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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
Paul’s letter to the Galatians has been called spiritual dynamite, and rightly so. Except for Romans, no other book in the Bible has sparked as much spiritual revival and reformation. One could argue that out of the pages of Galatians (along with Romans) Protestantism itself was born. It was while reading Galatians that Martin Luther first was touched with the glorious good news of righteousness by faith. “The Epistle to the Galatians,” he wrote, “is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock.”

In turn, it was Luther’s gospel-centered writings that, on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, transformed the life of John Wesley, who then spearheaded a spiritual revival that swept not only through the British Isles but across the entire English-speaking world.

Seventh-day Adventists also are indebted to Galatians. Through the study of Galatians, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones helped the Adventist Church rediscover the truth of righteousness by faith in the 1880s and 1890s.

What has made Galatians such a backbone of spiritual revival? Why has it been able to touch the hearts of so many? In a manner unlike any other book in the Bible, Galatians addresses a number of themes crucial to the Christian soul. In Galatians, Paul tackles issues such as freedom, the role of the law in salvation, our condition in Christ, and the nature of the Spirit-led life, as well as the age-old question: how
can sinful humans be made right before a holy and just God?

Of course other books, such as Romans, address some of these same questions, but Galatians is different. Not only is it more succinct, but its rich themes are written in a powerfully personal and impassioned pastoral tone that can’t help touching hearts open to the Spirit of God, even today.

Although Paul’s letter speaks to us personally, our understanding can be strengthened if we are aware of the original historical situation that Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was addressing.

Many scholars believe that Galatians may be the earliest of Paul’s letters, written perhaps in A.D. 49, after the famous Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The book may be the oldest Christian document known. As Acts and Galatians make clear, the early church found itself in a fierce battle over the nature of salvation, especially in the case of Gentiles. According to a group of Jewish believers known as Judaizers, belief in Jesus alone was not good enough for Gentiles. Gentiles also needed to be circumcised and follow the laws of Moses (Acts 15:1). It is no surprise, then, that when Paul founded a church of Gentiles in Galatia, some of these Judaizers traveled there to “straighten things out.”

When word of this problem reached Paul, he reacted fervently. Recognizing that this false gospel of salvation by faith and works threatened to undermine the work of Christ, Paul wrote the Galatians an impassioned defense of the gospel. In the strongest of words, he identified this false teaching for what it really was—legalism, pure and simple.

This quarter’s Bible study guide invites us to journey with the apostle Paul as he pleads with the Galatians to remain true to Jesus. At the same time, it also gives us a chance to reflect on our own understanding of the gospel. It’s our sincere hope that over the course of this quarter God’s Spirit will spark a spiritual revival in our hearts as we rediscover what God has done for us in Christ.

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How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’ ” (Acts 11:18, NKJV).

It’s not that hard to understand Saul of Tarsus (also known as the apostle Paul after his conversion) and why he did what he did. As a devout Jew who was taught all his life about the importance of the law and about the soon-coming political redemption of Israel, the idea of the long-awaited Messiah being ignominiously executed like the worst of criminals was just too much for him to tolerate.

No wonder, then, he was convinced that the followers of Jesus were being disloyal to the Torah and, thus, hindering God’s plan for Israel. Their claims that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah and that He had risen from the dead were, he believed, rank apostasy. There could be no tolerance for such nonsense or for anyone who refused to give up those notions. Saul was determined to be God’s agent to rid Israel of these beliefs. Hence, he first appears in the pages of Scripture as a violent persecutor of his fellow Jews, those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

God, however, had far different plans for Saul, plans that he never could have anticipated for himself: not only was this Jew going to preach Jesus as the Messiah, he was going to do it among the Gentiles!

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 1.*
Persecutor of Christians

Saul of Tarsus first appears in Acts as one involved in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and then in connection with the more wide-scale persecution that broke out in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1–5). Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul play a significant role in the book of Acts because they were involved in events that led to the spread of the Christian faith beyond the Jewish world. Stephen is of particular significance because his preaching and martyrdom appear to have had a profound influence on Saul of Tarsus.

Stephen himself was a Greek-speaking Jew, and one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:3–6). According to Acts, a group of foreign Jews who had come to live in Jerusalem (vs. 9) entered into a dispute with Stephen over the content of his preaching about Jesus. It is possible, maybe even likely, that Saul of Tarsus was involved in these debates.

Read Acts 6:9–15. What charges were brought against Stephen? Of what do these charges remind you? (See also Matt. 26:59–61.)

The fierce hostility toward Stephen’s preaching appears to have resulted from two different things. On the one hand, Stephen drew the ire of his opponents by not placing primary importance on the Jewish law and the temple, which had become the focal point of Judaism and were treasured symbols of religious and national identity. But Stephen did more than merely downplay these two treasured icons; he vigorously proclaimed that Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, was the true center of the Jewish faith.

No wonder, then, that he angered the Pharisee Saul (Phil. 3:3–6), whose zeal against the early Christians indicates that he probably belonged to a strict and militant wing of the Pharisees, one full of revolutionary fervor. Saul saw that the great prophetic promises of God’s kingdom had not yet been fulfilled (Daniel 2, Zech. 8:23, Isaiah 40–55), and he probably believed it was his task to help God bring that day about—which could be done by cleansing Israel of religious corruption, including the idea that this Jesus was the Messiah.

Convinced he was right, Saul was willing to put to death those whom he thought wrong. While we need to have zeal and fervor for what we believe, how do we learn to temper our zeal with the realization that, at times, we just might be wrong?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Acts 11:18

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Outline the challenging events that led to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.
- **Feel:** Sense the tensions surrounding Paul’s transformation from zealous Pharisee to zealous gospel preacher to the Gentiles.
- **Do:** Offer our talents and life ministry to God to be fitted for service.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Go to All the World
- A What circumstances surrounded the development of the ministry of the young church to the Gentiles?
- B Why was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles such a revolutionary practice for the early Christians, and how did they respond to this challenge?

II. Feel: Challenges and Tensions
- A What effect did Saul’s persecutions have on the early church?
- B In what variety of ways did the early church leaders respond to Paul’s transforming call to gospel ministry?
- C How did the young church resolve the tensions raised by the evolving ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles?

III. Do: Fitted for Service
- A What transformations do we need in order to be fitted for ministry?
- B How might we learn to adapt to the changing faces of the gospel ministry as did the early church?
- C What different challenges do we as an older church face, and what transformations do we need?

**Summary:** At first the young church faced determined opposition from the zealot Saul of Tarsus; but his transformation in response to God’s call resulted in the development of a strong ministry to the Gentiles.
Saul’s Conversion

“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads’” (Acts 9:5, NKJV).

Although Saul’s persecution of the early church begins rather inconspicuously (as he only holds the coats of Stephen’s executioners), it quickly intensifies (see Acts 8:1–3; 9:1, 2, 13, 14, 21; 22:3–5). Several of the words Luke uses to describe Saul paint a picture of a wild, ferocious beast, or a pillaging soldier bent on the destruction of his opponent. The word translated as “ravaging” in Acts 8:3 (ESV), for example, is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Ps. 80:13) to describe the uncontrolled and destructive behavior of a wild boar. Saul’s crusade against the Christians was clearly not a half-hearted matter of convenience; it was a deliberate and sustained plan to exterminate the Christian faith.

Look at the three descriptions of Saul’s conversion (Acts 9:1–18, 22:6–21, and 26:12–19). What role did the grace of God have in this experience? In other words, how much did Saul deserve the goodness that the Lord showed toward him?

Saul’s conversion, from a human perspective, must have seemed impossible (hence the skepticism that many expressed when they first heard about it).

The only thing Saul deserved was punishment, but God extended grace to this fervent Jew instead. It is important to note, however, that Saul’s conversion did not happen in a vacuum, nor was it forced.

Saul was no atheist. He was a religious man, though gravely mistaken in his understanding of God. Jesus’ words to Paul, “‘It is hard for you to kick against the goads’” (Acts 26:14, ESV), indicate that the Spirit had been convicting Saul. In the ancient world, a “goad” was a stick with a sharp point used to prod oxen whenever they resisted plowing. Saul had resisted God’s prodding for some time, but, finally, on his way to Damascus, through a miraculous encounter with the risen Jesus, Saul chose to fight no longer.

Think back to your own conversion experience. Maybe it wasn’t as dramatic as Paul’s (most aren’t), but in what similar ways were you the recipient of God’s grace? Why is it important never to forget what we have been given in Christ?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Like Saul of Tarsus we can be absolutely sure—and just as absolutely wrong—about what we believe. Being open to God’s leading means being open to surprises, even when they aren’t easy or pleasant.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the fact that both Saul/Paul and the early Christian church needed to allow God to open their minds. Paul needed to be shown that what he thought couldn’t possibly be true was, in fact, true. The early Jewish Christians, in turn, had to be woken up to the fact that the gospel was for all, even Gentiles.

You want to become really bad? Not bad as in “misunderstood”; not bad as in a diamond-in-the-rough kind of character with the proverbial heart of gold; but bad as in some of the world’s most evil men? You must start by convincing yourself you’re good. So good, in fact, that you believe you’re better than anybody else. Or that you can do no wrong. Not only that, but you have God on your side and anyone who opposes you opposes God. French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal wrote, “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction.” That could be you. It could be any of us if, in misguided devotion, we put ourselves in God’s place and stop listening to the real God.

This week we will study someone who was following that path, Saul of Tarsus. Saul was well on his way to becoming, as he later put it, the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). But God had other plans.

**Discuss With the Class:** It is important for us to be reasonably sure of what we believe and why. How can we balance that requirement with the need for the humility to realize that our ideas and perceptions are fallible and may need to change as we deepen our relationship with God and our understanding of His Word?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** In the Gospels we are introduced to Jesus Christ. We become familiar with His personality, His nature, His mission, and His
Saul in Damascus

During Saul’s encounter with Jesus, he was blinded and then instructed to go to the house of a man named Judas and to wait there for another man, Ananias. No doubt Saul’s physical blindness was a powerful reminder of the greater spiritual blindness that had led him to persecute the followers of Jesus.

The appearance of Jesus to him on the Damascus road changed everything. Where Saul had thought he had been so right, he had been dead wrong. Rather than working for God, he had been working against Him. Saul entered Damascus a different man from the proud and zealous Pharisee who had left Jerusalem. Instead of eating and drinking, Saul spent his first three days in Damascus in fasting and prayer as he reflected on all that had happened.

Read Acts 9:10–14. Imagine what must have been going on in the mind of Ananias: not only was Saul, the persecutor, now a believer in Jesus, but he was also Paul, God’s chosen apostle, to take the gospel to the Gentile world (see Acts 26:16–18).

No wonder Ananias was a little confused. If the church in Jerusalem was hesitant to accept Paul some three years after his conversion (Acts 9:26–30), one can imagine what questions and concerns filled the hearts of the believers in Damascus only days after the event!

Notice, too, that Ananias was given a vision by the Lord telling him the surprising and unexpected news about Saul of Tarsus; anything less than a vision might not have convinced him that what he was told about Saul was true—that the enemy of the Jewish believers had now become one of them.

Saul had left Jerusalem with the authority and commission of the chief priests to root out the Christian faith (Acts 26:12). God had, however, a vastly different commission for Saul, one that rested on far greater authority. Saul was to take the gospel to the Gentile world, an idea that must have been even more shocking to Ananias and the other Jewish believers than was the conversion of Saul himself.

Where Saul had sought to curtail the spread of the Christian faith, now God would use him to spread it far beyond anything that Jewish believers ever would have imagined.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7, Matthew 7:1, and 1 Corinthians 4:5. What is the message of these texts in regard to why we must be careful in how we view the spiritual experience of other people? What mistakes have you made in your judgments about others, and what have you learned from those mistakes?
relationship to, and fulfillment of, all that had gone before. In Acts we see how the early disciples went forward in the light of Jesus’ mission and message. We see old ways challenged and transformed and lives made new. Nowhere is this process clearer than in the life and career of Saul/Paul. Emphasize how this process of trial and transformation is paralleled in our lives as individuals.

Bible Commentary

I. Guilty Bystander (Review Acts 7:58 and 8:1–5.)

In English there’s an expression, “I’ll hold your coat for you.” Like so many other expressions in the English language, it could have come from the Bible, in this case, Acts 7:58. It can be used in one of two ways. Either it can be a person approving of an act of violence or aggression but not quite willing to do it himself or herself, or it can be a trenchant commentary on someone else’s fervor for bloodshed that never quite manifests itself in personal risk taking.

As Christians and students of the Bible, we view Saul of Tarsus as a great persecutor. But contrary to the expression mentioned before, he didn’t even hold the coats. He watched his colleagues stone Stephen. Two verses later we are told he approved of Stephen’s death. But we can surmise that it probably wasn’t his idea.

Does this mean that Paul was not guilty of Stephen’s death? He himself felt he was; he carried the guilt for the rest of his life. We have good reason to believe that the account of the events here was related to Luke (generally thought to be the author of Acts, as well as of the Gospel bearing his name) by Paul himself, and that Paul was quite insistent that Luke mention his role and his approval. And several verses later, in Acts 8:1–5, he was shown to be the bloodthirsty persecutor we all know.

Why didn’t Paul take a more active part in the stoning of Stephen? Was he a manipulator behind the scenes, or was he waiting to see what the authorities he revered and modeled himself after would do? His decision to facilitate this act of mob violence, disguised as theocratic justice, made him as guilty as if he had gathered and thrown all the stones. Only the grace of God could divert him from the course he had freely chosen for himself.

Consider This: Have you ever made a wrong decision, a decision that had repercussions far beyond the immediate circumstances, by taking no action at all or by acting passively to facilitate injustice or wrongdoing? If so, how did you make it right?
The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles

Where was the first Gentile church established? What events caused the believers to go there? Acts 11:19–21, 26. What does that remind you of from Old Testament times? See Daniel 2.

The persecution that broke out in Jerusalem after Stephen’s death caused a number of Jewish believers to flee three hundred miles north to Antioch. As capital of the Roman province of Syria, Antioch was second only to Rome and Alexandria in significance. Its population, estimated at five hundred thousand, was extremely cosmopolitan, making it an ideal location not only for a Gentile church but for a starting base for the worldwide mission of the early church.

What occurred in Antioch that resulted in Barnabas’s visit to the city and his subsequent decision to invite Paul to join him in Antioch? What kind of picture is presented of the church there? Acts 11:20–26.

It is difficult to construct a chronology of Paul’s life, but it appears that some five years passed between his post-conversion visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–30) and the invitation by Barnabas to join him in Antioch. What was Paul doing during all those years? It is hard to say for sure. But based on his comments in Galatians 1:21, he may have been preaching the gospel in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Some have suggested that perhaps it was during this time that he was disinherited by his family (Phil. 3:8) and suffered a number of the hardships he describes in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28.

The church in Antioch blossomed under the guidance of the Spirit. The description in Acts 13:1 indicates that the cosmopolitan nature of the city was soon reflected in the ethnic and cultural diversity of the church itself. (Barnabas was from Cyprus, Lucius from Cyrene, Paul from Cilicia, Simon presumably from Africa, and also there were all the Gentile converts.) The Spirit now sought to take the gospel to even more Gentiles by using Antioch as the base for more far-reaching missionary activities, beyond Syria and Judea.

Read again Acts 11:19–26. What can we learn from the church at Antioch, a very culturally and ethnically diverse church, that could help churches today emulate the good that existed there?
II. Saul’s Conversion (Review Acts 9:1–18; 22:6–21; 26:12–19; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:3; and Galatians 1:11, 12, 15, 16 with your class.)

To refer to the event mentioned or discussed in the passages above as a conversion is accurate, but not really adequate. The biblical words we usually translate as “conversion” (sub in Hebrew and epistrophē in Greek, respectively) refer to a turning or returning to God or the path that leads to God. As such, it is an act of will, aided by God or His Spirit.

Saul, on the other hand, did not so much turn as he was turned. Until the moment when the living Christ appears and incapacitates him, we see no sign of a change of heart in Saul. The passages in chapters 8 and 9 tell us nothing at all about his internal state. We see a lot of his external state, vividly described in terms evoking a fierce predatory animal (Acts 8:3). Was the Holy Spirit working with him? Undoubtedly, but to see it would have taken greater faith than most had then or have now.

The experience that Saul had was a conversion that resulted in a dramatic turn from his previous path. And as overwhelming as the call and the experience were, and as preposterous as the very idea may be to the reader, Saul could have—at least, in theory—refused. But what did happen here? First, Saul was deprived of his faculties, including sight. God took away the things Saul depended upon. All he could do was sit and listen. And when God finally had his undivided attention, He gave Saul a revelation—a revelation he later described in several places as a glimpse of the risen Christ. As skeptical as others may have been, Paul had no hesitation in matching this experience with those of apostles, who had walked and talked with Jesus Christ, the Man, during His earthly ministry.

Jesus Christ gave the best that He had to Saul, a man who deserved it least. To some this generosity may have been disconcerting or even infuriating. But if one is aware that one is a sinner in need of grace, Saul’s conversion demonstrates how limitless and powerful grace is.

**Consider This:** While we all claim to believe in God’s grace, we may sometimes be tempted to picture Him doling it out in strictly measured spoonfuls. Why are we tempted to think this way? When may we sometimes even wish that were the case?

**STEP 3—Apply**

*Just for Teachers: Use the following questions to help your students*
Conflict Within the Church

Of course, nothing human is perfect, and it wasn’t long before trouble began within the early community of faith.

For starters, not everyone was pleased with the entry of Gentile believers into the early church. The disagreement was not over the concept of a Gentile mission but over the basis on which Gentiles should be allowed to join. Some felt that faith in Jesus alone was not sufficient as the defining mark of the Christian; faith, they argued, must be supplemented with circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses. To be a true Christian, they asserted, Gentiles needed to be circumcised. (We can, in Acts 10:1–11:18, see the extent of the division between Jews and Gentiles through Peter’s experience with Cornelius and the reaction that followed.)

The official visits from Jerusalem, which monitored Philip’s work among the Samaritans (Acts 8:14) and the work with Gentiles in Antioch (Acts 11:22), may suggest some concern about the inclusion of non-Jews in the Christian community. Yet, the reaction to Peter’s baptism of Cornelius, an uncircumcised Roman soldier, is a clear example of the disagreement that existed regarding the Gentile question among the earlier believers. The inclusion of an occasional Gentile such as Cornelius may have made some feel uncomfortable, but Paul’s intentional efforts to open wide the doors of the church for Gentiles on the basis of faith in Jesus alone resulted in deliberate attempts by some to undermine Paul’s ministry.


Although the Jerusalem Council, in Acts 15, ultimately sided with Paul on the issue of circumcision, the opposition to Paul’s ministry continued. About seven years later, during Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem, many were still suspicious of Paul’s gospel. In fact, when Paul visited the temple, he nearly lost his life when Jews from Asia cried out, “Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place” (Acts 21:28; see also 21:20, 21).

Put yourself in the position of these Jewish believers who were concerned about Paul’s teaching. Why do their concern and opposition make some sense? What can we learn from this about how our own preconceived ideas, as well as cultural (and even religious) notions, can lead us astray? How can we learn to protect ourselves from making the same kind of errors, no matter how well-intentioned we are?
Learning Cycle continued

to see what the conversion of Saul of Tarsus teaches us about God’s grace and how one should respond to it.

Thought Questions:

1. We are actually told little about Saul’s early life and the influences that shaped him. What do you think his motivations for persecuting the Christians might have been?

2. In Acts 9:5 the mysterious voice refers to Saul kicking against the goads. How exactly was God “goading” Saul, even when Saul seemed to be acting in a way most contrary to God’s will?

Application Questions:

1. We have all met, or heard from, people with spectacular conversion stories, and perhaps ours is a bit more prosaic. In what ways do you see the grace of God manifested in yours, perhaps in the very fact that you did not have to experience all those things?

2. How do you react when a person you distrust or have reason to fear or dislike seems to have changed for the better?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The story of Saul is most of all a story of grace. God showed grace to him when he wasn’t even looking for it and didn’t feel the need of it. And those whom Saul persecuted, or might have persecuted, learned how one can genuinely be changed by that grace and how to show grace themselves. The following activity is intended to encourage students to make grace a part of their daily thoughts and lives.

Activity: We all face challenging situations or people in our daily lives. How do we react? Do we fly into a rage? Do we say certain words and phrases when we think no one can hear them? Do we silently nurse our resentments?

Over the next week, bring grace into your thoughts when faced with a challenging situation or relationship. Look at it as a learning opportunity or an opportunity to practice showing grace. Where the usual thoughts enter your mind and perhaps come out of your mouth, consciously think—and say—something else. Shield your thoughts with a relevant biblical verse. Report back the next week. How did practicing grace change the way you acted and felt in such situations?

“Paul had formerly been known as a zealous defender of the Jewish religion and an untiring persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Courageous, independent, persevering, his talents and training would have enabled him to serve in almost any capacity. He could reason with extraordinary clearness, and by his withering sarcasm could place an opponent in no enviable light. And now the Jews saw this young man of unusual promise united with those whom he formerly persecuted, and fearlessly preaching in the name of Jesus.

“A general slain in battle is lost to his army, but his death gives no additional strength to the enemy. But when a man of prominence joins the opposing force, not only are his services lost, but those to whom he joins himself gain a decided advantage. Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, might easily have been struck dead by the Lord, and much strength would have been withdrawn from the persecuting power. But God in His providence not only spared Saul’s life, but converted him, thus transferring a champion from the side of the enemy to the side of Christ. An eloquent speaker and a severe critic, Paul, with his stern purpose and undaunted courage, possessed the very qualifications needed in the early church.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 124.

Discussion Questions:

1. What lesson can we learn from the fact that some of Paul’s harshest opponents were fellow Jews who believed in Jesus?

2. How can you stand up for matters of religious principle and at the same time make sure that you are not fighting against God?

Summary: Saul’s encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road was the defining moment in his life and in the history of the early church. God changed the one-time persecutor of the church and made him His chosen apostle to bring the gospel to the Gentile world. Paul’s inclusion of Gentiles in the church by faith alone, however, proved a difficult concept for some within the church to accept—a powerful example of how preconceptions and prejudice can hinder our mission.
Paul’s Authority and Gospel

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Pet. 3:15, 16; Galatians 1; Phil. 1:1; Gal. 5:12.

Memory Text: “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10, NKJV).

Students at a university built a center on their campus where everyone—regardless of race, gender, social status, or religious beliefs—would be welcome. Imagine if, years later, these students returned to the campus only to discover that other students had redesigned the center. Instead of the large room with plenty of space for socializing—designed to bring a sense of unity to everyone there—the room had been subdivided into many smaller rooms with entrance restrictions based on race, gender, and so forth. The students responsible for the redesign might have argued that their authority to make these changes came from centuries-old established practice.

This is something like the situation that Paul faced when he wrote his letter to the churches in Galatia. His plan that Gentiles could join on the basis of faith alone was being challenged by false teachers who insisted that Gentiles must also be circumcised before they could become members.

This position, Paul saw, was an attack on the essence of the gospel itself; thus, he had to respond. The response is the letter to the Galatians.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 8.*
Paul, the Letter Writer

Read 2 Peter 3:15, 16. What do these verses tell us about how the early church viewed Paul’s writing? What does this teach us about how inspiration works?

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was not trying to produce a literary masterpiece. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul was addressing specific situations that involved him and the believers in Galatia.

Letters such as Galatians played an essential role in Paul’s apostolic ministry. As the missionary to the Gentile world, Paul founded a number of churches scattered around the Mediterranean. Although he visited these churches whenever he could, he couldn’t stay in one place too long. To compensate for his absence, Paul wrote letters to the churches in order to give them guidance. Over time, copies of Paul’s letters were shared with other churches (Col. 4:16). Although some of Paul’s letters have been lost, at least thirteen books in the New Testament bear his name. As the above words from Peter show, too, at some point Paul’s writings were viewed as Scripture. This shows just how much authority his ministry eventually gained early on in the history of the church.

At one time some Christians believed that the format of Paul’s letters was unique—a special format created by the Spirit in order to contain God’s inspired Word. This view changed in 1896 when two young scholars from Oxford, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, discovered in Egypt about five hundred thousand fragments of ancient papyri (documents written on papyrus, a popular writing material used several hundred years before and after Christ). In addition to finding some of the oldest copies of the New Testament, they found invoices, tax returns, receipts, and personal letters.

Much to everyone’s surprise, the basic format of Paul’s letters turned out to be common to all letter writers in his day. The format included (1) an opening salutation that mentioned the sender and the recipient and then included a greeting; (2) a word of thanksgiving; (3) the main body of the letter; and, finally, (4) a closing remark.

In short, Paul was following the basic format of his time, speaking to his contemporaries through a medium and style with which they would be familiar.

If the Bible were to be written today, what kind of medium, format, and style do you think the Lord would use to reach us now?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Galatians 1:10

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Describe how Paul defined the authenticity of his gospel call and teachings.
- **Feel:** Empathize with the zealous passion and determination with which Paul defended the truth of the gospel and fought against erroneous teachings at Galatia.
- **Do:** Determine to hold fast to the truths of the Scripture and to strongly support their defense.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Paul’s Defense**
   - A How did Paul’s first paragraphs of Galatians set forth his position regarding his calling and authority to address and correct doctrinal teachings?
   - B How did Paul’s account of his personal history in the ministry bolster his claim to authority? How were these claims substantiated by others in church leadership?

II. **Feel: Paul’s Passion**
   - A What phrases early in Paul’s letter illustrate his strong feelings regarding wrong doctrine and its effects on church members? Why does Paul feel so strongly?
   - B How have doctrinal errors caused havoc in church history?

III. **Do: The Call to Passionate Defense Today**
   - A What are the unique doctrinal challenges facing the church today that call for a devout, determined, and daring defense on our part?
   - B What do we need to do to ensure that our championship of biblical truths works in cooperation with Christ and His body for the glory of the gospel?

**Summary:** Paul opens his letter to the Galatians with an authoritative and succinct reference to the supremacy of God’s gifts of grace and a determined denunciation of any contradictory doctrine.
Paul’s Calling

Though Paul’s epistles generally follow the basic format of ancient letters, Galatians contains a number of unique features not found in Paul’s other epistles. When recognized, these differences can help us to better understand the situation Paul was addressing.

**Compare** Paul’s opening salutation in Galatians 1:1, 2 with what he writes in Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, and 2 Thessalonians 1:1. In what way is Paul’s salutation in Galatians similar to and different from the others?

Paul’s opening salutation in Galatians is not only a bit longer than his other opening salutations, but he goes out of his way to describe the basis of his apostolic authority. Literally, the word *apostle* means “someone who is sent” or “a messenger.” In the New Testament, in the strictest sense, it refers to the original twelve followers of Jesus, and to others to whom the risen Christ appeared and commissioned to be His witnesses (Gal. 1:19, 1 Cor. 15:7). Paul declares that he belongs to this select group.

The fact that Paul so strongly denies that his apostleship rests on any human being suggests that there was an attempt by some in Galatia to undermine his apostolic authority. Why? As we have seen, some in the church were not happy with Paul’s message that salvation was based on faith in Christ alone and not on works of the law. They felt that Paul’s gospel was undermining obedience. These troublemakers were subtle. They knew that the foundation of Paul’s gospel message was directly tied to the source of his apostolic authority (John 3:34), and they determined to launch a powerful attack against that authority.

Yet, they did not directly deny Paul’s apostleship; they merely argued that it was not really too significant. They likely claimed that Paul was not one of Jesus’ original followers; his authority, therefore, was not from God but from humans—perhaps from the church leaders from Antioch who commissioned Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (Acts 13:1–3). Or, perhaps, his authority came only from Ananias, who baptized Paul in the first place (Acts 9:10–18). Paul, in their opinion, was simply a messenger from Antioch or Damascus—nothing more! Consequently, they argued that his message was merely his own opinion, not the Word of God.

Paul recognized the danger these allegations posed, and so, he immediately defended his God-given apostleship.

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**In what ways, even subtly, is the authority of Scripture being challenged today within the confines of our church? How can we recognize these challenges? More important, how have they perhaps influenced your own thinking in regard to the authority of the Bible?**
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The gospel preached by Paul is still the unshakable basis for the Christian faith today. Everything in our lives must be subject to its authority.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the fact that as Paul defended his own authority to teach, he drew attention to the only true authority: Jesus Christ.

The Internet and other forms of modern technology have made it possible for the “tuned in” among us to gain access to an incredible amount of information. At the same time, this accessibility has made it more feasible than ever for us simply to “tune out” voices that we disagree with or that challenge us. As such, our view of the world is shaped by the authorities we choose to consider trustworthy.

The world in which Paul wrote Galatians was not so different. There were many people claiming to be authorities, with all sorts of plausible reasons that their opponents were not authorities at all. Paul’s opponents, advocating a gospel that was not a gospel, attacked Paul by undermining his claims to authority and by sowing confusion and suspicion within the church. Paul responded by basing his authority not on his own personal qualities but on the best grounds of all: his encounter with Jesus Christ and the message—the gospel—received.

