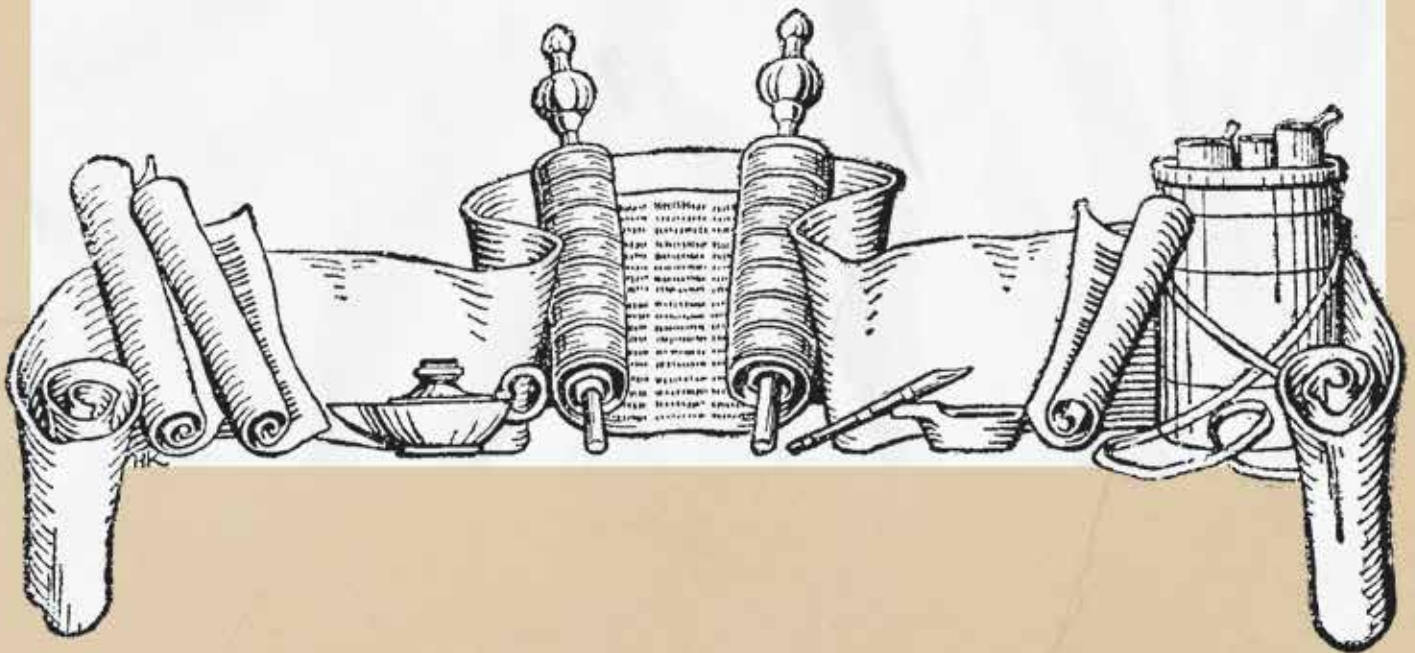




A STUDY ON  
**GALATIANS**





# INTRODUCTION

During the early ADs, the term “Galatians” referred to the inhabitants of North Turkey. This province was formerly the Kingdom of Galatia. Paul passed through this region on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 14:1-23, 16:1-5; 18:23).

He, along with Barnabas, preached the gospel in the southern Galatians towns of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra. A large number of Galatians accepted the message of gospel (4:14-15) and were baptized. They experienced dramatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit (3:2-5). Most of these new believers were Gentiles.

The Galatians were thankful for the grace of Christ. They also tasted the glorious freedom from sin and religious rituals that granted salvation. They experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit the moment they dedicate their lives to Christ in faith. But some false teachers, known as ‘agitators’, came to these churches to contradict what Paul and Barnabas preached.

These agitators wanted the church to adopt a Jewish lifestyle, more specifically the law of circumcision. On hearing what was going on, Paul wrote to remind the Gentile believers that their salvation depended solely on faith in Jesus Christ, and not on the obedience of ceremonial aspects in the law of Moses.

