot produce life in us. At a certain point, therefore, we are faced with a monumental decision. And we must make the right choice in order to have eternal life: we must choose to place our **faith** in **Christ Jesus** and follow Him, trusting that He has overcome our sin.

Question  
# 1

If all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for instruction (2 Tim 3:16), how does the law still function as a guide today?

In verses 23 and 25, Paul uses two unusual expressions which may lead to some confusion if not properly understood in their context: **but before faith came** and **but after faith came**. Based upon the way Paul has written them in Greek, we can more accurately translate them as: “but before that faith came” and “but when that faith came.” While Scripture generally speaks of **faith** in terms of an action in which we place our trust or confidence in someone or something, here it refers to a specific event rather than an action on our part. As such, these expressions become

shorthand for the incarnation of Christ which Paul will shortly address (Gal 4:4). While God was always the sole recipient of our **faith**, we live in a new era in which He has expressed Himself more fully by sending His Son—the Messiah—to redeem us. Because Christ **has** now **come**, we are **no longer** confined under **the law** and its death sentence nor do we need it as our guardian or **tutor**. We have Christ—the full revelation and resolution of God’s grand plan.



Because people often mischaracterize the teaching of this verse, I want to be clear about what Paul is and is not saying. Paul is not saying that God instituted two systems to bring life to His people—an inferior system (**law**) now replaced by a superior system (**faith in Christ**). God had only one plan from the beginning which came to fruition in Christ (Eph 1:3-14). Yet, many people often see **the law** (works) and **faith** (grace) as antithetical. In other words, they wrongly believe that God saved by works in the Old Testament and now by grace in the New Testament. For this reason, they dismiss the Old Testament as antiquated, irrelevant, and useless. This thinking actually misrepresents God’s plan and distorts what Paul has said in these verses.

God has always operated on the basis of **faith** and grace—even in the Old Testament (i.e., Abraham). God did not suddenly change the way that He acts! Rather, God always intended **the law** to bring us to a point of maturity through which we would realize that we must solely rely on Him for our salvation and serve Him alone. God never used **the law** to save, but rather He designed it to demonstrate the need for a Savior who could give life. Even today, **the law** still serves as a guide to bring us to Christ. It shows us our unrighteousness in comparison to God’s holiness. While the law cannot save, it does point us to the One who can!

During this week in which we recognize the contribution of our mothers, take time to think about how our parents guide us from adolescence to adulthood. As our God-given guardians, they shape our outlook on life—even if we don’t readily acknowledge it. They teach us to discern right from wrong, they protect us by setting boundaries, and they discipline us to keep us on the right path because they love us.

## Instruct

While under their care, they have complete charge over us. As we matured, however, the role of our parents changed. While they still offered advice and guidance, we had to stand on our own two feet and make the right choices which would put us in good stead in life. We became solely responsible for the decisions we made, so we had to learn to choose wisely. **The law**—the guardian which God gave to us—functions in the same way. It brings us to a point of choosing. To have life, therefore, requires that we choose **faith in Christ** rather than confidence in our flesh (i.e., good works).



Question  
# 2

In what ways did your parents shape your outlook on life? How do you shape the outlook of your children or grandchildren?

## Galatians 3:26-29

### **THE GUARANTEE AFFORDED:**

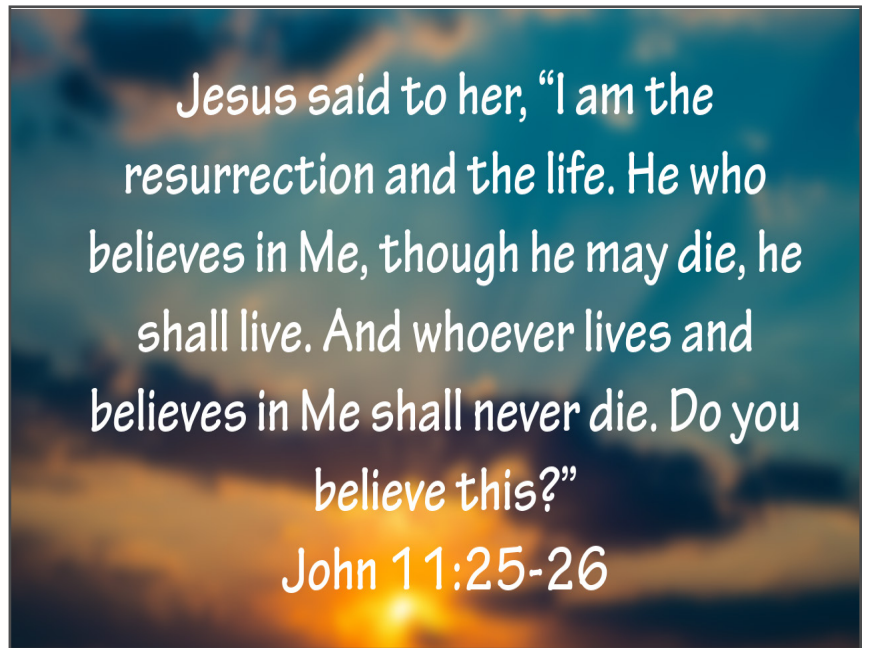
God guarantees the promise of salvation to all who follow His plan. Paul calls anyone who has turned from their sins and expressed **faith in Christ Jesus** children (literally **sons**) **of God** (v. 26). With the framework of repentance in mind, we can rightly comprehend what Paul means when he says **as many of you as were baptized into Christ** have put on Christ (v. 27). In this sense, to be **baptized into Christ** requires that we put to death our former way of life—that is repent—and then **put on** Him.

To **put on Christ** thus entails that we submit ourselves fully to Him and pattern our character after His (Eph 4:22-24). The word translated **put on** pictures the changing of clothes. We remove our dirty, soiled clothes and put on a fresh, clean outfit. Spiritually speaking, we should now live a new, transformed life in Christ free from sin (Rom 6:1-4) doing the good works for which we were created (Eph 2:10). Remember, Paul has already emphasized this very point in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith."

Furthermore, Paul goes to great lengths to demonstrate that God doesn't discriminate when it comes to salvation. He gives eternal life freely to anyone who will place his or her **faith in Christ Jesus**. Yet, many people often pluck verse 28 out of its context and distort its meaning: **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ**

**Jesus**. Unfortunately, we live in a world which tries to blur the distinctiveness with which God created us in a way this verse never intended. Paul is not saying that God has gotten rid of all our distinctiveness and roles! On the contrary, when Paul says **there is neither male nor female**, he means that we all come to Christ in the same way **through faith**.

God hasn't abolished the two genders, allowing people to choose as they see fit, nor has He abolished the specific roles He vested us as men and women—particularly in marriage. From the beginning, God designed us to fulfill unique roles which complement each other. To claim that He has abolished all these distinctions misrepresents this verse, destroys God's plan, and creates dysfunction in His world. God sent Jesus simply so that all may have life through Him—not to turn His creation upside down in opposition to its original purpose and intent!



Question  
# 3

What distinctive roles (and responsibilities) has God given us, specifically in marriage?  
What roles has He given us in the church?

This verse, therefore, depicts how we all become a unified, cohesive part of God's family despite our different backgrounds and experiences. While we may come from vastly different walks of life, we all join together as a single family to serve God with one purpose, moving in unity in the same direction. Thus, we share one thing in

## Instruct

common: we all become members of God's family in the same way by **faith through Christ Jesus**. Yet, even though we are all saved through a relationship with Christ, we still maintain our distinctiveness in the roles in which He has called us to serve in His family.

Think about how we function in our nuclear families. We each fulfill a different role, exercising our unique giftedness through our talents and skills. We also have distinctive personalities that must mesh together. As a family, we are bound together by physical birth and motivated by love to serve, work, and live together cohesively. The family of God mirrors the nuclear family. We too are bound together by spiritual birth (John 3) and motivated by love (John 14:15) to serve, work, and live together to accomplish God's will and glorify Him. While God treats us equally regardless of our ethnicity, gender, and social status, He has uniquely gifted us to fulfill a specific role in His family (Eph 4:11-12).

Question  
# 4

In what ways do we maintain distinctiveness in our nuclear families? How can we use that distinctiveness (roles, personalities, preferences, etc.) to be united and work together?

Paul further reinforces this idea as he concludes this section. Anyone who has a relationship with Christ, whether Gentile (**you**) or Jew (**Abraham's seed**), is an heir to **the promise** of God. Our names, therefore, have been written in the Book of Life (Phil 4:3; Rev 21:27) when we repent of our sin and confess Christ as our Savior. God has guaranteed life to anyone without discrimination. God is not stingy with His love. He doesn't exclude anyone, but offers life to all freely. All one must do is accept the gift He has given us in Christ.

### Galatians 4:1-7

#### **THE GIFT OF ADOPTION:**

Now that we have a new way of thinking in Christ, Paul shows us the utter foolishness of returning to our former way of thinking. Once again, the opponents of the gospel in Galatia have found themselves enslaved to the wrong way of thinking by elevating the prominence of **the law** over Christ. Hence, they've willingly placed themselves back under its **bondage** rather than the life-giving power of Christ

which transforms (v. 3)! When Paul contends that an **heir, as a child, does not differ at all from a slave**, it pictures our modern idea of a conservatorship (v. 1). In a conservatorship, for example, a court-appointed executor oversees a child's well-being—particularly, but not limited to financial matters—by making decisions on his behalf for a specific time period until the child can reasonably be trusted to make decisions on his own. Just as in a conservatorship, both an heir and a slave are subject to the guidance and control of another. Someone else governs all their affairs. For this reason, Paul reminds us that a **child is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father** (v. 6).