**Discuss With the Class:** Paul placed all his trust and faith in the gospel that he had been called to preach and the One who had commissioned him to preach it. Where do you place your trust? In the final analysis, who or what is your authority?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** In the early church, as today, the essence of the teaching was in a person, Jesus Christ, and His life and ministry. At that time the early church did not have the full collection of documents we know as the New Testament. But they did have living apostles, people who had known and walked with Jesus during His earthly existence. Necessarily, a significant amount of trust and authority attached itself to them. Emphasize the importance of Paul’s role as an apostle and the significance of efforts to question or minimize it.

CONTINUED
Paul’s Gospel

In addition to defending his apostleship, what else does Paul emphasize in his opening greeting to the Galatians? Compare Gal. 1:3–5 with Eph. 1:2, Phil. 1:2, and Col. 1:2.

One of the unique features of Paul’s letters is the way in which he links the words *grace* and *peace* in the greetings. The combination of these two words is a modification of the most characteristic greetings in the Greek and Jewish world. Where a Greek author would write “Greetings” (*chairein*), Paul writes “Grace,” a similar-sounding word in Greek (*charis*). To this Paul adds the typical Jewish greeting of “Peace.”

The combination of these two words is not a mere pleasantry. On the contrary, the words basically describe his gospel message. (In fact, Paul uses these two words more than any other author in the New Testament.) The grace and peace are not from Paul but from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What aspects of the gospel does Paul include in Galatians 1:1–6?

Although Paul has little space in his opening greeting to develop the nature of the gospel, he masterfully describes the essence of the gospel in only a few short verses. What is the central truth upon which the gospel resides? According to Paul, it is not our conformity to the law—the point that Paul’s opponents were trumpeting. On the contrary, the gospel rests fully on what Christ accomplished for us through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Christ’s death and resurrection did something that we never could do for ourselves. They broke the power of sin and death, freeing His followers from the power of evil, which holds so many in fear and bondage.

As Paul reflects on the wonderful news of the grace and peace that God created for us in Christ, he falls into a spontaneous doxology, which appears in verse 5.

In about as many words as Paul used in Galatians 1:1–5, write down your understanding of what the gospel is all about. Bring your words to class on Sabbath.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Bible Commentary

I. “According to the Wisdom Given to Him . . .” (Review 2 Peter 3:15, 16 with your class.)

Most well-informed Bible students are aware that the earliest Christians knew no other Scriptures than the Old Testament and that the New Testament, as we know it, did not take shape until the second century at the earliest. Yet, 2 Peter refers to the letters of Paul as scriptures, or at least implies such status by equating them with “other scriptures.” Some scholars have, therefore, proposed a late date for 2 Peter, even denying Peter’s authorship. How could the author know, they ask, that the letters of Paul would be accorded the status of Scripture?

First, the early church very much recognized the presence of living inspiration in its midst. The apostles, including Paul, were not just charismatic, highly spiritual individuals who had some good ideas and snappy insights, as we might regard a given pastor or teacher today. Part of the esteem in which they were held was because they had known, walked with, and/or encountered the living Christ and been found worthy to represent Him to the world.

As such, what the apostles wrote or taught carried extra authority. Whether such writings or teachings were considered to be on the level with the Pentateuch or the prophets of the normative Old Testament canon is open to debate. But they were certainly regarded as containing plenty of authority.

This point brings us to the specific situation Paul addresses in Galatians. The major difference between Paul and his opponents was that Paul could and did claim to be an apostle, and his opponents could not and did not claim this status for themselves. One might guess they might have made such a claim if they could have supported it, or even if the church members did not know enough to refute or question it. But clearly their (lack of) status was well-known. All that was left for them to do was to say, “Hey, we may not be apostles, but Paul isn’t really that much of an apostle either.”

Consider This: How is the attitude shown toward Paul by his opponents seen in attempts to undermine the authority of the Scriptures today?

II. Paul’s Authority (Review Galatians 1:11–24 with your class.)
No Other Gospel

**What normally follows the opening greeting in Paul’s letters? How is Galatians different?** Compare Gal. 1:6 with Rom. 1:8, 1 Cor. 1:4, Phil. 1:3, and 1 Thess. 1:2.

Although Paul addressed all kinds of local challenges and problems in his letters to the churches, he still made it a practice to follow his opening greeting with a word of prayer or thanksgiving to God for the faith of his readers. He even does this in his letters to the Corinthians, who were struggling with all kinds of questionable behavior (**compare 1 Cor. 1:4 and 5:1**). The situation in Galatia is so upsetting, however, that Paul omits the thanksgiving entirely and gets right to the point.

**What strong words does Paul use that demonstrate the degree of his concern about what was happening in Galatia?** Read Gal. 1:6–9, 5:12.

Paul does not hold back any words in his accusation against the Galatians. Simply put, he charges them with betraying their calling as Christians. In fact, the word *turning* (**NJKV**), which appears in verse 6, often was used to describe soldiers who gave up their loyalty to their country by deserting the army. Spiritually speaking, Paul is saying that the Galatians were turncoats who were turning their backs on God.

How were the Galatians deserting God? By turning to a different gospel. Paul is not saying that there is more than one gospel but that there were some in the church who—by teaching that faith in Christ was not enough (**Acts 15:1–5**)—were acting as if there were another one. Paul is so upset by this distortion of the gospel that he desires that anyone who preaches a different gospel might fall under the curse of God (**Gal. 1:8**). Paul is so emphatic about this point that he basically says the same thing twice (**Gal. 1:9**).

There is, today, a tendency even in our church (in some places) to emphasize experience over doctrine. What matters most (we are told) is our experience, our relationship with God. However important experience is, what does Paul’s writing here teach us about the importance of correct doctrine?
As we have seen, Paul’s opponents attacked him on the basis of his personal qualities and the soundness of his calling and teachings. Superficially, their broadsides might have been appealing to people of the first-century, Greco-Roman milieu. Paul had never met Jesus in the flesh; even he admitted this. Thus, like it or not, he could not be viewed in the same way as, say, Peter.

Also, Paul’s Judaizing opponents spoke for tradition. Respect for tradition was one thing that Jews, Romans, and Greeks agreed upon. Contrary to the modern belief in progress, people of that time believed that the (literal) Golden Age had been in the past and that things had been going downhill ever since. As such, things that could claim to have been passed down from an immemorial past were superior to things that had just come on the scene recently. Many Greeks and Romans scorned Jewish tradition as odd, disagreeable, or antithetical to common sense. But nearly as many looked on it with a sort of awe, as a revelation from an age when their own ancestors had just emerged from barbarism. Some of them even believed Hellenistic Jews, such as Philo of Alexandria, who claimed (among other things) that Plato got all his ideas from Moses. In short, innovation was not valued. And Paul was seen, rightly or wrongly, as an innovator.

Paul’s response? His opponents were absolutely right. He had not received his doctrines from personal contact with the historical Jesus during His earthly ministry. He had received them from the risen, heavenly Jesus who now resided at the right hand of the Father in heaven. This revelation was so obviously powerful and authentic that even those who had walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry were compelled to acknowledge it and indeed “glorified God” because of it (vs. 24).

As for background in Jewish traditions of scriptural interpretation and religious practice, Paul did have that, even more than his detractors did. And this knowledge had done him little good! It had set him on the wrong path, one that led him to the persecution of the very Jewish Christians who now claimed he was insufficiently rooted in Judaism. In fact, to become the apostle he was, he had to jettison many of the trappings that would have made him more credible in the eyes of his detractors.

**Consider This:** In his ministry Paul could not depend on many of the things others could use to assure themselves of their own worth and self-sufficiency. Upon what do you base your assurance of your calling and the presence of God’s grace in your life?
The Origin of Paul’s Gospel

The troubleshooters in Galatia were claiming that Paul’s gospel was really driven by his desire to obtain the approval of others. What might Paul have done differently in his letter if he were merely seeking human approval? *Consider Gal. 1:6–9, 11–24.*

Why did Paul not require Gentile converts to be circumcised? Paul’s opponents claimed it was because Paul wanted conversions at any cost. Maybe they thought that because Paul knew that Gentiles would have reservations about circumcision, he didn’t require it. He was a people-pleaser! In response to such allegations, Paul points his opponents to the strong words he had just written in verses 8 and 9. If all he wanted was approval, he would surely have answered otherwise.

**Why** does Paul say it is impossible to be a follower of Christ while trying to please people?

**After** Paul's statement in verses 11 and 12 that he received his gospel and authority directly from God, how do his words in verses 13–24 make his point?

Verses 13–24 provide an autobiographical account of Paul’s situation before his conversion (vss. 13, 14), during his conversion (vss. 15, 16), and afterward (vss. 16–24). Paul claims that the circumstances that surrounded each of these events make it absolutely impossible for anyone to claim that he received his gospel from anyone but God. Paul is not going to sit by and allow anyone to disparage his message by questioning his calling. He knows what happened to him, he knows what he was called to teach, and he is going to do it, regardless of the cost.

**How certain are you of your calling in Christ? How can you know for sure what God has called you to do? At the same time, even if you are sure of your calling, why must you learn to listen to the counsel of others?**
**STEP 3—Apply**

*Just for Teachers:* Use the following questions to challenge your students to base their lives on the authority of the same Jesus Christ upon whom Paul depended for his authority to teach and preach.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Paul’s opponents based their teachings on what was essentially an appeal to tradition. What is the place of tradition in the life of the church and one’s own spiritual life?

2. Paul’s apostleship was probably, at first, difficult for the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem to accept. But we are told that eventually they praised God for it. And even Paul’s detractors in Galatia did not frontally attack Paul’s claims. What was it about Paul’s ministry that clearly showed its authenticity when opponents seemingly could have easily said he was imagining things?

**Application Questions:**

1. How can our lives prove to skeptics the reality of God?

2. Paul talks about a true gospel and false “other gospels.” Sometimes the difference is quite subtle. How can we know that we are guided by the true gospel, even when the false gospels sound plausible?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* Galatians goes to the heart of why we believe what we believe, which is a question of authority. Emphasize that in the Christian life there is only one final authority, and that is Jesus Christ and the gospel He lived and preached. We are drawn to it because of the way it manifests itself in our lives and experience, just as Paul’s claims to authority manifested themselves in his effective ministry and radically changed life. The following activity will challenge your students to evaluate the authorities they accept and to make God and His Word first in their lives.

Ask your students how they know what they know. Why do they believe in the existence of Antarctica, for example? How many have been there? Perhaps they know someone who has been there, but how do they know that person is trustworthy? After your students pile up evidences for the trustworthiness of the authorities they accept, compare them to the Scriptures.
Further Study: “In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. To these converts the Jewish teachers found ready access, and through them gained a foot-hold in the churches. It was impossible, by scriptural arguments, to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul; hence they resorted to the most unscrupulous measures to counteract his influence and weaken his authority. They declared that he had not been a disciple of Jesus, and had received no commission from him; yet he had presumed to teach doctrines directly opposed to those held by Peter, James, and the other apostles. . . .

“Paul’s soul was stirred as he saw the evils that threatened speedily to destroy these churches. He immediately wrote to the Galatians, exposing their false theories, and with great severity rebuking those who had departed from the faith.”—Ellen G. White, Sketches From the Life of Paul, pp. 188, 189.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, read your explanations of what you understand the gospel to be. What can you learn from the writings of each other?

2. In Paul’s greeting to the Galatians, he declared that Jesus’ death occurred for a specific reason. What was that reason, and what meaning does that have for us today?

3. In Galatians 1:14 Paul says he was extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. By “traditions” he probably means both the oral traditions of the Pharisees and the Old Testament itself. What place (if any) is there for traditions in our faith? What warning might Paul’s experience offer for us today in regard to the whole question of tradition?

4. Why was Paul so seemingly “intolerant” of those who believed differently from the way he did? Read again some of the things he wrote about those who had a different view of the gospel. How might someone who holds such a strong, uncompromising stance be viewed in our church today?

Summary: The false teachers in Galatia were trying to undermine Paul’s ministry by claiming that his apostleship and gospel message were not God-given. Paul confronts both of these accusations in the opening verses of his letter to the Galatians. He boldly declares that there is only one way of salvation and describes how the events surrounding his conversion demonstrate that his calling and gospel only could be from God.
The Unity of the Gospel

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 2:1–14, 1 Cor. 1:10–13, Gen. 17:1–21, John 8:31–36, Col. 3:11.

Memory Text: “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2, ESV).

Protestant reformer John Calvin believed that disunity and division were the devil’s chief devices against the church, and he warned that Christians should avoid schism like the plague.

But should unity be preserved at the cost of truth? Imagine if Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, had in the name of unity chosen to recant his views on salvation by faith alone when he was brought to trial at the Diet of Worms.

“Had the Reformer yielded a single point, Satan and his hosts would have gained the victory. But his unwavering firmness was the means of emancipating the church, and beginning a new and better era.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 166.

In Galatians 2:1–14, we find the apostle doing all in his power to maintain the unity of the apostolic circle in the midst of attempts by some believers to destroy it. But as important as that unity was to Paul, he refused to allow the truth of the gospel to be compromised in order to achieve it. While there is room for diversity within unity, the gospel must never be compromised in the process.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 15.*
The Importance of Unity

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–13. What does this passage tell us about the importance with which Paul viewed unity in the church?

Having refuted the allegations that his gospel was not God-given, Paul directs his attention in Galatians 2:1, 2 to another charge being made against him. The false teachers in Galatia claimed that Paul’s gospel was not in harmony with what Peter and the other apostles taught. Paul, they were saying, was a renegade.

In response to this charge, Paul recounts a trip he made to Jerusalem at least fourteen years after his conversion. Although we’re not totally sure when that trip took place, no trip in antiquity was an easy affair. If he traveled by land from Antioch to Jerusalem, the three-hundred-mile trip would have taken at least three weeks and would have involved all kinds of hardships and dangers. Yet, in spite of such difficulties, Paul undertook the journey, not because the apostles had summoned him but because the Spirit had. And while he was there, he set his gospel before the apostles.

Why did he do that? Certainly not because he had any doubt about what he was teaching. He certainly did not need any kind of reassurance from the apostles. After all, he already had been proclaiming the same gospel for fourteen years. And though he did not need their permission or approval, either, he highly valued the other apostles’ support and encouragement.

Thus, the accusation that his message was different was not only an attack on Paul but also an attack on the unity of the apostles, and on the church itself. Maintaining apostolic unity was vital, since a division between Paul’s Gentile mission and the mother church in Jerusalem would have had disastrous consequences. With no fellowship between the Gentile and Jewish Christians, then “Christ would be divided, and all the energy which Paul had devoted, and hoped to devote, to the evangelizing of the Gentile world would be frustrated.”—F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 111.

What are some issues that threaten the unity of the church today? More important, after we define these issues, how do we deal with them? What issues are more important than unity itself?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Philippians 2:2

The Student Will:

Know: Examine the true basis of unity among believers who are as different as the Jews and Gentiles.
Feel: Appreciate the level of tension and concern surrounding the issue of circumcision in the light of the gospel of grace.
Do: Determine to stand fast on the foundational doctrines of faith and grace.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: A Fresh Face on an Old Tradition

A How had God’s commands regarding circumcision become a legalistic tradition blinding many to the true means of salvation?
B Why is the gospel of grace the best means of unifying the widely diverse members of the church?

II. Feel: Trouble in the Church

A Why, despite the need for unity in the young church, did Paul feel it was necessary to publicly oppose Peter, who sought to take a less confrontational stand on Jewish customs?
B What grave dangers threatened those who didn’t want to confront the issue regarding circumcision?

III. Do: Unity in Diversity

A What challenges does diversity bring to our church?
B What do we need to do to identify and build on the true basis of unity without compromising the gospel?

Summary: In depending on Jewish traditions that blinded the early church to the critical matter of faith in Christ’s work, the church was in danger of losing its understanding of the gospel.
Circumcision was the sign of the covenant relationship that God established with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Although circumcision was only for Abraham’s male descendants, everyone was invited into the covenant relationship with God. The sign of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17. This occurred after Abraham’s disastrous attempt—by fathering a child with his wife’s Egyptian slave—to help God fulfill His promise to him of a son.

Circumcision was a fitting sign of the covenant. It was a reminder that the best-laid plans of humans can never accomplish what God Himself has promised. Outward circumcision was to be a symbol of circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4, Rom. 2:29). It represented a stripping away of our confidence in ourselves and a faithful dependence on God instead.

During Paul’s time, however, circumcision had become a prized sign of national and religious identity—not what it was originally intended to signify. About one hundred fifty years before Jesus’ birth, some overly zealous patriots not only forced all uncircumcised Jews in Palestine to be circumcised, but they also required it of all men living in the surrounding nations who fell under their jurisdiction. Some even believed circumcision was a passport to salvation. This can be seen in ancient epigrams that confidently declare things such as, “‘Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna [hell].’”—C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1975), p. 172.

It would be a mistake to assume that Paul was opposed to circumcision itself. What Paul objected to was the insistence that Gentiles had to submit to circumcision. The false teachers said: “‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1, NKJV). The issue, then, was not really about circumcision but about salvation. Salvation is either by faith in Christ alone, or it is something earned by human obedience.

Maybe today circumcision isn’t the issue. But what (if anything) do we as a church struggle with that parallels this problem?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Unity is a key characteristic of the true Christian church, but it is not merely avoidance of conflict or the papering over of legitimate differences. It must be founded upon the gospel.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that while tolerance and mutual respect are usually what are called for in church life, sometimes Christian unity is best served by confronting error in a seemingly divisive way.

Are you a splitter or a lumper? In most disciplines (biology, for example), it becomes necessary to classify individual examples within a larger framework. Say that you have a green, scaly creature. Is it a reptile, an amphibian, or something entirely new and unheard of? If it is an amphibian, is it a frog? Is it a toad? Could it even be a salamander? Or again, is it entirely new? If you are a biologist, your answer may depend on whether you are a lumper or a splitter. The lumper will look for the category that the new specimen has most in common with and will tend to regard the differences as less important. The splitter will focus on the differences and will tend to multiply categories and subcategories in order to define narrowly the identity of the specimen. An objective observer will usually have to admit that they both have a point.

These two drives exist in the church, as well, and most of us will have a preference one way or the other. Lumpers will tend to seek unity. At worst, this tendency becomes the search for peace at any price, in which immorality or rank heresy is ignored or glossed over to avoid conflict.

Splitters will tend to divide the church over arcane matters of doctrine or practice that have little bearing on matters central to Christian faith. We all have heard of churches and denominations that multiply into myriad feuding factions. If we examined them closely, we would probably find a predominance of splitters in such groups.

Paul sought unity, and in that sense, he was a lumper. But he would not accept unity unless it was based upon the one gospel. He was not willing to accommodate those who preached another gospel that was not the gospel, and in that sense, he was a splitter. As Christians we must know when to be a lumper and when to be a splitter, and only God can give us the wisdom and discernment necessary for that.
Unity in Diversity

**Read** Galatians 2:1–10. Paul says that the false brothers “slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery” (Gal. 2:4, ESV). What are Christians free from? Read John 8:31–36; Rom. 6:6, 7; 8:2, 3; Gal. 3:23–25; 4:7, 8; Heb. 2:14, 15. How do we experience for ourselves the reality of this freedom?

Freedom, as a description of the Christian experience, is an important concept for Paul. He used the word more frequently than did any other author in the New Testament, and in the book of Galatians the words free and freedom occur numerous times. Freedom, however, for the Christian means freedom in Christ. It is the opportunity to live a life of unhindered devotion to God. It involves freedom from being enslaved to the desires of our sinful nature (Romans 6), freedom from the condemnation of the law (Rom. 8:1, 2), and freedom from the power of death (1 Cor. 15:55).

The apostles recognized that Paul “had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:7, ESV). What does this suggest about the nature of unity and diversity within the church?

The apostles acknowledged that God had called Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, just as He had called Peter to preach to the Jews. In both cases, the gospel was the same, but the way it was presented depended on the people the apostles were trying to reach. Implicit in this verse “is the important recognition that one and the same formula is bound to be heard differently and to have different force in different social and cultural contexts. . . . It is precisely this oneness which is the basis of Christian unity, precisely as unity in diversity.”—James D. G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 106.

How open should we be to methods of evangelism and witnessing that take us out of our “comfort zone”? Are there some forms of evangelism that bother you? If so, what are they, why do they bother you, and might you need to be more open-minded about these things?
Discuss With the Class: What is true unity in the New Testament sense, and why might people who are naturally disposed to be either lumpers or splitters fail to grasp the meaning of it?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the importance of unity in the church as a way of revealing the unity and harmony embodied in the Godhead and the grace and peace God gives us as individuals.

Bible Commentary

I. The Foundation of Christian Unity (Review John 17:21 and 1 Corinthians 1:10–13.)

Unity in the Christian church was, and is, not just an organizational imperative but a theological imperative. As Jesus Christ envisioned the future of His church, one of the first things He wished for them was “that they all may be one” (John 17:21). There were many reasons for this goal. Obviously, the church would function more efficiently if its members were united in faith, practice, and goals.

So, unity helps us to represent God better to people who don’t know Him yet but might be open to the opportunity.

And this brings us to the theological point. The church represents God to the extent that it is His body on earth (Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 12:12–27, Eph. 3:6, 5:23). If we leave aside the fact that a body is a functioning unity of many parts (not that this distinction of diversity isn’t important too), the church, in a sense, is Christ. Christ is God, and God is a harmonious unity of three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If the church is to reflect God, it should be a harmonious unity of the different personalities included in it.

At the same time, Christian unity is not just unity or harmonious relationships among the members. Christian unity is unity in Christ. In the early church much of the disunity that manifested itself resulted from misguided confidence in human leaders, as Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:10–13. And, to an extent, this misguided confidence also had much to do with the Galatian dilemma. Paul’s opponents knew that they could cast doubt and suspicion on Paul as a person and, perhaps, inspire confidence in themselves because of their charisma, personal qualities, or sheer brazen self-assuredness. In contrast, Paul focused on the one true gospel,
Confrontation in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–13)

Some time after Paul’s consultation in Jerusalem, Peter made a visit to Antioch in Syria, the location of the first Gentile church and the base of Paul’s missionary activities as described in Acts. While there, Peter ate freely with the Gentile Christians, but when a group of Jewish Christians arrived from James, Peter—fearful of what they would think—changed his behavior entirely.

**Why should Peter have known better?** Compare Gal. 2:11–13 and Acts 10:28. What does his action tell us about just how powerfully ingrained culture and tradition can be in our lives?

Some have mistakenly assumed that Peter and the other Jews with him had ceased following the Old Testament laws about clean and unclean food. This, however, does not seem to be the case. If Peter and all the Jewish Christians had abandoned the Jewish food laws, a major uproar in the church certainly would have followed. If so, there would surely be some record of it, but there is not. It is more likely that the issue was about table fellowship with Gentiles. Because many Jews saw Gentiles as unclean, it was a practice among some to avoid social contact with Gentiles as much as possible.

Peter had struggled with this issue himself, and it was only a vision from God that helped him to see it clearly. Peter said to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, after he entered his house, “‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean’” (Acts 10:28, ESV). Although he knew better, he was so afraid of offending his own countrymen that he reverted to his old ways. That’s, apparently, how strong the pull of culture and tradition was in Peter’s life.

Paul, though, called Peter’s actions exactly what they were: the Greek word he used in Galatians 2:13 is hypocrisy. Even Barnabas, he said, was “carried away with their hypocrisy” (NKJV). Strong words from one man of God to another.

**Why is it so easy to be a hypocrite?** (Isn’t it, perhaps, that we tend to blind ourselves to our own faults while eagerly looking for faults in others?) What kind of hypocrisy do you find in your own life? More important, how can you recognize it and then root it out?
which should be the true unifying force among Christians.

**Consider This:** What are some of the more obvious pitfalls of placing one’s confidence in human leaders as opposed to Christ Himself?

**II. Let’s Talk About Circumcision** *(Review Galatians 5:2–6 with your class.)*

It is often said that Paul’s opponents, referred to as Judaizers, wanted converts to Christianity to become Jews, and that is true. Some take this statement to mean that the Judaizers wanted to require Gentile Christians to become circumcised and observe other, more recondite, Jewish customs. Most scholars agree, though, that this was not true of all Judaizers. Furthermore, there was a place for righteous Gentiles in both the normative Judaism of the time and in the scheme of some Judaizing Christians. There was a class of people known as God fearers, Gentiles who adopted some Jewish beliefs, customs, and practices. They participated in synagogue life, to some extent, and were accepted to a degree. But they were not full converts, primarily because they had not been circumcised. As such, the status they occupied was decidedly second-class.

The Christian church at the time had not yet reached a consensus on what to do with or about Gentile converts, but they existed and played a major part in the early Christian churches. It was a *fait accompli*, in that sense.

It seems from the available biblical evidence that the church leaders in Jerusalem, while Jewish themselves and largely obedient to Jewish laws and customs, did not take an active part in the controversy as it was taking shape. Others, most notably the Judaizers whom Paul confronted in Galatia, actively took it upon themselves to “improve” the Gentile converts, holding out the prospect of a higher level of belonging or spiritual attainment to Gentiles who undertook full conversion to Judaism. An elite corps of superconverts, if you will.

Paul rightly saw this agenda as undermining the unity and equality before God that should exist in the church. The Judaizers distorted the gospel by suggesting it could be improved or fortified by something else and that people who added (or subtracted) that little something somehow occupied a higher place. This is why Paul states in Galatians 5:2 that anyone circumcised under such an assumption does himself no good and possibly does himself spiritual harm.

**Consider This:** We all have our ideas of how a good Christian should look
Paul’s Concern *(Gal. 2:14)*

The situation in Antioch surely was tense: Paul and Peter, two leaders in the church, were in open conflict. And Paul holds nothing back as he calls Peter to account for his behavior.

**What** reasons does Paul give for publicly confronting Peter? *Gal. 2:11–14.*

As Paul saw it, the problem was not that Peter had decided to eat with the visitors from Jerusalem. Ancient traditions about hospitality certainly would have required as much.

The issue was “the truth of the gospel.” That is, it wasn’t just an issue of fellowship or dining practices. Peter’s actions, in a real sense, compromised the whole message of the gospel.

**Read** Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11. How does the truth in these texts help us understand Paul’s strong reaction?

During Paul’s meeting in Jerusalem with Peter and the other apostles, they had come to the conclusion that Gentiles could enjoy all of the blessings in Christ without first having to submit to circumcision. Peter’s action now put that agreement in jeopardy. Where once Jewish and Gentile Christians had joined in an environment of open fellowship, now the congregation was divided, and this held the prospect of a divided church in the future.

From Paul’s perspective, Peter’s behavior implied that the Gentile Christians were second-rate believers at best, and he believed that Peter’s actions would place strong pressure upon the Gentiles to conform if they wanted to experience full fellowship. Thus, Paul says, “‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’” *(Gal. 2:14, ESV).* The phrase “to live like Jews” can be more literally translated as “to Judaize.” This word was a common expression that meant “to adopt a Jewish way of life.” It was used for Gentiles who attended a synagogue and participated in other Jewish customs. It is also the reason that Paul’s opponents in Galatia, whom he calls the false brothers, are often referred to as “the Judaizers.”

As if Peter’s actions weren’t bad enough, Barnabas got caught up in this behavior, as well—someone who should have also known better. What a clear example of the power of “peer pressure”! How can we learn to protect ourselves from being swayed in the wrong direction by those around us?
or act. Some of these are very deeply rooted in upbringing or indoctrination in a given tradition. Some of our ideas may even have some scriptural basis. How can we avoid polluting the gospel by attempting to control people with our own ideas of how they should look or act?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following questions to help your students to be able to understand the importance of true Christian unity.

**Thought Questions:**
1. In what ways did Paul strive to promote unity within the church, even as he confronted error and slander?
2. How might the arguments of the Judaizers have made sense to people who only half understood the gospel? (After all, circumcision was biblical.)

**Application Questions:**
1. How can we identify when a given policy or practice—whether erring in the direction of strictness or laxity—is destructive of unity in the gospel?
2. Peter’s actions in pretending to adhere to customs he no longer regarded as relevant (Gal. 2:11–13, Acts 10:28) might, in some contexts, be seen as concern for unity. When does a desire to protect others’ sensibilities become, as in this case, cowardice and hypocrisy?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** In Galatians we see Paul confronting people who might be called apostles of disunity, if not apostles as such. While Paul’s opponents represent an extreme example of the spirit of disunity—often based upon completely arbitrary matters—this tendency exists in all of us. We may all place (or misplace) extreme value and importance on things that, in the light of the gospel and its message of grace for all, fade into irrelevance and unimportance. The following activity will help us all to recognize and change this tendency in ourselves.

**Ask your class:** “What do you regard as the outward manifestations of inward Christianity? Why do you regard this as important?” Be careful not to pass judgment on what anyone says. You are acquainted with the personalities and biases of your class; be careful with anything that might have a tendency to get controversial or personal.

“Even the best of men, if left to themselves, will make grave blunders. The more responsibilities placed upon the human agent, the higher his position to dictate and control, the more mischief he is sure to do in perverting minds and hearts if he does not carefully follow the way of the Lord. At Antioch Peter failed in the principles of integrity. Paul had to withstand his subverting influence face to face. This is recorded that others may profit by it, and that the lesson may be a solemn warning to the men in high places, that they may not fail in integrity, but keep close to principle.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1108.