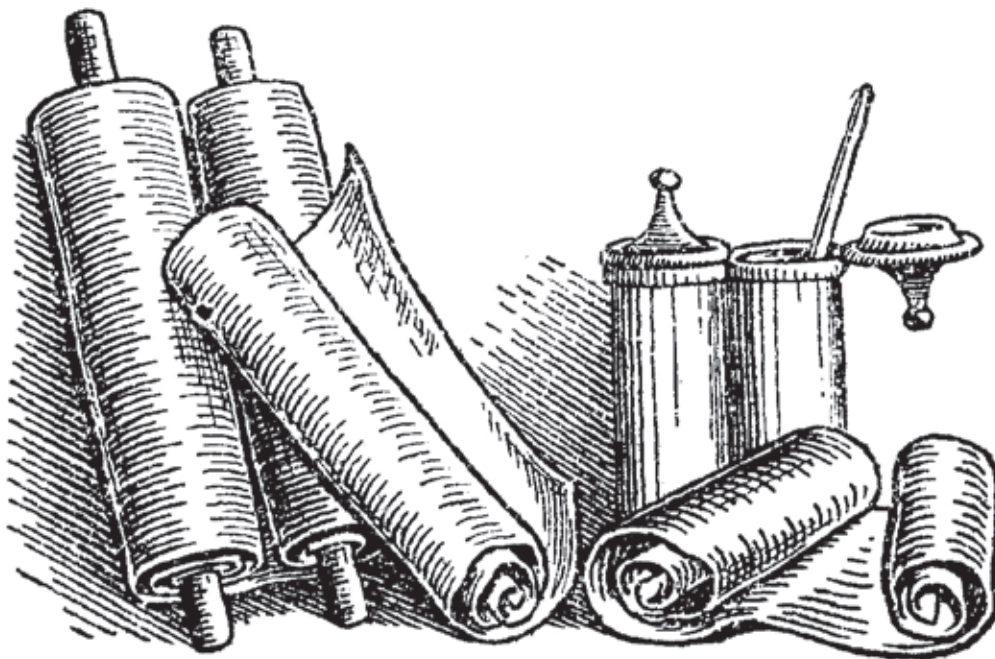
Paul takes distortion of the gospel very seriously. It is too precious to be tampered with.

The book of Galatians offers an insight into how culture can influence our faith. We are directed not to draw conclusions based on acts of worship or liturgy or practices, as culture may influence their actions.

This book motivates us to reflect on what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Is it to adopt the practices of a group (or denomination) or surrender our lives to live for Christ?

- In Galatia, the problem manifested itself in terms of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.
- In South Asia, it manifests itself in the lines drawn between castes, ethnic groups, genders & denominations.

As we are faced with diversity, the letter reminds us to clearly differentiate between the essentials of the gospel and mere external issues.





# THE BIG IDEA OF GALATIANS



Paul's belief in the divinity of the gospel has found meaning in every generation. This is solely because the gospel does not rest on a human foundation. It *"is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ."* – Galatians 1:12

Paul, from being an uncompromising dictator with a passionate desire to earn God's favour and approval, to a modest servant of God who was ready to accept whatever God offered, the transformation was immense! **No longer did he arrogantly glorify what he could do for God and for himself. Instead, he was overcome with awe and gratitude in what God had done for him.**

He was filled with a heart of gratitude for God's direct intervention in his life. And this is what God can do with any life through varying means. The initiative is still with God, and we cannot claim credit for salvation. **It is grace—all grace! We are justified by grace alone.** This is the overarching theme of Galatians.

Interestingly, all of us fall into a repetitive trap over and over again. We get delivered from “the law” (efforts to earn salvation or please God), discover the joyous liberty in Christ and go back to relying on our own strength to save ourselves. We fall into the trap of believing that we must do something to save ourselves.

Paul was absolutely convinced that **salvation is a gift from God**. It cannot be earned through any ritual or offering. At the same time, we should not abuse the free gift of salvation by living a deliberately sinful life.

Paul knew first-hand the frustrations and futility of keeping the law and seeking to be righteous. He was certain that:

- No one can ever earn the love of God.
- God’s love is a gift and he experienced that on the road to Damascus.
- All we can do is fling ourselves into the love and mercy of God in faith.

Paul’s understanding of the church was transformed after he was born again. He no longer thought of it as a human institution, but understood that the *church is a divinely orchestrated fellowship*. This was also his message to the churches in Galatia – grace is given to you to be gracious to one another as all coming under the covering of Christ alone (**Galatians 6:2**). When the fellowship is in and with Christ, the church becomes the united body of Christ, against which no gates of hell can ever prevail.

# CHAPTER SUMMARY

## Chapter 1-2

**Gospel is the Power  
of God in the  
Grace of God**

**Galatians 2:20-21,**

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 22 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.”

## Chapter 3-4

**Adoption as  
children of God**

**Galatians 3:26-29,**

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

## Chapter 5-6

**Walking in the  
Spirit**

**Galatians 5:16-18,**

“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desire of the flesh.