### *In-Depth Information*



The Greek word for **guardians** here in verse 2 differs from the one translated tutor earlier (3:25) for which I proposed “guardian” as a more suitable translation. Especially when taken together with **stewards** here in 4:2, the Greek connotes a person who legally manages or oversees an estate or household. Perhaps, executors would reflect a more accurate translation. While an executor typically deals with finances and properties, his work is not limited to these things only, but rather he governs all the affairs of the estate for the child until he comes of age.

Like an executor overseeing an estate, God designed **the law** so that it would govern His people and point them to Him by anticipating the coming of His Son who would bring His plan for salvation to fruition. But over the years, many people misconstrued God's purpose. They disenfranchised themselves from the Lord by trying to govern their own affairs and achieve salvation through their own good works. Now, however, the coming of Christ has revealed God's true intention for **the law** by fulfilling its requirements on our behalf so that we do not incur its penalty—death. As a result, we should have matured in our thinking to recognize the benefit of following God's perfect plan rather than relying on our own wisdom. To place ourselves back under the authority of **the law**, therefore, means that we are again subject to the penalty for our sins from which Christ has come to save us!

What point does Paul wish to make with this analogy then? From our own experience, we know that many children think they know best when it comes to the

## Instruct

course of their lives. They have it all figured out! They don't need any adult to tell them what to do. They simply want their independence. Yet, as adults, we know that they need structure and guidance. They need to know the right direction to proceed in life. Herein lies the biggest problem for the world, too. We think that we know best—even better than God. We have it all figured out. We don't need anyone to show us the way or give us advice. We can do it on our own. This type of thinking, however, always leads to dysfunction and destruction. Rather than listen to God and seek His wisdom, we continually return to our old way of thinking because we believe we know best! The former ways in which we thought and lived never work! Only God's plan through Christ brings life.

*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?  
Romans 6:16*

### Question # 5

In what ways do we as humans tend to return to our old way of thinking even though we may be privy to a new way of thinking in Christ?

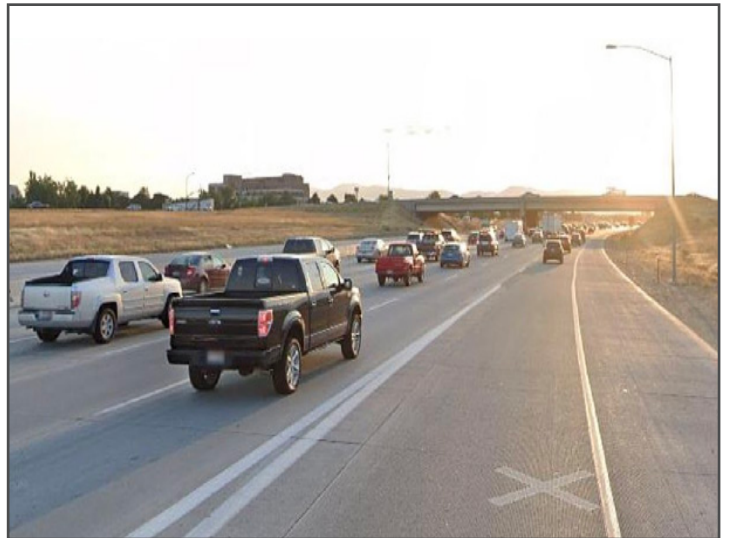
When we place ourselves back under **the law** instead of living in Christ, Paul points out that we have returned to **bondage under the elements of the world** (v. 3). By **elements of the world**, Paul means the basic principles governing morality or righteousness in the universe. Whether Jew or Gentile, we all have a conscience that distinguishes right from wrong. Technically, we don't need a written law to tell us lying, stealing, adultery, murder, and the like are wrong. God has written these things on our hearts so that none is without excuse (Rom 2:14-15). If we reject Christ and the life He gives by foolishly thinking that we can keep **the law** on our own, then we subject ourselves to its full penalty when we fail! We put ourselves under its **bondage** or control. We have no way of escaping its penalty because we cannot keep every part of the law flawlessly.



**A BIRTH THAT REDEEMS:**

In verse 4, we see an abbreviated version of the Christmas story: **when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son born of a woman, born under the law.** The expression **when the fullness of time** had come simply means at the right **time** God acted. God's plan is never too early or too late; He always acts at precisely the right **time**. In this case, once the law had served its purpose—showing our need to depend upon Him for salvation and life—God **sent His Son to redeem those under the law** (v. 5). Thus, Jesus rescued us from the law's curse—death—which we could not escape on our own. We live in a fast-paced world which demands prompt action and immediate results. We hate to wait and often find ourselves becoming impatient—sometimes to our own detriment. But we must realize that God's plan is neither rushed nor delayed. He always acts at the most optimal time to accomplish His will even when it may not make sense from our perspective.

When merging on or off the freeway, a solid white line divides a portion of the ramp from the main lanes. Technically, we shouldn't cross that solid line when merging. We should wait until it becomes a series of dashes. But people still cross it all the time! Some cross too early while others procrastinate—sometimes cutting through the triangular portion of the ramp! Such maneuvers contribute to both road rage and accidents. However, studies have shown that when people merge at the right time, traffic flows more smoothly with less congestion. Whereas we may tend to be impatient or procrastinate, God always acts at exactly the right **time**! In 2 Peter 3:9, the Apostle reminds us, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance."



Question  
# 6

To what events can you point in your life that show God acts exactly at the right time?


The two phrases with which Paul describes Jesus in verse 4 also carry important weight theologically. First, Paul refers to Jesus as **born of a woman**. The omission of Mary's name is by design. The more generic phrase **of a woman** points to Jesus' humanity. He had a natural birth like any other person on earth. He was fully Man. In addition, the absence of the phrase "born of a man" coupled with His description as God's **Son** indicates His divinity. He was fully God, too. Through this one phrase, Paul effectively captures Jesus' unique identity as both fully God and fully man at the same time!

Second, the phrase **born under the law** has two primary implications. It first of all suggests

that Jesus in His humanity can identify and empathize with us in every way. He was subject to the same obligations, needs, and emotions that we encounter in life. But even more importantly, it demonstrates how He voluntarily placed Himself **under** the constraints of **the law** to fulfill its requirements perfectly. Even though Jesus experienced everything in life we do, unlike us, He remained without sin (Heb 4:15). Therefore, He could become that perfect, unblemished, sinless sacrifice who defeated death for us once and for all!

Moreover, Jesus willingly chose to share His victory with us by redeeming us so that we **might receive the adoption as sons** (v. 5). **Adoption**, like the memberships we mentioned in the introduction, makes us a full member of God's family with all the benefits, privileges, and responsibilities. While God gives us numerous benefits as His children, we must still recognize the great responsibility we bear in the way that we represent Him. Even though we are no longer under the curse of **the law**, we are now bound to live by the high standards as the Spirit leads (Gal 5:16-26). No longer do we live according to our own desires, but rather we live according to the guidance of the Spirit unto holiness.

Take a moment to ponder the privilege of **adoption**. During our celebration of our mothers this week, we often reflect on their unconditional love. For those who



For as many as are led by the Spirit  
of God, these are sons of God.  
Romans 8:14

have adopted or been adopted, this love becomes even more pronounced. Many times, families who adopt endure hardships and obstacles—whether financial or legal hurdles. Yet, they persist. Their love never wanes because they desperately want that child to become part of their family. After finalizing the **adoption**, these children become full-fledged members of the family with all the rights and privileges as heirs. Their parents treat them in the exact way they do their biological children, supporting, encouraging, teaching, nurturing, consoling, and correcting them. They do this because they love them as their own!

That’s the extent to which God loves us. He came for us. He searched for us. He bore the legal and financial responsibility to buy us out of slavery to sin. He wanted a relationship with us so much that He provided both the means and the way. To adopt us, God had to overcome great obstacles—namely sin and death. He paid a tremendous price for us. He **sent His** one and only **Son** to die in our place! God extends this adoption to all. All we must do is accept it by faith indicated through our repentance and surrender to Him.

Question  
# 7

What privileges do we have as God’s adopted children? What responsibilities has He given us?

vv. 6-7

### **THE BENEFITS RECEIVED:**

Because of our **adoption** in Christ, we receive two primary benefits in addition to the eternal life which we now await to receive as heirs. First, we receive the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. As His children, **God** has **sent forth the Spirit of His Son** to live in our **hearts** (v. 6). While we will talk much more about what this entails when we get to chapter 5, we need to address a few things here briefly. As soon as Christ redeems us, He sends **His Holy Spirit** to live in our **hearts**; there is no such thing as “second baptism” in the **Spirit**. We don’t receive any more or any less of the **Spirit** as some wrongly teach. The **Spirit** comes to reside in our hearts the moment we repent and accept Christ as our Savior! However, we don’t always allow the **Spirit** full access and control of our lives, so we stray off course at times. The indwelling presence of the **Spirit**, therefore, identifies us as God’s children and preserves or seals us until

## **Instruct**

the day of redemption—that is until God calls us home to live with Him in heaven forever (Rom 8:16-17; Eph 4:30). The Spirit’s presence in our lives is thus currently signified by transformation. We should now live righteously according to God’s holy standards, imitating Him (Eph 5:1).

Second, because of our **adoption**, we now have a new status in Christ. No longer do we stand isolated and alone as slaves, but through Christ we have become close-knit members of the family and heirs to the promises of God! As His children, we now have a more personal and intimate relationship with God as our **Father** so that we call upon Him in any circumstance. The transliteration of the Aramaic word for **Father**, **Abba**, captures this very idea of intimacy and trust. Although not a perfect correspondence, we can discern the slight difference in nuance by comparing our English words **father** and dad. “Dad,” in our modern understanding, is a more familiar, less formal term which highlights the intimacy of the relationship. While we may introduce our parents to someone as “father” or “mother,” we typically call them “dad” and “mom” in our everyday conversations. God certainly commands respect and reverence as our heavenly **Father**. At the same time, we can rely upon Him to provide for our every need because He knows and loves us so intimately.