Discussion Questions:

1. Very few people enjoy confrontation, but sometimes it is necessary. In what circumstances should a church condemn error, and discipline those who refuse to accept correction?

2. As the Seventh-day Adventist Church grows around the world, it becomes more and more diverse. What steps can the church take to make sure that unity is not lost in the midst of such diversity? How can we learn to accept and even enjoy the diversity of cultures and traditions among us, while at the same time maintaining unity?

3. When sharing the gospel in a different culture, what are the essential elements that should not change, and what can be changed? How do we learn to distinguish between what must remain and what we can, if necessary, let go?

Summary: The insistence by some Jewish Christians that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to become true followers of Christ posed a serious threat to the unity of the early church. Instead of letting this issue divide the church into two different movements, the apostles worked together, in spite of conflicts among themselves, to ensure that the body of Christ stayed united and faithful to the truth of the gospel.
Lesson 4 *October 15–21

Justification by Faith Alone

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 2:15–21; Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:10–20; Gen. 15:5, 6; Rom. 3:8.

Memory Text: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, ESV).

As we saw last week, Paul publicly confronted Peter in Antioch for the lack of consistency between the faith he advocated and the behavior he displayed. Peter’s decision no longer to eat with former pagans suggested that they were second-rate Christians, at best. His actions implied that if they really wanted to be part of the family of God and enjoy the blessings of full table fellowship, they must first submit to the rite of circumcision.

What did Paul actually say to Peter on that tense occasion? In this week’s lesson, we will study what is likely a summary of what went on. This passage contains some of the most compressed wording in the New Testament, and it is extremely significant, because it introduces us for the first time to several words and phrases that are foundational both to understanding the gospel and to the rest of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. These key words include justification, righteousness, works of law, belief, and not only faith but even the faith of Jesus.

What does Paul mean by these terms, and what do they teach us about the plan of salvation?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 22.
The Question of “Justification” (Gal. 2:15, 16)

In Galatians 2:15, Paul writes, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners” (ESV). What point do you think he was making?

Paul’s words need to be understood in their context. In an attempt to win over his fellow Jewish Christians to his position, Paul starts with something with which they would agree—the traditional distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Jews were the elect of God, entrusted with His law, and they enjoyed the benefits of the covenant relationship with Him. Gentiles, however, were sinners; God’s law did not restrain their behavior, and they were outside the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12, Rom. 2:14). While Gentiles were obviously “sinners,” in verse 16 Paul warns the Jewish Christians that their spiritual privileges do not make them any more acceptable to God, because no one is justified by “works of the law.”

Paul uses the word justified four times in Galatians 2:16, 17. What does he mean by “justification”? Consider Exod. 23:7 and Deut. 25:1.

The verb to justify is a key term for Paul. Of the thirty-nine times it occurs in the New Testament, twenty-seven are in Paul’s letters. He uses it eight times in Galatians, including four references in Galatians 2:16, 17. Justification is a legal term, used in courts of law. It deals with the verdict a judge pronounces when a person is declared innocent of the charges brought against him or her. It is the opposite of condemnation. Additionally, because the words just and righteous come from the same Greek word, for a person “to be justified” means that the person also is counted as “righteous.” Thus, justification involves more than simply pardon or forgiveness; it is the positive declaration that a person is righteous.

For some of the Jewish believers, however, justification also was relational. It revolved around their relationship with God and His covenant. To be “justified” also meant that a person was counted as a faithful member of God’s covenantal community, the family of Abraham.

Read Galatians 2:15–17. What is Paul saying to you here, and how can you apply these words to your own Christian experience?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 2:20

The Student Will:

Know: Explain the only way by which we can stand justified before God in judgment.

Feel: Sense the rest that comes from abandoning our own qualifying works and from depending on Christ’s righteousness.

Do: Identify completely with Christ’s death and live Christ’s life rather than our own.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Made Righteous in Christ

A Why is it impossible to become righteous by hard work, denying self, and obeying God’s commandments?

B How can God be just in assigning Christ’s record of righteousness in place of our own? What does our faith have to do with this transaction?

II. Feel: None of Me

A Why is it so important to abandon all claims to our own righteousness, and instead, put our faith completely in Christ’s?

B What emotional, physical, and spiritual benefits come from resting completely in what Christ has done?

C Does resting in Christ result in lazy living? Why, or why not?

III. Do: Living Christ’s Life

A How does identifying with Christ’s death and living His life make a difference in how we live?

B What choices do we make, moment by moment, that make dying Christ’s death and living Christ’s life possible?

Summary: Faith makes it possible to come before God and accept His provisions, provided through Christ’s death, for our forgiveness and restoration to a righteous standing before Him. Through faith we may die to self and let Christ live His life in us.
Works of the Law

Paul says three times in Galatians 2:16 that a person is not justified by “works of the law.” What does he mean by the expression “works of the law”? How do these texts (Gal. 2:16, 17; 3:2, 5, 10; Rom. 3:20, 28) help us understand his meaning?

Before we can understand the phrase “the works of the law,” we first need to understand what Paul means by the word law. The word law (nomos in Greek) is found 121 times in Paul’s letters. It can refer to a number of different things, including God’s will for His people, the first five books of Moses, the entire Old Testament, or even just a general principle. However, the primary way Paul uses it is to refer to the entire collection of God’s commandments as given to His people through Moses.

Therefore, the phrase “the works of the law” likely involves all the requirements found in the commandments given by God through Moses, whether moral or ceremonial. Paul’s point is that no matter how hard we try to follow and obey God’s law, our obedience never will be good enough for God to justify us, to have us declared righteous before God. That’s because His law requires absolute faithfulness in thought and action—not just some of the time but all of the time, and not just for some of His commandments but for all of them.

Although the phrase “works of the law” does not occur in the Old Testament and is not found in the New Testament outside of Paul, stunning confirmation of its meaning emerged in 1947 with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of writings copied by a group of Jews, called Essenes, who lived at the time of Jesus. Although written in Hebrew, one of the scrolls contains this exact phrase. The scroll’s title is Miqsat Ma’as Ha-Torah, which can be translated, “Important Works of the Law.” The scroll describes a number of issues based on biblical law concerned with preventing holy things from being made impure, including several that marked the Jews out as separate from the Gentiles. At the end the author writes that if these “works of the law” are followed, “you will be reckoned righteous” before God. Unlike Paul, the author does not offer his reader righteousness on the basis of faith but on the basis of behavior.

In your experience, how well do you keep God’s law? Do you really sense that you keep it so well that you can be justified before God on the basis of your law-keeping? See Rom. 3:10–20. If not, why not—and how does your answer help you understand Paul’s point here?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Becoming justified in God’s sight comes only from having faith in Christ’s death on our behalf and by accepting His righteous record as our own.

**Just for Teachers:** Use this opening activity to help your class identify with the theme of justification on an emotional as well as a spiritual level.

**Opening Activity:** Philip P. Bliss was a young missionary evangelist and songwriter who worked with Dwight Moody in his campaigns. Philip and his wife, Lucy, left their four-year-old and one-year-old baby with friends and family and took a train to an engagement at the Moody tabernacle in December 1876. As the train was crossing the Ashtabula River in Ohio, the trestle bridge collapsed, dropping the train into the icy river. Philip escaped, but he returned to the train for his wife, who was trapped in the fiery wreckage. Neither Philip’s nor Lucy’s body was recovered, but Philip’s trunk survived. In the trunk was a manuscript for the lyrics to what became his best-known song, “I Will Sing of My Redeemer” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Bliss). Ask someone to sing this song for your class or sing it together. You can find it in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 343.

**Consider This:** Does it seem like a paradox to be so joyful about Christ’s death on a cruel cross? Why is it such a wonderful thing to contemplate the story of the cost that Jesus paid for our salvation? How might this song have been a source of comfort to the children that Philip and Lucy left behind?

- What songs in Revelation are raised on the same theme as hymn 343—the cost that Jesus paid for our salvation? (See Rev. 5:9–13, 7:9–17, 12:10–12.) List the reasons in these songs that made worshipers around the throne so eternally grateful.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Use this study to help your class examine the relationship between faith, obedience, and justification.
The Basis of Our Justification

“And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:9, NKJV).

We should not assume Jewish Christians were suggesting that faith in Christ was not important; after all, they were all believers in Jesus. They all had faith in Him. Their behavior showed, however, that they felt faith was not sufficient by itself; it must be supplemented with obedience, as if our obedience adds something to the act of justification itself. Justification, they would have argued, was by both faith and works. The way that Paul repeatedly contrasts faith in Christ with the works of the law indicates his strong opposition to this kind of “both/and” approach. Faith, and faith alone, is the basis of justification.

For Paul, too, faith is not just an abstract concept; it is inseparably connected to Jesus. In fact, the phrase translated twice as “faith in Christ” in Galatians 2:16 is far richer than any translation can really encompass. The phrase in Greek is translated literally as “the faith” or “the faithfulness” of Jesus. This literal translation reveals the powerful contrast Paul is making between the works of the law that we do and the work of Christ accomplished in our behalf, the works that He, through His faithfulness (hence, the “faithfulness of Jesus”), has done for us.

It’s important to remember that faith itself doesn’t add to justification, as if faith were meritorious in and of itself. Faith is, instead, the means by which we take hold of Christ and His works in our behalf. We are not justified on the basis of our faith but on the basis of Christ’s faithfulness for us, which we claim for ourselves through faith.

Christ did what every individual has failed to do: He alone was faithful to God in everything He did. Our hope is in Christ’s faithfulness, not our own. As one author puts it, “We believe in Christ, not that we might be justified by that belief, but that we might be justified by his faith (fulness) to God.”—John McRay, Paul: His Life and Teaching (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 355.

An early Syriac translation of Galatians 2:16 conveys Paul’s meaning well: “Therefore we know that a man is not justified from the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus the Messiah, and we believe in him, in Jesus the Messiah, that from his faith, that of the Messiah, we might be justified, and not from the works of the law.”

Read Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; and Philippians 3:9. How do these texts, and what we read above, help us to understand the amazing truth that Christ’s faithfulness for us, His perfect obedience to God, is the only basis of our salvation?
I. The Origins of Faith (Review Genesis 12:1–8 and 15:5, 6 with your class.)

The story of Abraham (formerly Abram) and his walk with God comes a short twelve chapters into the opening book of the Bible, though Abraham was born several hundred years after the Flood and some two thousand years after Adam. While others had a relationship with God, Abraham is the first person to whom the author of Genesis devotes much time to in order to develop his story. In the course of Abraham’s lifetime, he has many firsthand experiences and conversations with God, and we are able to picture a developing relationship of faith in the man who has become known through the ages as an example of true faith.

We first learn about Abram when God asks him to leave his country and his father’s household and then gives him the promise of a blessing to make him the father of many nations. Eventually, we find out, as Abram did sometime later, that this promise won’t be fulfilled in his lifetime. When Abram notes that he is childless, God promises a family that will rival the stars in number. The Lord promises possession of a land of inheritance, and “Abram believed the Lord, and he [the Lord] credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, NIV). Then God mentions that this land of promise in which Abram is wandering won’t be his or even his family’s for some four hundred years.

Abram has to wait until he is 100 before he has the son God promised, a miracle baby. It’s a far cry from the uncountable numbers God promised, but it’s a start. Finally, in a closing drama of Abraham’s life, he is asked to sacrifice that longed-for, long-waited-for boy on a lonely mountaintop, with only the angels and the universe as witnesses.

Abraham had demonstrated a checkerboard pattern of faith. Sometimes he showed faith; other times he took matters into his own hands. However, Abraham grew in faith. When he was asked to offer up his beloved son, he did not stop to reason or make excuses or question. “He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 153.

“Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23). This act of faith shines like a great beacon of light, illuminating the pathway of faith for those of us, Abraham’s children, who also are learning how to walk in faith.
The Obedience of Faith

Paul makes it clear that faith absolutely is foundational to the Christian life. It is the means by which we lay hold of the promises we have in Christ. But what is faith exactly? What does it involve?

What do the following texts teach us about the origin of faith? Gen. 15:5, 6; John 3:14–16; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Gal. 5:6.

Genuine biblical faith is always a response to God. Faith is not some kind of feeling or attitude that humans one day decide to have because God requires it. On the contrary, true faith originates in a heart touched with a sense of gratitude and love for God’s goodness. That’s why when the Bible talks about faith, that faith always follows initiatives that God has taken. In the case of Abraham, for example, faith is his response to the amazing promises God makes to him (Gen. 15:5, 6), while in the New Testament, Paul says that faith is ultimately rooted in our realization of what Christ did for us on the cross.

If faith is a response to God, what should that response include? Consider what the following texts say about the nature of faith. John 8:32, 36; Acts 10:43; Rom. 1:5, 8; 6:17; Heb. 11:6; James 2:19.

Many people define faith as “belief.” This definition is problematic, because in Greek the word for “faith” is simply the noun form of the verb “to believe.” To use one form to define the other is like saying “faith is to have faith.” It tells us nothing.

A careful examination of Scripture reveals that faith involves not only knowledge about God but a mental consent or acceptance of that knowledge. This is one reason why having an accurate picture of God is so important. Distorted ideas about the character of God actually can make it more difficult to have faith. But an intellectual assent to the gospel is not enough, for, in that sense, “even the demons believe.” True faith also affects the way a person lives. In Romans 1:5, Paul writes about the “obedience of faith.” Paul is not saying that obedience is the same as faith. He means true faith affects the whole of a person’s life, not just the mind. It involves commitment to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as opposed to just a list of rules. Faith is as much what we do and how we live and in whom we trust as it is what we believe.
Consider This: What lessons in the long-term nature of the development of faith does the story of Abraham demonstrate? How do his failings help encourage and admonish us when we are tempted to create our own answers to prayer?

II. Faith and Obedience  *(Review Galatians 2:15–21 with your class.)*

Through faith, Abraham was strictly obedient to God’s request to offer up his son. He believed God, took Him at His word, and acted upon it. That belief and action (based on belief) were what was accounted to him as righteousness. “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” *(James 2:21, 22, NIV).*

However, it isn’t by following the law that Abraham or anyone else is considered justified before God. Paul doesn’t have a problem with obedience to the law; faith in Jesus makes true obedience possible. Abraham, responding to God’s request to sacrifice his son, “strengthened his soul by dwelling upon the evidences of the Lord’s goodness and faithfulness.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 151. He recalled the promise that from Isaac would come children as countless as the grains of sand on the shore and as the stars in the sky. Faith gave him strength to obey, and it was that faith that was counted to him for righteousness.

Consider This: How is faith strictly obedient, even in the face of great unknowns and tragedy? What other scriptural examples illustrate obedient faith, despite obstacles and tragedy and what seemed to be a bleak future?

III. Faith and Obedience and Justification  *(Review Galatians 2:15–21 with your class.)*

Paul makes it clear that it is not possible to be justified before God by observing the law. Christ Jesus, in His righteousness, justifies us, a righteousness that we claim by faith, a faith that results in obedience. When we have faith in Jesus, we hold nothing back from Him, even unto death. If we die to self daily, laying everything that we value on the cross and accepting Christ’s life in place of our own deeds and merits, then the only way we can live is by faith in the Son of God. Though living life through faith in Jesus results in obedience—for Jesus Himself “became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” *(Phil. 2:8, NIV)*, obedience is not the means by which we become
Does Faith Promote Sin?

One of the main accusations against Paul was that his gospel of justification by faith alone encouraged people to sin (see Rom. 3:8, 6:1). No doubt the accusers reasoned that if people do not have to keep the law to be accepted by God, why should they be concerned with how they live?

How does Paul respond to the accusation that a doctrine of justification by faith alone encourages sinful behavior? *Gal. 2:17, 18.*

Paul responds to his opponents’ charges in the strongest terms possible: “God forbid!” While it is possible that a person might fall into sin after coming to Christ, the responsibility would certainly not belong to Christ. If we break the law, we ourselves are the law-breakers.

How does Paul describe his union with Jesus Christ? In what way does this answer refute the objections raised by his opponents? *Gal. 2:19–21.*

Paul finds the reasoning of his opponents simply preposterous. Accepting Christ by faith is not something trivial; it is not a game of heavenly make-believe where God counts a person as righteous while there is no real change in how that person lives. On the contrary, to accept Christ by faith is extremely radical. It involves a complete union with Christ—a union in both His death and resurrection. Spiritually speaking, Paul says we are crucified with Christ, and our old sinful ways rooted in selfishness are finished (Rom. 6:5–14). We have made a radical break with the past. Everything is new (2 Cor. 5:17). We have also been raised to a new life in Christ. The resurrected Christ lives within us, daily making us more and more like Himself.

Faith in Christ, therefore, is not a pretext for sin but a call to a much deeper, richer relationship with Christ than could ever be found in a law-based religion.

How do you relate to the concept of salvation by faith alone without the deeds of the law? Does it, perhaps, scare you a little, making you think that it can be an excuse for sin—or do you rejoice in it? What does your answer say about your understanding of salvation?
Learning Cycle continued

justified before God. Our record of goodness can never match that of Christ’s. His record was one of perfect obedience, and that is what we need in order to be justified. The only way we can receive that perfect record of obedience is by faith, laying hold of Christ’s promises to give us His perfect record of righteousness as a substitute for our broken, faulty record of misdeeds.

Consider This: In the face of such an incredible gift of goodness that we can never imagine, much less merit, why are we tempted to ignore our need for Jesus’ gifts and attempt to justify ourselves based on our own good deeds? What are the results of such attempts? What scriptural examples inform us about the consequences of trying to gain God’s favor by following our own ideas of what is right?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use this role play as a means of helping your class picture themselves as crucifying self and choosing to live by faith in Christ.

Role Play: Give a volunteer from the class two large nails to hold, as if they were on the cross. Pose this situation: someone in your church family, whom you have been trying to help, disparages you to another church member. You have determined to be crucified with Christ and live only His life. What will you do?

Ask for several other volunteers to carry the nails and pose these and other situations to them: (1) you have a difficult time turning down food, even though you have had enough; (2) you are tired, and your children are getting on your nerves; (3) you are embarrassed to give the real reason for being tardy at an important meeting: you simply didn’t leave on time to make your appointment. It would be easier to mention traffic as an excuse.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following ideas for activities to do during the week.

- Create a list of the reasons for which the worshipers of Revelation praise Jesus for what He has done. Post this list where you can see it for a week.
- Research a number of songs that express joy in our redemption. Memorize them and sing them during private devotions and for others.
- Fill a small basket with reminders of Christ’s gifts of redemption and place it where you can see it often.
Further Study: “The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ. . . .

“There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.” —Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 18, 19.

“The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the first passage quoted above, Ellen G. White says no subject needs to be emphasized more than justification by faith. As a class, discuss whether her comments are as applicable for us today as they were when she wrote them over a hundred years ago and, if so, why.

2. Why does Paul say that Christ would have died for no purpose, if justification were through the law? *Gal. 2:21*. What does he mean by that?

Summary: Peter’s behavior in Antioch suggested that former pagans could not be true Christians unless they were first circumcised. Paul pointed out the fallacy of such thinking. God cannot pronounce anyone righteous on the basis of that person’s behavior, for even the best humans are not perfect. It is only by accepting what God has done for us in Christ that sinners can be justified in His sight.
Old Testament Faith

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 3:1–14, Rom. 1:2, 4:3, Gen. 15:6, 12:1–3, Lev. 17:11, 2 Cor. 5:21.

Memory Text: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13, ESV).

A little boy made a little boat, all painted and fixed up beautifully. One day someone stole his boat, and he was distressed. In passing a pawnshop one day he saw his boat. Happily he ran in to the pawnbroker and said, ‘That is my little boat.’ ‘No,’ said the pawnbroker, ‘it is mine, for I bought it.’ ‘Yes,’ said the boy, ‘but it is mine, for I made it.’ ‘Well,’ said the pawnbroker, ‘if you will pay me two dollars, you can have it.’ That was a lot of money for a boy who did not have a penny. Anyway, he resolved to have it; so he cut grass, did chores of all kinds, and soon had his money.

“He ran down to the shop and said, ‘I want my boat.’ He paid the money and received his boat. He took the boat up in his arms, and hugged and kissed it, and said, ‘You dear little boat, I love you. You are mine. You are twice mine. I made you, and now I have bought you.’

“So it is with us. We are, in a sense, twice the Lord’s. He created us, and we got into the devil’s pawnshop. Then Jesus came and bought us at awful cost—not silver and gold, but His precious blood. We are the Lord’s by creation and by redemption.”—William Moses Tidwell, Pointed Illustrations (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1951), p. 97.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.*
The Foolish Galatians

Read Galatians 3:1–5. Summarize below what Paul is saying to the Galatians. In what sense could we be in danger of falling into the same spiritual pitfall, of starting out right and then falling into legalism?

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Several modern translations have tried to capture the sense of Paul’s words in verse 1 about the “foolish” Galatians. The actual word Paul uses in Greek is even stronger than that. The word is anoetoi, and it comes from the word for mind (nous). Literally, it means “mindless.” The Galatians were not thinking. Paul does not stop there; he says that because they are acting so foolishly, he wonders if some magician has cast a spell on them. “Who has bewitched you?” His choice of words here may even suggest that the ultimate source behind their condition is the devil (2 Cor. 4:4).

What baffles Paul so much about the Galatians’ apostasy on the gospel is that they knew salvation was rooted in the cross of Christ. It was not something that they could have missed. The word translated as “portrayed” or “set forth” (KJV) in Galatians 3:1 literally means “placarded” or “painted.” It was used to describe all public proclamations. Paul is saying that the Cross was such a central part of his preaching that the Galatians had, in effect, seen in their mind’s eye Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2). In a sense, he’s saying that, by their actions, they are turning away from the Cross.

Paul then contrasts the current experience of the Galatians with how they first came to faith in Christ. He does this by asking them some rhetorical questions. How did they receive the Spirit, meaning How did they first become Christians? And from a slightly different perspective, Why did God give the Spirit? Was it because they did something to earn it? Certainly not! Instead, it was because they believed the good news of what Christ had already done for them. Having begun so well, what would make them think that now they had to rely upon their own behavior?

How often, if ever, do you find yourself thinking, I’m doing pretty well. I’m a pretty solid Christian, I don’t do this and I don’t do that... and then, even subtly, thinking you’re somehow good enough to be saved? What’s wrong with that picture?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Galatians 3:13

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Outline the foundation for understanding redemption and justification by faith in the Old Testament.
- **Feel:** Sense the sorrow and agony of the curse of separation from the Father that Christ endured for our sake.
- **Do:** Accept and appreciate the depths of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf and, in faith, ask for His righteousness to forgive our sins and cover us.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Redemption in the Old Testament
   - A. How was the theme of redemption illustrated throughout the Old Testament in the sacrificial system?
   - B. What Old Testament stories develop the theme of a substitute bearing a tragic cost in order to save others?

II. Feel: He Bore Our Curse
   - A. Why did God go to so much trouble to illustrate the substitutionary death of Christ long before Christ ever came to this earth?
   - B. Why is it critical for us to identify with Christ’s humiliation and shame in the arrest, accusations, nakedness, and sense of abandonment of the Crucifixion?

III. Do: Accepting the Cost
   - A. The Old Testament sacrificial system was a daily physical reminder of the costs Christ bore on our behalf. How do we keep these images fresh today?
   - B. What do we need to do to share in Christ’s death and, by faith, accept His gift of life?

**Summary:** Through the sacrificial system, the Old Testament illustrated the terrible cost of sin and the offering of a perfect Substitute to take the place of the sinner in death.
Grounded in Scripture

So far, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul has defended his gospel of justification by faith by appealing to the agreement reached with the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1–10) and to the personal experience of the Galatians themselves (Gal. 3:1–5). Beginning in Galatians 3:6, Paul now turns to the testimony of Scripture for the final and ultimate confirmation of his gospel. In fact, Galatians 3:6–4:31 is made up of progressive arguments rooted in Scripture.


It is important to remember that at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians there was no “New Testament.” Paul was the earliest New Testament writer. The Gospel of Mark is probably the earliest of the four gospels, but it likely was not written until around the time of Paul’s death (A.D. 65)—that is, about fifteen years after Paul’s letter to the Galatians. So, when Paul refers to the Scriptures, he has only the Old Testament in mind.

The Old Testament Scriptures play a significant role in Paul’s teachings. He does not view them as dead texts but as the authoritative and living Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16 he writes, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The word translated “inspiration” is theopneustos. The first part of the word (theo) means “God,” while the second half means “breathed.” Scripture is “God-breathed.” Paul uses the Scripture to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah (Rom. 1:2), to give instruction in Christian living (Rom. 13:8–10), and to prove the validity of his teachings (Gal. 3:8, 9).

It is difficult to determine exactly how many hundreds of times Paul quotes the Old Testament, but quotes are found throughout all his letters, except his shortest ones, Titus and Philemon.

Read carefully Galatians 3:6–14. Identify the passages Paul quotes from the Old Testament in those verses. What does that tell us about how authoritative the Old Testament was?

Do you at times find yourself thinking that one part of the Bible is more “inspired” than other parts? Given Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, what’s the danger of going down that path?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Faith in Christ alone is what makes us sons and daughters of God.

Just for Teachers: In this lesson teachers are encouraged to follow Paul’s example in Galatians 3 in presenting and pursuing thought exercises that encourage and assist the class in breaking out of the pervasive thought that our works save us. We are asked to reorient our minds continually to focus on the astonishing concept that grace through faith in Christ alone saves us.

In Galatians we find an interesting paradox: Paul, a man trained in the law, deploys his considerable persuasive reasoning skills to argue that faith, not logic or reason, is what connects us to God.

Discuss With the Class: Ask the class to honestly assess the degree to which they can relate to the Galatians. The Galatians may be called “foolish,” but we live in a time in history that defines “truth” as what can be empirically known through logical reasoning, tested hypotheses, evidence from statistical analysis, and so on. How do we share in the Galatians’ struggle to step out in faith and believe in something and Someone we cannot “prove” outside of our own experience?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The story of Abraham is familiar to us all. Yet, our very familiarity with this story also poses the biggest barrier to encountering it as if for the first time and feeling astounded by its audacity: both in the impossibility (from a human perspective) of God’s promises to Abraham and in the concurrent epic struggle of faith revealed through Abraham’s life. This lesson is an opportunity to rediscover the story of Abraham, which has the potential to function as a script for how to live a life of absolute faith and trust in God.
Reckoned as Righteous

Why do you think Paul first appeals to Abraham as he looks to the Scriptures to validate his gospel message? Gal. 3:6.

Abraham was a central figure in Judaism. Not only was he the father of the Jewish race, but Jews in Paul’s time also looked to him as the prototype of what a true Jew should be like. Many not only believed that his defining characteristic was his obedience, but that God had declared Abraham righteous because of that obedience. After all, Abraham forsook his homeland and family, he accepted circumcision, and he was even willing to sacrifice his son at God’s command. That’s obedience! With their insistence on circumcision, Paul’s opponents certainly argued along these same lines.

Paul, however, turns the tables by appealing to Abraham—nine times in Galatians—as an example of faith instead of law-keeping. Consider Paul’s quotation of Genesis 15:6. What does it mean when it says that Abraham’s faith was “counted . . . to him for righteousness”? See also Rom. 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24.

Whereas justification was a metaphor taken from the legal world, the word counted, or reckoned, is a metaphor drawn from the domain of business. It can mean “to credit” or “to place something to one’s account.” Not only is it used of Abraham in Galatians 3:6, but it occurs another 11 times in connection with the patriarch. Some Bible versions translate it as counted, reckoned, or imputed.

According to Paul’s metaphor, what is placed to our accounts is righteousness. The question is, however, On what basis does God count us as righteous? It surely cannot be on the basis of obedience—despite what Paul’s opponents claimed. No matter what they said about Abraham’s obedience, Scripture says that it was because of Abraham’s faith that God counted him as righteous.

The Bible is clear: Abraham’s obedience was not the ground of his justification; it was, instead, the result. He didn’t do the things he did in order to be justified; he did them because he, already, was justified. Justification leads to obedience, not vice versa.

Dwell on what this means—that you are justified not by anything you do but only by what Christ has done for you. Why is that such good news? How can you learn to make that truth your own; that is, to believe it applies to you, personally, no matter your struggles, past and even present?
Bible Commentary

Knowing we are saved by grace through faith in Christ should make Abraham’s story a touchstone for each of us, a tool to reorient ourselves to living faith-centered lives. According to Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Abraham’s story provides a timeless blueprint for faith. Three salient aspects of that story will help us to focus on what it means to live a life of faith.

Delve into the details of what the Bible tells us about (a) how God reveals Himself to Abraham, (b) the progressive nature of God’s promises to Abraham, and (c) the journey of Abraham in living a life centered on the belief in God’s promise. If critiqued by any standard other than faith (for example, reason or human experience), that journey appears downright ludicrous.

I. The Three Lessons of Faith That the Story of Abraham Teaches
(Review with your class Genesis 12:1–8, 13:14–18, 15:1–10.)

Implicit in Paul’s use of Abraham as the singular example of true faith is the idea that this is a possibility for all of us. Indeed, not just a possibility but something that God longs to engage in with each of us. The story of Abraham helps us learn about how to engage with God in a personal faith journey in which God can reveal Himself, His promises, and His expressed desire for each one of us.