17For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”



# GALATIANS 1 & 2

## The Power and Authority of the Gospel

In Chapter 1, Paul was amazed that the gospel of salvation was abruptly replaced by a return to the law. He compares their behaviour with that of soldiers who ‘desert’ their units.

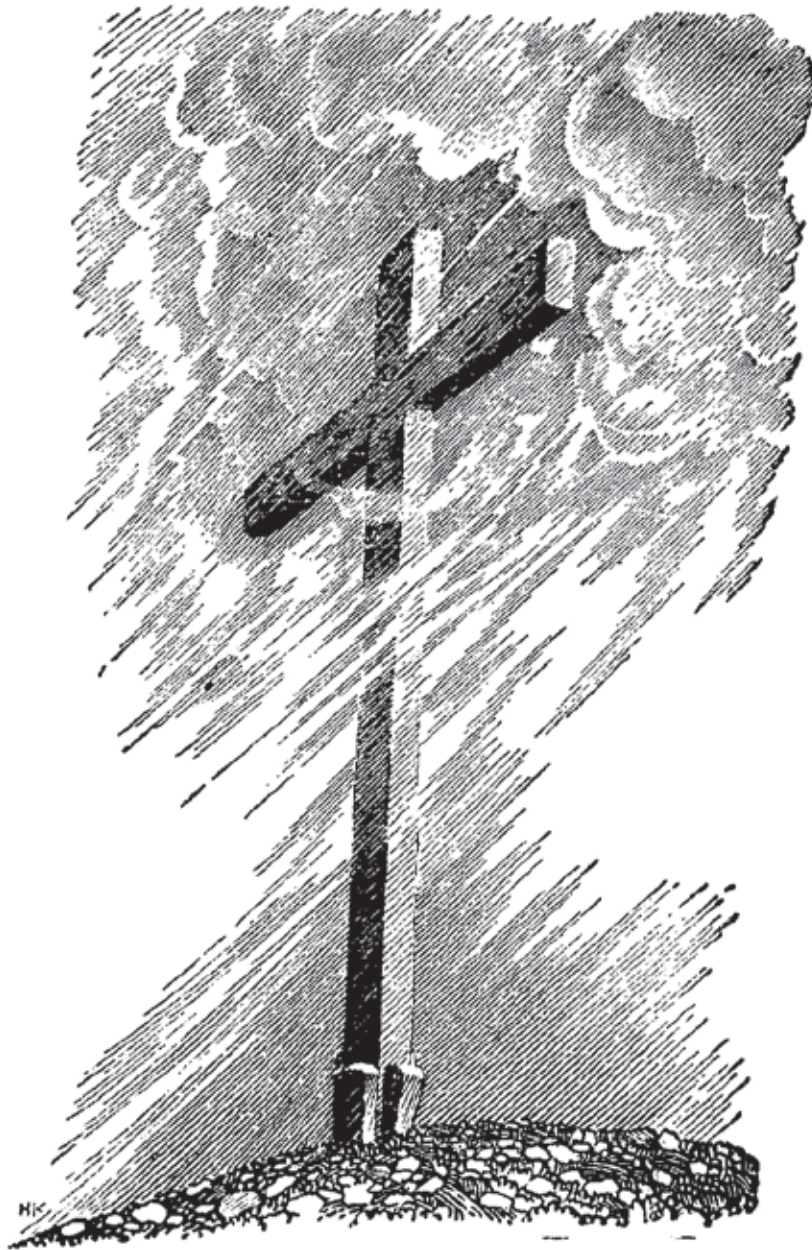
In turning to the law, they turned away from God Himself. The new teachers in Galatia claimed that they were merely correcting or adding to Paul’s teaching. However, what they were offering was so utterly different that Paul bluntly said, “*it is no gospel at all*” (1:7). They perverted the gospel of Christ, turning it upside down.



Instead of proclaiming that Jesus Christ gave us salvation, these people were teaching that Jesus did not do enough. According to them, those who wanted salvation had to obey the Jewish law and be circumcised as a sign of acceptance by God (5:2, 12; 6:12). This teaching was causing confusion and conflict in the church because it was contrary to what Paul preached.



*Paul viewed the distortion of the gospel as a sin because it is too precious to be tampered with. Not even an apostle or an angel has the right to change it. Anyone who distorts it is under God's curse. (1:8-9)*



The gospel Paul preached was not man-made (1:11). It had not been taught to him by any apostle or church leader. He had received it directly by a revelation from Jesus Christ Himself (1:12). This revelation determined the content of his message.