*Behold what manner of love the  
Father has bestowed on us, that we  
should be called children of God!*

*1 John 3:1*

Through the presence of the **Spirit** in our lives, we can cry out to the **Father** in an intimate way because we have direct access to Him (Rom 8:26; Heb 4:16). In the New Testament, we find three ways we can “cry out” to the **Father** based on the use of this word elsewhere. Based on the most prominent usage, we can cry out to the Lord for provision or help—whether physical or spiritual (salvation). In several instances, people cry to Jesus for mercy or physical help (Matt 9:27; 14:30; 20:30-31) and also for salvation (Rom 10:13). We can also cry out to the Lord for protection and preservation, especially in times of distress and persecution (Rev 6:10). Finally, but perhaps most importantly, we can cry out to our **Father** in praise. At the beginning of the last week of Jesus’ life on earth, people

lined the streets of Jerusalem and shouted praises unto the passing Savior as they laid their coats and palm branches before Him (Matt 21:9; John 12:13).

We have much for which we can cry out to our heavenly **Father** in praise! He has freed us from the shackles of sin and given us an inheritance of life through His Son. But that inheritance and blessings are not something just in the distant future. While we await that day God calls us home to dwell with Him forever, we can live an abundant life now because He has graciously given us His Spirit to guide us and sustain us.

Question  
# 8

For what can you specifically praise the Lord right now?

## *Inspire*

Sometimes, at Christmas, stores and online retailers will advertise gifting memberships to their sites. We have been graciously gifted membership into God's family. Christ paid the price in full for us with His blood! As a result, we now have all the rights, privileges, benefits, and responsibilities that come with such a magnanimous gift! Therefore, we must ask ourselves: Do we take our responsibilities seriously or do we just look forward to the benefits we'll receive and wait for them to come in full? As members of God's family, may we seek to honor our heavenly Father in how we now live while we reflect on the gracious benefits that He has given us both now and will give to us in the future.

## ***Incorporate***

Even though we are technically no longer under the law, how should the law still serve as a template for our conduct? Why are we not at liberty to sin even though we are no longer under the law as a guardian?

To what standard are we held today? Why is that standard actually much higher than the written law? What New Testament examples can you give to support your conclusions?

As adopted children into God's family, how does God demonstrate His love and care for us—and you in particular? How should you become a conduit of His love by communicating it to others?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

May 19, 2024



*LIVE*

*Fervently*

*Galatians 4:8-20*

Focal Verse:

“But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

back to  
Table of  
Contents

Galatians 4:18



## Introduce

Whether or not we consider ourselves fashionable or trendy, most of us have followed fads at some point in our lives. Some fads, like clothing, are seemingly forced upon us. When we go to the store to buy a new outfit, for example, we have little choice but to select from the current styles available. On the other hand, participating in other societal trends, such as dieting and pop culture, solely reflects a personal choice to go along with the crowd and engage in what's popular at the time. Life ebbs and flows. Trends come and go with astonishing regularity and brevity. Typically, people think little about their actual purpose, the science behind them, and the consequences—both the long-term and immediate effects.

Most people have some desire to eat healthier and reduce their weight, but they often lack the willpower to sustain the practice. Although they may have a sincere desire and make a valiant attempt, they don't often consider the nutritional and medical value behind the diet they select. They simply follow what's popular on

social media or by word of mouth from an acquaintance. As a result, they jump from one program to another on a whim. For example, one popular diet advocates eating only proteins and eliminating carbohydrates. Yet, such a fad fails to consider the need for a balanced diet where we get the right nutrients and exercise regularly. This diet may even appear good and seem to work initially, but in the end our bodies won't get all the nutrients and vitamins they need. This prompts Dana White to remark, "A flood of dieters with good intentions latch on to crazy fads only to be disappointed when their overly restrictive conquests fail."\*

Although faddish diets may not have overly severe consequences, some of the trends influencing our children on social media do. Influencers trying to make a name for themselves propose preposterous and dangerous stunts they brand "TikTok challenges."\*\* Some of these challenges have led to scores of deaths. For instance, the "Benadryl Challenge" encourages people to consume mass quantities of the over-the-



## Introduce

counter drug in order to hallucinate. Similarly, the “Blackout Challenge” compels people to hold their breath or asphyxiate themselves in other ways in order to experience the euphoria of passing out. Both have led to dozens of deaths! Other challenges, however, can result in severe bodily harm or arrest. The “Kool-Aid Man Challenge” incites people to bust through walls and fences whereas the “Devious Licks Challenge” provokes students to vandalize their school’s restrooms, stealing signage and other objects. They don’t merely steal the objects, however. They also record themselves doing it and post it online! Both challenges have led to multiple arrests.

Human nature compels us to follow fads and participate in trends no matter how stupid or dangerous they may be. People often give little thought to their involvement and feel pressured by the crowd to fit in. In Galatians 4, Paul deals with this very same problem. The Galatians are following a fad rather than the gospel which they first heard and believed. They have listened to others who have distorted the gospel of grace adding ritualistic works as a means of salvation in addition to Christ. But we know, as Paul reminds them from Scripture, good works and rituals cannot save. Christ alone and the work He did on the cross can. Therefore, the fad to which they have turned to follow has dangerous and destructive eternal consequences! Instead of following such ill-conceived fads, we must follow the truth and guard against anything that distracts us from living fervently in the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Key  
Question

What trends or fads do you see in our world today? How do they influence the spread or reception of the gospel?

## In Reference



*\*Dana Angelo White, “These are the Best Diets of 2023,” Food Network (January 5, 2023), available from [www.foodnetwork.com](http://www.foodnetwork.com); \*\*For a discussion and description, see Kyra Cola, “7 Dangerous TikTok Challenges for Kids that Parents Must Know About: ‘Extreme and Risky,’” Fox News (March 18, 2023), available from [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com).*

### Galatians 4:8-11

#### **RETURN NOT TO YOUR FORMER LIFE:**

Building upon the verses we studied last week, Paul continues contrasting our former lives without Christ characterized by idolatry with our new lives in Christ now led by the Spirit. By doing so, the Apostle hopes to warn the Galatian believers about the danger of returning to the former life they had left. In their former lives, the Galatians, just like us, once **served those things which by nature are not gods when they did not know God** (v. 8). The way that Paul pens this description of idolatry here reminds us also of how he explains the concept in Romans 1 where he chastises the people for claiming to 'know' God, but then refusing to "glorify Him as God" (Rom 1:21). Instead, he points out that they "exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25).

Typically, we think of idols as statues of animals or human beings with some animal-like features carved in stone, precious metal, or wood to which people literally bow in worship. While the ancients have plenty of examples of worshiping such icons or figures, idolatry extends far beyond bowing to an engraved image, thinking it has some magical or supernatural power. Idolatry, on the contrary, occurs any time we elevate any created thing—whether nature, man-made objects, religion, or people—above God. Any object, action, or philosophy to which we ascribe prominence and preeminence over the Lord becomes an idol that skews our perspective and detracts from our spiritual growth.

Question  
# 1

How can "religion" or even "busyness" in ministry become an idol that distracts us from the Lord?

One area that many people may never even consider as a form of idolatry, but often becomes so, is our families. Our families (the creature) can take the place of the Creator if we don't exercise awareness and caution, intentionally keeping the Lord at the center of all our relationships. Sometimes a spouse, or for singles the pursuit of a spouse, can become the center of our attention, supplanting our rightful relationship with the Lord. But even more frequently, for those who have children, they sometimes unintentionally become the culprit in drawing our attention away from God. Certainly, "children are a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3) just as a spouse is a blessing

## Instruct

and benefit (Gen 2:18, 24; Prov 19:14), but we should never elevate them in importance or prominence over Him. While God has charged parents with the responsibility of raising their children in the admonition of the Lord (Deut 6:6-9; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4), many may ask, “How can our families, especially children, become idols that distract us?”

Stop and think how life tends to revolve around our children or grandchildren. Their activities often dictate our schedules even more so than work. Although the following may sound like an indictment to some, let’s use these words to reflect on our own situations honestly. Whereas many parents spare no expense and exert maximum effort to have their children involved in sporting events, band competitions, or extracurricular activities, they fail to make time for a family devotion and prayer at home. Many may demand their children do their homework and even tutor them when needed, but they don’t encourage them to invest in the study of God’s Word with equal fervor. Many will rearrange their schedules to ensure their children practice for some sport or activity, but their busy schedules don’t permit time for gathering as the church or serving God through the proclamation of the gospel. Many parents don’t impress these spiritual disciplines on their children and, even worse, they don’t practice them themselves, setting a bad precedent.



Stop and think how life tends to revolve around our children or grandchildren. Their activities often dictate our schedules even more so than work. Although the following may sound like an indictment to some, let’s use these words to reflect on our own situations honestly. Whereas many parents spare no expense and exert maximum effort to have their children involved in sporting events, band competitions, or extracurricular activities, they fail to make time for a family devotion and prayer at home. Many may demand their children do their homework and even tutor them when needed, but they don’t encourage them to invest in the study of God’s Word with equal fervor. Many will rearrange their schedules to ensure their children practice for some sport or activity, but their busy schedules don’t permit time for gathering as the church or serving God through the proclamation of the gospel. Many parents don’t impress these spiritual disciplines on their children and, even worse, they don’t practice them themselves, setting a bad precedent.

### Question # 2

What criteria should we use to determine if something has become idolatry? Why are we often blind to idolatry in our own lives?