Three Teachable Moments: The Bible says that God spoke to Abraham (Gen. 12:1, 4; 13:14), appeared to Abraham (Gen. 12:7), and came to Abraham in a vision (Gen. 15:1). In these passages we find the methods of revelation, the increasing progression of information revealed, and also Abraham’s struggle to accept the astonishing promises he was given.

1. The central and critical element of what Abraham’s story reveals about living the life of faith is that it is more than just belief in God; it is a relationship with God. Faith is an opening of your mind and heart to have a personal relationship with the Divine. It is being open to the idea that God speaks to each one of us in ways that we are best equipped to hear, whether through nature, counsel, signs, dreams—however He chooses to communicate with us. It is a journey and relationship that may defy human logic and expectations and cannot be authenticated by scientific reasoning, rationale, or the shared learning of human experience.

2. We find in Abraham’s story that, over time, God reveals increasingly specific information about His promise. Initially, God promises land and descendants, content that grows in specificity over time, soon resulting in knowledge that Abraham will be the father of a son born to Sarah. We
The Gospel in the Old Testament

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Gal. 3:8, ESV). Paul writes that not only was the gospel preached to Abraham, but it was God who preached it; so, it must have been the true gospel. But when did God preach the gospel to Abraham? Paul’s quotation of Genesis 12:3 indicates he has in mind the covenant that God made with Abraham when he called him in Genesis 12:1–3.

Read Genesis 12:1–3. What does this tell us about the nature of the covenant that God made with Abraham?

The basis of God’s covenant with Abraham centered on God’s promises to him. God says to Abraham four times, “I will.” God’s promises to Abraham are amazing because they are completely one-sided. God does all the promising; Abraham promises nothing. This is the opposite of how most people try to relate to God. We usually promise we will serve Him, if only He will do something for us in return. But that is legalism. God did not ask Abraham to promise anything but to accept His promises by faith. Of course, that was no easy task, because Abraham had to learn to trust completely in God and not in himself (see Genesis 22). The call of Abraham illustrates, therefore, the essence of the gospel, which is salvation by faith.

Some mistakenly conclude that the Bible teaches two ways of salvation. They claim that in Old Testament times salvation was based on keeping the commandments; then, because that did not work very well, God abolished the law and made salvation possible by faith. This could not be farther from the truth. As Paul wrote in Galatians 1:7, there is only one gospel.


We often hear the phrase “cheap grace.” Yet, it’s a misnomer. Grace isn’t cheap—it’s free (at least for us). But we ruin it when we think that we can add to it by our works or when we think we can use it as an excuse to sin. In your own experience, which one of these two ways are you more inclined to lean toward, and how can you stop?
can ask many questions regarding this story, which may guide us in our effort to live a life of faith: (1) What does Abraham’s story demonstrate about continuing revelation? (2) Why do you think that God’s promises are revealed piecemeal over time?

3. God’s promise to Abraham to be a father of a great nation born of a son through his wife whose womb has long since lost its reproductive capacity defies human logic and reason. Yet, Abraham has the audacity to believe. Most of the time anyway. We see our own experience in faith through Abraham’s life. As the years wear on, Abraham struggles. He makes bad decisions that are not the result of faith. For example, he lies to Pharaoh about his relationship with Sarah because of his fear of dying despite God’s promise that he would live to be the father of a great nation. Furthermore, he takes matters into his own hands by conceiving a son with Hagar. He interrogates God’s promises when it seems to him that God is all talk and no action. In this element of the story, there is great hope for us. Despite all of these “failings,” Paul cites Abraham as the stellar example of faith. We can take a lot of courage from this, knowing that we are called to keep returning to faith, even after we struggle and fail.

Consider This: The first aspect to focus on in the story is the dynamic between God and Abraham. What can we learn from Abraham about being open to God’s voice? The second aspect of interest is the progressive way in which God reveals Himself and His promises to Abraham. We can clearly see that God’s promises to Abraham grow in specificity and content over time. What might this show us about living a life of faith in relationship to God? The third teachable moment and element in this story is the witness of Abraham’s life in living with God’s promises. What can we learn about Abraham’s openness to believe, which seemed equally matched by his struggle to believe? After all, he was given something which, looked at from a rational or dispassionate perspective, would be foolhardy, if not impossible, to believe.

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the simple but profound truth that faith is more than a one-time acceptance of God. Our affirmation of God is just walking through the open door; the rest of faith constitutes the lifetime of living with God in a relationship of faith.
Redeemed From a Curse (Gal. 3:9–14)

Paul’s opponents were no doubt stunned by his bold words in Galatians 3:10. They certainly did not think themselves to be under a curse; if anything, they expected to be blessed for their obedience. Yet, Paul is unequivocal: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them’ ” (NKJV).

Paul is contrasting two completely different alternatives: salvation by faith and salvation by works. The covenant blessings and curses outlined in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 were straightforward. Those who obeyed were blessed, those who disobeyed were cursed. That means that if a person wants to rely on obedience to the law for acceptance with God, then the whole law needs to be kept. We do not have the liberty to pick and choose what we want to follow; nor should we assume that God is willing to overlook a few mistakes here and there. It is all or nothing.

This is, of course, bad news not only for Gentiles but also for Paul’s legalistic opponents, because we “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). No matter how hard we try to be good, the law can only condemn us as lawbreakers.

**How did Christ deliver us from the curse of the law?** See Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21.

Paul introduces another metaphor to explain what God has done for us in Christ. The word *redeem* means “to buy back.” It was used as the ransom price paid to release hostages or as the price paid to free a slave. Because the wages of sin is death, the curse of failing to keep the law was often a death sentence. The ransom paid for our salvation was not insignificant; it cost God the life of His own Son (John 3:16). Jesus ransomed us from the curse by becoming our sin-bearer (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). He voluntarily took our curse upon Himself and suffered in our behalf the full penalty of sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 as scriptural proof. According to Jewish custom, a person was under God’s curse if, after execution, the body was hung upon a tree. Jesus’ death on the cross was seen as an example of this curse (Acts 5:30, 1 Pet. 2:24).

No wonder, then, that the cross was a stumbling block for some Jews who could not fathom the idea that the Messiah was accursed by God. But this was exactly God’s plan. Yes, the Messiah bore a curse, but it was not His curse—it was ours!
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Thought Questions:

1. In addition to reading Scripture and praying, what practices do you employ to cultivate listening to God’s voice? How does God reveal His will and His unique promises for your life? When was the last time you felt the distinct voice of God in your heart or mind? What enabled you to follow through with what you heard?

2. In your spiritual community, do you spend enough time sharing about individual faith journeys? What methods can be used to affirm and encourage each other to engage more directly with God in a relationship of faith?

Application Question:

What can be done to create actual “communities of faith”—safe harbors to affirm that God speaks to all of us in many different ways? How can we affirm that, just as God knows the numbers of hairs on our head, He has plans for each of our lives that He is waiting to reveal to us if we are willing to embark on a faith odyssey with Him?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Faith is an initial leap into the unknown for us, but our heavenly Father promises to catch us in His holy arms. Imagine being held in His arms, as a newborn to faith. Now continue the metaphor of growth in faith by comparing it to the growth of a child. God’s invitation to make that first leap comes with a promise that He will give us a lifetime of opportunities to grow in a special relationship to Him.

1. If you are feeling the absence of a meaningful faith practice, resolve to spend at least one evening during the following week doing something new to cultivate your faith experience. Ask God to open your heart to the ways He is already speaking to you, which you perhaps are missing.

2. If you feel deeply enriched in your own spiritual faith walk, resolve to step out in service as a mentor or support to others in your circle of friends, family, and faith community. Ask for inspiration and God’s leading about how your experience might best serve His purposes to strengthen the faith of others.
Further Study: “Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 753.

Discussion Questions:

1. Even today in our own church, some still have a hard time accepting salvation by faith alone—that God’s grace, through Christ, saves us, apart from our works. What’s behind the hesitancy of some to accept this crucial truth?

2. Paul spoke very strongly about the theological error of salvation by works. What does that tell us about the importance of good theology? Why should we, as a church, stand up, forcefully if need be, when error is being taught among us?

Summary: From start to finish in the Christian life, the basis of our salvation is faith in Christ alone. It was because of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises that he was counted as righteous, and that same gift of righteousness is available for anyone today who shares Abraham’s faith. The only reason we are not condemned for our mistakes is that Jesus paid the price for our sins by dying in our place.
The Priority of the Promise

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 3:15–20, Gen. 9:11–17, Matt. 5:17–20, Exod. 16:22–26, Gen. 15:1–6.

Memory Text: “For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise” (Galatians 3:18, ESV).

Someone once asked a politician, “Have you kept all the promises that you made during the campaign?” He responded, “Yes . . . well, at least all the promises that I intended to keep.”

Who hasn’t, at one time or another, been at one end or the other of a broken promise? Who hasn’t been the one to break a promise or the one to have a promise made to him or her broken?

Sometimes people make a promise, fully intending to keep it but, later, don’t; others make a promise, knowing—as the sounds leave their mouths or the letters their fingers—it’s all a lie.

Fortunately for us, God’s promises are of an entirely different order. God’s Word is sure and unchanging. “‘I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it,’ ” says the Lord (Isa. 46:11, ESV).

In this week’s lesson, Paul directs our attention to the relationship between God’s promise to Abraham and the law given to Israel 430 years later. How should the relationship between the two be understood, and what implications does that have for the preaching of the gospel?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.*
Law and Faith *(Gal. 3:15–18)*

Even if his opponents conceded that Abraham’s life was characterized primarily by faith, Paul knew that they still would have questions about why God gave the law to Israel about four centuries after Abraham. Did not the giving of the law nullify any previous arrangement?

**What** is the point of Paul’s analogy between a person’s final will and testament and God’s covenant with Abraham? *Gal. 3:15–18.*

A covenant and a will are generally different. A covenant is typically a mutual agreement between two or more people, often called a “contract” or “treaty”; in contrast, a will is the declaration of a single person. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, never translates God’s covenant with Abraham with the Greek word used for mutual agreements or contracts (*syntheke*). Instead, it uses the word for a testament or a will (*diatheke*). Why? Probably because the translators recognized that God’s covenant with Abraham was not a treaty between two individuals where mutually binding promises are made. On the contrary, God’s covenant was based on nothing other than His own will. No string of “ifs, ands, or buts” was attached. Abraham was simply to take God at His word.

Paul picks up on this double meaning of “will” and “covenant” in order to highlight specific features of God’s covenant with Abraham. As with a human will, God’s promise concerns a specific beneficiary, Abraham and his offspring (*Gen. 12:1–5*, *Gal. 3:16*); it also involves an inheritance (*Gen. 13:15*, *17:8*, *Rom. 4:13*, *Gal. 3:29*). Most important to Paul is the unchanging nature of God’s promise. In the same way that a person’s will cannot be changed once it has been put into force, so the giving of the law through Moses cannot simply nullify God’s previous covenant with Abraham. God’s covenant is a promise (*Gal. 3:16*), and by no means is God a promise-breaker (*Isa. 46:11*, *Heb. 6:18*).

Replace the word **covenant** with **promise** in the following passages. What is the nature of the “covenant” in each passage? How does understanding God’s covenant as a promise make the meaning of the passage clearer, and how does it help us understand better what a covenant is? *Gen. 9:11–17, 15:18, 17:1–21.* What does this also teach us about the character of God and how we can trust Him?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 3:18

The Student Will:

Know: Explain the relationship between the promise of salvation and the law.
Feel: Sense the contrast between our relationship to God through His promise of grace and through the law.
Do: Accept the promise of grace through faith, while at the same time benefiting from the law.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Covenant Promise

A How is God’s regard for the law reflected in His plan for justification by faith?
B What is the purpose of the law in a system based on God’s promise of grace?

II. Feel: Intimate Encounters

A How did the power and drama of the encounter with God at Mount Sinai teach Israel about God’s nature?
B How does this encounter with God compare and contrast with the intimate relationship that God had with Abraham and His promises to Him?

III. Do: Pathway to the Promise

A How may we choose to benefit from relating to the law as a mirror, teacher, and guide to Christ?
B How can we use this relationship to the law to help us develop a more intimate relationship with the Promise Giver?
C How can the law increase our faith?

Summary: Our salvation is based on our acceptance, by faith, of Christ’s righteousness and redemption. The law serves to illustrate God’s character and mirror our own deficiencies, leading us to the only source of righteousness.
Faith and Law (Rom. 3:31)

Paul has argued strongly for the supremacy of faith in a person’s relationship with God. He has repeatedly stated that neither circumcision nor any other “works of law” are a prerequisite to salvation, “because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16, ESV). Moreover, it is not the works of the law but faith that is the defining mark of the believer (Gal. 3:7). This repeated negation of the works of the law raises the question, “Does the law have absolutely no value, then? Did God do away with the law?”

Because salvation is by faith and not by works of law, does Paul mean to say that faith abolishes the law? What do the following texts tell us? Compare Rom. 3:31 with Rom. 7:7, 12; 8:3; and Matt. 5:17–20.

Paul’s argument in Romans 3 parallels his discussion about faith and law in Galatians. Sensing that his comments might lead some to conclude that he is exalting faith at the expense of the law, Paul asks the rhetorical question, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?” (ESV). The word translated as “overthrow” in Romans 3:31 (ESV) is katargeo. Paul uses the word frequently, and it can be translated as “to nullify” (Rom. 3:3, ESV), “to abolish” (Eph. 2:15), “to be brought to nothing” (Rom. 6:6, ESV), or even as “to destroy” (1 Cor. 6:13). Clearly, if Paul wanted to endorse the idea that the law was somehow done away with at the cross, as some people today claim he taught, this would have been the time. But Paul not only denies that sentiment with an emphatic no, he actually states that his gospel “establishes” the law!

“The plan of justification by faith reveals God’s regard for His law in demanding and providing the atoning sacrifice. If justification by faith abolishes law, then there was no need for the atoning death of Christ to release the sinner from his sins, and thus restore him to peace with God.

“Moreover, genuine faith implies in itself an unreserved willingness to fulfill the will of God in a life of obedience to His law. . . . Real faith, based on wholehearted love for the Saviour, can lead only to obedience.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 510.

Think through the implications if Paul did, indeed, mean that faith nullifies the need to keep the law. Would then, for instance, adultery no longer be sin or stealing or even murder? Think about the sorrow, pain, and suffering you could spare yourself if you merely obeyed God’s law. What suffering have you or others gone through as a result of disobedience to God’s law?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: This week’s lesson seeks to help us understand the role of the law—the “law of love.” Our ability to practice this law in our faith walk is the manifestation of divine grace.

Just for Teachers: A good thought/discussion exercise to pursue with your class is to ponder why Paul spends so much time distinguishing between the role of faith in salvation and the role of the law. Focus on the cultural context of the time to help further elucidate why the Galatians needed instruction with respect to the role of faith and the law in salvation and the lesson Paul is trying to impart.

Discuss With the Class: We know from reading the Bible and tracking the story of the Jewish people that the law, both moral and ceremonial, was central to their culture and tied intricately to their faith in the coming of the Messiah. In Exodus we read of God giving the law and also His instructions about which tribes and persons should be tasked with leadership in assuring those laws, both their implementation and survival. Yet, is it not interesting that Jesus had very little to do with the established “religious” leaders of the day—the rabbis, scribes, Sadducees, Pharisees, and so on—when these were the very leaders who were focused on the preservation of the law?

Consider This: We can discern from Jesus’ lack of engagement with these leaders that the law they were focused on was not the law with which Jesus was concerned. The Pharisees and Sadducees wanted “compliance” with standards, and when individuals were out of compliance they were there to judge and punish the offenders (John 8:1–11). Jesus and the law He was concerned with dealt with few of the things the established church of the day was interested in upholding. Why was this so?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: A culture of legalism occurs in faith communities when the understanding and practice of the “law” shifts away from God’s “law of love” to modeling human-made laws and legal systems. We know from reading the Bible that the religious culture into which Jesus was born had become legalistic even though, in
The Purpose of the Law

In Galatians 3:19–29 Paul makes multiple references to “the law.” To what law is Paul primarily referring in this section of Galatians?

Some, believing that the word *until* in verse 19 (*ESV*) indicates that this law was only temporary, have thought the passage must refer to the ceremonial law, since the purpose of that law was fulfilled at the cross and thus came to an end. Although this makes sense by itself, it does not appear to be Paul’s point in Galatians. While both the ceremonial and moral law were “added” at Sinai because of transgression, we will see by considering the following question that Paul appears to have the moral law primarily in mind.

Does Paul say that the law was added? To what was it added, and why? Compare Gal. 3:19 and Rom. 5:13, 20.

Paul is not saying that the law was added to God’s covenant with Abraham as if it were some sort of addendum to a will that altered the original provisions. The law had been in existence long before Sinai (see tomorrow’s lesson). Paul means, instead, that the law was given to Israel for an entirely different purpose. It was to redirect the people back to God and the grace He offers all who come to Him by faith. The law reveals to us our sinful condition and our need of God’s grace. The law was not intended to be some kind of program for “earning” salvation. On the contrary, it was given, Paul says, “to increase the trespass” (*Rom. 5:20, ESV*); that is, to show us more clearly the sin in our lives (*Rom. 7:13*).

While the ceremonial laws pointed to the Messiah and emphasized holiness and the need of a Savior, it is the moral law, with its “Thou shall nots,” that reveals sin, that shows us that sin is not just a part of our natural condition but is, indeed, a violation of God’s law (*Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20; 7:7, 8, 13*). This is why Paul says, “Where there is no law there is no transgression” (*Rom. 4:15, ESV*). “The law acts as a magnifying glass. That device does not actually increase the number of dirty spots that defile a garment, but makes them stand out more clearly and reveals many more of them than one is able to see with the naked eye.”—William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 141.
principle, the Jewish religion was always grace-oriented. We see evidence that this legalistic culture continued throughout His life and after His death, necessitating Paul’s letter to the Galatians, which desperately sought to redraw emphasis on the gospel; namely, that we are saved by grace through faith and that God’s law is a “law of love and grace.” Perhaps the extent to which we struggle with the concepts set out in Galatians, specifically the role of faith and the law in the life of believers, reflects that too often we too, like those in Jesus’ day, need to reorient our thinking.

Bible Commentary

In order to appreciate fully the message that Paul is seeking to relay in Galatians about the role and relationship of faith and adherence to the law, it is even more important to define the law that is in question. Looking to the cultural context within which Paul is writing can help to identify the law to which he is referring—and the law to which he is not.

During a time in which it seemed as if the whole world was embracing Greek culture, certain Jewish groups arose that were concerned with preserving their cultural and religious traditions. The Sadducees believed that only the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) were authoritative, and these men were interested in preserving adherence to the laws laid out in those books. The Pharisees were interested in preserving Jewish ways and particularly the law of Moses, for which they developed applications of the law for everyday life. It is interesting, then, that the most famous Pharisee in all the Bible—although few people realize that that’s what he once had been—is the apostle Paul (Phil. 3:5). Who better, then, to write the letters of the Bible, such as Galatians, which sought to change the thinking perpetuated by the teachings of the Pharisees and similar groups fixated on the rigorous application of the law to all facets of life in society?

The challenge of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and how their story is instructive to this lesson, is that the law at the root of their interest included, but was not limited to, the same law we are interested in and value—the Ten Commandments. Of paramount importance, then, is to learn from the mistakes they made in subverting the very law of God they outwardly claimed to uphold. When Jesus was on earth He reserved His harshest words for them.
The Duration of God’s Law

**Does** Paul’s statement about the law being added at Mount Sinai mean that it did not exist previously? If not, what was the difference before and after Mount Sinai? Read Gen. 9:5, 6; 18:19; 26:5; 39:7–10; Exod. 16:22–26.

God did not need to reveal His law to Abraham with thunder, lightning, and a penalty of death (Exod. 19:10–23). Why, then, did God give the law to the Israelites in that manner? It was because, during their bondage in Egypt, the Israelites had lost sight of God’s greatness and His high moral standards. As a result, they needed to be made aware of the extent of their own sinfulness and the sacredness of God’s law. The revelation at Sinai certainly did just that.

**What** does Paul mean when he says the law was added “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made”? Gal. 3:16–19 (ESV).

Many have understood this text to mean that the law given at Mount Sinai was temporary. It entered 430 years after Abraham and ended when Christ came. This interpretation, however, conflicts with what Paul says about the law in Romans, as well as other passages in the Bible, such as Matthew 5:17–19.

The mistake readers often make with this passage is to assume that the word *until* always implies a limited duration of time. This is not the case. Describing the person who fears the Lord, Psalm 112:8 (ESV) says, “His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.” Does this mean that when he triumphs he will become afraid? In Revelation 2:25 (ESV) Jesus says, “Only hold fast what you have until I come.” Does Jesus mean that once He comes we no longer need to be faithful?

The role of the law did not end with the coming of Christ. It will continue to point out sin as long as the law exists. What Paul is saying is that the coming of Christ marks a decisive turning point in human history. Christ can do what the law could never do—provide a true remedy for sin; that is, justify sinners and, by His Spirit, fulfill His law in them (Rom. 8:3, 4).

Have you ever thought to yourself, *If only the Lord did this for me, or that, or the other, then I would never again doubt or question Him*? Think, though, about what happened at Sinai, about how powerful a manifestation of God’s power the Israelites saw—and yet, still, what did they do? What should this tell you about what true faith is and how we obtain and maintain it? *(See Col. 2:6.)*
It is important to remember that God’s law derives from the nature of God’s perfect moral code and character. God’s law is universal, transcendent, and inspired to exhort us to live fully and completely in the shadow of His grace. God’s law is there to instruct and guide us in how to come closer to the Divine and to gain a richer and deeper understanding of His love. As Paul states in Galatians 5:14, the law is summed up in one directive: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (NKJV). Having the law of God in your heart means having love in your heart (Ps. 40:8). A community of faith that has the law of love in their hearts can never be one that is legalistic in a human sense. Further, belief in God and a focus on His gift of life to us can do nothing but instill love in us for others, naturally showing how faith leads to the law of love in our hearts.

Consider This: How does considering Paul’s message in Galatians 3, within the cultural and religious context of the time, shed light on the relationship between faith and observing the law? How does the law function in our growth in God’s grace—the results of which are the fruit of the Spirit, noted in Galatians 5:22—the first of which is love, followed by joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The lesson study used the metaphor of the law functioning as a microscope, so that we can better see our own sins. Encourage the class to discuss how the law might be used in different ways; for example, ways that help us to focus on the beautiful character of God and the ways in which the law can help us enact godly principles in our lives. Encourage students to adapt new ways of thinking about the law, since what we emphasize and focus on translates into how we act and live in ways we aren’t even aware of. As Hebrews 12:2 states, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (NIV); focusing on the beautiful character of God helps us to enact the very principles He established in living out the law.
The Superiority of the Promise

“He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.” (Acts 7:38, NIV).

In Galatians 3:19, 20, Paul continues his train of thought about how the law does not nullify the covenant of grace; this is important because, if the theology of his opponents were correct, the law would do just that. Think, then, what our position as sinners would be if we had to rely on our law-keeping, as opposed to God’s grace, to save us. We would, in the end, be without hope.

Although the details of Paul’s comments in Galatians 3:19, 20 are difficult, his basic point is clear: the law is subsidiary to the promise, because it was mediated through angels and Moses. The connection of angels to the giving of the law is not mentioned in Exodus, but it is found in several other places in Scripture (Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Heb. 2:2). Paul uses the word mediator in 1 Timothy 2:5 in reference to Christ, but his comments here strongly suggest he has Deuteronomy 5:5 (ESV) in mind, where Moses says, “I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord.”

As majestic as the giving of the law was on Sinai, with countless angels in attendance, and as important as Moses was as the lawgiver, the giving of the law was indirect. In stark contrast, God’s promise was made directly to Abraham (and, therefore, to all believers), for there was no need for a mediator. In the end, however important the law, it is no substitute for the promise of salvation through grace by faith. On the contrary, the law helps us to better understand just how wonderful that promise really is.

**Describe** the nature of Abraham’s direct encounters with God. What benefit was there to such immediacy with God? **Consider Gen. 15:1–6, 18:1–33, 22:1–18.**

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Think about some of the other encounters people in the Bible had with God—Adam and Eve in Eden (Genesis 3); Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28); Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Maybe you haven’t experienced anything as dramatic, but in what ways has God revealed Himself to you? Ask yourself, too, whether anything in your personal life might prevent you from having the kind of intimacy and immediacy that Abraham experienced with God. If so, what steps can you take to change?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Thought Questions:

1. How does understanding the context of the religious culture in the New Testament help to illuminate what Paul is saying to the Galatians in chapter 3?

2. Why is it that Galatians 3 continues to be so relevant today, particularly in light of the fact that the issue of faith versus works is a continuing point of dialogue and discussion in faith communities?

STEP 4—Create

Many of us, in the privacy of our hearts, feel judged either by others or by our own internal standards with respect to the ways we fail in keeping God’s law. How does the lesson Paul shares in Galatians help us reorient our minds and hearts? How can refocusing on our faith in God and His grace, through the perfect gift and beautiful character of Jesus, soften our hearts toward our own failings and those of others? How can we, drawing from that spirit of forgiveness and grace, refocus our lives to truly live out our highest calling to be sons and daughters of Christ by grace alone through faith, living a life in keeping with God’s law and bearing all the fruits of the Spirit?

1. What can you do—first in your own life and then within your family, your circle of friends, and finally your community of faith—to reorient the emphasis of conversations and activities to a faith-based (as opposed to a works-based) experience in God?

2. Second, if our understanding of God’s law is currently aligned more with human legal applications, how can we refocus our understanding of the law of God as being that of love? How can that translate into churches, schools, and other communities, so that we uplift others by focusing on the opportunity for happiness and peace (for ourselves and others) through the law of love?
**Further Study:** “In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage.

“But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God’s law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 371.

“The law of God, spoken in awful grandeur from Sinai, is the utterance of condemnation to the sinner. It is the province of the law to condemn, but there is in it no power to pardon or to redeem.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1094.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Think about this whole idea of promises, especially broken ones. How did you feel about those who broke their promise to you? How much difference did it make whether a person intended to keep it and then either couldn’t, or changed his or her mind, or if you realized that the person never meant to keep it? What happened to your level of trust after the promise was broken, whatever the reason? What does it mean to you to know that you can trust God’s promises? Or perhaps the question should be, How can you learn to trust God’s promises in the first place?

2. In what ways are we in danger of being corrupted by our environment to the point that we lose sight of the important truths God has given us? How can we make ourselves aware of just what those corrupting influences are, and then how can we counteract them?

**Summary:** The giving of the law on Sinai did not invalidate the promise that God made to Abraham, nor did the law alter the promise’s provisions. The law was given so that people might be made aware of the true extent of their sinfulness and recognize their need of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants.
The Road to Faith

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 3:21–25; Lev. 18:5; Rom. 3:9–19; 1 Cor. 9:20; Rom. 3:1, 2; 8:1–4.

Memory Text: “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Galatians 3:22, ESV).

Homing pigeons long have been known for their ability to fly hundreds of miles a day and arrive at their destination with amazing accuracy. Yet, even the best homing pigeons at times have become disoriented, never returning to their starting point. The worst incident happened in England, when about twenty thousand birds (valued at more than six hundred thousand dollars) never came back to their lofts.

As most of us have experienced in one way or another, being disoriented, or lost, is not enjoyable. It fills us with fear and anxiety; it can lead us to moments of panic, as well.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Even after we accept Christ, we can get lost, or disoriented, even to the point of never returning to the Lord.

The good news is, however, that God has not left us to ourselves. He has mapped out the road to faith, as revealed in the gospel, and that path includes the law. Many people try to separate the law from the gospel; some even see them as contradictory. Not only is this view wrong, it can have tragic consequences. Without the law we would have no gospel. It’s hard, really, to understand the gospel without the law.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.
The Law and the Promise

“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” (Gal. 3:21, ESV).

Sensing that his comments might lead his opponents to conclude he had a disparaging view of the law, or that his comments about the priority of God’s promises were just a veiled put-down of Moses and the Torah, Paul asks the very question they were thinking: “Are you saying the law contradicts the promises of God?” To this Paul responds with an emphatic, “No!” Such a conclusion is impossible, because God is not opposed to Himself. God gave both the promise and the law. The law is not at odds with the promise. The two merely have different roles and functions in God’s overall plan of salvation.


These people believed that the law was able to give them spiritual life. Their views probably arose out of a mistaken interpretation of Old Testament passages such as Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 6:24, where the law directs how life should be lived by those abiding in God’s covenant. The law did regulate life within the covenant, but they concluded that the law was the source of a person’s relationship with God. The Bible is clear, however, that the ability to “make alive” is a power exercised by God and His Spirit alone (2 Kings 5:7, Neh. 9:6, John 5:21, Rom. 4:17). The law cannot make anyone alive spiritually. This does not mean, however, that the law is opposed to God’s promise.

Seeking to prove the inability of the law to give life, Paul writes in Galatians 3:22, “Scripture has confined all under sin” (ESV). In Romans 3:9–19, Paul draws from a string of verses extracted from the Old Testament to show just how sinful we are. The passages are not strung together in a haphazard manner. He begins with the heart of the sin problem—the selfish attitude that plagues human hearts—and then moves to verses that describe sin’s pervasiveness and finally its universality.