Paul reminded the Galatians of the kind of person he was before he met the risen Christ:

- There was nothing in his life that suggested he would become an apostle of Christ.
- He was zealous for the Jewish way of life and dedicated his life to stopping Jews from following Jesus (1:13).
- There could be no doubt that Paul was a dedicated Pharisee (Acts 22:3) who was extremely passionate about the traditions of his forefathers.
- He was out to ensure that the Jews observed all the rules that distinguished them from the Gentiles, particularly circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath observances, and the system of sacrifices and feasts.

***But suddenly there was a transformation in the life of Paul as he encountered the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. From a Jewish terrorist to a humble messenger of God, the change was dramatic!***

- Paul, now, served as an apostle only because God intended for him to do so.
- He became an apostle not because of who he was, but in spite of who he was.
- His transformation was accredited purely to the grace of God.

The revelation of Christ is a blessing to all. You belong to Him only by Grace and not merits. This is a lifelong message that holds good for both Jews and Gentiles.

## Defending the Gospel of Grace

In Chapter 2, Paul continued to defend the gospel. He highlights the truth that faith in God's grace is sufficient for all, Jews and Gentiles alike. For Paul, this message of Jesus Christ was a revelation. At the same time, his message of the gospel had to be discussed with the apostles to ensure that everyone was on the same page.

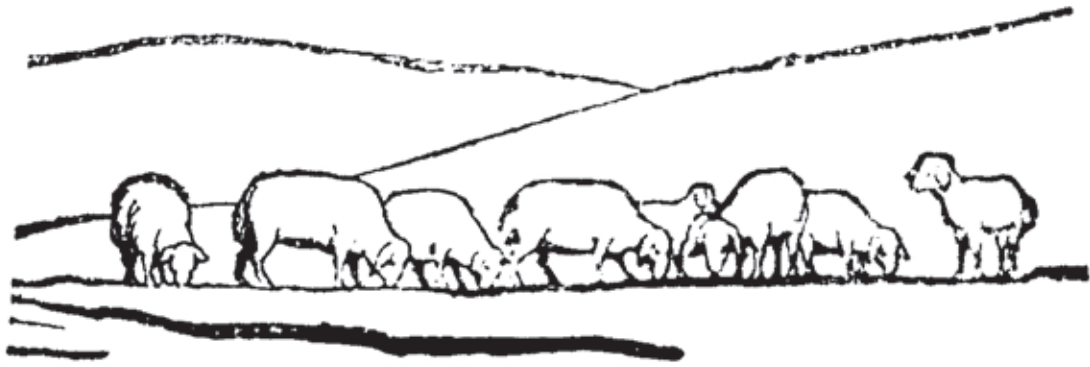
**Galatians 2:2**, *“I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.”*

Why did Paul meet the other apostles?

- Paul was instrumental in bridging the gap between *revelation and reasoning*, which worked together, though, at times, in tension. It was a matter of utmost importance to Paul to prevent the imposition of the Jewish laws upon Gentiles, while maintaining the unity of the church. Paul carried that desire deep within his heart, and his conduct throughout his career demonstrated a commitment to that unity.

- Another critical lesson that is implied in this passage is the importance of *structure and relationships*. Though strong-willed and independent, Paul gave authority due respect. He may have gone his own way, but did so within the confines of structure and relationship. Even though he differed from the leaders in Jerusalem he kept the lines of communication open, and respected authority and structure.





We, often, forget that our personal commitment to God and interpersonal relationships among people are not exclusive. They go hand in hand, which requires us to respect the opinions and convictions of others.

The outcome of Paul's visit to Jerusalem (vv. 7–10) was proof that Paul's ministry with Gentiles was just as important as Peter's ministry with Jews. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem—James, John, and Peter—witnessed the grace of the Lord Jesus working through Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles, and they supported it with '*the right hand of fellowship*.' The key takeaway from the conference report was that Paul and Barnabas were to go to the Gentiles, the uncircumcised; and James, John, and Peter were to preach to the Jews, the circumcised.

Beyond the question of circumcision and uncircumcision, is the fact that within Christianity there is a place for different expressions of faith— expressions indigenous to the unique cultural, educational, social, economic, racial, and national identities of people. The gospel expresses itself in its diverse forms, but in essence, it is the **Grace of God that is unchanging.**

## A Gospel of “Grace, Faith & Freedom”

The heart of the gospel and Paul’s immortal expression of it can be found in **Galatians 2:16** *“A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.”*

- In the Old Testament, obedience of the law rendered one righteous and acceptable in God’s sight.
- Works of the Law were those deeds done in obedience to the Torah.
- The object of obedience was to justify oneself in the presence of God and be accepted by Him.