On their own, the things we do for and with our families may not be inherently evil or sinful. In fact, God designed us and tasked us with showing love, caring for, and investing in our families in meaningful ways. But we must maintain the right perspective and focus. In doing a simple Google search for the phrase “my family is my,” it generated the following top results: “my family is my . . . everything, world, ministry,

greatest treasure, heart," etc. When our family becomes the center of our world, it becomes idolatry. Although we say that we love God with all our hearts because He sent His Son to die for us, we diminish His prominence in our lives behind all these other temporal things that have absolutely no eternal significance. When we don't make our relationship with Him the priority in life for any reason at all, it becomes idolatry! As such, idolatry distracts us in our spiritual growth and hinders our maturity because we submit ourselves to the control of external forces and circumstances rather than the Lord who should dictate how we view and respond to every facet of life.

Question  
# 3

How can we ensure that we maintain the proper balance between serving the Lord with full devotion and our families?

Through these two verses, Paul draws an explicit contrast between their former lives as pagans and their new lives in Christ by highlighting how they once **did not know God, but now** they have come to know Him through the proclamation of the gospel. Paul more precisely points to God's role in initiating the relationship by clarifying that it is more important they **are known by God** (v. 9). In essence, man's attempt to 'know' God has led to idolatry, particularly when he tried to reach God through his own devices. But as Galatians 4:4-5 has revealed, God Himself—not our human actions, philosophies, or traditions—made it possible for us to know Him because He sent His Son to establish that relationship. God sought us! He took the initiative to redeem us. Our attempts to seek God on our own fail! Elsewhere, Scripture reminds us, "There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God" (Psalm 53:2; Rom 3:11). To be **known by God** means that He not only showed us the way to have life, but through His sacrifice He provided the way. Something we could not do on our own.



Herein lies the chief problem: the Galatians were in danger of returning to the

very thinking which led them down the path to idolatry in the first place. Paul labels this a return to **the weak and beggarly elements** which had formerly enslaved them. In Galatians 4:3, he referred to these **elements** as **the elements of the world** or the basic principles governing the structure and function of the universe with regards to morality specifically. Paul identifies these **elements** as **weak and beggarly**, that is worthless, because they lack the power to transform and save. Rather than trust in their relationship with the Lord, the Galatians began to trust in religion—or the things they thought they could do on their own to reach God.

This time, however, they weren't in danger of reverting to serving false idols who could not hear, speak, or act. Instead, they had begun trusting in the law as a means of salvation. Rather than rely exclusively on their relationship with Christ to bring life, the Galatians began relying on what they could achieve by fulfilling the law on their own. However, it is a relationship with Christ based on grace through faith that saves—not religious ritual. Religion and tradition, apart from a relationship with Christ, places us back under the penalty of sin because we have no way to overcome it on our own. Unless we rely on Christ, we will fail because we cannot achieve perfection through our own fulfillment of the law. We need His righteousness which He freely offers.

In verse 10, Paul specifically points out their folly. In addition to Christ, they **observe days and months and seasons and years** for salvation. Although some slight differences might exist amongst the four different terms used to describe the various time periods here, Paul likely intends us to take them together as a unit which simply shows that the Galatians had begun to follow the Jewish calendar. As such, this

would likely encompass observance of the Sabbath, monthly new moon festivals (Isa 1:14), and annual festivals commemorating significant events in Israel's history (Passover, Booths, Tabernacles, etc.). The particular danger wasn't merely participating in the festivals, but rather placing them on par with Christ. They had made these special **days** and festivals part of the requirements for salvation.

2024												Holidays & Observances											
January			February			March						Jan 01	New Year's Day										
Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa						Jan 15	Martin Luther King Day										
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	Feb 10	Chinese New Year								
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Feb 14	Valentine's Day								
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Feb 14	Ash Wednesday								
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	Feb 19	President's Day								
28	29	30	31	25	26	27	28	29	31	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	Mar 11	Parade begins					
April			May			June						Mar 17	St. Patrick's Day										
Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa						Mar 20	March equinox (GMT)										
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mar 31	Easter				
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Apr 01	April Fools' Day	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Apr 22	Earth Day	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	Apr 23	Passover	
28	29	30	26	27	28	29	30	31	30	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	Apr 24	Admiral Assistant's Day					
July			August			September						May 05	Cinco de Mayo										
Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa						May 12	Mother's Day										
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	May 19	Pentecost					
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	May 27	Memorial Day
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	Jun 14	Flag Day	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Jun 15	Father's Day	
28	29	30	31	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30	23	24	25	26	27	28	Jun 15	Juneteenth			
October			November			December						Jun 20	June Solstice (GMT)										
Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa			Su M Tu W Th F Sa						Jul 04	Independence Day										
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sep 02	Labor Day	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	Sep 22	September equinox (GMT)	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Oct 03	Rosh Hashanah	
27	28	29	30	31	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	29	30	31	29	30	31	Oct 14	Federal Holiday				
												Oct 31	Halloween										
												Nov 11	Veterans Day										
												Nov 20	Thanksgiving										
												Dec 21	December Solstice (GMT)										
												Dec 25	Hanukkah begins										
												Dec 25	Christmas Day										
												Dec 26	Kwanzaa begins										
												Dec 31	New Year's Eve										

Unfortunately, some who profess to 'know' Christ engage in this same practice

today— albeit with a slightly different variation. The calendar still dictates their worship. They merely attend church on special days, particularly Christmas, Easter, and perhaps a few other occasions. They regard themselves as having a relationship with Christ solely on the basis of participating in these annual events. These days, however, become routine—something they do out of habit without true meaning and purpose because they don't walk with Christ on a daily basis. Jesus requires anyone who wishes to follow Him to take up his cross daily (Luke 9:23). Simply attending church on special days or pinning our hopes upon being the member of a certain church doesn't save us; only a relationship with Christ does. When we have true life in Christ, it will show through the daily walk that we have with Him and in the transformed way in which we now live.

Question  
# 4

How can even 'regular' worship and church attendance become so routine that it distracts us from our true purpose? How can we guard against this?

After pointing out their ritualistic dependence upon the Jewish calendar, Paul interjects how he fears for them, **lest** he has **labored in vain** (v. 11). The Apostle has sincere concern for their salvation which is two-fold. First, they have returned to their former way of thinking which enslaved them. In other words, they abandoned life in Christ in hope of attaining life through their good works—following the law and observing the Jewish calendar. Yet, what they formerly did—whether as a Gentile or Jew—to attain life on their own apart from Christ never worked. And now they have ignorantly returned to these same errant practices that they once abandoned! As a result, they have moved from God's grace in Christ back to a hopelessness that leads only to death and destruction.

Second, if they don't correct their course, Paul fears that they may not have truly understood the gospel in the first place which he expresses through his concern that he might **have labored in vain**. While we may err at times in what we believe or practice, the Holy Spirit of God will always convict us and bring us back on course if we truly have a relationship with Christ. So, Paul doesn't fear that the Galatians will somehow lose their salvation. Rather, he fears that they may not have truly trusted Christ in the first place. If they have trusted in Christ, the Spirit would lead them to stop

## Instruct

placing confidence in the physical things they could do and being so easily influenced by these false teachers. If they persisted in trusting their own flesh, however, it would serve as a strong indicator that they never truly had a relationship with Christ. Therefore, they would need to repent of their sins and surrender their lives completely to Him before they could have the assurance of eternal life.

As humans, we have the tendency to return to the things which feel most comfortable even if they don't always work. Although we may have even been shown a better way, we keep going back to the old way which seems most familiar. Life then becomes a constant struggle to maintain the right course. In golf, for example, we may have a stance which feels so natural. Our swing may feel easy and fluid as we pummel the ball in the direction of the fairway. Yet, the results don't lie. Even though our swing may seem natural, our mechanics sometimes cause a terrible slice. We haven't hit the ball with precision.

Consequently, we need someone to analyze our swing—to tell us where we've erred and to show us the right way. Then, we need to follow their advice. If we would only follow the advice of a professional with proven results and do exactly what he said, we would have success in keeping the ball on the fairway. But old habits die hard. Even though we may know the right way, we may frequently find ourselves reverting to our original stance which caused us to slice the ball in the first place. Therefore, we must maintain constant vigilance, remembering what got us to the point of success and what caused us to stray off course and fail.

The Galatians had the same problem that many have in golf. They became complacent and returned to their former way of thinking and living. They reverted to what felt most comfortable and natural to them: seeking life through religion or through what they themselves could do. But the results don't lie. This way never worked. Paul had come to show them their error by preaching the gospel. He showed





them the right way to have life through what Christ did on the cross—not through what they could do on their own. At first, the Galatians enthusiastically accepted Paul’s correction and trusted in Christ alone. However, they had now let down their guard and allowed others to influence their thinking. They followed a fad rather than fervently lived for Christ. They returned to their old stance so to speak which put them in mortal danger, causing them to stray off course.

Question  
# 5

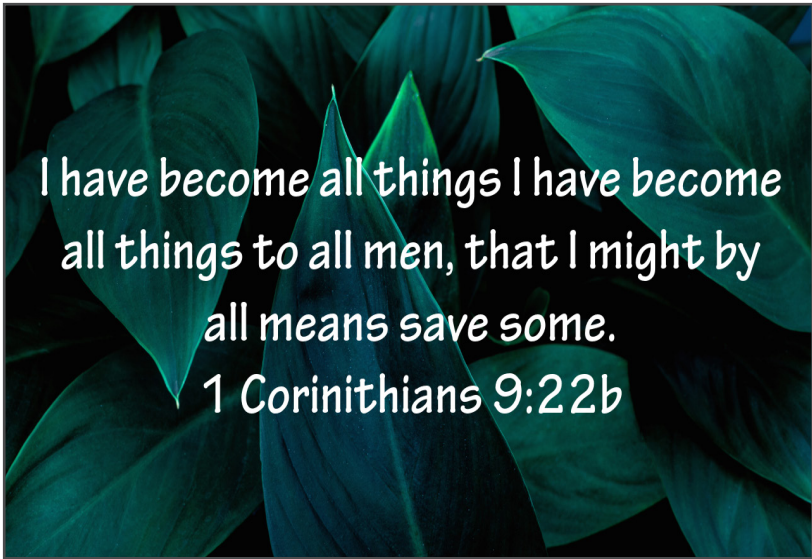
As believers what can we do to guard ourselves against returning to our old way of thinking and living?