His point? Because of the extent of sin and the limitations of the law, the promise of eternal life can come to us only through the faithfulness of Christ in our behalf.

Although the law cannot save us, what great benefits does our adherence to it have for us? That is, what practical good have you experienced in your own life through obedience to God’s law?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 3:22

The Student Will:

Know: Explain how the law, while not giving life, protects us and points us to Christ.
Feel: Nurture a love for the law as it is reflected in the sacrificial system and the foundation of God’s kingdom.
Do: Submit to the law’s discipline as it leads us to the One who writes His law on our hearts.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Submitting to Discipline
   A In what ways is the law a blessing as it serves as guard and disciplinarian?
   B What relationship do believers in Christ have to the law?
   C How are the requirements of the law fulfilled in us?

II. Feel: Loving the Law
   A How do we come to love the law by reflecting on the depths to which the Father and Son went to ensure our salvation?
   B How does the sacrifice of Christ illustrate the great value that God places on His beautiful, holy, and eternal law?

III. Do: Written on Our Hearts
   A As we see at what cost Christ has met the law’s requirements on our behalf, how do we respond?
   B How do we cooperate as God writes His laws on our hearts?
   C What part does faith play in the fulfillment of the law in our hearts?

Summary: While the law acts as a guard and disciplinarian, it points us to Christ. By submitting to the Father’s will, Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law. By living His life, we allow God to write the law on our hearts.
“Kept Under Law”

In Galatians 3:23, Paul writes that “before faith came, we were kept under the law.” By “we” Paul is referring to the Jewish believers in the Galatian churches. They are the ones acquainted with the law, and Paul has been speaking to them in particular since Galatians 2:15. This can be seen in the contrast between the “we” in Galatians 3:23 and the “you” in Galatians 3:26 (ESV).

Galatians 3:23 reads, “Before faith came”; but in the literal Greek it reads, “before the faith came.” Because Paul is contrasting the place of the law before and after Christ (Gal. 3:24), “the faith” is most likely a reference to Jesus Himself and not a reference to Christian faith in general.

**Paul** says the Jews were kept “under the law” before the coming of Christ. What does he mean by “under the law”? Compare Gal. 3:22, 23 with Rom. 6:14, 15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18.

Paul uses the phrase “under the law” twelve times in his letters. Depending on its context, it can have a couple of different connotations.

1. “Under the law” as an alternative way of salvation (Gal. 4:21). The opponents in Galatia were trying to gain life-giving righteousness by obedience. However, as Paul has already made clear, this is impossible (Gal. 3:21, 22). Paul later will even point out that, by desiring to be under the law, the Galatians were really rejecting Christ (Gal. 5:2–4).

2. “Under the law” in the sense of being under its condemnation (Rom. 6:14, 15). Because the law cannot atone for sin, the violation of its demands ultimately results in condemnation. This is the condition in which all human beings find themselves. The law acts as a prison warden, locking up all who have violated it and brought upon themselves the sentence of death. As we will see in tomorrow’s lesson, the use of the word guard (Gal. 3:23, NKJV) indicates that this is what Paul means by “under the law” in this passage.

A related Greek word, *ennomos*, normally translated as “under the law,” literally means “within the law” and refers to living within the requirements of the law through union with Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). By “the works of the law,” that is, by trying to keep the law apart from Christ, it is impossible to be justified, because only those who through faith are righteous will live (Gal. 3:11). This truth doesn’t nullify the law; it shows only that the law can’t give us eternal life. It’s way too late for that.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Without the law of God, human beings would not know what sin is or what God expects of them. However, keeping the law requires more than mere knowledge; it necessitates power that comes only from the Lawgiver, dispensed through His Christ.

Just for Teachers: Share the following in your own words. Some of the students may remember this iconic commercial and its unforgettable tagline.

Many years ago an auto commercial captured the fancy of the national audience, no doubt because of the simple yet profound message it delivered. The commercial featured a woman driving a vehicle and thinking what it would be like to cross the lines on the highway and “go for broke.” She remembers her childhood days, when she would “color outside the lines” of the figures in her coloring book.

The fantasy comes to an abrupt end when the voice of her kindergarten teacher jolts her back to reality. What did the teacher say? “Stay between the lines. The lines are our friends.”

Consider This: Ask the class why some people are fascinated by life outside the lines, while others obsess about staying within them. How can we keep God’s law without becoming legalists?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The Hebrews were selected by God to be His representatives on earth, leading others to Him by the example of faith and connection with God that they lived. However, that didn’t always work out as planned.

I. Legal Righteousness (Read Galatians 3:8–10, 15 and Mark 7:1–7.)
The Law as Our “Guard”

Paul gives two basic conclusions about the law: (1) the law does not nullify or abolish God’s promise made to Abraham (Gal. 3:15–20); (2) the law is not opposed to the promise (Gal. 3:21, 22).

What role does the law actually play then? Paul writes that it was added “because of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19), and he expands on this idea using three different words or phrases in connection to the law: kept (vs. 23), shut up (vs. 23), and schoolmaster (vs. 24).

Read prayerfully and carefully Galatians 3:19–24. What is Paul saying about the law?

Most modern translations interpret Paul’s comments about the law in Galatians 3:19 in wholly negative terms. But the original Greek is not nearly so one-sided. The Greek word translated as “kept” (vs. 23) literally means “to guard.” Although it can be used in a negative sense, as to “hold in subjection” or to “watch over” (2 Cor. 11:32), in the New Testament it generally has a more positive sense of “protecting” or “keeping” (Phil. 4:7, 1 Pet. 1:5). The same is true of the word translated as “shut up” (Gal. 3:23). It can be translated “to close” (Gen. 20:18), “to shut” (Exod. 14:3, Josh. 6:1, Jer. 13:19), “to enclose” (Luke 5:6), or “to confine” (Rom. 11:32). As these examples indicate, depending on its context, this word can have either positive or negative connotations.

What benefits did the law (moral and ceremonial) provide the children of Israel? Rom. 3:1, 2; Deut. 7:12–24; Lev. 18:20–30.

While Paul can speak about the law in negative terms (Rom. 7:6, Gal. 2:19), he also has many positive things to say about it (see Rom. 7:12, 14; 8:3, 4; 13:8). The law was not a curse that God placed upon Israel; on the contrary, it was intended to be a blessing. Although its sacrificial system could not ultimately remove sin, it pointed to the promised Messiah who could; and its laws guiding human behavior protected Israel from many of the vices that plagued other ancient civilizations. In light of Paul’s positive comments about the law elsewhere, it would be a mistake to understand his comments here in a completely negative way.

Think of something good that is misused. For example, a drug created to treat a disease could be used by some people to get high. What examples have you seen in your own life of this principle? How does our knowledge of how something good can be misused help us to understand what Paul is dealing with here?
The law given by God to Moses was very detailed. Specific blessings were attached to the keeping of it.

But God didn’t stop at the enunciation of blessings that would attend obedience to His laws; He also listed a number of curses for disobedience, such as this one: “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country” (vs. 16, NKJV). Because any deviation from the law could bring on the curse of God, the Israelites took great pains to “keep the law.” By doing so, they met its legal stipulations. Lawkeepers possessed a “legal righteousness.”

Eventually, God’s people added more laws than even God had given; they did this in order to be sure that the laws God gave were kept, or at least that was their idea. The Israelites were on a mission to master God’s “dos and don’ts.”

Consider This: How did Jesus respond to the brand of tradition-cum-religion promulgated and practiced by some of the religious leaders of His day? (Mark 7:5–8). Why was this brand of religion so odious to the Son of God? What was missing from it?

II. Faith in Practice (Review Galatians 3:19–23 and Genesis 12:1–4.)

Tuesday’s study examines Paul’s “seemingly” negative statements about the moral law and its civil and ceremonial counterparts. However, Paul states unequivocally that the law does not nullify the promise of God to Abraham and his seed. It actually brings that seed to the foot of the cross of Jesus, where true justification occurs (Gal. 3:24, 25).

It bears remembering here that Paul is haggling with the Jews in an effort to share the gospel with Gentile believers, who desperately need it. Paul’s effort is in line with God’s original purpose in calling out a people, Abraham and his heirs (Gen. 12:1–4), through whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed. “The objective of God’s covenant with Abraham was the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of men.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 957.

God’s chosen people did not always follow Him in this venture. They copied the hedonistic practices of the world. In other words, the faith they practiced was one that bore little resemblance to the holiness of the God they claimed to serve.

Consider This: How does the practice of our faith impact those around us? What essential truths are we called to share with a dying world? Many in ancient Israel believed that the Abrahamic blessing was theirs and theirs...
The Law as Our Schoolmaster

In Galatians 3:23, Paul describes the law as a guarding and protecting force. To what does he liken it in verse 24, and what does that mean?

The word translated “schoolmaster” (KJV) comes from the Greek word paidagogos. Some versions translate it as “disciplinarian” (NRSV), “tutor” (NKJV), or even “guardian” (ESV), but no single word fully can encompass its meaning. The paidagogos was a slave in Roman society who was placed in a position of authority over his master’s sons from the time they turned six or seven until they reached maturity. In addition to providing for his charges’ physical needs, such as drawing their bath, providing them with food and clothes, and protecting them from any danger, the paidagogos also was responsible for making sure the master’s sons went to school and did their homework. In addition, he was expected not only to teach and practice moral virtues but also to ensure that the boys learned and practiced the virtues themselves.

Although some pedagogues must certainly have been kind, as well as loved by their wards, the dominant description of them in ancient literature is as strict disciplinarians. They ensured obedience not only through harsh threats and rebukes but also by whipping and caning.

Paul’s description of the law as it refers to a pedagogue further clarifies his understanding of the role of the law. The law was added to point out sin and provide instruction. The very nature of this task means that the law also has a negative aspect, and that’s because it rebukes and condemns us as sinners. Yet, even this “negative” aspect God uses for our benefit, because the condemnation that the law brings is what drives us to Christ. Thus, the law and the gospel are not contradictory. God designed them to work together for our salvation.

“In this Scripture [Gal. 3:24], the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law. The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 234.

When was the last time you compared your actions and words and thoughts to the law? Do it now, comparing them not just to the letter of the law but also to the spirit (Matt. 5:28, Rom. 7:6). How well do you fare? What does your answer tell you about Paul’s point in this epistle?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

alone. In what ways do we sometimes cherish our exclusivity to the detriment of those yearning for the good news of salvation?

III. A Little History (Read Galatians 3:19 and Romans 7:7–13.)

Humanity’s penchant for self-delusion is great. Hence, God does everything within His power to open our eyes to the sanctity of His laws, His ways, and His life. This was God’s objective in giving the moral law at Mount Sinai and the civil and ceremonial laws that followed.

Humans need the law because they need to know what is right and what is wrong. For instance, the Lord reiterated the law at Sinai because, after many long years in Egypt, the Hebrews lost sight of what God’s ways were.

Consider This: God’s laws function in much the same way today. They help us to see in stark relief God’s view of sin and point us to the Christ, the One who has made atonement for that sin. Is there a point at which the sensitizing influence of God’s law ceases to jolt us back to reality? Explain.

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to internalize the questions below. The objective is for each person to take a hard look at himself or herself.

Thought Questions:

1. Contemplating the law of the Lord, King David wrote the following: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7, NKJV). What do you think the psalmist meant by the word perfect? What’s perfect about God’s law?

2. In Joshua 1:8, God counsels Joshua to keep the book of the law in his mouth and meditate on it day and night. Why was it important that the nation’s leader know, speak, and live the law? How does this admonition extend to followers of God today?

Application Questions:

1. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and...
The Law and the Believer (Gal. 3:25)

Many have interpreted Paul’s comment in Galatians 3:25 as a complete dismissal of the law. This makes little sense, however, in light of Paul’s positive comments about the law elsewhere in the Bible.

What, then, does he mean?

First, we are no longer under the law’s condemnation (Rom. 8:3). As believers, we are in Christ and enjoying the privilege of being under grace (Rom. 6:14, 15). That gives us the liberty of serving Christ wholeheartedly, without fear of being condemned for mistakes we might make in the process. This is what true liberty and freedom in the gospel is, which is something radically different from no longer having to obey the law—which is what some people claim is “freedom” in Christ. But disobedience to the law, instead, is sin—and sin is anything but freedom (John 8:34).

Read Romans 8:1–3. What does it mean to be no longer condemned by the law? How should this wonderful truth impact how we live?

As a result of being forgiven through Christ, our relationship to the law is now different. We are now called to live a life that is pleasing to Him (1 Thess. 4:1); Paul refers to this as walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:18). This does not mean that the moral law is no longer applicable—that was never the issue. How could it be when we have seen so clearly that the law is what defines sin?

Instead, because the law is a transcript of God’s character, by obeying the law we simply reflect His character. But more than that, we follow not just a set of rules but the example of Jesus, who does for us what the law itself could never do: He writes the law on our hearts (Heb. 8:10) and makes it possible for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4). That is, through our relationship with Jesus, we have the power to obey the law as never before.

Read Romans 8:4. What is Paul saying here? How have you seen this promise manifested in your own life? At the same time, despite whatever positive changes you have experienced, why must salvation always be based on what Christ has done for us and nothing else?
desperately wicked; who can know it?” (NKJV). How do God’s laws help to corral the human heart?

2 Which of God’s laws do you have the most trouble obeying? Why?

Questions for Witnessing:

1 When is it appropriate to share God’s requirements with people to whom we give the gospel? Many unchurched people are often surprised by what the Bible has to say on different subjects. How do we get by their initial surprise—and at times disdain—in order to share with them the blessing and joys of obedience to God’s dictates?

2 Think about the ministry of Jesus to the woman at the well (John 4:1–42). What was it about Jesus that drew this woman to Him? In extending grace to the woman, did Jesus gloss over dictates of the law concerning marriage? Contrast this experience with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11). Why did Jesus embrace her with His forgiveness and love rather than condemn her for her adulterous behavior? How was Jesus able to find the right balance between applying the law and applying grace?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following true story in your own words. The objective here is to see clearly the inability of the law to prevent human beings from behaving in unethical, and even criminal, ways. Emphasize our need for a deep abiding relationship with God!

Today we live in the age of identity theft. One woman recently came home to find a host of frantic messages left on her voicemail by a credit fraud division of a huge department store. What was the problem? Someone in another city was attempting to buy $1,500 worth of goods using her credit card.

What prompts people to commit such crimes? Sure, there is obvious criminal pathology, but go beyond the obvious. How could a relationship with Jesus have played any significant role in changing the behavior of the identity fraudsters mentioned above? How do we quantify the difference that Jesus makes in the life?
Further Study: “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments.

“Christ was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. The death of Abel was in consequence of Cain’s refusing to accept God’s plan in the school of obedience to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ typified by the sacrificial offerings pointing to Christ. Cain refused the shedding of blood which symbolized the blood of Christ to be shed for the world. This whole ceremony was prepared by God, and Christ became the foundation of the whole system. This is the beginning of its work as the schoolmaster to bring sinful human agents to a consideration of Christ the Foundation of the whole Jewish economy.

“All who did service in connection with the sanctuary were being educated constantly in regard to the intervention of Christ in behalf of the human race. This service was designed to create in every heart a love for the law of God, which is the law of His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 233.

“The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 235.

Discussion Questions:

1. We often struggle with the question of how we can overcome sin in our lives. What promises do we have in the Bible about victory over sin? How can we better position ourselves to help make these promises real? At the same time, why must we be so careful to make sure that we place our full hope of salvation not on whatever victories we get but on Christ’s victory for us?

2. We often hear Christians claim that the law has been done away with. Of course, these same Christians will speak out against sin, which means, of course, that they really don’t mean the law has been done away with. What, in fact, do they really mean by that claim? (Hint: In the context of what commandment does that claim usually arise?)

Summary: The law was given to point sinners to their need of Christ. As a custodian, it provides instruction about God and protection from evil. But, like a disciplinarian, it also points out our sinfulness and brings condemnation. Christ frees us from the law’s condemnation and writes His law upon our hearts.
From Slaves to Heirs

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 3:26–4:20; Rom. 6:1–11; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14, 15; Rom. 9:4, 5.

Memory Text: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7, ESV).

Paul tells the Galatians that they should not live and act as slaves but as the sons and daughters of God, with all the rights and privileges thereof. Their situation was similar to the story of a discouraged new convert who came to talk with Chinese Christian Watchman Nee.

“No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.’ Nee said, ‘Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ’s heir because it is for you that He died.’”—Lou Nicholes, Hebrews: Patterns for Living (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2004), p. 31.

We, too, are God’s heirs, not because of our own merit but because of His grace. In Christ we have much more than we even had before Adam’s sin; this is one of the points that Paul was trying desperately to teach the Galatian believers, who were fast losing their way.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 19.
Our Condition in Christ (Gal. 3:26–29)

Keeping Galatians 3:25 in mind, read Galatians 3:26. How does this text help us to understand our relationship to the law, now that we have been redeemed by Jesus?

The word for at the beginning of verse 26 indicates that Paul sees a direct connection between this verse and the preceding one. In the same way that a master’s son was under a pedagogue only as long as he was a minor, Paul is saying that those who come to faith in Christ are no longer minors; their relationship with the law is changed because they are now adult “sons” of God.

The term son is not, of course, exclusive to males; Paul clearly includes females in this category (Gal 3:28). The reason he uses the word sons instead of children is that he has in mind the family inheritance that was passed on to the male offspring, along with the fact that the phrase “sons of God” was the special designation of Israel in the Old Testament (Deut. 14:1, Hos. 11:1). In Christ, Gentiles now also enjoy the special relationship with God that had been exclusive to Israel.

What is it about baptism that makes it such a significant event? Gal. 3:27, 28; Rom. 6:1–11; 1 Pet. 3:21.

Paul’s use of the word for in verse 27 indicates once again the close logical development of his reasoning. Paul sees baptism as a radical decision to unite our lives with Christ. In Romans 6, he describes baptism symbolically as our uniting with Jesus, in both His death and His resurrection. In Galatians, Paul employs a different metaphor: baptism is the act of being clothed with Christ. Paul’s terminology is reminiscent of wonderful passages in the Old Testament that talk about being clothed with righteousness and salvation (see Isa. 61:10, Job 29:14). “Paul views baptism as the moment when Christ, like a garment, envelops the believer. Although he does not employ the term, Paul is describing the righteousness which is conferred upon believers.”—Frank J. Matera, Galatians (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 145.

Our union with Christ symbolized through baptism means that what is true of Christ also is true of us. Because Christ is the “seed” of Abraham, as “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), believers also are heirs to all the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants.

Dwell on this thought that what is true of Christ is also true of us. How should this amazing truth affect every aspect of our existence?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 4:7

The Student Will:
- **Know:** Review the process whereby we are clothed with Christ in baptism and become heirs to Christ’s kingdom.
- **Feel:** Sense the intimacy of a child/parent relationship to the Father through the Spirit of Christ in our hearts.
- **Do:** Live as a child of God, no longer a restrained minor under the law, but free to accept the full rights of inheritance.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Heirs, Clothed in Christ
   - A How does baptism in Christ mark us as a child of God?
   - B Why was it necessary for Christ to be born of a woman, under law, in order to free us to become His children and heirs?

II. Feel: Abba, My Father
   - A How does the Spirit in our hearts evoke the loving, informal intimacy between a father and child who is beloved and knows it?
   - B What experiences bring about such warm, trusting love?

III. Do: Heirs of the Kingdom
   - A How might we who have been God’s children slide back into the slavery of works in exchange for favor?
   - B How do we daily clothe ourselves in the death and resurrection of Christ?
   - C How does our daily to-do list reflect our status as God’s children and inheritors of His kingdom?

Summary: As we live Christ’s life, we are called children of God. We address the Father lovingly and intimately, with all the rights of those who inherit Christ’s kingdom because of His gifts, and not because of our own merits.
Enslaved to Elementary Principles

Having just compared our relationship to God with that of sons and heirs, Paul now elaborates on this metaphor by including the theme of inheritance in Galatians 4:1–3. Paul’s terminology evokes a situation in which an owner of a large estate has died, leaving all his property to his oldest son. His son, however, is still a minor. As is often the case with wills even today, the father’s will stipulates that his son is to be under the supervision of guardians and managers until he reaches maturity. Although he is master of his father’s estate by title, as a minor he is little more than a slave in practice.

Paul’s analogy is similar to that of the pedagogue in Galatians 3:24, but in this case the power of the stewards and managers is far superior and much more important. They are responsible not only for the upbringing of the master’s son, but they are also in charge of all the financial and administrative affairs until the son is mature enough to assume those duties himself.

Read Galatians 4:1–3. What is Paul saying here that, again, should help to clarify what the role of the law should be in our lives, now that we are in Christ?

Exactly what Paul means by the phrase “elementary principles” (Gal. 4:3, 8, ESV) is disputed. The Greek word stoicheia literally means “elements.” Some have seen it as a description of the basic elements that compose the universe (2 Pet. 3:10, 12), or as demonic powers that control this evil age (Col. 2:15), or as the rudimentary principles of religious life—the ABCs of religion (Heb. 5:12). Paul’s emphasis on humanity’s status as “minors” before the coming of Christ (Gal. 4:1–3) suggests that he is referring here to the rudimentary principles of religious life. If so, Paul is saying that the Old Testament period, with its laws and sacrifices, was merely a gospel primer that outlined the basics of salvation. Thus, as important and instructional as the ceremonial laws were to Israel, they were only shadows of what was to come. They never were intended to take the place of Christ.

To regulate one’s life around these rules instead of Christ is like wanting to go back in time. For the Galatians to return to those basic elements after Christ had already come was like the adult son in Paul’s analogy wanting to be a minor again!

While a childlike faith can be positive (Matt. 18:3), is it necessarily the same thing as spiritual maturity? Or could you argue that the more you grow spiritually, the more childlike your faith will be? How childlike and “innocent” and trusting is your faith?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ were God’s means of setting human beings free from the power of sin and death and returning us to a right relationship with Himself. We are called to live free in Christ.

**Just for Teachers:** The following true story reminds us that the freedom given to us by God through Christ is one of the most precious gifts possessed by fallen human beings and should be celebrated as such.

In April 2002 Ray Krone, a former death-row inmate, became the 100th prisoner in the United States to be exonerated by DNA evidence since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. Krone had spent more than ten years in prison for a murder he did not commit.

How did Krone spend his first day of freedom? He ate steak and went for a swim in a hotel pool, letting out a shriek of exultation as the cold water enveloped him. Almost immediately after his release he began decrying the weaknesses in the justice system that had caused him to lose faith. Krone had been sentenced not once but twice for the same crime, the final time to life in prison.

When asked how he planned to rebuild his life, Ray Krone responded, “I don’t think about rebuilding. I think about starting over. I have a brand-new life, brand-new dreams. . . . I don’t want to be negative, vengeful or angry. I don’t have time for that.”

**Consider This:** Ask the class to consider the following questions: What does freedom in Christ look like? How can we tell when that freedom is genuine and when it is not—if that is at all possible? What deep truth about our new life in Christ is revealed by Ray Krone’s words about starting over?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** As this week’s lesson makes clear, Old Testament prophets faced the difficult task of exposing the hidden—and not so hidden—sins of people who often claimed to be worshiping the true God.
“God Sent Forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4)

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4, ESV).

Paul’s choice of the word *fullness* indicates God’s active role in working out His purpose in human history. Jesus did not come at just any time; He came at the precise time God had prepared. From a historical perspective, that time is known as the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace), a two-hundred-year period of relative stability and peace across the Roman Empire. Rome’s conquest of the Mediterranean world brought peace, a common language, favorable means of travel, and a common culture that facilitated the rapid spread of the gospel. From a biblical perspective, it also marked the time that God had set for the coming of the promised Messiah (see Dan. 9:24–27).

**Why** did Christ have to take our humanity in order to redeem us?  
*John 1:14; Gal. 4:4, 5; Rom. 8:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14, 15.*

Galatians 4:4, 5 contains one of the most succinct accounts of the gospel in Scripture. The coming of Jesus into human history was no accident. “God sent forth His Son.” In other words, God took the initiative in our salvation.

Also implicit in these words is the fundamental Christian belief in Christ’s eternal deity (*John 1:1–3, 18; Phil. 2:5–9; Col. 1:15–17*). God did not send a heavenly messenger. He, Himself, came.

Although He was the divine preexistent Son of God, Jesus was also “born of woman.” Although the virgin birth is implied in this phrase, it more specifically affirms His genuine humanity.

The phrase “born under the law” points not only to Jesus’ Jewish heritage but also includes the fact that He bore our condemnation.

It was necessary for Christ to assume our humanity because we could not save ourselves. By uniting His divine nature with our fallen human nature, Christ legally qualified to be our Substitute, Savior, and High Priest. As the second Adam, He came to reclaim all that the first Adam had lost by his disobedience (*Rom. 5:12–21*). By His obedience He perfectly fulfilled the law’s demands, thus redeeming Adam’s tragic failure. And by His death on the cross, He met the justice of the law, which required the death of the sinner, thus gaining the right to redeem all who come to Him in true faith and surrender.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

I. Dead Indeed (Read Romans 6:1–11, Galatians 3:26, 1 Corinthians 12:13.)

This week’s lesson outlines the crucial role that baptism plays in the extreme makeover of the sinner’s life. According to Sunday’s study, it represents a “radical decision to unite our lives with Christ.”

In Romans 6:4, the apostle Paul thickens the meaning of baptism’s significance. He describes the process as being “buried with Him through baptism into death” (NKJV). This is often one of the most difficult concepts to grasp—that through baptism one has truly died to his or her old way of life. Yet, this understanding is the predicate of Galatians 3:26.

The believer’s death to sin in baptism is as real and complete as Christ’s literal death. As the emergence of Christ from the grave signaled a total rebirth, so our emergence from the watery grave of baptism signals a new way of life in Christ.

Baptism represents a union with Christ. Paul notes, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13, NKJV).

Consider This: Why do many believers struggle to accept the totality of their death in Christ? How are we to understand the fact that although we are dead to sin, certain sins continue to challenge us? How does Satan use this tension between the old and new lives to discourage the believer?

II. Even the Power? (Review Galatians 4:7 and Matthew 4:4–11.)

One of the truly awe-inspiring aspects of Jesus’ ministry on earth was the raw exercise of His mastery over Satan, beginning with the temptation He endured in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4–11). As the author makes clear in this week’s study, because we are joint heirs with Christ, whatever belongs to Him belongs to us—even His power. Part of the freedom offered by Christ is a growing capacity to resist and put away sin in all its forms. God adopted us from the “bondage to sin.”

Think for a moment about Satan’s inability to succeed with Jesus on any front, as described here by Ellen G. White: “When Jesus came into the world, Satan’s power was turned against Him. . . . But he was defeated. . . . All the efforts of Satan to oppress and overcome Him only brought out in a purer light His spotless character.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 759.
The Privileges of Adoption (Gal. 4:5–7)

In Galatians 4:5–7, Paul expands on his theme, stressing that Christ has now “redeemed those who were under the law” (vss. 4, 5, ESV). The verb to redeem means “to buy back.” It referred to the price paid to buy the freedom of either a hostage or a slave. As this context indicates, redemption implies a negative background: a person is in need of being liberated.

From what, though, do we need to be freed? The New Testament presents four things among others: (1) freed from the devil and his wiles (Heb. 2:14, 15), (2) freed from death (1 Cor. 15:56, 57), (3) freed from the power of sin that enslaves us by nature (Rom. 6:22), and (4) freed from the condemnation of the law (Rom. 3:19–24, Gal. 3:13, 4:5).

What positive purpose has Christ achieved for us through the redemption we have in Him? Gal. 4:5–7; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15, 16, 23; 9:4, 5.

We often speak about what Christ has accomplished for us as “salvation.” Although true, this word is not nearly as vivid and descriptive as Paul’s unique use of the word adoption (huiothesia). Although Paul is the only New Testament author to use this word, adoption was a well-known legal procedure in the Greco-Roman world. Several Roman emperors during Paul’s life used adoption as the means of choosing a successor when they had no legal heir. Adoption guaranteed a number of privileges: “(1) The adopted son become[s] the true son . . . of his adopter . . . . (2) The adopter agrees to bring up the child properly and to provide the necessities of food and clothing. (3) The adopter cannot repudiate his adopted son. (4) The child cannot be reduced to slavery. (5) The child’s natural parents have no right to reclaim him. (6) The adoption establishes the right to inherit.” —Derek R. Moore-Crispin, “Galatians 4:1–9: The Use and Abuse of Parallels,” The Evangelical Quarterly, vol. 61, no. 3 (1989), p. 216.

If these rights are guaranteed on an earthly level, just imagine how much greater are the privileges we have as the adopted children of God!

Read Galatians 4:6, realizing that the Hebrew word Abba was the intimate word children used to address their father, like the words Daddy or Papa today. Jesus used it in prayer (Mark 14:36), and as God’s children we have the privilege of calling God “Abba,” as well. Do you enjoy that kind of intimate closeness to God in your own life? If not, what’s the problem? What can you change to bring about this closeness?
Consider This: Many Christians do not believe that through Jesus they too can be victorious over the wiles of Satan. What prevents them from experiencing freedom from the power of certain sins?