Israel’s effort at attaining salvation through the law led to turmoil. This confirmed Paul’s experience that no effort on the part of people is ever adequate to make one righteous before God (**Psalm 143:1-2**).

The truth of salvation becomes clear when we understand the difference between the terms - ‘to justify’ and ‘to be justified’:

- To justify is to make ‘right’.
- “To be justified” is when we’re declared righteous, not by our merits, but by the grace of God. Through this we can form a fulfilling relationship with God.

“Justified” is a metaphor from a court of law. It holds utmost significance throughout this letter. To follow the judicial metaphor, one has to admit their guilt and throw themselves at the mercy of the judge. Then an unbelievable miracle comes to pass.

God, the judge, contrary to all expectation, not only acquits the guilty one of their sins, but accepts them as a son or daughter through Christ. This gives them the right to become a fellow heir of the kingdom of God.

- Paul makes a crucial point here in **2:19** when he says he cannot return to the law because he has died to the law.
- In part, he means that he has discovered the pointlessness of his own attempts at observing the law.
- He also implies that the penalty for breaking the law has already been paid by Christ, who died on behalf of all sinners.
- Those who trust Christ have been crucified with Him and are free to live for God, and not in fear of breaking the law.

Paul's testimony is extra effective because previously, he lived in the law. But after his transformation he lived in Christ and Christ in him (2:20).

We cannot understand Paul, nor can we participate fully in the Christian experience, until we grasp the fact that 'to be justified' means that we are

- Acquitted
- Accepted
- Set right with God, and
- Saved, despite our sin

What then is the "righteousness" of God? His righteousness is His justifying action through salvation for all people.

Paul stated it in this fashion in his letter to the **Romans 3:21-22**, "*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*".



What a strange turn of events in the Jewish system—a God who justifies the *ungodly*, not the godly! Don't miss the importance of this! If God justified the godly, we could calculate and even control our justification, because we would have an achievement-reward system. Such a system can be manipulated, so justification would really be in our hands. Paul says this can't be so: *“A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ”*

Another key word in this passage is the word **faith**. For Paul, the primary meaning of faith is *trust*. Therefore, it is not a passive reception of God's mercy. It is an active entrustment of oneself upon the mercy of God. Faith is a personal decision and commitment. Trust is the best descriptor of faith because it is both a verb and a noun - we have trust and we also trust someone. (Active faith is intentional in following Christ and involving the teachings of Jesus in every facet of our walk with Him while passive faith is about being random or uninterested in allowing God in every area of your life and may act with some encouragement from others to follow Christ.)

**We are justified by faith—or trust—in Jesus Christ, that is by entrusting ourselves to Him.** This radical faith (entrusting ourselves to Christ for salvation) saves us from two great pitfalls:

- The pitfall of trying to earn favour with God.
- The temptation to compare our moral and spiritual achievement with others in order that we may be seen in a different light.

# GALATIANS 3-4

## The Foolishness of Galatians

**Galatians 3:1-3**, *“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh”*

Why does Paul refer to the Galatians as fools?

Paul’s charge against the Galatians was that they were doing the “unthinkable” and the “unreasonable.” Having received the joy and freedom of God’s grace for salvation, they were returning to the dead ways of seeking salvation by their own efforts in keeping the law.

The Spirit comes either by hearing with faith, or by the law. There is no middle ground. The Galatians had only one avenue to receive the Spirit from their experience and that was by **hearing with faith**. As it says in Romans 10:17, *“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”*

To keep the law and the traditions set down by Moses, carried with it the burden, strain and guilt of inevitable failure. Whereas, hearing the gospel creates faith in which the Spirit is received.

## Abraham – the Prototype of Our Faith

Paul turns to the Scripture and calls Abraham a prototype of their faith. He was pronounced righteous *because of his faith* (**Genesis 15:6**). It wasn't until **Genesis 17** that the story of Abraham's circumcision is told.

Circumcision was “a sign or seal of the righteousness”. **But he was righteous through faith when he was still uncircumcised.** Using this scriptural knowledge, Paul says, “*Know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham*” (**Gal. 3:7**). Thus, all who believe are blessed with Abraham (**Gal.3:9**).

If God's relationship with his people is based on his covenant with Abraham, why did he bother to give them the law of Moses?