### Galatians 4:12-16

#### **RELY NOT ON YOUR PHYSICAL FLESH:**

To illustrate his point about not returning to their former life apart from Christ, Paul implores the Galatians to **become like** him **because** he has **become like** them (v. 12). They can emulate him precisely because he has patterned himself after Christ (1 Cor 11:1). By appealing to himself as an example for the Galatians to emulate, Paul pits himself against his opponents. Unlike his opponents who required the Galatians to adopt Jewish customs and rituals to become full-fledged members of God’s family, Paul put aside any cultural differences that would become a hindrance to the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 9:22b, Paul makes a similar point when he declares, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” Like the gospel itself, Paul focused specifically on matters of the heart. He didn’t allow cultural practices that weren’t sinful and had no bearing upon salvation, such as what one ate and how one worshiped, to become a distraction in presenting the gospel. On the contrary, he put aside those things to focus on the things that mattered most: sin and the need for repentance through Christ. Truly, then, Who one worships (Christ) and how they respond (repent) to what He did (the crucifixion) matter most.



*I have become all things I have become  
all things to all men, that I might by  
all means save some.  
1 Corinthians 9:22b*

## Instruct

We as the modern church should have the same aim to reach all people with **the gospel** regardless of their background. Like Paul, we must put aside any cultural difference that isn't sinful and has no bearing upon salvation in order to proclaim the good news. While we should never tolerate, accept, or practice sinful behavior, we must never allow cultural differences to prevent us from proclaiming **the gospel** to anyone. Even when people don't talk, dress, or act like we do, we have still been called to go! **The gospel** illuminates (i.e., reveals sin), Jesus saves, and the Spirit conforms us into the image of God. As believers, we're not here to conform people to our standards or preferences or participate in the degradation of the culture in the name of reaching them; we're here to point them to Christ by living exemplary lives that reflect His holy standard for which He has set us apart.

Question  
# 6

What are cultural differences (not sinful) that we must overcome sometimes when sharing the gospel?

Just as we should never allow cultural practices to hinder the spread of **the gospel**, we cannot allow **physical** challenges to prevent us either. We must not rely on our **physical** flesh as the source of our strength to spread **the gospel** because it will fail us at times. We all have problems and weaknesses that will distract us from proclaiming **the gospel** if we allow them. Yet, we must rely on the Lord who can overcome any apparent disadvantage and use it to glorify Himself. For example, Paul did not allow his **physical infirmity** to prevent him from coming to Galatia to preach **the gospel** (v. 13). Neither did the Galatians focus on his **physical** ailment. They **did not despise or reject** the message because Paul had something physically wrong with him, rather they received him with open arms just as they would have received an angel or Christ Himself (v. 14).

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul also refers to perhaps this same **physical** malady when he speaks of the "thorn in the flesh" for which he often prayed for God to remove. As a result, scholars have speculated that this ailment could have been anything from epilepsy to malaria. Yet, here in Galatians, the text perhaps offers the greatest insight into what plagued Paul. It appears that the Apostle had vision problems which perhaps hindered his missionary work at times. In verse 15, for instance, he reports that the Galatians so readily accepted him that they **would have plucked out their own eyes**

**and given them to** him. Coupled with the fact that he concludes this letter by signing it in his own hand using “large letters,” it seems Paul’s illness was poor eyesight.



Too often, people limit what God can do through them because they see things entirely from a human perspective. They look at what they can do in their own strength or even judge others according to their outward appearance. They tend to focus on their weaknesses and problems, failing to see how God can overcome them and use them to His glory. Paul wasn’t alone, however, in facing **physical** challenges in his ministry. Moses, for instance, had a speech impediment—perhaps stuttering (Exod 4:10). Based upon external appearance alone, Samuel would have overlooked David as king (1 Sam 16:7) and King Saul would have prevented him from fighting Goliath (1 Sam 17:33). Jeremiah, likewise, objected to God’s call because he was a youth (Jer 1:6). Zacchaeus was vertically challenged and, yet, still wanted to see Jesus (Luke 19:3). From Scripture, we know how God worked through each of these **physical** challenges to do something extraordinary! Rather than taking pity on ourselves and allowing our flesh to impede us, we must derive our strength from the Lord and look beyond our momentary challenges to see the bigger picture of what God wants to accomplish. We must then trust the Lord to overcome our weaknesses and problems.

Question  
# 7

How have you seen God use people despite physical challenges they may have to spread the gospel?

## Galatians 4:16-20

### **RESPOND NOT TO FOOLISH FADS:**

When Paul first came to Galatia, they gladly **received** him. They didn't let any perceived **physical** deformity stand in the way. But after the false teachers came, they suddenly changed their tune. They now treated Paul as an **enemy** (v. 16). These false teachers had convinced the Galatians that Paul had deceived them when in fact he had told them **the truth**. This leads Paul to describe how these false teachers **zealously** courted them (v. 17). When we hear the word **court**, we often think of how a man tries to convince a woman to go on a date with him. While pursuing a woman, a man shows interest by paying much attention to her—the meaning of the Greek word here. He will tell her nice things. He will perform kind gestures for her. And he will attempt to present himself as the best option among any possible suitor. The woman, therefore, must discern his motives to determine whether he is genuine or a fraud.

Sometimes people become so enamored with the ones paying attention to them that they fail to analyze their message and motives. So, they turn out to be frauds! To borrow from dating again, think about how some can fool others through their words and actions. For example, sometimes a man tells a woman nice things because it's what he thinks she wants to hear. He pays attention to her and does kind gestures only because he wants to elicit a certain response and facilitate a desired outcome. He may even resort to attacking other suitors verbally based on their appearance, intelligence, and character while falsely bolstering his own. Essentially, this is what Paul accuses the false teachers of doing. They tried to **zealously court** them, **but for no good**. In other words, they didn't want the best for them; they sought to destroy them! Their whole purpose was to **exclude** them from the church—not because they cared for them, but because they selfishly desired followers for themselves.

Paul, on the other hand, had **courted** them with **the truth**; he wanted the best life for them which we knew that only Christ could give.



So, he attempts to allay any fears they may have and reassure them of his honorable intentions by appealing to a proverbial saying: **it is good to be zealous in a good thing always** (v. 18). In other words, it's **good** to be **courted** for the right reasons! To understand his intentions, they need only examine the content of his message and its results. His message, **the gospel**, didn't **exclude** based on superfluous rituals or external characteristics; his message was inclusive—available to anyone who would accept it. Neither did his message bring division in the church; it produced unity through the life they now lived in Christ no matter their background. As a result, the Galatians should be able to see evidence of the effectiveness of **the gospel** in their lives through the work of the Holy Spirit!

Unlike the false teachers, Paul hadn't come to gain followers for himself; he had come to implore them to follow Christ. To reinforce his point, therefore, he explains how he continues to **labor in birth again until Christ is formed in** them (v. 19). He wants them to know **the truth** so that they can mature in their salvation. But he has **doubts about** them (v. 20). Paul's doubts don't disparage their character or demean them in any way; instead, they show his deep concern that they have a genuine relationship with Christ—something for which we too should have great concern for anyone we meet!

Based on his concern for them and his honorable intentions to point them to Christ, we can draw two implications about what he means by the phrase **Christ formed in** them. First, Paul desires them to have a relationship with Christ if they didn't. He wants them to be in right standing with God (i.e., justified) and forgiven of their sins. Second, if they already have a relationship with Christ, Paul desires that they grow in their faith. He wants them to pattern their lives after Christ—that means to imitate Him.

Question  
# 8

For whom are you concerned with regards to salvation? Who does God want you to labor in birth (i.e., evangelize and disciple) until Christ is formed in them?

Our world today uses these same techniques as these false teachers to distract us from **the truth** and keep us from maturing in our faith. They deceptively package their message in an attention-grabbing way whether through the slick use of technology, popular personalities, or catchy phrases. Moreover, the culture tells people what they want to hear—not **the truth**. When people do proclaim **the truth**, they will attack their

## Instruct

character, insult their intelligence, and call them names in an effort to invalidate **the truth** by demonizing the person communicating it. Culture pressures us to follow fads by cultivating a fear of being excluded. The oft-used acronym FoMo (fear of missing out) even captures that idea. However, if we follow these fads, we will only end up excluding ourselves from the abundant life Christ wants to give! We must fervently follow Christ and not these fleeting fads.

Question # 9 In what ways do you see the world deceptively marketing fads today?

We can learn two principles from Paul's admonition to the Galatians that we can apply today. First, evaluate the message! Don't merely look at its packaging—either the way it's presented or the one who presents it. Look at its substance. Examine the contents. Does it measure up to the standard God has set in Scripture? Therefore, we must also examine the results. What is the outcome of participating in the fad? Does it help me to grow in my faith or will it hinder me?

Second, evaluate the motives behind the fad! This can be somewhat more difficult to discern at times because our world rushes us to make decisions and act quickly. Fads come and go in an instant which is evidence that they actually lack substance. But the principles of Scripture never change or fade. So, we must slow down and seek to understand why the world is promoting the fad. Fads, from the world's perspective, are often a smoke-screen to conceal sin. They are simply an attempt to justify sin and make it look enticing. Yet, such fads can lead to addiction and in the end enslave us to sin. Therefore, we must exercise great caution not to just follow fads because they feel good, seem to have a positive message, or claim to be beneficial. We must evaluate the content of their message in relation to **the gospel** and evaluate the motives behind them in order to discern **the truth** and live an abundant life as Christ intended.