III. Paul’s Living Witness *(Read Galatians 3:28, 4:12.)*

This week’s study closes with Paul’s plea that the new Galatian believers not return to the “weak and beggarly elements” that once enslaved them *(Gal. 4:9, NKJV)*. To Paul, a return to past legalism would be akin to going back to pagan worship.

Paul urges his Gentile audience to “become like me, for I became like you” *(vs. 12)*. Hidden in this seemingly sentimental language is the truth that Paul revealed in Galatians 3:28; that in Christ 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” *(NKJV)*. As we’ll find out in next week’s study, Paul actually adopted some Gentile customs and ways of life.

One can only begin to imagine how this statement fell on the ears of Paul’s Jewish listeners. Paul emphatically rejects any separation between himself and the Gentiles. First Corinthians 9:21 states that Paul became like a Gentile that perchance he might lead some to Christ: “to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law” *(NKJV)*.

Paul’s freedom in Christ had stripped away parochialism and opened him to share the love of God far and wide.

Consider This: How should we go about modeling the unity that we share with all of God’s children?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** As adopted sons and daughters of God, we must learn the life of the Father, what it means to abide in Him *(John 15:1–7)* and what it means to share His love with lost family members *(Matt. 28:18–20)*.

**Thought Questions:**

1. What role does our devotional life play in maintaining our freedom in Christ? Read Mark 1:35–39. What do these verses tell us about the devotional life of Jesus and how that life informed His moment-by-moment decision-making?
Why Turn Back to Slavery? (Gal. 4:8–20)

Read Galatians 4:8–20. On the lines below, summarize what Paul is saying here. How seriously does he take the false teachings among Galatians?

Paul does not describe the exact nature of the Galatians’ religious practices, but he clearly has in mind a false system of worship that resulted in spiritual slavery. Indeed, he deemed it so dangerous and destructive that he had to write such an impassioned letter, warning the Galatians that what they were doing was akin to turning away from sonship to slavery.

Although he doesn’t get into specifics, what does Paul say is so objectionable about the behavior of the Galatians? Gal. 4:9–11.

Many have interpreted Paul’s reference to “days and months and seasons and years” (Gal. 4:10, ESV) as an objection not merely to ceremonial laws but to the Sabbath, as well. Such an interpretation, however, goes beyond the evidence. For starters, if Paul really wanted to single out the Sabbath and other specific Jewish practices, it is clear from Colossians 2:16 that he easily could have identified them by name. Second, Paul makes it clear that whatever it is the Galatians are doing, it has led them from freedom in Christ to bondage. “If observance of the seventh-day Sabbath subjects a man to bondage, it must be that the Creator Himself entered into bondage when He observed the world’s first Sabbath!”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 967. Also, why would Jesus not only have kept the Sabbath but taught others how to keep it, if its proper observance were in any way depriving people of the freedom that they have in Him? (See Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 13:10–16.)

Might there be any practices in Seventh-day Adventism that take away from the freedom that we have in Christ? Or, instead of the practices themselves being problematic, what about our attitudes toward the practices? How could a wrong attitude lead us into the kind of bondage that Paul warned the Galatians about so vehemently?
Why do some believers doubt the reality of their adoption in Christ? How might our past relationship with sin sometimes sabotage our future relationship with our Father?

Application Questions:

1. How do we reconcile freedom in Christ with the Bible’s teaching on subjects such as modesty of dress, Christian behavior, and health reform? What are we free and/or not free to do?

2. In what ways should we remain childlike in our Christian walk? In what ways should we grow up into fully mature sons and daughters of God?

Questions for Witnessing:

1. “The disciples were to be colaborers with their Redeemer in the work of saving the world.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 818. What does our willingness to work for the salvation of lost brothers and sisters say about our love for the Father?

2. Read the parable of the great supper found in Luke 14:15–24. Jesus commands His servants to “go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (vs. 23, NKJV). Why is the Father so desirous of sharing His largesse with as many people as possible? How do we “compel” people to come to the great adoption celebration?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following message with your students and ask them how they would apply the truths learned this week to meet the need of the struggling heart of the person referred to below. Ask your students to make a list of things they would say to this person.

Someone posted the following cry for help on a Christian Web site: “Sometimes God just feels like He’s a galaxy away from me. I guess my past sins just keep haunting me. I can’t seem to forget them. And just when I think it is under control and I won’t do it again, BOOM! There it goes again. I mess up. It’s like the devil’s taunting me: ‘You thought you could get away? You can’t!’ And sometimes I feel that way. That I have sunk so low, so far from God’s grace, that I can’t get back. I know that it isn’t true, that God meets you wherever you are, but I sometimes wonder if He really hears me.”
Further Study: “In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will. God wills that all men should be saved; for ample provision has been made, in giving his only-begotten Son to pay man’s ransom. Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus. The pride of man hinders him from accepting the provisions of salvation. But human merit will not admit a soul into the presence of God. That which will make a man acceptable to God is the imparted grace of Christ through faith in his name. No dependence can be placed in works or in happy flights of feelings as evidence that men are chosen of God; for the elect are chosen through Christ.”—Ellen G. White, “Chosen in Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, January 2, 1893.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell more on the idea of what it means, and what it does not mean, to be like children in our walk with the Lord. What aspects of children are we to emulate in regard to our faith and our relationship with God? At the same time, what are ways in which we can take this idea too far? Discuss.

2. What is it about human beings that makes us so afraid of the idea of grace, of salvation by faith alone? Why is it that many people would rather try to work their way to salvation, if that were possible?

3. As a class, go over the final question from Thursday’s lesson. In what ways can we as Seventh-day Adventists get caught up in the kind of slavery from which we have been ideally freed? How could this happen to us, how can we know if it does, and how can we be set free?

Summary: In Christ we have been adopted into God’s family as His sons and daughters. As God’s children, we have access to all the rights and privileges that such a family relationship entails. To relate to God on the basis of rules and regulations alone would be foolish. It would be like a son wanting to renounce his position and inheritance in order to become a slave.
Paul’s Pastoral Appeal

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 4:12–20, 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:17, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, 2 Cor. 4:7–12.

Memory Text: “Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are” (Galatians 4:12, NRSV).

As we’ve seen so far, Paul did not mince words with the Galatians. His strong language, however, simply reflected the inspired passion he felt concerning the spiritual welfare of the church that he had founded. Besides the crucial theological issue with which Paul was dealing, the letter to the Galatians in a broad sense also shows just how important correct doctrine is. If what we believed were not that important, if doctrinal correctness did not matter all that much, then why would Paul have been so fervent, so uncompromising, in his letter? The truth is, of course, that what we believe matters greatly, especially in the whole question of the gospel.

In Galatians 4:12–20 Paul continues his discourse, although he changes his approach, at least a bit. Paul has made a number of detailed and theologically sophisticated arguments in his attempts to persuade the Galatians of their errors, and now he makes a more personal, pastoral appeal. Unlike the false teachers who had no true interest in the Galatians, Paul reveals the genuine concern, worry, hope, and love of a good shepherd for his wayward flock. He was not just correcting theology; he was seeking to minister to those whom he loved.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 26.*
The Heart of Paul

**Read** Galatians 4:12–20. What is the thrust of Paul’s message in these verses?

The initial indication of the concern that weighs heavily on Paul’s heart is his personal appeal in verse 12. The appeal follows immediately after Paul’s insistence that the Galatians “become as I am.” The significance of the word *entreat* or *beseech* is, unfortunately, not fully conveyed in some translations. The word in Greek is *deomai*. Although it can be translated as “to urge” (*NKJV*) or “to entreat” (*ESV*), the Greek word has a stronger sense of desperation connected to it (*see* 2 Cor. 5:20, 8:4, 10:2). Paul is really saying, “I’m begging you!”

Paul’s concern was not simply about theological ideas and doctrinal points of view. His heart was bound up with the lives of the people who were brought to Christ through his ministry. He considered himself more than just a friend; he was their spiritual father, and they were his children. But even more than that, Paul likens his concern for the Galatians to the worry and anguish that accompany a mother in childbirth (*Gal. 4:19*). Paul had thought that his previous “labor” had been sufficient for their “safe delivery” when he founded the church. But now that the Galatians had wandered from the truth, Paul was experiencing those labor pains all over again in order to secure their well-being.

**What** goal did Paul have in mind for the Galatians? What result did he want to see from all his “labor” in their behalf? *Gal. 4:19.*

Having first described the Galatians as being formed in the womb, Paul now speaks of the Galatians as if they were expectant mothers themselves. The word translated as “formed” was used medically to refer to the development of an embryo. Through this metaphor Paul describes what it means to be Christian, both individually and collectively as a church. To be a follower of Christ is more than just the profession of faith; it involves a radical transformation into the likeness of Christ. Paul was “not looking for a few minor alterations in the Galatians but for such a transformation that to see them would be to see Christ.”—Leon Morris, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 142.

In what ways have you seen the character of Christ manifested in your life? In what areas do you still have a lot of growing to do?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 4:12

The Student Will:

Know: Describe how Paul’s letter to the Galatians moved from scriptural argument to one based on personal appeal.
Feel: Appreciate the emotional plea that Paul made as a pastor, sharing his anxieties and reminding the Galatians of their shared experiences.
Do: Resolve to benefit not only from our leaders’ spiritual insights but also from their human love and concern, and support them in turn.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Double Appeal

A Why did Paul make both a theological and a personal appeal?
B Why would sharing his ministerial anxieties help the Galatians realize the seriousness of their crisis?

II. Feel: Pastoral Anxiety

A How did relating their shared history help Paul evoke earlier memories of important lessons?
B Why might Paul’s arguing, pleading, and agonizing awaken a heartfelt revival of relationship as well as an intellectual assent to truth?
C How did Paul contrast his passionate concern for the church’s well-being with the false teachers’ desire to court favor?

III. Do: Loving, Though Uncomfortable Truth

A How can we be open to lessons that chide and upbraid us, as well as those that encourage and uplift us?
B How can we, like Paul, use relationships as a platform for sharing truth, even when it is uncomfortable?
C How can we support those who might have gone through spiritual “childbirth” on our behalf?

Summary: After strong spiritual argument, Paul made an emotional appeal to the Galatians to remain in the gospel of grace.
The Challenge to Become

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9; and Acts 26:28, 29. What is Paul saying here that is reflected in Galatians 4:12? How are we to understand his point?

Paul encourages Christians to imitate his behavior several times throughout his letters. In each situation, Paul presents himself as an authoritative example that believers should follow. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9, Paul offers himself as an example of how the believers in Thessalonica should work to earn their own living and not be a burden on others. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to imitate him in placing the welfare of others first. Paul’s concern in Galatians appears to be somewhat different.

In Galatians 4:12, Paul does not ask the Galatians to imitate him; instead, he asks that they “become as” he is—he is talking about being, not acting. Why? The trouble in Galatia was not unethical behavior or an ungodly lifestyle, as it was in the church in Corinth. The issue in Galatia was rooted in the essence of Christianity itself. It was more about “being” than “behavior.” Paul was not saying act like me, but be what I am. The exact terminology in Galatians 4:12 occurs in Paul’s appeal to Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:29 (ESV) where Paul writes, “I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains” (emphasis supplied). In other words, Paul is referring to his experience as a Christian, a foundation that rests on Christ alone, a faith that trusts in what Christ has done for him and not in his works of the law. The Galatians were placing greater value on their behavior than on their identity in Christ.

Although Paul does not specifically say how he wants the Galatians to become like him, the context of the situation in Galatians indicates it was not a blanket statement that covered every aspect and detail of his life. Because his concern was with the law-centered religion of the Galatians, Paul surely had in mind the wonderful love, joy, freedom, and certainty of salvation he had found in Jesus Christ. In light of the surpassing wonder of Christ, Paul had learned to count everything else as rubbish (Phil. 3:5–9)—and he longed for the Galatians themselves to have that same experience.

Is there someone you know (other than Jesus) who presents to you a good example? If so, what are the qualities of that person that you find so exemplary, and how can you better reveal those qualities in your life?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The gospel we preach should be the gospel we live. There is nothing quite as irresistible as a Christian thoroughly in love with Jesus Christ and committed to the salvation of lost human beings.

Just for Teachers: Discuss the social reality in which much of the world finds itself today, a reality in which words and deeds rarely come together to give a clear picture of who people really are.

Talkers abound. One need only turn on the radio, watch the television, or surf the Internet to discover a retinue of talking heads who are only too happy to opine about the latest hot-button issue of the day. Financial analysts feel qualified to decry the state of the education system. Politicians say one thing when seeking election and then do the opposite once in office, all the while accepting thinly veiled bribes from special interests.

And then there are the mentally deranged who squat on national airwaves, spewing up words and antics calculated to breed hatred, deliver an audience, and fill their pockets. The world seems to be awash in a torrent of meaningless blather—people totally out of their depth who nevertheless continue on undaunted.

Like a military commander depositing stealth fighters behind enemy lines, God drops the Christian into the din of empty talk to live and speak the gospel. What amazing love for a fallen world.

Consider This: Ask the class to come up with a list of the “big talkers” who dominate the media. What is it that keeps them in the news? Why do they have an audience? Are their core messages positive or negative? Finally, do they live what they spew?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: As you explore this week’s commentary, the class will take a close look at Paul’s personal obedience to God, his willingness to sacrifice to see Christ formed in believers, and his emotional efforts to get them to choose Christ. Paul’s heart for the lost is positively inspiring.
I Have Become as You Are

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. What does Paul say in these verses that can help us to understand better his point in the latter part of Galatians 4:12? See also Acts 17:16–34, 1 Cor. 8:8–13, Gal. 2:11–14.

Galatians 4:12 can seem a little confusing. Why should the Galatians become like Paul, if he had already become like them?

As we saw in yesterday’s lesson, Paul wanted them to become like him in his complete faith and confidence in the all-sufficiency of Christ for salvation. His comment about having become like them was a reminder of how, although he was a Jew, he had become a Gentile “without the law” so that he might reach the Gentiles among them with the gospel. As the great missionary to the Gentile world, Paul had learned how to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, according to 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, although the gospel remained the same, Paul’s method varied, depending on the people he was trying to reach.

“Paul was a pioneer in what we call today contextualization, the need to communicate the gospel in such a way that it speaks to the total context of the people to whom it is addressed.”—Timothy George, The New American Commentary: Galatians (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 321.

Paul’s own comments in 1 Corinthians 9:21 indicate that he believed there were limits to how far someone should go in contextualizing the gospel. He mentions, for example, that while one is free to reach out in different ways to Jews and Gentiles, this freedom does not include the right to live a lawless lifestyle, for Christians are under the “law of Christ.”

Although contextualization is not always easy, “insofar as we are able to separate the heart of the gospel from its cultural cocoon, to contextualize the message of Christ without compromising its content, we too should become imitators of Paul.”—Timothy George, Galatians, pp. 321, 322.

It’s so easy to compromise, isn’t it? Sometimes the longer one is a Christian, the easier compromise gets. Why might that be so? Look at yourself, honestly. How much compromise has crept into your life, and what have been the ways you have justified it? How can you turn this around in areas where you need to?
Bible Commentary

I. Reaching the Heart Through a Living Faith *(Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Acts 14:1–26, and Galatians 4:12.)*

In spite of his noble desire to lead others to Jesus, Paul does not approach his task carelessly, especially as it relates to his understanding of God’s law and civic legal codes. There is a reason for Paul’s strict adherence to a personal code of conduct that is above reproach. While Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Iconium—with great success—“the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren” *(Acts 14:2, NKJV).* The multitude of the city became so divided that “part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles” *(vs. 4, NKJV).*

The apostle Paul could not afford to be reckless in the way he lived his faith. For one, his enemies kept close tabs on him; but more than that, Paul’s desire was to please God first and foremost.

**Consider This:** Ask someone in the class to read Luke 15:1–10. Note the fact that Jesus faced spurious attacks when attempting to do good to those on the margins of society during His day. Ask: in what ways did Paul’s contextualization of the gospel mirror Christ’s? In what ways did it differ?

II. Whatever It Takes *(Review Galatians 4:19, John 3:3, and Colossians 1:27.)*

Paul used the metaphor of childbirth to make the point that he had endured, as it were, the pangs of childbirth in order to bring these people to Christ. But as they contemplated returning to a legalistic form of the faith, the process of “birthing” them would have to begin again. Paul is no doubt echoing the language of Jesus as He spoke to Nicodemus *(see John 3).*

The apostle persisted in the Galatian outreach because he wanted Christ to be fully formed in them and reign in their hearts *(Gal. 2:20).* As Wednesday’s study makes clear, Paul presses through personal illness to complete his task. In his letter to the Colossians he again uses the language and metaphor of maternity to make clear that Christ’s being formed in us represents humanity’s only “hope of glory” *(Col. 1:27).*

**Consider This:** What does the life of a Christian look like once Christ begins to be formed within? What changes? What stays the same? Why...
Then and Now

Paul’s relationship with the Galatian believers was not always as difficult and frigid as it had now become. In fact, as Paul reflects on the time when he first preached the gospel in Galatia, he speaks in glowing terms of how well they treated him. What happened?

What event seems to have led to Paul’s decision to preach the gospel in Galatia? Gal. 4:13.

Apparently it had not been Paul’s original intention to preach the gospel in Galatia. Some sort of illness, however, overtook him on his journey, forcing him either to stay longer in Galatia than expected or to travel to Galatia for his recovery. Mystery surrounds the exact nature of Paul’s malady. Some have suggested that he contracted malaria; others (on the basis of Paul’s reference to the Galatians’ willingness to pluck out their eyes and give them to him) suggest that it was perhaps an eye disease. His illness may also have been connected to the “thorn in the flesh” he mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:7–9.

Whatever Paul was suffering from, he does tell us it was so unpleasant that it became a trial to the Galatians. In a world where illness was often seen as a sign of divine displeasure (John 9:1, 2; Luke 13:1–4), Paul’s illness easily could have provided the Galatians with an excuse to reject both him and his message. But they welcomed Paul wholeheartedly. Why? Because their hearts had been warmed by the preaching of the Cross (Gal. 3:1) and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. What reason could they give now for their change of attitude?

What might have been God’s reasons for allowing Paul to suffer? How could Paul minister to others when he was struggling with his own problems? Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 4:7–12, 12:7–10.

Whatever Paul’s illness was, it certainly was serious, and it easily could have provided him with an excuse either to blame God for his problems or to simply give up on preaching the gospel. Paul did neither. Instead of letting his situation get the best of him, Paul used it as an opportunity to rely more fully on God’s grace. “Time and again God has used the adversities of life—sickness, persecution, poverty, even natural disasters and inexplicable tragedies—as occasions to display his mercy and grace and as a means to advance the gospel.” —Timothy George, Galatians, pp. 323, 324.

How can you learn to let your trials and suffering make you lean more upon the Lord? (What other options do you have?)
was Paul so motivated to help the Galatian believers come to a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ as their only source of salvation? What did Paul’s life look like after Christ was “birthed” in his heart?

III. Closing the Deal (Read Galatians 4:16 and 2 Corinthians 1 and 2.)

Emotional appeals are one of the truly distinguishing characteristics of the apostle Paul. At a time when many ministers of the gospel shy away from making sermonic appeals, Paul’s “naked” appeals seem out of step. To be sure, emotions can be played like an instrument, and many religious leaders have mastered the trade, but Paul is not being insincere.

Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 1 and 2 is even more disquieting. His ministerial authority challenged, Paul wrote, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (2 Cor. 2:4, NKJV).

Paul’s love for those he wanted to come to know Christ underpinned his appeals and made them effective.

Consider This: Why are some Christians afraid to put their “hearts” on the line as they reach out to others? Some cultures are more reserved than others. What role should cultural norms play in the way in which we appeal to men and women on behalf of Christ?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to answer the personal inventory questions below. Allow time for those who may wish to share their responses.

Thought Questions:

1. How did you come to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Was it through the encouragement of a friend, a great sermon that convicted your heart, or an appeal that you simply could not resist? What “hooked” you and made you want to give your life to Jesus?

2. Paul often faced rejection in his efforts to win souls to Christ. Does the fear of rejection stop you from sharing your faith? How do you plan to overcome it?
Speaking the Truth

Read Galatians 4:16. What powerful point is Paul making here? In what ways might you yourself have experienced something similar? See also John 3:19; Matt. 26:64, 65; Jer. 36:17–23.

The expression “speaking the truth” often has negative connotations, especially in our day and age, when it can be viewed as a hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, spare-no-enemies tactic of telling someone the facts, no matter how unpleasant or unwanted they may be. If it were not for Paul’s comments in Galatians 4:12–20 and a few other comments scattered throughout his letter (see Gal. 6:9, 10), one might mistakenly conclude that Paul’s interest in the truth of the gospel outweighed any expression of love. Yet, as we’ve seen, although Paul was concerned about the Galatians knowing the “truth of the gospel” (see Gal. 2:5, 14), that concern arose because of his love for them. Who hasn’t experienced personally just how painful it can be to have to chastise someone, or in plain terms speak truths to them that—for whatever reason—they don’t want to hear? We do it because we care about the person, not because we want to cause hurt, although at times the immediate effect of our words is hurt, or even anger and resentment against us. We do it anyway, because we know it is what the person needs to hear, no matter how much he or she might not want to do so.

In Galatians 4:17–20, what is Paul saying about those whom he is opposing? What else is he challenging, besides their theology?

In contrast to the candor of Paul’s gospel, by which he risked the possible ire of the Galatians, his opponents were actively courting the favor of the Galatians—not out of love for the Galatians but out of their own selfish motives. It is unclear exactly what Paul means when he says that his opponents “want to shut you out,” although this perhaps refers to an attempt to shut them out of the privileges of the gospel until they first submit to circumcision.

Think of some incident when your words, however truthful and needed, caused someone to be angry with you. What did you learn from the experience that could help you the next time you need to do something similar?
Application Question:
Second Corinthians 5:20 states, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (NKJV). What specific gifts or talents do you possess that God can use to plead for others through you?

Questions for Witnessing:
1. It is obvious that a chorus of contradictory voices was confusing the Galatian believers. If not, Paul would not have gone to such great pains to explain the law and how it complements faith in Jesus Christ. What unique challenges does the “chattering class” of our day present for the Christian attempting to share God’s gospel?
2. How do we strike the correct balance between building relationships with those we wish to see saved and telling them the truth? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the process?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Distribute slips of paper to the class and ask them to write one or two sentences detailing how we should appeal to the people mentioned in the following scenarios:

1. Sarah has visited your church several times. She is attentive during the services and has even purchased a Bible for the first time so that she can follow along with the minister. Everyone wonders when she’ll give her heart to Jesus and become baptized, but your minister rarely makes appeals. When he does, he seems uncomfortable and rushes to end it. How would you go about appealing to Sarah?

2. A close friend of yours has been cheating on her taxes for years. She looks for all the loopholes to save money, but she also goes over the line. She sometimes jokes about it with you and justifies her behavior by saying, “It’s my money anyway. All the government does is waste it.” How would you go about helping her to see that this behavior is wrong? Would you bring God into the mix, or just address her from the legal perspective—that she is breaking the law? Explain.
**Further Study:** “In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the gospel message. Christ, the true foundation of the faith, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism. The apostle saw that if the believers in Galatia were saved from the dangerous influences which threatened them, the most decisive measures must be taken, the sharpest warnings given.

“An important lesson for every minister of Christ to learn is that of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are alike needful; but these are to be exercised with proper discrimination. To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God. . . .

“Paul pleaded with those who had once known in their lives the power of God, to return to their first love of gospel truth. With unanswerable arguments he set before them their privilege of becoming free men and women in Christ, through whose atoning grace all who make full surrender are clothed with the robe of His righteousness. He took the position that every soul who would be saved must have a genuine, personal experience in the things of God.

“The apostle’s earnest words of entreaty were not fruitless. The Holy Spirit wrought with mighty power, and many whose feet had wandered into strange paths, returned to their former faith in the gospel. Henceforth they were steadfast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 385, 386, 388.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Dwell more on the whole question of suffering and how God can use it. How do we deal with situations in which nothing good appears to have come from suffering?

2. Meditate on the idea of Christ being formed in us. What does this mean in practical terms? How can we know that this is happening to us? How do we keep from being discouraged if it’s not happening as quickly as we think it should?

**Summary:** Having made a number of detailed and theologically sophisticated arguments, Paul now makes a more personal and emotional appeal to the Galatians. He begs them to listen to his counsel, reminding them of the positive relationship they once shared and of the genuine love and concern he has for them as their spiritual parent.
The Two Covenants

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 4:21–31; Gen. 1:28; 2:2, 3; 3:15; 15:1–6; Exod. 6:2–8; 19:3–6.

Memory Text: “But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother” (Galatians 4:26, NIV).

Christians who reject the authority of the Old Testament often see the giving of the law on Sinai as being inconsistent with the gospel. They conclude that the covenant given on Sinai represents an era, a dispensation, from a time in human history when salvation was based on obedience to the law. But because the people failed to live up to the demands of the law, God (they say) ushered in a new covenant, a covenant of grace through the merits of Jesus Christ. This, then, is their understanding of the two covenants: the old based on law, and the new based on grace.

However common that view may be, it is wrong. Salvation was never by obedience to the law; biblical Judaism, from the start, was always a religion of grace. The legalism that Paul was confronting in Galatia was a perversion, not just of Christianity but of the Old Testament itself. The two covenants are not matters of time; instead, they are reflective of human attitudes. They represent two different ways of trying to relate to God, ways that go back to Cain and Abel. The old covenant represents those who, like Cain, mistakenly rely on their own obedience as a means of pleasing God; in contrast, the new covenant represents the experience of those who, like Abel, rely wholly upon God’s grace to do all that He has promised.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 3.
Covenant Basics

Many regard Paul’s interpretation of the history of Israel in Galatians 4:21–31 as the most difficult passage in his letter. That’s because it is a highly complex argument that requires a broad knowledge of Old Testament persons and events. The first step in making sense of this passage is to have a basic understanding of an Old Testament concept central to Paul’s argument: the concept of the covenant.

The Hebrew word translated “covenant” is berit. It occurs nearly three hundred times in the Old Testament and refers to a binding contract, agreement, or treaty. For thousands of years, covenants played an integral role in defining the relationships between people and nations across the ancient Near East. Covenants often involved the slaughter of animals as part of the process of making (literally “cutting”) a covenant. The killing of animals symbolized what would happen to a party that failed to keep its covenant promises and obligations.


What was the basis of God’s original covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden before sin? Gen. 1:28; 2:2, 3, 15–17.

While marriage, physical labor, and the Sabbath were part of the general provisions of the covenant of creation, its main focal point was God’s command not to eat the forbidden fruit. The basic nature of the covenant was “obey and live!” With a nature created in harmony with God, the Lord did not require the impossible. Obedience was humanity’s natural inclination; yet, Adam and Eve chose to do what was not natural, and, in that act, they not only ruptured the covenant of creation, they made its terms impossible for humans now corrupted by sin. God had to restore the relationship that Adam and Eve had lost. He did this by immediately enacting the covenant of grace based on the eternal promise of a Savior (Gen. 3:15).

Read Genesis 3:15, the first gospel promise in the Bible. Where in that verse do you see an inkling of the hope that we have in Christ?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 4:26

The Student Will:

Know: Compare and contrast the old and new covenant with Hagar and Sarah’s children and their relationship with Abraham.
Feel: Nurture attitudes of appreciation, faith, and love to God for our deliverance from sin.
Do: Depend on God’s covenant promises.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Ishmael and Isaac

A How did those who insisted on circumcision put themselves in the camp of the natural-born Ishmael rather than the miracle-born Isaac?
B What other biblical examples illustrate our attempts at working things out on our own?
C How did Abraham in this story illustrate our tendency to rely on the old rather than the new covenant?

II. Feel: Appreciating the New Covenant

A How did Israel’s failure to keep their promise at Mount Sinai teach them their need to depend on God’s power?
B How does feeling our great need for God’s help awaken trust and love?

III. Do: Children of Promise

A How are we tempted to create our own children of promise, as Abraham did, rather than let God work miraculously for us?
B What opposition do we face because we are children of the new, rather than the old, covenant?

Summary: Like Abraham, Hagar, and Israel at Mount Sinai, we are often tempted to try to make God’s Word come true ourselves. But our own efforts not only don’t work, they also bring on tragedy. God’s grace brings blessings rather than tragedy.
The Abrahamic Covenant

**What** covenant promises did God make to Abram in Genesis 12:1–5? What was Abram’s response?

God’s initial promises to Abram make up one of the more powerful passages in the Old Testament. These verses all are about God’s grace. It is God, not Abram, who makes the promises. Abram had done nothing to earn or merit God’s favor; neither is there any indication that suggests that God and Abram had somehow worked together to come up with this agreement. God does all the promising. Abram, in contrast, is called to have faith in the surety of God’s promise, not some flimsy so-called “faith” but a faith that is manifested by his leaving his extended family (at the age of seventy-five!) and heading to the land God promised.