- God gave them the law to show how they were sinning.
- Law's purpose was to restraint and protect.
- The Law of Moses was a good law. Paul didn't dispute that. It was good, though, not for redemptive purposes but to make us aware of our transgressions.
- Paul says law was our tutor and a temporary guardian until Christ came to save us all.

Abraham's example should have been enough. But Paul piles up the scriptural evidence, calling on the testimony of Habakkuk - one of Israel's prophets. “*The just shall live by his faith*” (**Hab. 2:4**).

Paul quotes Habakkuk not only in his letter to the Galatians, but in his letter to the Romans (**1:17**). Habakkuk is also quoted in Hebrews (**10:38**).



There is no descriptive word in English to infer that a person is both “just” and “justified.” This difficulty provides a trap into which we fall easily. It is easy to confuse faith for faithfulness, and justification for righteousness. This is no license for undisciplined, irresponsible living. Rather, there is an inseparable relationship between the righteousness imputed by God and the righteousness (right-living) of the person who is *justified* and lives by faith.

### **No Longer Slaves but Sons of God**

**Galatians 4:4-7**, *“4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

Paul is talking about the importance of adoption in the redeeming process of God. As in the fullness of time, God sent His Son to redeem us, to adopt us back as His sons and daughters. After adoption, He empowers us for a life of free and joyous sonship. Thus, our sonship implies more than a status. It means that we share the life of the Father.

The parable of the prodigal son must have been on Paul’s mind as he penned the above verse. Some of the applicable highlights from the allegory are listed below:

- Both the elder and younger (prodigal) son had the status of sons after the prodigal son’s return.

- But the elder had only the status. He did not enter into the life of the Father and would not even share the joy of the welcome-home party.
- The prodigal son kept acting like a servant even though the Father wanted him as a son.
- In fact, that is precisely what the Father would not have—sons who acted like servants.
- He would not accept the request of the prodigal son who pleaded, “Make me a hired servant.” Instead, the Father replied, “No! “Bring the robe and the ring and the shoes. Kill the fatted calf. Let’s have a party! *My son was dead but is alive, was lost but is found.*”

Paul introduces the idea of being covered with Christ through baptism. Please note that this baptism is not a matter of “law”, nor the result of our doing. This is a work of grace; of new birth in Christ alone.

**Galatians 3:26-27**, *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

Baptism or being covered with Jesus means at least three things:

- To take up the cross and follow Him
- To be immersed in Christ’s character
- To receive the power of the Holy Spirit

## Two Covenants – Slavery (Law) & Freedom (Grace)



In order to emphasise the contrast between law and grace, Paul uses Hagar to illustrate the covenant God established on Mount Sinai, the place where the law was given to Moses and the people of Israel.

Hagar was a slave and generally children of slaves were also slaves. Similarly, those who have to obey the law are slaves to the law (4:24).

Sarah represents the state of a Christian. She was a free woman and her children are free (4:26). They are bound by a heavenly covenant – children of the promise.