Question # 10 What biblical criteria would you use to evaluate the message and motive of any fad the world might promote?

In the introduction, we saw just a few of the fads or trends in which our world has engaged today. Some of them had severe consequences, leading to arrest, bodily injury, and even death. Others, however, simply faded from popularity as people grew tired of them. In either case, these fads had no substance. They added no value to life. They had no true benefit or they would have withstood the test of time. The same cannot be said for the life which Jesus offers us. It has remained consistent over the centuries. It's not a fleeting fad, but something that comes with both great responsibility and great reward. Rather than get caught up in the fads of the world which come and go with great regularity, let's bind ourselves to God's truth and live fervently according to His Word which never changes.

## *Incorporate*

What are some things that pressure us to return to our “former” lives? How can we overcome those things to grow in Christ?

In what ways do we sometimes rely on our flesh—our own strength, abilities, and thinking—in the ministries God has given us? What danger does this pose? How has God equipped us to rely on Him for these things?

What fads have you followed in the past? What did you learn from that experience? Why didn't it last? What did that teach you about following Christ?



## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

May 26, 2024



**LIVE**

*In Freedom*

**Galatians 4:21-31**

Focal Verse:

“So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

back to  
Table of  
Contents

Galatians 4:31

## Introduce

In general, life teaches us to look at things pragmatically and avoid taking unnecessary risks. As believers, however, we must balance such a mindset with our faith in the Lord, relying on Him to direct us even when something seems impossible humanly speaking. While we should never act impetuously or foolishly, putting ourselves in mortal danger under any circumstance, such a pragmatic outlook can sometimes curtail how God wants to use us in ministry when we don't surrender to His plan. When we look at our lives through these same practical lenses, we often fail to see the bigger picture of what God wants to accomplish through us because we have a limited perspective. Such a limited perspective can cause us to trust only in ourselves rather than rely on God who can do the impossible (Matt 19:26). From a human point of view, we only have a limited amount of strength, ability, and resources. God, however, is not bound by these things.

Throughout Scripture, we find people who have a limited vision and trust only in what they can do on their own. At the same time, however, we also find people who trust the Lord to do the seemingly impossible through them. After their exodus from Egypt, Israel camped on the border of the land which God had promised them as an inheritance. As they waited,

they sent out twelve spies to survey it (Num 13). Only two of them returned with a positive attitude, believing that God would deliver it into their possession just as He had promised. With God on their side, no obstacle was too big for them to overcome! On the other hand, the rest of the spies feared the mighty inhabitants of the land along with their well-fortified cities, knowing that based on their own strength alone they could not overthrow them. This doubt subjected them to forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Years later, as the people of Israel faced an external threat from the Philistines, both their king and their soldiers feared a giant named Goliath who taunted them daily and mocked the Lord (1 Sam 17). Only David, a mere lad at the time, recognized the



*But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

*Matthew 19:26*

## Introduce

cause for which he had been called and gladly accepted the challenge set before him. Thus, God felled the giant through David, using only a slingshot and stones. In the New Testament, the disciples, many of whom were seasoned fishermen, feared capsizing and drowning in the Sea of Galilee during a raging storm as the boat was violently thrashed by the waves. But at least they knew where to turn for help—to Jesus who was asleep in the boat! When they woke Him, Jesus commanded the wind and waves to cease (Matt 8:23-27)!

Take a moment to consider some of the impossible things God did through His people to glorify Himself and advance the gospel. Abraham, for instance, was willing to sacrifice his promised heir because He believed that God could raise him from the dead (Heb 11:19)! During Israel's exile in Babylon, three friends refused to bow in worship of King Nebuchadnezzar. So, God delivered them through a fiery furnace without one hair being singed (Dan 3). God also delivered Daniel from the mouths of hungry lions when he refused to obey an edict to stop praying to anyone but the king (Dan 6). God did extraordinary things through these individuals simply because they trusted Him! He doesn't always spare us from turmoil, trouble, and terror, but He always remains by our side sustaining us and working through us! God, therefore, also wants to use us to do extraordinary things to glorify Himself and advance the gospel.

William Carey, the great translator and missionary to India, wholeheartedly championed his sending agency's slogan: Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God. Many of us may expect great things from God, but we fail to attempt great things for Him because they seem impossible from our perspective. If God has clearly called us to a specific task, He will equip us—even if it appears impossible on our own! Which way of thinking best describes you: Do you have a practical outlook only trusting in the limited things you can do or do you trust God to do the seemingly impossible through you? We can live freely not because of what we have accomplished on our own, but because God has done the impossible for us through Christ—the heart of our lesson this week.

Key  
Question

In the past, how have you responded when things looked seemingly impossible?

#### **THE PROBLEM WITH THE FLESH:**

The verses to which we will turn our attention this week are perhaps some of the most difficult and misunderstood in all Scripture. Paul appeals to a series of events in the Old Testament as an example which clearly illustrates what he has said thus far about **the law**. He begins by asking a rhetorical question that cuts to the heart of the issue. He asks it to those **who desire to be under the law**—both the false teachers and the Galatian Christians who have adopted Jewish customs as if they have merit for salvation (v. 21). His question is simple: Do you not understand (literally, **hear**) **the law**? We could even rephrase it for emphasis this way: “**Do you not** understand the purpose and function for which God intended **the law**?”

Have you ever read something and thought you understood it, but then later realized you really hadn't? As a teenager, I made that discovery when I tried to heat some pizza rolls in the microwave after school for a snack. On the packaging for frozen foods, we generally find a few recommended methods for preparation along with specific instructions for each. After grabbing the pizza rolls from the freezer, I read and followed the instructions exactly. I got out a cookie sheet, sprayed it with oil, and arranged the rolls in a single layer. I placed it—somewhat snugly—into the microwave and set the timer for thirty minutes. It wasn't until they burst into flames and turned into charcoal briquettes that I realized something had gone awry. Seeing the word “oven” on the package, I realized that I had read the instructions for a “conventional oven” instead of a “microwave oven.” I thought that I had understood—and even rightly applied the instructions for the microwave—but it turned out that I really hadn't.

With this question, Paul hopes his audience will come to realize that they have not really understood the purpose and intention of **the law**. In Ephesus, just like here in Galatia,



## Instruct

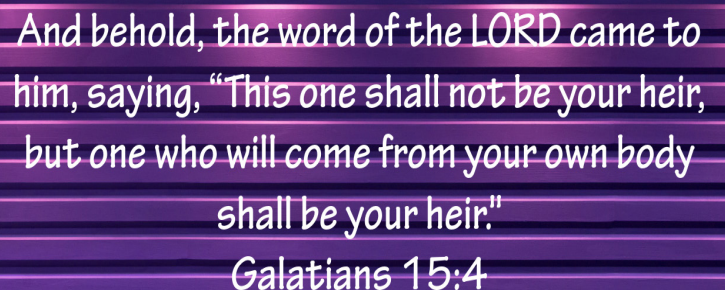
Paul battles people “desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7). Although they pass themselves off as experts, they haven’t understood **the law** and, so, lead people astray from the truth. If they had understood **the law**, they would have recognized it is powerless to save because no one can perfectly keep it. Therefore, **the law** enslaves us, leading only to death. As such, it can only show our imperfections and point to our need for a Savior.

This question likely hits home with many of us because at some point in life we’ve misunderstood or misapplied something we’ve read or heard. Perhaps, we’ve even had someone misunderstand what we’ve said. Just think about the times when you text someone with two different options and the person simply responds with a “thumbs up.” It leaves you wondering whether they actually read the message. And in order to seek clarification, it forces you to reply, “Which one?” When it comes to the gospel and Scripture as a whole, we must take great care to interpret and apply it correctly. Because it contains matters of eternal importance, we can’t afford to think we’ve understood it only to later find out that we really haven’t!

Question  
# 1

When have you ever thought you understood something, but then found out that you really hadn’t? What did God teach you through this incident?

To help his audience understand the purpose and function of **the law**, Paul appeals to the life of **Abraham** as an example. But he does so through symbolism. In verse 24, he even notes that he speaks symbolically—which is the word in Greek from which we get our English word allegory. An allegory uses events, people, places, and things to represent an idea that an author wishes to emphasize. Here, Paul wants to contrast two ways of thinking in relation to **the law** and the Spirit which we will see in the discussion that follows. Even though he uses symbolism, Paul does not want to divorce these events from their historical context or imply



*And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”*  
*Galatians 15:4*

that they did not actually happen. Therefore, we must resist the temptation to over-spiritualize every element of these episodes in Abraham's life so much that it obscures the actual history and we miss what Paul wants to communicate. From what he has said so far, the meaning is explicitly clear from the context if we only pay attention to the cues.

Having understood that Paul is writing symbolically, we can now analyze the meaning of the allegory. He begins by pointing out that **Abraham had two sons: one by a bondwoman and the other by a freewoman** (v. 22). Paul expects his audience to have at least some familiarity with the events because he speaks rather broadly at first without identifying them by their proper names. He merely refers to **Hagar** and Sarah respectively as **a bondwoman** and **a freewoman**. The word translated **bondwoman**, or servant, comes from the same root translated earlier as "tutor" or guardian, thereby linking the entire section together as a single unit (Gal 3:24). By using this same root, it allows Paul to associate **Hagar** with **the law** to show how it places one under **bondage** (Gal 4:3). In fact, he goes to great lengths to make the connection explicit in verses 24 and 25 where he identifies the two women with **two covenants**.