“With the ‘blessing’ pronounced on Abraham and through him on all human beings, the Creator renewed His redemptive purpose. He had ‘blessed’ Adam and Eve in Paradise (Gen. 1:28, 5:2) and then ‘blessed Noah and his sons’ after the flood (9:1). This way God clarified His earlier promise of a Redeemer who will redeem humanity, destroy evil, and restore Paradise (Gen. 3:15). God confirmed His promise to bless ‘all peoples’ in His universal outreach.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, pp. 22, 23.

**After** ten years of waiting for the promised son to be born, what questions did Abram have regarding God’s promise? *Gen. 15:1–6.*

It often is easy to glorify Abram as the man of faith who never had any questions or doubts. Scripture, however, paints a different picture. Abram believed, but he also had questions along the way. His faith was a growing faith. Like the father in Mark 9:24, Abram basically said to God in Genesis 15:8, “I believe, help my unbelief.” In response, God graciously assured Abram of the certainty of His promise by formally entering into a covenant with him (Gen. 15:7–18). What makes this passage so surprising is not the fact that God enters into a covenant with Abram but the extent to which God was willing to condescend to do so. Unlike other rulers in the ancient Near East who balked at the idea of making binding promises with their servants, God not only gave His word, but, by symbolically passing through the pieces of slaughtered animals, He staked His very life on it. Of course, Jesus ultimately gave His life on Calvary to make His promise a reality.

**What are some areas now where you have to reach out by faith and believe in what seems impossible? How can you learn to keep holding on, no matter what?**
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The old covenant attitude is one of making things happen, while the new covenant attitude trusts God to bring about His purpose.

Athletes approach sports differently. There are athletes so intent on making things happen that they force the action, even to the point of cheating when and where they can.

Others “let the game come to them.” They are confident about the system or game plan instituted by their coaching staff and concern themselves only with their assigned roles in executing that plan. These athletes encounter success, not because they “made things happen” or “forced the action” but because they relied upon their coaches’ wisdom and experience, accepting their training procedures and assigned roles. This approach demands patiently trusting the coaches’ leading and being prepared to execute the coaches’ plan whenever opportunities present themselves.

God’s followers throughout history have exemplified both approaches. Ancient Israelites self-confidently declared their intention to execute God’s will perfectly. Abraham panicked because he believed that God’s game clock was expiring, and rather than patiently waiting upon the divine game plan, he took upon himself the responsibility for producing offspring. This assistance merely complicated things. Fortunately, the spiritually maturing Abraham experienced a dramatic reversal when He surrendered Isaac. This week’s study vividly contrasts these conflicting approaches to spirituality.

Consider This: What is the difference between the old covenant attitude and the new covenant attitude? How do we live the new covenant attitude?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Abraham makes a compelling example for both approaches to covenant keeping. Earlier he exhibited self-dependence when he took upon himself the responsibility for fulfilling God’s
Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar

Why does Paul have such a disparaging view of the incident with Hagar? Gal. 4:21–31, Genesis 16. What crucial point about salvation is Paul making through his use of this Old Testament story?

Hagar’s place in the Genesis story is directly related to Abram’s failure to believe God’s promise. As an Egyptian slave in Abram’s household, Hagar likely came into Abram’s possession as one of the many gifts Pharaoh gave to him in exchange for Sarai, an event associated with Abram’s first act of unbelief in God’s promise (Gen. 12:11–16).

After waiting ten years for the promised child to be born, Abram and Sarai remained childless. Concluding that God needed their help, Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a concubine. Although strange to us today, Sarai’s plan was quite ingenious. According to ancient customs, a female slave legally could serve as a surrogate mother for her barren mistress. Thus Sarai could count any child born from her husband and Hagar as her own. While the plan did produce a child, it was not the child God had promised.

In this story we have a powerful example of how, when faced with daunting circumstances even a great man of God had a lapse of faith. In Genesis 17:18, 19, Abraham pleaded with God to accept Ishmael as his heir; the Lord, of course, rejected that offer. The only “miraculous” element in the birth of Ishmael was Sarah’s willingness to share her husband with another woman! There was nothing out of the ordinary about the birth of a child to this woman, a child born “according to the flesh.” Had Abraham trusted in what God had promised him instead of letting the circumstances overcome that trust, none of this would have happened, and a lot of grief would have been avoided.

In contrast to the birth of Ishmael, look at the circumstances surrounding Isaac’s birth. Gen. 17:15–19; 18:10–13; Heb. 11:11, 12. Why did these circumstances require so much faith of Abraham and Sarah?

In what ways has your lack of faith in God’s promises caused you some pain? How can you learn from these mistakes to take God at His word, no matter what? What choices can you make that can help strengthen your ability to trust God’s promises?
promise. How many well-intentioned Christians repeat that mistake? Sincerely sorrowful regarding their sinful past, they self-confidently declare that they will never again repeat their former behaviors, effectively saying that their willpower is sufficient to fulfill God’s promises for changed lives. Abraham’s willfulness produced Ishmael and a deeply divided household. Unfortunately, self-dependent believers likewise produce or foster similar results and divide God’s household. Later Abraham learned that self-surrender, not self-dependence, unlocks God’s storehouse of blessings.

Atop Mount Moriah, Abraham surrendered his son for sacrifice, essentially surrendering himself, regardless of the apparent consequences for his cherished dreams. Completely surrendered, Abraham was now positioned to experience God’s extravagant grace. God’s Son, prefigured by the entrapped ram, would fulfill the promise, substituting Himself for Isaac and all humanity. Renewing power belongs to Christ, not humans.

There are second-phase Abrahams today: believers who sincerely regret their sinful behaviors but who recognize that righteousness can never be achieved through human effort to overcome temptation but only through moment-by-moment submission to God’s leading and absolute confidence in Christ’s sacrifice. The renewed church is any group of believers who have replaced old covenant, self-confident obedience with new covenant, fully trusting obedience. Obedience is never in doubt: we will serve somebody—either self-concocted notions of righteousness or Christ as revealed throughout Scripture.

Bible Commentary

I. Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar (Review Galatians 4:21–31 and Genesis 16 with the class.)

Those among us who share modern sensitivities may become consternated with Paul’s illustration involving Hagar because it apparently blames her and Ishmael by typing them as the example of legalistic religion. What fairness can there be in castigating the powerless slave woman who had no choice about whether or not to bear her wealthy slave owner’s offspring? Making
Hagar and Mount Sinai (Gal. 4:21–31)

**What** type of covenant relationship did God want to establish with His people at Sinai? What similarities does it share with God’s promise to Abraham? *Exod. 6:2–8, 19:3–6, Deut. 32:10–12.*

God desired to share the same covenant relationship with the children of Israel at Sinai that He shared with Abraham. In fact, similarities exist between God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 and His words to Moses in Exodus 19. In both cases, God emphasizes what He will do for His people. He does not ask the Israelites to promise to do anything to earn His blessings; instead, they are to obey as a response to those blessings. The Hebrew word translated as “to obey” in Exodus 19:5 literally means “to hear.” God’s words do not imply righteousness by works. On the contrary, He wanted Israel to have the same faith that characterized Abraham’s response to His promises (at least most of the time!).

If the covenant relationship God offered to Israel on Sinai is similar to the one given to Abraham, why does Paul identify Mount Sinai with the negative experience of Hagar? *Exod. 19:7–25; Heb. 8:6, 7.*

The covenant at Sinai was intended to point out the sinfulness of humanity and the remedy of God’s abundant grace, which were typified in the sanctuary services. The problem with the Sinai covenant was not on God’s part but rather with the faulty promises of the people (*Heb. 8:6*). Instead of responding to God’s promises in humility and faith, the Israelites responded with self-confidence. “‘All that the Lord hath spoken we will do’” (*Exod. 19:8*). After living as slaves in Egypt for more than four hundred years, they had no true concept of God’s majesty nor the extent of their own sinfulness. In the same way that Abraham and Sarah tried to help God fulfill His promises, the Israelites sought to turn God’s covenant of grace into a covenant of works. Hagar symbolizes Sinai in that both reveal human attempts at salvation by works.

Paul is not claiming that the law given at Sinai was evil or abolished. He is concerned with the Galatians’ legalistic misapprehension of the law. “Instead of serving to convict them of the absolute impossibility of pleasing God by law-keeping, the law fostered in them a deeply entrenched determination to depend on personal resources in order to please God. Thus the law did not serve the purposes of grace in leading the Judaizers to Christ. Instead, it closed them off from Christ.” —O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 181.
things worse, Paul elevates Abraham’s and Sarah’s relationship (the people who caused the problem) as the example of genuine righteousness! Paul’s purpose here is neither to vilify the forsaken Hagar nor enshrine the conspiring Sarah. Their regrettable household situation merely illustrates two phases of Abraham’s spiritual journey—the *do-it-yourself religion* phase and the later *completely-trust-God phase*.

Unfortunately, Abraham’s poor choices irrevocably damaged his relationship with his firstborn and introduced unnecessary tensions into his household. Certainly we should remember that it was the relationship that produced Ishmael—not Ishmael himself—that symbolized self-righteousness. It was Abraham’s self-dependence imposed upon the powerless Hagar that epitomizes self-righteousness. Hagar and Ishmael were merely victims of Abraham’s experiment with *do-it-yourself religion*.

**Consider This:** In church conflicts regarding the nature of righteousness, sometimes legalistic persons are attacked. Perhaps those who have experienced Christ’s saving grace should be more graceful to those who haven’t. Rather than castigating them, should not genuine believers exhibit more compassion toward victims of this false, but widespread, religious philosophy? How can genuine Christians oppose legalism’s self-dependent *philosophy* while exhibiting compassion toward the legalistic *person*? What can we learn from Abraham’s transformation from self-dependent, *make-it-happen* religion to divine dependency?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. What attitudes regarding covenant keeping distinguish the old from the new covenant?

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CONTINUED
Ishmael and Isaac Today

Paul’s brief sketch of Israel’s history was designed to counter the arguments made by his opponents who claimed that they were the true descendants of Abraham and that Jerusalem—the center of Jewish Christianity and the law—was their mother. The Gentiles, they charged, were illegitimate; if they wanted to become true followers of Christ, they must first become a son of Abraham by submitting to the law of circumcision.

The truth, Paul says, is the opposite. These legalists are not the sons of Abraham but are illegitimate sons, like Ishmael. By placing their trust in circumcision, they were relying on “the flesh,” as Sarah did with Hagar and as the Israelites did with God’s law at Sinai. Gentile believers, however, were the sons of Abraham not by natural descent but, like Isaac, by the supernatural. “Like Isaac they were a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham . . . ; like Isaac, their birth into freedom was the effect of divine grace; like Isaac, they belong to the column of the covenant of promise.”—James D. G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 256.

What will the true descendants of Abraham face in this world? Gal. 4:28–31, Gen. 21:8–12.

Being the promised child brought Isaac not only blessings but also opposition and persecution. In reference to persecution, Paul has in mind the ceremony in Genesis 21:8–10, where Isaac is being honored and Ishmael appears to make fun of him. The Hebrew word in Genesis 21:9 literally means “to laugh,” but Sarah’s reaction suggests Ishmael was mocking or ridiculing Isaac. While Ishmael’s behavior might not sound very significant to us today, it revealed the deeper hostilities involved in a situation when the family birthright was at stake. Many rulers in antiquity tried to secure their position by eliminating potential rivals, including siblings (Judg. 9:1–6). Although Isaac faced opposition, he also enjoyed all the privileges of love, protection, and favor that went along with being his father’s heir.

As spiritual descendants of Isaac, we should not be surprised when we suffer hardship and opposition, even from within the church family itself.

In what ways have you suffered persecution, especially from those closest to you, because of your faith? Or ask yourself this hard question: might you be guilty of persecuting others for their faith? Think about it.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

The ethical requirements of the old covenant remain unaltered. Adultery remains adultery; murder remains murder; sin is still wrong. Scripture nowhere suggests that commandment breaking has suddenly become acceptable. However, covenant orientation has shifted. Formerly, Israel viewed God’s covenant as a burdensome obligation. Why is keeping the covenant recognized as a joy-filled privilege under the new covenant?

Application Questions:

1. How can church divisions be healed without compromising with works-oriented religion?

2. How can self-dependent religionists be led into a faith-oriented relationship?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: Examine Christmas carols within the hymnal, looking for expressions of the new covenant relationship with God. Invite members to share their discoveries with others. Have each explain how their selected phrases exemplify the new covenant relationship for them.

“But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. . . .

“God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: ‘If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.’ Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. . . . Yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 371, 372.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is your own walk with the Lord more of an “old covenant” or a “new covenant” type? How can you tell the difference?

2. What are some of the issues in your local church that are causing tension within the body? How are they being resolved? Although you might find yourself being the victim of “persecution,” how can you make sure, too, that you aren’t the one doing the persecuting? Where’s the fine line there? See also Matt. 18:15–17.

3. How many times have you made promises to the Lord that you would not do this or that, only to do this or that? How does this sad fact help you understand the meaning of grace?

Summary: The stories of Hagar, Ishmael, and the children of Israel at Sinai illustrate the foolishness of trying to rely upon our own efforts to accomplish what God has promised. This method of self-righteousness is referred to as the old covenant. The new covenant is the everlasting covenant of grace first established with Adam and Eve after sin, renewed with Abraham, and ultimately fulfilled in Christ.
Freedom in Christ

In Galatians 2:4, Paul briefly referred to the importance of protecting the “freedom” that we have in Christ Jesus. But what does Paul mean when he speaks about “freedom,” which he so often does? What does this freedom include? How far does this freedom go? Does it have any limits? And what connection does freedom in Christ have to the law?

Paul addresses these questions by warning the Galatians of two dangers. The first is legalism. Paul’s opponents in Galatia were so caught up trying to earn God’s favor through their behavior that they lost sight of the liberating nature of Christ’s work, of the salvation that they already had in Christ through faith. The second threat is the tendency to abuse the freedom Christ has obtained for us by lapsing into licentiousness. Those who hold this view mistakenly assume that freedom is antithetical to the law.

Both legalism and licentiousness are opposed to freedom, because they equally keep their adherents in a form of slavery. Paul’s appeal to the Galatians, however, is to stand firm in the true freedom that is their rightful possession in Christ.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.*
Christ Has Set Us Free

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

Like the rallying command of a military leader to his wavering troops, Paul charges the Galatians not to surrender their freedom in Christ. The forcefulness and intensity of Paul’s tone cause his words nearly to leap off the page into action. In fact, this seems to be exactly what Paul intended. Although this verse is connected thematically to what precedes and what follows, its abruptness and lack of syntactical connections in Greek suggest that Paul wanted this verse to stand out like a gigantic billboard. Freedom in Christ sums up Paul’s entire argument, and the Galatians were in danger of giving it away.

Read Galatians 1:3, 4; 2:16; and 3:13. What are some of the metaphors used in these verses, and how do they help us understand what Christ has done for us?

Paul’s words, “for freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1, ESV), may suggest that he has another metaphor in mind here. The wording of this phrase is similar to the formula used in the sacred freeing (manumission) of slaves. Because slaves had no legal rights, it was supposed that a deity could purchase their freedom, and in return, the slave, though really free, would legally belong to the god. Of course, in actual practice the process was fiction; it was the slave who paid the money into the temple treasury for his or her freedom. Consider, for example, the formula used in one of the nearly one thousand inscriptions found at the temple to Pythian Apollo at Delphi that date from 201 B.C. to A.D. 100: “‘For Freedom, Apollo the Pythian bought from Sosibus of Amphissa a female slave whose name is Nicaea. . . . The purchase, however, Nicaea has committed unto Apollo for freedom.’”—Ben Witherington III, Grace in Galatia (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 340.

This formula shares a basic similarity with Paul’s terminology, but there is a fundamental difference. In Paul’s metaphor, no fiction is involved. We did not provide the purchase price ourselves (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). The price was far too high for us. We were powerless to save ourselves, but Jesus stepped in and did for us what we could not do (at least not without forfeiting our lives). He paid the penalty for our sins, thus freeing us from condemnation.

Look at your own life. Do you ever think that you could save yourself? What should your answer tell you about how grateful you need to be for what we have been given in Jesus?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 5:13

The Student Will:
   Know: Discuss how true freedom in Christ escapes both legalism and licentiousness.
   Feel: Sense the stirring joy that freedom in Christ brings.
   Do: Spring into loving service that is born through faith in the one who is united to Christ.

Learning Outline:
   I. Know: True Freedom
      A How does faith in Christ set us free? What and whom are we free from?
      B What are we called to do with our freedom?
      C How does our freedom in Christ result in “fulfillment” of the law, as opposed to “doing” the law?

   II. Feel: Joyful Freedom
      A How does freedom from bondage to sin, death, and the devil affect our attitudes and relationships to others?
      B How do we express our joy in our worship to the One who freed us and empowers us to live a life of faith?
      C How is joy related to faith?

   III. Do: Active Freedom
      A If we are truly free because we are united to Christ through faith, how is our resulting joy and love expressed through service to others?
      B How is our labor of love, which results from our relationship with Christ, different from labor designed to bring us into Christ’s favor?

Summary: Freedom born from faith in Christ liberates us from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. We are free to express our faith in Christ through loving and joyful service, thereby fulfilling the law which enjoins us to “love others as yourself.”
The Nature of Christian Freedom

Paul’s command to stand firm in freedom is not made in isolation. An important statement of fact precedes it: “Christ has set us free.” Why should Christians stand firmly in their freedom? Because Christ has already set them free. In other words, our freedom is a result of what Christ has already done for us.

This pattern of a statement of fact followed by an exhortation is typical in Paul’s letters (1 Cor. 6:20; 10:13, 14; Col. 2:6). For example, Paul makes several indicative statements in Romans 6 about the facts of our condition in Christ, such as, “We know that our old self was crucified with him” (Rom. 6:6, ESV). On the basis of this fact, Paul can then issue the imperative exhortation, “Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies” (Rom. 6:12, NRSV). This is Paul’s way of saying essentially, “Become what you already are in Christ.” The ethical life of the gospel does not present the burden of trying to do things in order to prove that we are God’s children. Rather, we do what we do because we already are His children.

From what has Christ freed us? Rom. 6:14, 18; 8:1; Gal. 4:3, 8; 5:1; Heb. 2:14, 15.

The use of the word freedom to describe the Christian life is more prominent in Paul’s letters than anywhere else in the New Testament. The word freedom and its cognates occur 28 times in Paul’s letters, in contrast to only 13 times elsewhere.

What does Paul mean by freedom? First, it is not a mere abstract concept. It does not refer to political freedom, economic freedom, or the freedom to live any way we might please. On the contrary, it is a freedom that is grounded in our relationship to Jesus Christ. The context suggests that Paul is referring to freedom from the bondage and condemnation of a law-driven Christianity, but our freedom includes much more. It includes freedom from sin, eternal death, and the devil.

“Outside of Jesus Christ, human existence is characterized as bondage—bondage to the law, bondage to the evil elements dominating the world, bondage to sin, the flesh, and the devil. God sent his Son into the world to shatter the dominion of these slave-holders.”—Timothy George, Galatians, p. 354.

To what things do you feel enslaved in life? Memorize Galatians 5:1 and ask God to make the freedom you have in Christ a reality in your life.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christ’s sacrifice releases us from bondage to sin so that we may freely choose Christ and His lifestyle.

Countercultural icon Bob Dylan wailed, “You’re gonna have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.” Dylan’s sentiment is correct. While “no man can serve two masters,” everyone serves one. Christian freedom must be understood within this context. There is no spiritual Switzerland—neutral territory inclined neither right nor left. We are on one side or the other in the great controversy. To choose not to choose is to make a choice, the wrong choice. Through His death on the cross, Christ has paved the way for all the world to have salvation, freedom, and victory in Him. Yet, we have to be careful. First, millions of freed slaves have willingly returned to slavery. Christ unlocked the penitentiary, shattering prison gates and destroying prison walls, but many prisoners remained there by choice. Second, others escaped but carried an invisible prison with them. Their prison consists of doubts, shame, fearfulness, and guilt. They serve God motivated by fear rather than love. They serve Jonathan Edwards’ angry God: “The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked.”—Clyde E. Fant, Jr., and William M. Pinson, Jr., 20 Centuries of Great Preaching (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1971), vol. 3, p. 63. Fortunately millions have also accepted the freedom purchased at the exorbitant price of Christ’s life. Released from guilt, shame, haunting memories, addictions, and self-destructive behaviors, they enjoy the abundant life provided by their Creator.

Discuss: How do we flourish within the context of loving obedience and revel in the adventure of passionate and compassionate service to God?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Freedom is simultaneously the world’s greatest blessing and its greatest curse. Freedom must be measured by outcomes. How is freedom exercised? Freedom expresses special privileges or rights of access proceeding from citizenship. What, then, constitutes heavenly citizenship? How are citizenship and freedom acquired or forfeited?
The Dangerous Consequences of Legalism (Gal. 5:2–12)

The way in which Paul introduces Galatians 5:2–12 indicates the importance of what he is about to say. “Look” (ESV), “Listen!” (NRSV), “Mark my words!” (NIV), “I, Paul, say to you” (ESV). Paul is not fooling around. By his forceful use of the word look, he not only calls for his readers’ full attention, but he even evokes his apostolic authority. He wants them to understand that if the Gentiles are going to submit to circumcision to be saved, then the Galatians need to realize the dangerous consequences involved in their decision.

Read Galatians 5:2–12. What does Paul warn about in regard to the whole question of circumcision?

The first consequence of trying to earn God’s favor by submitting to circumcision is that it obligates the person to keep the entire law. Paul’s language in verses 2 and 3 includes an interesting play on words. Christ, he says, will not benefit them (ophelesei); rather, they will be obligated (opheiletes) to the law. If a person wants to live according to the law, he or she cannot just pick and choose the precepts to follow. It is all or nothing.

Second, they will be “cut off” from Christ. A decision to be justified by works involves at the same time a rejection of God’s way of justification in Christ. “You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to receive Christ, thereby acknowledging that you cannot save yourself, and then receive circumcision, thereby claiming that you can.”—John R. W. Stott, The Message of Galatians (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 133.

Paul’s third objection to circumcision is that it hinders spiritual growth. His analogy is of a runner whose progress toward the finish line has been deliberately sabotaged. In fact, the word translated “hindered” (vs. 7, ESV) was used in military circles to refer “to breaking up a road or destroying a bridge or placing obstacles in the way of an enemy, to halt his advance.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 978.

Finally, circumcision removes the offense of the Cross. How? The message of circumcision implies that you can save yourself; as such, it is flattering to human pride. The message of the Cross, however, is offensive to human pride, because we have to acknowledge that we are dependent completely on Christ.

Paul is so outraged at these people for their insistence on circumcision that he says that he wishes that the knife would slip and they would castrate themselves! Strong words, but Paul’s tone simply reflects how seriously he views this issue.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

What rights and obligations accompany citizenship? How does the believer utilize freedom? What might believers do that would compromise or eventually forfeit their freedoms? How should Christians avoid both legalistic, fear-driven religion, and anything-goes, licentious philosophy? These questions constitute not mere discussion points but critical issues central to emotional stability and abundant living.

Bible Commentary

I. The Nature of Christian Freedom (Review Romans 6:6, 12 with the class.)

Over the centuries, Jewish religion had become encrusted beneath layers of well-intentioned human tradition. The well-intentioned aspect must not be overlooked, lest modern believers repeat those same mistakes. The first mistake was miscalculating the relationship between worshiper and covenant. Rather than worshiping God motivated by gratitude for redemption and creation, the people offered worship on the foundation of fearful obligation. Their observations were not flawed, but their interpretation was. They observed that whenever the nation lived harmoniously with God’s principles, the nation prospered. They interpreted this as the divine payment for acceptable service. They reasoned that whenever their service became unacceptable, God would withdraw divine favor, and punishment would follow. This thinking produced legalistic mind-sets and practices that destroyed concepts of a loving heavenly Father who desired intimate fellowship with His earthly children. Service was rendered to avoid punishment or to obtain reward. Loving service offered from hearts appreciative for God’s gracious goodness was largely, but not completely, unknown.

Paul’s new covenant message, following Jeremiah’s ancient prophecy of internalized devotion, rooted in love rather than fear, constituted spiritual release for Paul’s contemporaries and Christians of every generation. Christian freedom includes release from base impulses, hereditary tendencies, every kind of temptation, and, naturally, the consequences of indulging those impulses and tendencies. Christ’s indwelling Spirit releases us from both legalism and licentiousness.

Consider This: Throughout history sincere attempts have been made to regulate human behavior in order to appease God. Pharisaical regulations governing Sabbath observance were a prime example. These were well-intended and perfectly acceptable as individual expressions of devotion. However, when these personal preferences regarding the
Liberty Not Licentiousness *(Gal. 5:13)*

Galatians 5:13 marks an important turning point in the book of Galatians. Whereas up to this point Paul has focused entirely on the theological content of his message, he now turns to the issue of Christian behavior. How should a person who is not saved by works of law live?

**What potential misuse of freedom did Paul want to keep the Galatians from committing? **Gal. 5:13.

Paul was well aware of the potential misunderstanding that accompanied his emphasis on the grace and the freedom that believers have in Christ *(Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 2)*. The problem, however, was not Paul’s gospel but the human tendency for self-indulgence. The pages of history are littered with the stories of people, cities, and nations whose corruption and descent into moral chaos were directly related to their lack of self-control. Who hasn’t felt this tendency in his or her own life, as well? That’s why Paul so clearly calls followers of Jesus to avoid indulging in the flesh. In fact, he wants them to do the opposite, which is “through love serve one another” *(NKJV)*. As anyone who serves others out of love knows, this is something that can be done only through death to self, death to the flesh. Those who indulge their own flesh are not the ones who tend to serve others. On the contrary.

Thus, our freedom in Christ is not merely a freedom from the enslavement to the world but a call to a new type of service, the responsibility to serve others out of love. It is “the opportunity to love the neighbor without hindrance, the possibility of creating human communities based on mutual self-giving rather than the quest for power and status.”—Sam K. Williams, *Galatians* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 145.

Because of our familiarity with Christianity and the wording of modern translations of Galatians 5:13, it is easy to overlook the startling power these words would have conveyed to the Galatians. First, the Greek language indicates that the love that motivates this type of service is not ordinary human love—that would be impossible; human love is far too conditional. Paul’s use of the article *(the)* before the word *love* in Greek indicates he is referring to “the” divine love that we receive only through the Spirit *(Rom. 5:5)*. The real surprise lies in the fact that the word translated as “serve” is the Greek word for “to be enslaved.” Our freedom is not for self-autonomy but for mutual enslavement to one another based on God’s love.

Be honest: have you ever thought you could use the freedom you have in Christ to indulge in a little bit of sin here and there? What’s so detrimental about that kind of thinking?
allowable Sabbath traveling distance, and so on, became laws restricting others’ choices, they led to legalism. Knowing that every facet of life leads toward or away from God, some well-intentioned modern believers have legislated dress, diet, leisure, and other aspects of living. How should Christians respond to attempts by other Christians to legislate their conduct? How can well-intentioned believers honor their conscientious convictions without trying to impose them upon others? Why might some substitute legislation for prayerful searching of Scripture and confidence in the power of the indwelling Spirit? How might “majoring on minors” compromise our spiritual authority when, at other times, indisputable sinful behavior requires confrontation and correction? How might quietly modeling our understanding of appropriate Christian behavior and passionately loving others be more effective in promoting our views as compared with trying to legislate them?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Christian freedom means receiving a new nature that institutes an internal transformation of behavior rather than an external regulation of behavior. The bicycle’s chain attaches to the rear sprocket and, from the center of the radiating spokes, transfers power that mobilizes the entire bicycle. Some motion could be accomplished by turning the tire outside the rim, but such motion is superficial when compared with the power radiating from the centered sprocket. Civil government does bear some responsibility for regulating society so that such egregious evils as violence, robbery, and so on will not go unchecked; but history has shown that spiritual revival is exponentially more effective in transforming behavior than is imprisonment and punishment. The Holy Spirit’s power, radiating from the completely surrendered heart, is humanity’s only realistic hope for lasting transformation and survival.

**Activity:** Read the following parable aloud and discuss the implications for making Christian freedom real in the believer’s experience.

**The Airplane’s Soliloquy**

They finally released me from ground school. I’m free to soar, explore, and reach my destiny. Speaking of destinations, I’m free to go anywhere. What an adventure! Think: exotic destinations never even dreamed about
Fulfilling the Whole Law (Gal. 5:13–15)

**How** do you reconcile Paul’s negative comments about “do[ing] the whole law” (Gal. 5:3) with his positive statement about “fulfill[ing] all the law” (Gal. 5:14)? Compare Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12; 5:3 with Rom. 8:4; 13:8; Gal. 5:14.

Many have seen the contrast between Paul’s negative comments about “doing the whole law” and his positive assertions about “fulfilling the whole law” as paradoxical. They really aren’t. The solution lies in the fact that Paul intentionally uses each phrase to make an important distinction between two different ways of defining Christian behavior in relation to the law. For example, it is significant that when Paul refers positively to Christian observance of the law, he never describes it as “doing the law.” He reserves that phrase to refer solely to the misguided behavior of those who are living under the law and are trying to earn God’s approval by “doing” what the law commands.