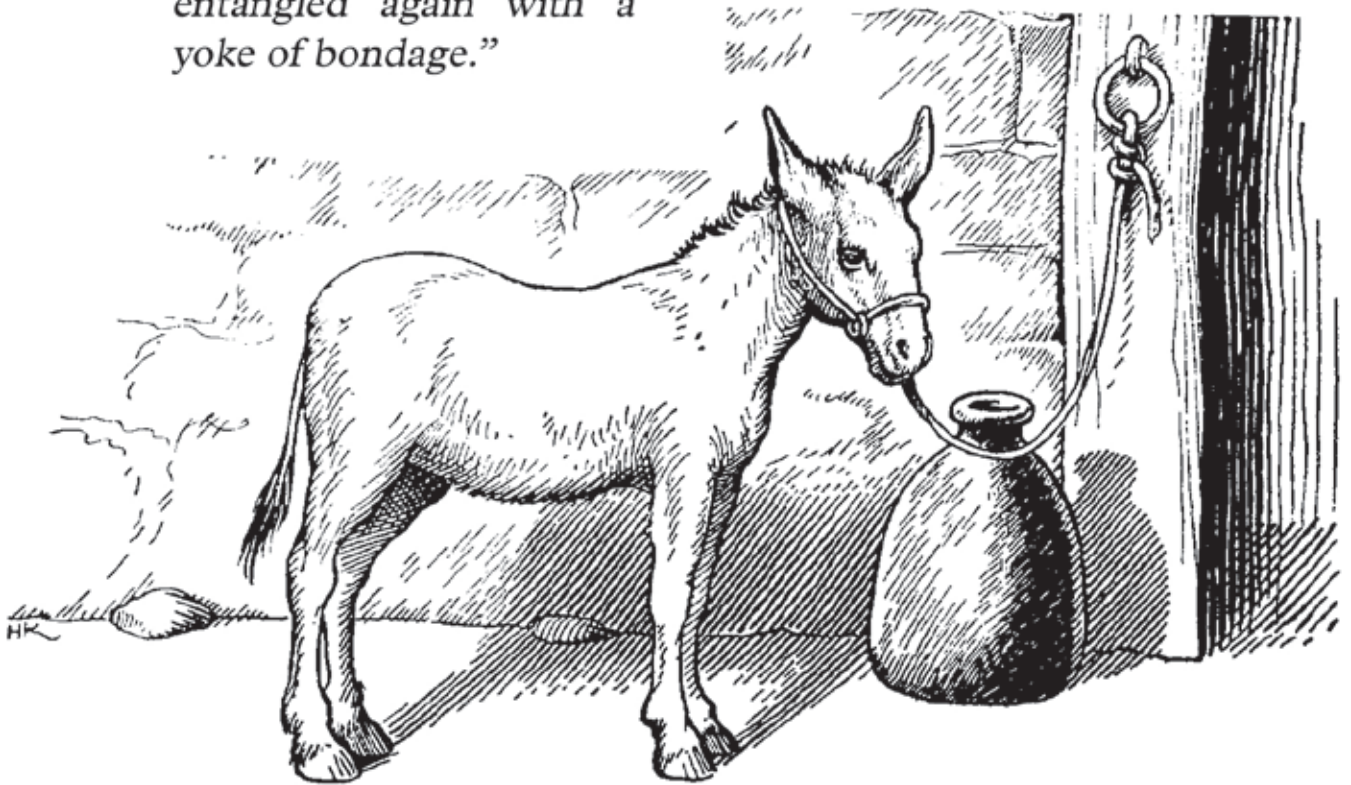
So, all those who follow Christ are like Isaac. Our born-again experience is supernatural as a result of the promise (4:28).

Isaac was mistreated by his brother Ishmael; in the same way the Galatians were mistreated by the false teachers. Those teachers were like the son born according to the flesh, and they persecuted those born by the power of the Spirit (4:29).



How did Abraham handle the situation between his two sons?

- He sent one of them away (the one born of the flesh)
- In the same way, the Galatians believers ought to expel those who pervert the gospel.
- Paul reminds his readers that those who remain in slavery to the law have no part in the inheritance of the family of God (4:30).
- Paul was pleading with the Galatians to accept the freedom that was theirs, and not be subject to the bondage of the law.
- The first verse of chapter 5 is the conclusion of Paul's appeal: *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."*



# GALATIANS 5-6

## We are Called to Live in the Spirit

**Galatians 5:13**, *“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”*

We are called to be **free in Christ** – the theme that runs all through the book of Galatians (1:4; 2:20; 3:13; 4:4-5; 5:1). So, does that mean we can do anything we want? “No!”, says Paul. We abuse our freedom if we use it as an excuse to indulge the flesh (5:13).

Then what is the right way to interpret the relationship between the flesh and the spirit?

- Paul does not set flesh against spirit, as we tend to.
- Nor does Paul see flesh (Gk.sarx) as identical with body (so̅ma).
- Rather, like Spirit, flesh is a domain of power and sin is linked closely to flesh because flesh is where sin operates.
- Sin, not flesh, is condemned.
- God came in Christ to enter the domain of power, the flesh, in order that sin might be conquered once and for all.
- Our predicament is not that we are in the flesh, but that we are in sin. In essence we are setting our minds on flesh rather than the spirit, as a domain of power. There is a shift in power from flesh to spirit when we are saved.



To be in the flesh is not to be in sin, but to live “according to the flesh” is to be in sin. Spirit is the power sphere of the new life. Living “by faith in the Son of God” is to live in the Spirit. To be Spirit-filled, for Paul, would be to live under the power of Christ in the domain of the Spirit, instead of living under the power of sin in the domain of the flesh.

**Galatians 5:16-18**, *“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*

It is easy to forget, when we read passages like this, that Paul was writing to Christians, people who have received the Spirit of God. Paul is aware of the potential relapse into fleshly existence, the ever-present possibility of falling from grace into the clutches of sin.





## Works of the Flesh vs Fruit of the Holy Spirit

**Galatians 5:19-25**, *“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*

Paul gives us a sample of the types of behaviour that result when people are not led by the Spirit. He warns that this habitual lifestyle will lead to disinheritance of God’s kingdom. He then compares the many “*works of the flesh*” with just one thing: the fruit of the Spirit.