First, he equates **Hagar** specifically with the covenant **from Mount Sinai**—that is where Moses received **the law** (Ten Commandments) from God which he subsequently declared to the people. This covenant, Paul says, **gives birth to bondage**. In addition, he shows the extent of the covenant's influence by tying **Mount Sinai in Arabia** together with the city of **Jerusalem**. By doing so, he demonstrates how the Jewish people, particularly those who have rejected Christ, still remain **in bondage** under **the law**. This group also includes the false teachers and those in Galatia who have followed them. They, too, will find themselves back **in bondage** when they make adherence to **the law** a requirement for salvation.

Paul now refers to the second covenant in Christ as **Jerusalem above** which he describes as both **free** and **the mother of us all** (v. 26). In the prior verse, he had stressed the physical location of each place—hence **Mount Sinai in Arabia** and **Jerusalem, which is now** (on earth)—because he wanted to show the current state of affairs in the world versus what exists in the spiritual realm through Christ. Thus, he sets up a contrast between these two realms: the physical and the spiritual. The current "**Jerusalem**" on earth finds itself bound by religion rather than a relationship. It wrongly relies on ritual and tradition to draw people closer to God. Instead, such routine and

## Instruct

monotonous actions become odious to the Lord because He desires a relationship predicated on obedience rather than mere ritual. Therefore, they literally rob people of life, confining them in their sins! They cannot save!

### Question # 2

Why are traditions and rituals not necessarily bad? When do they become off base and burdensome?

On the other hand, the **Jerusalem above**, or heaven, represents the spiritual realm. We can only have access to this realm through Christ Jesus (Eph 2:18). This **Jerusalem is free** in two ways. First, God paid for our access through Christ. While it cost Christ everything, He offers it to us freely (Rom 6:23). Second, Christ frees us from the burden of **the law** itself. Even though we have a higher standard by which we must now live in the Spirit, Christ frees us from the burden of fulfilling **the law** on our own. He fulfilled it on our behalf. This doesn't mean that we can act lawlessly, doing whatever we desire, or that we have no responsibility, but rather Christ has imbued us with His Holy Spirit to help us live consistently with God's holy standards. Therefore, Paul can describe this **Jerusalem** as **mother of us all** because those who have access in Christ will live in faithful obedience to Him.



Furthermore, Paul explains that the child of **the bondwoman was born according to the flesh** whereas the child of **the freewoman through promise** (v. 23). What does he mean by **flesh** in this context? **Flesh**, in this case, simply refers to human means or ability. Abraham and **Hagar** were able to conceive a child on their own power so to speak because they were both humanly capable. On the other hand, Abraham and Sarah did not have that same luxury, for she was barren. The couple could only conceive because God had promised and then made it possible. Both, according to Scripture, were well past child-bearing age when God allowed them to conceive. With their bodies as good as dead, there was no doubt who made it possible for them to have a child (Rom 4:19-22). Truly, they had to rely on God, not their own power, to



fulfill His **promise** to them!

Question  
# 3

When have you relied on God to do something you could not possibly do yourself? What did that teach you about yourself and God?

Consequently, the contrast between **flesh** and **promise** represents two different ways of thinking. In the **flesh**, for instance, we rely on our own capability and strength; it's that limited perspective we discussed in the introduction. Recall how the union between Abraham and **Hagar** occurred in the first place. Sarah proposed it! She wanted to give God a helping-hand because she believed that time was running out for Abraham to produce an heir according to her human perspective. So, she proposed he take her young, fertile handmaiden to aid in the process. Although culturally acceptable in one sense, it was not God's plan! We all know how this turned out. Even though Sarah made the proposal, she became angry, bitter, and jealous when it actually came to fruition and **Hagar** bore a son.

The term **promise**, on the other hand, represents a way of thinking where we rely on God to guide us, we walk in the Spirit, and we trust Him to work in our lives to accomplish His will even when it seems impossible from our own human perspective. As we have seen from their first attempt to produce an heir, both Abraham and Sarah had to revise their way of thinking. It's not something that came naturally to them—or to us for that matter. We generally think in terms of what we ourselves have the capability of doing. To think in terms of **promise**, however, we must recognize our own limitations and weaknesses while at the same time trusting God to do what we cannot do on our own. This type of life, and thinking, comes only through Christ—not **the law**.

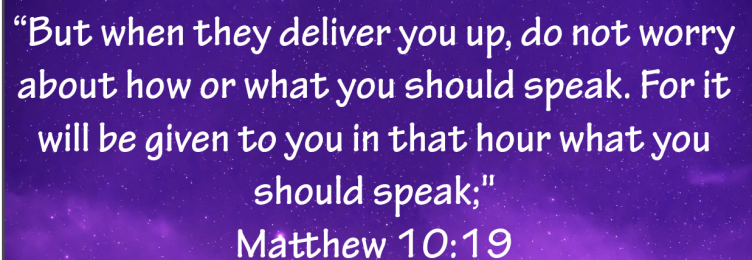
What does Paul mean by all this? Simply put, the **two covenants**—the former covenant instituted through **the law** and the new covenant established in Christ—represent two widely



divergent ways of thinking. Trusting in **the law** for salvation means that we have adopted a human perspective, thinking that we can achieve life on our own through our good works. But we can't. This way fails. God designed **the law** only to show our weaknesses and limitations—not to save us. If we trust in **the law**, we will find ourselves subject to death and we remain **in bondage** to sin because we have no power to overcome it on our own. God had a greater, more perfect and permanent plan to deal with sin which He promised through the Messiah. To trust in Christ, therefore, indicates a spiritual mindset where we see things from God's perspective and surrender ourselves to His plan in faith. As a result of this mindset, we recognize that God can do what is impossible for us, so we seek eternal life through Him alone.

Although Paul specifically addresses salvation here, we can expand this principle slightly and apply it to our thinking in general. Not only must we trust God alone for our salvation, but we must trust Him in every area of our lives to accomplish His will even when it seems impossible. Therefore, we must dare to think big from God's point of view. This doesn't mean that we take foolish risks or venture out on our own, asking God to sanction it; we must still seek Him and wait upon Him. Neither does it mean that we can live by the power of positive thinking—believing that we can do anything we set our minds to. On the contrary, we must submit ourselves to God, obeying what He says. To achieve something "big" in life with eternal purpose and value, we must listen to God, understand His will, and rely on His power and strength.

In other words, we must allow God to work through us rather than fighting against Him based on the perception of what we can and can't do on our own. From our human point of view, we can often rightly say, "I can't." But we must always follow that declaration with "God can if He has called me." We should never limit what God wants to do through us by thinking only in terms of the **flesh**. If God has called us, given us clear directives, and we have confirmed it with Scripture, then we should never make excuses. He will always make a way. Too often, however, we limit God because we focus only on our own weaknesses and inadequacies and declare that we can't do something.



*"But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;"*  
Matthew 10:19

When we trust Him to work through us, however, we can figuratively move mountains when He leads (Matt 17:20-21). The question that we must ask ourselves, then, is, "Do I trust God enough to allow Him to move mountains through me?"

To help us grasp the differences between these two ways of thinking, let's look at some common examples. The differences in these mindsets often become manifest in how some view evangelism or witnessing. From a human perspective, people will lament, "I can't share my faith. I don't know what to say." But God does and He even promises to guide us in what we should say (Matt 10:16-20). Others may interject, "I may not know how to answer their questions." "But God does! Will you trust Him to speak through you, give you the words to say, and respond to their questions wisely? God promises to do so! From a human perspective, some will argue, "I don't have the resources to give." But God does! Whether it's the command to tithe or the fact He has laid on your heart to give an offering toward a special project, will you not trust that the Lord will provide for all your needs? God promises to meet our needs if we would only put Him first in our lives (Matt 6:25-34).

As a church, we sometimes limit what God wants to accomplish through us because we don't see the big picture nor do we think big and dare to do the "impossible." Some members become overwhelmed and, therefore, retreat rather than push forward in battle. They look around and see the enormity of the task of reaching the culture and they lose heart. They regard culture as too far gone. They may even ask in desperation, "What can I do?" They see themselves as insignificant and powerless to change the course of culture. But a person led by the Spirit will always ask, "What can God do through me?" It's not about what we can do to change the culture because we will certainly fail on our own. Rather, it's about what God can and wants to do through us collectively! Hope will abound when we trust the Lord and allow Him to work through us. Just as God worked through the first-century church in the midst of an adversarial culture to effect life-change, so also will He work through us in the twenty-first century when facing the same adversarial culture which persecutes His people.

God has not called us to act recklessly or foolishly, however; He has called us to trust Him and rely upon Him. We must stop looking at the things we may want as individuals with respect to our personal preferences and goals. We must look at things in terms of what God wants. We can only have this mindset when we seek His desires through prayer and Scripture, surrendering to the direction of the Holy Spirit. We must

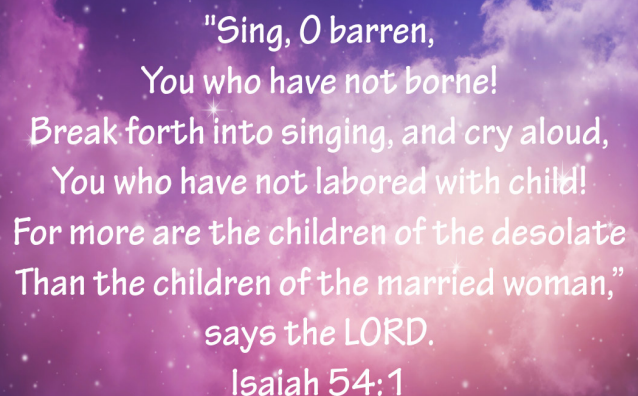
## Instruct

also stop complaining as if we are victims of fate. We must allow God to use us how He sees fit. Rather than complain, we must be part of the solution. This means that we must cede control of our lives to God and allow Him to guide us. None of this comes naturally to our human way of thinking—just look at Abraham and Sarah. While they still had faith and trusted the Lord, they sometimes ventured errantly on their own with disastrous results. They both had to learn the hard way from their mistakes. But in the end as they both grew in their faith, they began to see things from God's perspective, taking their own opinions, perceptions, and feelings out of the equation. This allowed Abraham to be willing to sacrifice his promised heir, confidently knowing that God would raise him from the dead because He always delivered on His promises! Like them, as we grow in our faith, a mindset governed by the Spirit should become a more natural way of thinking through which we follow God anywhere He leads.