The word “fruit” is singular, indicating that these qualities are in unity. All of these qualities should be found in every Christian community and in every believer who lives under the control of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is an outward expression of Christ dwelling within. This fruit grows and is expressed in any person that willingly dies to what Christ died to, so that the Spirit may bring him or her to new life in Christ. Powerfully and surely the Spirit works—sometimes dramatically, sometimes gradually—in our lives to repeat the miracle of a new creation in Christ Jesus.

## Sharing Your Life With One Another

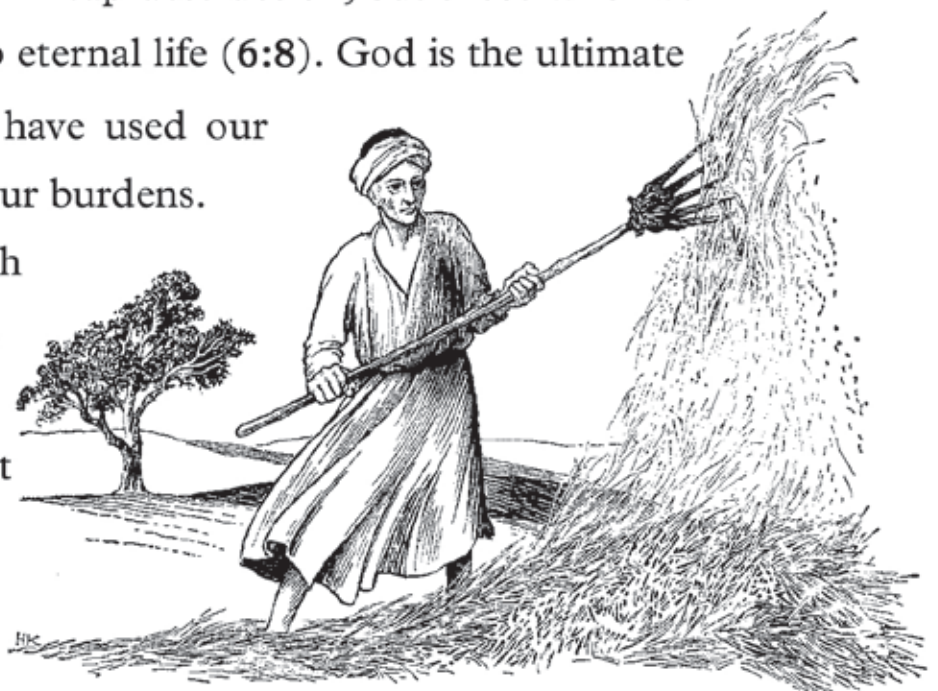
How do we learn to live in love?

- The way to do this is to walk in the Spirit (5:16).
- We are to be slaves neither to the law nor to the flesh but must submit to serve one another humbly in love (5:13).

Paul says a child of God must be guided by the freedom in the Spirit to support one another in love as an extended family. He doesn't want the members of Galatian churches to think of themselves as rivals, competing to see who can be most devout, but as brothers and sisters (6:1,2), thus fulfilling the law of Christ. This law of Christ is submissive to the teachings of Jesus, characterized by the love that flows from life in the Spirit.

Paul concludes by saying God cannot be mocked as we are responsible for how we have lived in the Spirit. Those who sow what is bad will reap destruction, but those who live in the Spirit will reap eternal life (6:8). God is the ultimate judge of how we have used our gifts and carried our burdens.

He knows the truth behind our works, and will ensure that we get the just reward for what we have done.



# CONCLUSION

Salvation is the grace-filled gift of God. We are not worthy of it. We cannot earn it. We are justified (made right) in the sight of God by His grace and our response in faith to that grace. Through the Cross, Jesus has purchased our pardon, doing for us what we could never do ourselves.

The relationship between salvation and freedom:

- Christian liberty is not a license to keep on sinning.
- Salvation is a continual process, whereby we are saved by grace that works progressively to make us righteous and transform our life.
- Christian freedom makes us disciples of Christ and must produce an effective relationship with Christ.
- The only way to use this freedom is by self-investment in the lives of others for Christ's sake.
- We should continually die to those things for which Christ died, and constantly produce the fruit of His Spirit.







**Bethel AG Church International Worship Centre**

#67 RING ROAD HEBBAL, BANGALORE 560024

24/7 PRAYER LINE: 080-67537777 | [WWW.BETHEL.AG.IN](http://WWW.BETHEL.AG.IN)