Question  
# 4

What extraordinary thing does God want to accomplish through you to build His kingdom?

Paul ends this first section on a note of hope and praise for what God has done and will do when we trust Him. Quoting from Isaiah 54:1, the Apostle offers praise to the Lord for accomplishing the impossible for His people. In its original context, Isaiah 54:1 called Israel to **rejoice** over her restoration and return from exile in Babylon. In the sixth century BC when Nebuchadnezzar laid waste to Judah and Jerusalem, the region became a **barren** and **desolate** place. This applied particularly to the city of **Jerusalem** with its wall and homes in smoldering ruins, its temple destroyed, and many of its citizens either dead or deported. In the midst of all this death and destruction, however, hope remained because God would fulfill His promises and bring life through a remnant who relied on Him and never waived in their faith. On their own, Israel could have never overcome this calamity. But God graciously made it possible by compelling Cyrus the Great to allow and even fund Israel's return to her homeland!



"Sing, O barren,  
You who have not borne!  
Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,  
You who have not labored with child!  
For more are the children of the desolate  
Than the children of the married woman,"  
says the LORD.  
Isaiah 54:1

Although in its original context this verse referred to Israel's return from exile in Babylon, the principle which Paul wishes to underscore applies to every generation: God never fails. He will always do what He says. We can trust Him. We must rely upon Him even when things may seem hopeless and impossible on our part. This was certainly true for those in exile in Babylon, but also for Abraham and Sarah who remained childless. God fulfilled His **promise!** The couple could **rejoice** that the Lord worked through them in such a mighty way to achieve His plan through the birth of their son, Isaac, in their old age and barrenness. In the same way, this principle is also true when it comes to the life we have in Christ. God fulfilled His promise which He made at the beginning of the world—to rid the world of sin and death and give life to all who trust Him. We could have never achieved this feat on our own. God had to do it for us. Such life freely given through the sacrificial death of Christ gives us reason to **rejoice!**

Question  
# 5

For what reasons can you rejoice for seeing God work in your life?

### *Galatians 4:28-31*

#### **THE PROMISE WHICH BRINGS FREEDOM:**

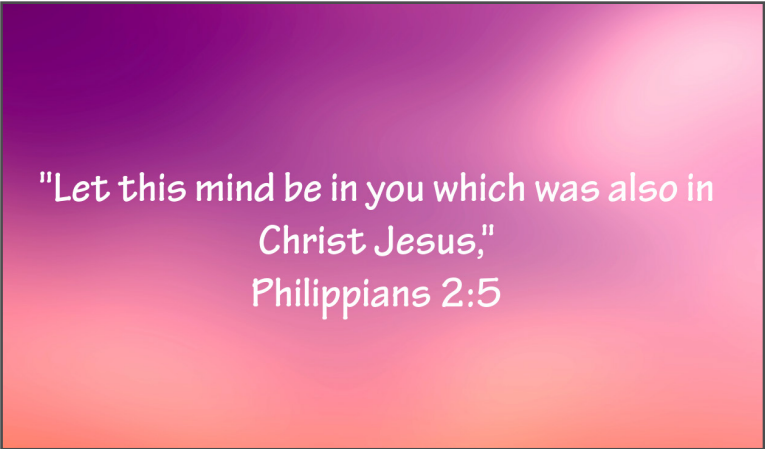
This analogy takes a more ominous turn as Paul applies it specifically to the trouble brewing in Galatia and really anywhere the gospel comes under the threat of perversion by those agitators who don't communicate it faithfully. Paul likens it to the animosity experienced by the child of **promise, Isaac**, and the child **born according to the flesh**, Ishmael (vv. 28-29a). Using Genesis 21:9, he alludes to the time when Sarah observed Ishmael playing with **Isaac** which prompted her to plead for his expulsion along with his mother. The Hebrew word used in Genesis 21:9 to describe that interaction can simply mean playing or laughing, but it can also carry the more sinister sense of mocking or scoffing. Paul understood this term in the more negative light of mocking. Therefore, he equates it with the current persecution of those who have accepted Christ through the proclamation of the gospel. Thus, the children **of flesh**, that is the false teachers or those who rejects the gospel in favor of religion and works of **the law**, persecute those in **the Spirit** who have a relationship with God through faith in Christ. These false teachers try to force them to adopt their way of thinking.

## Instruct

Those who reject the gospel are cast out just like Hagar and Ishmael (v. 30, see Gen 21:10). In other words, these individuals remain enslaved to their sin because they retain faith in what they themselves can do through **the law**; as a result, they don't rely on what Christ did for them on the cross. For this reason, they are cut off from the promises of God. So, they do not have eternal life! Consequently, Paul reminds them that those who truly have life are **not children of the bondwoman, but of the free** (v. 30). We will talk much more about what this freedom entails next week when we begin our study of chapter 5. But now, we must focus our attention on the severe consequences imposed by God Himself for those who reject His plan—whether Jew or Gentile. Those who trust in **the law**, ritual, religion, good works, or anything other than Jesus will be excluded from eternal life. They are not heirs of the promise because they trust in what they can humanly do.

Today, we can still find people peddling a perverted perspective of the gospel based solely on their own opinions. They will vehemently attack and persecute anyone who will not accept their particular view albeit based on their own flawed understanding. To return to the phrasing of the very first question Paul asked to open this section in verse 21, they have not **heard** God speak. They have not understood His Word. They are cut off from His people because they do not have a relationship based on faith in Christ Jesus who died for us on the cross what we could not do for ourselves. They may sound intelligent or even use phrases that sound religious and appeal to the culture, but their teaching leads to death and destruction—not life. In a sense, true freedom comes when we hear (understand) what God said, we see what God did, we trust in His plan, and we apply it in our lives.

Thinking in terms of the flesh enslaves us in a number of ways. First, as we will see definitively in chapter 5, it holds us captive to our sinful thoughts which in turn govern the way we live. As a result, people become disillusioned and frustrated because they can never change on their own. Even though they may see the need for change and even want change in their lives, they can never overcome their faults and continue repeating them! They always wonder what went wrong! On our own, we



*"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,"  
Philippians 2:5*

can't change. We need Christ to transform us—not a ten-step plan, not some self-help course, and not some human philosophy that manipulates our minds. We need Christ!

Second, it enslaves us to a humanistic mindset—believing that through either our personal or collective intelligence as man we have all the answers. This leads some people to persist in their errant way of thinking even though they have been shown the truth! People controlled by a humanistic mindset will often skew data and statistics, denying reality. Moreover, they will often argue simply for the sake of being right, never even seriously considering another point of view that communicates the truth. Such individuals will, for the sake of argument, claim the sky is green rather than blue because they see it through the filtered lens of their worldview! They allow their biases, perceptions, and thoughts to dictate what they believe rather than listen to the logic of the truth found in Scripture.

Third, and perhaps most predominantly, thinking according to the flesh enslaves us to worry. People who trust only in what they can do tend to worry about everything in life—they do not trust God to fulfill His promises. They do not trust God to provide for their needs as He has said in His Word. The next time worry creeps into our minds we must realize that it indicates doubt and a lack of trust in our Lord. When we begin to worry, may we ask, “When has the Lord ever failed me?” It should always bring a resounding answer of “never.” If we trust God rather than rely upon our own power, then we never have to worry!

Question  
# 6

How does thinking according to the flesh rather than the Spirit specifically enslave our minds? What examples can you cite? How does the Spirit free us from such a mindset?

God desires to work through His people to accomplish His will even when it means doing the impossible from our human point of view. As His people, we need to adopt His perspective in everything. After all, we've been called to align ourselves with the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). To have God's perspective frees us from worry. No longer do we worry about what we can do to effect change; we trust in what He can do through us. This becomes evident as we live out our salvation. Just as we cannot save ourselves and attain eternal life on our own power, so also can we not effect change in our culture merely through human means. We need God. He will do it for us if we surrender to Him, submit to His plan, and rely on His power. When we do, we will bear fruit as He intends, doing extraordinary things as He leads.



## ***Incorporate:***

In what areas or ways do you find yourself struggling to trust the Lord to accomplish His will through you? Why do you find this a struggle? What can you do to overcome it?

Although we've spent most of our time talking about God doing the impossible through us, why is it important to have a balanced perspective so we don't miss the little things God desires to do?

In what ways does relying upon God reduce worry in our lives?

May 26, 2024

Written and Published by  
First Baptist Church of Fort Worth

For more information  
or for questions  
please contact  
[mikeneal@fbcfw.org](mailto:mikeneal@fbcfw.org)

Interactive PDF available online at  
[curriculum.fbcfw.org](http://curriculum.fbcfw.org)

Visit us on the web  
[www.fbcfw.org](http://www.fbcfw.org)



@FirstBaptistFortWorth



@FBCFW



@FBC\_FortWorth

First Baptist Church of Fort Worth  
A place to belong!

5001 NE Loop 820 • Fort Worth, TX • 76137  
(817) 485-7711 • [info@fbcfw.org](mailto:info@fbcfw.org)