This is not to imply that those who have found salvation in Christ do not obey. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul says they “fulfill” the law. He means that true Christian behavior is much more than the outward obedience of just “doing” the law; it “fulfills” the law. Paul uses the word *fulfill* because it goes far beyond just “doing.” This type of obedience is rooted in Jesus (see Matt. 5:17). It is not an abandonment of the law, nor a reduction of the law only to love, but it is the way through which the believer can experience the true intent and meaning of the whole law!

**Where**, according to Paul, is the full meaning of the law found? Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:31, 33; Matt. 19:19; Rom. 13:9; James 2:8.

Although it is a quotation from Leviticus, Paul’s statement in Galatians is ultimately rooted in Jesus’ use of Leviticus 19:18. Jesus, however, was not the only Jewish teacher to refer to Leviticus 19:18 as a summary of the whole law. Rabbi Hillel, who lived about a generation before Jesus, said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole law.” But Jesus’ perspective radically was different (Matt. 7:12). Not only is it more positive, but it also demonstrates that law and love are not incompatible. Without love, the law is empty and cold; without law, love has no direction.

What’s easier, and why: to love others or simply to obey the Ten Commandments? Bring your answer to class.
before; searching endless horizons, tasting tantalizing sunsets in paradise, navigating the outer limits of known civilization. What possibilities! Maybe I’ll survey Iceland for starters. Of course, the regulatory agency is recommending otherwise because of a volcanic eruption. Some commission decided that it’s dangerous because previous airplanes stalled on microscopic dust found in volcanic clouds. Maybe they’re just saying that to drive people away from the fun. Where’s their proof? It’s just small stuff anyway. How much harm could that be? There are those stories about that small stuff hardening and clogging engines; but just because other airplanes haven’t been able to handle it doesn’t necessarily mean I’m not built strong enough. Then again, why chance it? Maybe waiting makes sense. There are dozens of other exciting options. Maybe the commission does know what it’s talking about this time. I’m free to travel Iceland, but there’s Newfoundland, the Pyrenees, the Solomons, plus the Mediterranean. Besides, my manufacturer invested endless hours of research and development to produce me. I’m actually free. That means I can choose.

**Discussion Points:** When Christians utilize freedom, how should they view the *small stuff*? How could careless self-confidence bring about disaster? How should appreciation for God’s investment in the believer affect his or her attitude about using freedom? How might studying the examples of freedom contained in Scripture help us make profitable decisions?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Despite what we have been given in Christ, somehow the liberated have often sided with their captor rather than their liberator. Christians must counteract this travesty by becoming heaven’s agents, exemplifying lives transformed by divine grace. By becoming examples of properly exercised freedom, believers demonstrate God’s wisdom in liberating prisoners rather than in manufacturing robots to worship Him.

**Activity:** *Option A.* Invite the class to make lists of choices that they or their friends make that may affect their spirituality. Allow them to reflect openly about how misused freedom could inhibit their growth in these areas.

*Option B.* Study the Christmas songs found in the hymnal. Look for allusions to freedom. Discuss how Christ’s incarnation provided spiritual freedom for His followers. What might the lyrics suggest about how Christians appropriate the freedoms that Jesus purchased at such a high price?
**Further Study:** “Genuine faith always works by love. When you look to Calvary it is not to quiet your soul in the nonperformance of duty, not to compose yourself to sleep, but to create faith in Jesus, faith that will work, purifying the soul from the slime of selfishness. When we lay hold of Christ by faith, our work has just begun. Every man has corrupt and sinful habits that must be overcome by vigorous warfare. Every soul is required to fight the fight of faith. If one is a follower of Christ, he cannot be sharp in deal, he cannot be hardhearted, devoid of sympathy. He cannot be coarse in his speech. He cannot be full of pomposity and self-esteem. He cannot be overbearing, nor can he use harsh words, and censure and condemn.

“The labor of love springs from the work of faith. Bible religion means constant work. ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’ ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ We are to be zealous of good works; be careful to maintain good works. And the true Witness says, ‘I know thy works.’

“While it is true that our busy activities will not in themselves ensure salvation, it is also true that faith which unites us to Christ will stir the soul to activity (MS 16, 1890).”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1111.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, go over your answers to the last question from Thursday’s lesson. Which option did most people find easier, and why? What important truths does your answer suggest to you about what it means to fulfill the law?

2. Paul says that faith “works” through love. What does he mean?

3. Examine the idea of seeking to use your freedom in Christ to indulge in sin. Why is that so easy to do? When people think that way, what trap are they falling into? See 1 John 3:8.

**Summary:** *Freedom* is one of Paul’s favorite words for defining the gospel. It includes both what Christ has done for us in freeing us from bondage to the world and also how we are called to live the Christian life. We need to be careful, however, that our liberty does not fall prey either to legalism or licentiousness. Christ did not set us free so that we could serve ourselves but so that we might give our lives in ministry to our neighbors.
Lesson 12
December 10–16

Living by the Spirit

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 5:16–25; Deut. 13:4, 5; Rom. 7:14–24; Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Matt. 22:35–40.

Memory Text: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16, ESV).

One of the most beloved Christian hymns is Robert Robinson’s “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Robinson, however, was not always a man of faith. The death of his father left him angry, and he fell into debauchery and drunkenness. After hearing the famous preacher George Whitefield, Robinson surrendered his life to the Lord, became a Methodist pastor, and wrote that hymn, which originally included the lines: “Oh, to grace how great a debtor / Daily I’m constrained to be! / Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, / Bind me closer still to Thee.”

Uncomfortable with the line about the Christian heart’s wandering, someone once changed the words to read: “Prone to worship, Lord, I feel it, / Prone to love the God I serve.”

Despite the editor’s good intentions, the original words accurately describe the Christian struggle. As believers we possess two natures, the flesh and the Spirit, and they are in conflict. Although our sinful nature will always be “prone” to wander from God, if we are willing to surrender to His Spirit, we do not have to be enslaved to the desires of the flesh. This is the thrust of Paul’s message in the texts for the week.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.
Walking in the Spirit

Read Galatians 5:16. What does the concept of “walking” have to do with a life of faith? Deut. 13:4, 5; Rom. 13:13; Eph. 4:1, 17; Col. 1:10.

“Walking” is a metaphor drawn from the Old Testament that refers to the way a person should behave. Paul, himself a Jew, makes use of this metaphor often in his letters to describe the type of conduct that should characterize the Christian life. His use of this metaphor is also likely connected to the first name that was associated with the early church. Before the followers of Jesus were called Christians (Acts 11:26), they were known simply as followers of “the Way” (John 14:6, Acts 22:4, 24:14). This suggests that, at a very early date, Christianity was not merely a set of theological beliefs that centered on Jesus but was also a “way” of life to be “walked.”

In what way is Paul’s metaphor about walking different from that found in the Old Testament? Compare Exod. 16:4; Lev. 18:4; Jer. 44:23 with Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4.

Conduct in the Old Testament simply was not defined as “walking” but more particularly as “walking in the law.” Halakhah is the legal term Jews use to refer to the rules and regulations found in both the law and the rabbinic traditions of their forefathers. While Halakhah usually is translated “the Jewish law,” the word actually is based on the Hebrew word for “to walk” and literally means “the way of going.”

Paul’s comments about “walking in the Spirit” are not contrary to obedience to the law. He is not proposing that Christians should live in a way that violates the law. Again, Paul is not opposed to the law or to obedience to the law. What he is opposed to is the legalistic way in which the law was being misused. The genuine obedience that God desires never can be achieved by outward compulsion but only by an inward motivation produced by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18).

What has been your own experience of “walking in the Spirit”? How do you do that? What practices in your life make this kind of walk more difficult?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 5:16

The Student Will:

Know: Describe what it means to live by the Spirit.

Feel: Sense the conflict as we are caught in the pull of a sinful nature, though we long to live a Spirit-ruled life.

Do: Choose to live every moment in step with the Spirit.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Living by the Spirit

A. How does a person walking with the Spirit behave?
B. How does a Spirit-guided person relate to the law?
C. How do the "works of the flesh" compare to the "fruit of the Spirit"?
D. Why can Paul say that against the fruit of the Spirit there is no law?

II. Feel: Internal Spiritual Conflict

A. Why is there such an internal struggle between our inborn desires to serve ourselves and the Spirit’s promptings, and how do we find relief from this conflict?
B. What emotions result from the works of the flesh, and how do these compare with the emotions and attitudes listed as the fruit of the Spirit?

III. Do: Living in Love

A. What must we do to crucify our sinful nature?
B. What conscious choices do we make that side with the Spirit against our sinful nature?
C. What choices do we make that strengthen our sinful tendencies?

Summary: Living by the Spirit implies a daily walk along the path that the Spirit dictates. It requires daily choices that side with the Spirit in all matters of decision and that starve our sinful self.
The Christian’s Conflict

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17; see also Rom. 7:14–24). How have you, in your own life as a believer, experienced the harsh and painful reality of these words?

________________________________________________________________________________________

The struggle that Paul describes is not the struggle of every human being; it refers specifically to the inward tug-of-war that exists in the Christian. Because humans are born in harmony with the desires of the flesh (Rom. 8:7), it is only when we are born anew by the Spirit that a real spiritual conflict begins to emerge (John 3:6). This does not mean that non-Christians never experience moral conflict; they certainly do. But even that conflict is ultimately a result of the Spirit. The struggle of the Christian, however, takes on a new dimension, because the believer possesses two natures that are at war with each other, the flesh and the Spirit.

Throughout history, Christians have longed for relief from this struggle. Some have sought to end the conflict by withdrawing from society, while others have claimed that the sinful nature can be eradicated by some divine act of grace. Both attempts are misguided. Although by the Spirit’s power we certainly can subdue the desires of the flesh, the conflict will continue in various ways until we receive a new body at the Second Coming. Fleeing from society does not help, because no matter where we go, we take the struggle with us, and we will until death or the Second Coming.

When Paul writes in Romans 7 about the inward conflict in Christians preventing them from doing what they want, he is underscoring the full extent of that conflict. Because we possess two natures, we are literally on both sides of the battle at once. The spiritual part of us desires what is spiritual and detests the flesh. The fleshly part of us, however, longs for the things of the flesh and opposes what is spiritual. Because the converted mind is too weak to resist the flesh by itself, the only hope we have of subduing the flesh is by making a daily decision to side with the Spirit against our sinful selves. This is why Paul is so insistent that we choose to walk in the Spirit.

From your own experience of the battle between these two natures, what advice would you give to a Christian who is trying to come to terms with this never-ending struggle with self?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Only the daily indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables us to live a God-honoring life.

The lightbulb is nothing without electricity. It was designed for illumination, but cannot, without energy, displace darkness. Several simple things occur whenever the lightbulb is ignited. Obviously, the bulb must be properly connected to an electrical source. The electrical switch must be turned on. The filaments within the incandescent bulb or the gases within the fluorescent tube must be intact. Similarly, whenever Christians shine forth, several simple things occur. The Christian must be properly connected to a spiritual energy source (God). Interruptions of the energy flow (for example, switches) must be overridden, meaning that sinful tendencies and habitual shortcomings must be unreservedly submitted to divine control. The internal integrity of the Christian’s life must likewise be intact. The smallest cracks in the fluorescent tube or the tiniest breaks of an incandescent filament can destroy the bulb’s capacity for lighting. Small cracks (questionable language, shortage of physical discipline [for example, gluttony, drunkenness, laziness], coarse humor, greediness, uncontrolled temper, and multitudes of similar characteristics) will eliminate the Christian’s effectiveness. Summarily, the primary conditions for spiritual effectiveness are moral integrity and spiritual energy. Whenever either is absent, spiritual light fails. Some church members exemplify exalted standards of citizenship and apparent integrity but produce no spiritual light because no connection with God exists. Other members emphasize supernatural encounters with God but lack moral integrity. Again, no light is produced. However, whenever the Holy Spirit’s power engages the morally integrated life, the surrounding landscape is illuminated. Apart from God Himself, Spirit-filled, morally upright believers are this world’s greatest need.

Opening Activity: Sing the Christmas carol “Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light” (number 128 of The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal) and discuss how Christ’s heavenly light must be reflected in our lives. Share the concepts developed in the teacher’s section above, focusing on what believers must do to stay connected with God’s Spirit.
The Works of the Flesh

Having introduced the conflict that exists between the flesh and the Spirit, Paul, in Galatians 5:18–26, elaborates on the nature of this contrast by means of a list of ethical vices and virtues. The catalog of vices or virtues was a well-established literary feature present in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. These lists identified behavior to be avoided and virtues to be emulated.

Carefully examine the vice and virtue lists in the passages below. In what ways are Paul’s lists in Galatians 5:19–24 similar to, yet different from, these lists? Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Mark 7:21, 22; 1 Tim. 3:2, 3; 1 Pet. 4:3; Rev. 21:8.

Although Paul was well aware of vice and virtue lists, there are significant differences in the way he uses the two lists in Galatians. First, even though Paul contrasts the two lists, he does not refer to them in the same manner. He labels the vice list as the “works of the flesh” but the virtue list as the “fruit of the Spirit.” This is an important distinction. As James D. G. Dunn writes, “The flesh demands, but the Spirit produces. Where the one list breathes an air of anxious self-assertiveness and frenetic self-indulgence, the other speaks more of concern for others, serenity, resilience, reliability. The one features human manipulation, the other divine enabling or engracing, reinforcing the point that inner transformation is the source of responsible conduct.”—*The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 308.

The second intriguing difference between Paul’s two lists is that the vice list is deliberately labeled as plural in number: “works of the flesh.” “Fruit of the Spirit,” however, is singular. This difference may suggest that the life lived in the flesh can promote nothing more than division, turmoil, divisiveness, and disunity. In contrast, the life lived in the realm of the Spirit produces one fruit of the Spirit, which manifests itself in nine qualities that foster unity.

In this context, some people claim that what a person believes about God does not really matter as long as he or she is sincere. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Paul’s list of vices suggests the opposite: corrupt views about God lead to distorted ideas about sexual behavior and religion and ethics, resulting in the breakdown of human relationships. Furthermore, they can lead to the loss of eternal life (Gal. 5:21).

Look through the list of “works of the flesh.” In what ways can you see each as a violation of one or more of the Ten Commandments?
STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: For Paul, walking by the Spirit is the opposite of gratifying the desires of the flesh. Throughout many of the Pauline letters, the metaphors of flesh and spirit are played against each other. Some have misunderstood Paul’s intentions. The ascetics misinterpreted these writings to condemn every aspect of physical existence. Many monastic movements were built upon this suspicion of the body or humanity’s physical nature. Two equally repulsive viewpoints emerged. The monastic movements espoused the position that the body itself was irreparably evil and must be denied, punished, deprived, and otherwise humbled to achieve righteousness. Nourishment, sexual expression, and other ordinary pleasures were denied to humiliate the body and purge wickedness. Their extreme opponents taught that since the body was beyond redemption, their treatment of the body was inconsequential. Therefore gluttony, drunkenness, laziness, and various sexual perversions were considered acceptable because only souls, not bodies, mattered. Neither extreme is correct. Body and spirit were divinely created perfect; thus, neither is inherently evil. Sin entered and corrupted every aspect of human existence. Divine redemption is not merely spiritual but physical and mental also.

Bible Commentary

I. The Christian’s Conflict (Review Galatians 5:17 and Romans 7:14–24 with the class.)

The means by which God redeems our corrupted human spirit and body is the Holy Spirit. In Romans, chapter 8, Paul outlines the working of God’s Spirit in human lives. God’s Spirit accomplishes through human weaknesses what law could never achieve. Battles daily rage within human souls between flesh, symbolizing self-destructive desires and propensities, and the Spirit, representing everything God has invested to liberate the captive individual. Law—external reinforcement of societal standards for preserving life—will always be necessary to restrain individuals who selfishly live to gratify every personal craving regardless of their actions’ impact upon others. Nevertheless, restraining selfishness should never be equated with producing righteousness.
The Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–24)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22, 23, ESV). In what ways does obedience to the Ten Commandments reflect the fruit of the Spirit as it is expressed in these verses? See also Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28; 22:35–40.

The Ten Commandments are not an alternative to love; they help guide us in how we are to show love, both to God and to humankind. However much it might transcend the letter of the law, love is not in conflict with the law. The idea that love for God and love for our neighbor void the Ten Commandments makes about as much sense as saying that love for nature voids the law of gravity.

Also, in contrast to the 15 one-word descriptions of the works of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit is described in nine elegant virtues. Scholars believe these nine virtues are organized into three clusters of three, but there is little agreement on the significance of their order. Some see an implicit reference to the Trinity in the number three; others believe the three triads reflect the ways in which we should relate to God, to our neighbor, and, finally, to ourselves; and others see the list as essentially a description of Jesus. Although each of these views has some merit, the most significant point not to be overlooked is the supreme importance Paul places on love in the Christian life.

The fact that Paul lists love as the first of the nine virtues is not accidental. He has already highlighted the central role of love in the Christian life in Galatians 5:6 and 13, and he includes it in his virtue lists elsewhere (2 Cor. 6:6, 1 Tim. 4:12, 6:11, and 2 Tim. 2:22). Whereas all the other virtues appear also in non-Christian sources, love is distinctly Christian. All this indicates that love should be seen not merely as one virtue among many but as the cardinal Christian virtue that is the key to all other virtues. Love is the preeminent fruit of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:13, Rom. 5:5), and it should define the life and attitudes of every Christian (John 13:34, 35), however difficult at times it might be to show love.

How much self-denial is involved in love? Can you love without self-denial? What does Jesus teach us about love and self-denial?
Most religions part company with Christianity here. Most religions are mechanisms for restraining evil that utilize retribution to enforce social conformity. Righteousness is achieved by appeasing the deity through conformity to societal rules. Sadly, legalistic expressions of Christianity travel that same road. Genuine Christianity, however, recognizes that rules are powerless to transform the rebellious human heart. Only an intelligent appreciation of God’s love and its supreme expression at Calvary can effectively redirect self-centeredness into God-centeredness.

**Consider This:** When believers recognize their shortcomings, how should they initiate positive change? What resources has heaven provided to those who sincerely desire righteousness? How can the spiritual battle’s intensity be minimized? As the believer’s life is increasingly filled by God’s Spirit, what is being displaced? How should Christians avoid the temptation to concentrate their efforts on changing behavior when the effective strategy would be to facilitate the Spirit’s invasion of our lives?

### **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Paul outlines nine virtues known as the fruit of the Spirit, which characterize the Spirit’s working within the surrendered life. Just as natural fruit is created through internal plant processes that transform the soil’s nutrients into delectable grapes, strawberries, and mangoes, so spiritual fruit is generated by the Spirit's work upon the human heart. Experimenters have successfully replicated the taste and shape of various fruits by carefully analyzing their chemical structure and externally assembling their various components. Such fruit-like things, however, have never reproduced themselves. Artificial copies lack one essential: life! Externally assembled morality bears some resemblance to authentic character, but it remains lifeless, incapable of reproducing itself. Only internally generated spiritual fruit endures forever and yields offspring. Thus, faithfulness engenders faithfulness, kindness encourages kindness, gentleness generates gentleness, etc.

**Activity:** Bring some high-quality artificial fruit to class—some that could almost be mistaken for real fruit. Bring real fruit that matches the artificial fruit you have selected. Fill a container with both types of fruit. The container must allow class participants to view the fruit from
The Way to Victory

Although an inward conflict between the flesh and the Spirit always will rage in the heart of every believer, the Christian life does not have to be dominated by defeat, failure, and sin.

According to Galatians 5:16–26, what is the key to living a life where the Spirit reigns over the flesh?

Galatians 5:16–26 contains five key verbs that describe the type of life in which the Spirit reigns. First, the believer needs to “walk” in the Spirit (vs. 16). The Greek verb is peripateo, which literally means “to walk around or to follow.” The followers of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle came to be known as the Peripatetics because they followed Aristotle everywhere he went. The fact that the verb is in the present tense implies that Paul is not talking about an occasional walk but rather a continuous daily experience. In addition, since it is also a command “to walk” in the Spirit, it implies that walking in the Spirit is a choice we have to make on a daily basis.

The second verb is “to be led” (vs. 18). This suggests that we also need to allow the Spirit to lead us where we should go (compare Rom. 8:14, 1 Cor. 12:2). It is not our job to lead but to follow.

The next two verbs appear in Galatians 5:25. The first is “to live” (zao in Greek). By “live,” Paul is referring to the new-birth experience that must mark the life of every believer. Paul’s use of the present tense points to a new-birth experience that is to be renewed daily. Because we live by the Spirit, Paul goes on to write that we also need “to walk” by the Spirit. The word translated as “walk” is different from the one in verse 16. Here the word is stoicheo. It is a military term that literally means “to draw up in a line,” “to keep in step,” or “to conform.” The idea here is that the Spirit not only gives us life but should direct our lives on a daily basis also.

The verb Paul uses in verse 24 is “to crucify.” This is a little shocking. If we are to follow the Spirit, we must make a firm decision to put to death the desires of the flesh. Of course, Paul is speaking figuratively. We crucify the flesh by feeding our spiritual life and by starving the desires of the flesh.

What changes and choices must you make in order to have the victories you are promised in Christ—victories that now continually elude you?
a distance. Transparent bowls are ideal. Place the container within your meeting location but at some distance from where participants sit. Read Matthew 7:16. Or, alternately, if these items are unavailable, ask class members to compare artificial fruit to real fruit, describing the differences, and then read the text from Scripture and answer the questions below.

**Thought Questions:** How can the artificial fruit be discerned from the authentic fruit? Would discerning become easier if the fruit container was closer? What methods might be used to eliminate doubts concerning which was which? Would biting into the fruit settle the question? How can believers discern genuine spiritual fruit within others? Within themselves? How might biting circumstances and trials distinguish between genuine spiritual fruit and the morally good look-alike?

### STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The strongest Christian gathers strength from the encouragement of fellow believers. Beginning Christians are even needier. By recognizing the Spirit’s transforming power in our acquaintances’ lives and acknowledging that recognition to the person, one may mightily encourage others to continue growing. Remember, recognition is only the first phase; expressing that recognition must follow.

**Activity:** Gather New Year’s cards, generic holiday greetings cards, or some attractive nonseasonal stationery. Or if such cards or stationery is unavailable, any paper will do. Distribute to class members and encourage them to write an encouraging note to someone whose life has blessed their own. Recognize a specific spiritual attribute that can be tied to a specific biblical reference. Two prominent lists of godly attributes were contained in our theme chapter (Galatians 5) and also 2 Peter 1. The blessing presented could have been received secondhand. For example, the note could be directed to someone who led the class member’s parents to Christ, indirectly contributing to his or her spiritual advancement. Share how that blessing has affected the class member personally, as well as other family members or friends. Share also how Christ has used your life to bless others. (In some ways this could be described as the divine pyramid marketing plan: the uplinks receive credit for the downlinks’ spiritual influence!) Either provide postage so that the messages can be left with you for mailing, or encourage class participants to deliver or mail the notes themselves.
Further Study: “The life of the Christian is not all smooth. He has stern conflicts to meet. Severe temptations assail him. ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.’ The nearer we come to the close of this earth’s history, the more delusive and ensnaring will be the attacks of the enemy. His attacks will grow fiercer and more frequent. Those who resist light and truth will become more hardened and unimpressible, and more bitter against those who love God and keep His commandments (MS 33, 1911).”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1111.

“The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not see Christ and speak to Him, but His Holy Spirit is just as near us in one place as in another. It works in and through every one who receives Christ. Those who know the indwelling of the Spirit reveal the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (MS 41, 1897).”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1112.

Discussion Questions:

1. Dwell more on the idea of crucifying the desires of the flesh. What does that mean? How do we do it? How often do we have to do it? Why would Paul use such a strong verb? What does his use of the word crucify tell us about just how hard the battle with self is?

2. What role, if any, does human effort play in producing the fruit of the Spirit? What does your own experience tell you about this role?

3. Paul says that those who practice the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. How do you reconcile this statement with the fact that Paul says we are saved by faith and not by works?

4. In your own walk with the Lord, what’s the biggest struggle you face? Is it not sin and what sin does to your relationship with God? What Christian hasn’t felt alienation, doubt, and disappointment as a result of the sin in his or her life, especially because we have the promise of victory over that sin? Given this fact in the context of victory over sin, why must we always remember that our salvation rests totally upon what Jesus has done for us?

Summary: Although in the life of all believers a conflict exists between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, the Christian life does not have to be doomed to failure. Because Christ has conquered the power of sin and death, the Christian life can be a life where the Spirit reigns, bringing a daily supply of God’s grace that enables us to keep the desires of the flesh at bay.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Gal. 6:1–10, Matt. 18:15–17, 1 Cor. 10:12, Rom. 15:1, John 13:34, Luke 22:3.

Memory Text: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10, ESV).

S ome potato farmers decided to save the biggest potatoes for themselves and to plant the smaller potatoes as seed. After a few disappointing harvests, they discovered that nature had reduced their potato crops to the size of marbles. Through this disaster, those farmers learned an important law of life.

“They could not have the best things of life for themselves and use the leftovers for seed. The law of life decreed that the harvest would reflect the planting.

“In another sense, planting small potatoes is still common practice. We take the big things of life for ourselves and plant the leftovers. We expect that by some crazy twist of spiritual laws, our selfishness will be rewarded with unselfishness.”—International Student Fellowship Newsletter, March 2007.

Paul applies this principle in Galatians 6:1–10. Instead of members “bit[ing] and devour[ing] one another” (Gal. 5:15), the church should be a place where the Spirit leads us to put others before ourselves. Understanding that we are saved by grace should make us humble and more patient and compassionate in how we treat others.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 24.
Restoring the Fallen

While Paul has lofty expectations for the nature of the Christian life (Gal. 5:16), his counsel to the believers in Galatians 6:1 also is refreshingly realistic. Humans are not perfect, and even the most dedicated Christians are not immune to mistakes. In Greek, Paul’s words in Galatians 5:16 indicate that he is envisioning a situation that is likely to happen in the church at some time. Paul gives the Galatians practical advice on how to deal with such situations when they arise.

How should Christians respond when a fellow believer falls into some sinful behavior? Gal. 6:1, Matt. 18:15–17.

To benefit from Paul’s advice in Galatians 6:1, we need to understand the precise type of situation that Paul has in mind. This revolves around two words used in the first half of the sentence. The first word is caught (ESV) or overtaken (KJV). It literally means “to be detected, overtaken, or surprised.” The context and different nuances associated with this word suggest that Paul has two aspects in mind. It refers not only to a believer who “catches” another believer in the act of some wrongdoing but also to the process by which a person finds himself “overtaken” by a behavior (see Prov. 5:22) that, under the best of circumstances, he would have chosen to avoid.

The likelihood that the wrongdoing Paul is discussing is not deliberate is evident from the terminology he uses. The word translated “fault” (KJV) or “sin” (NIV), which comes from the Greek word paraptoma, does not refer to a deliberate sin but rather to a mistake, a stumble, or a false step. The latter makes particular sense in light of Paul’s previous comments about “walking” in the Spirit. Although this in no way excuses the person’s mistake, it makes clear that Paul is not dealing with a case of defiant sin (1 Cor. 5:1–5).

The proper response in such circumstances should not be punishment, condemnation, or disfellowship but restoration. The Greek word translated “restore” is katartizo and means “to mend” or “to put in order.” In the New Testament it is used as “mending” fishnets (Matt. 4:21), and in Greek literature it is used as a medical term describing the process of setting a broken bone. In the same way that we would not abandon a fellow believer who fell and broke a leg, as members of the body of Christ we should gently care for our brothers and sisters in Christ who may stumble and fall as we walk together on the path to God’s kingdom.

Instead of practicing Matthew 18:15–17, why do we so often talk badly about the person with whom we’re angry, let our anger simmer against the person, or even plan revenge?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Galatians 6:10

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Review the ways in which living in and through Christ instructs the way we relate to others.

**Feel:** Sense the dangers that spiritual pride carries, especially for Christians who believe themselves safe from temptation.

**Do:** Love our neighbors as we care for ourselves, thus fulfilling the law of Christ.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Doing Good**

- A How should Christians relate to their brothers and sisters who have stumbled?
- B Why is it especially important to treat others who are burdened as we would like to be treated?

II. **Feel: Spiritual Pride**

- A Why is spiritual pride such a danger to Christians?
- B How can we guard against an indifferent, cold, critical spirit?
- C Why is a thoughtful self-examination and evaluation important?
- D What biblical examples illustrate the perils of thinking too much of our own abilities?

III. **Do: The Law of Christ**

- A How does loving our neighbor fulfill the law of Christ?
- B Where do our greatest challenges arise in bearing one another’s burdens?
- C What family members do we need to serve in this way?
- D What gender, racial, tribal, or class prejudices do we carry that need to be eradicated?

**Summary:** When the law of Christ is fulfilled in our lives, we will care for those who have fallen and who are burdened. We will recognize our own weaknesses and humbly submit to every evidence of truth, lest we become spiritually proud and blind.
Beware of Temptation

“And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7).

The seriousness of Paul’s words in Galatians 6:1—to guard our own lives lest we also follow into temptation—should not be overlooked. An indication of the urgency and personal concern behind Paul’s counsel can be seen in the way he makes his appeal. The word translated “considering” (KJV) or “take care” (NRSV) literally means “to look at carefully” or “to pay careful attention to” (compare Rom. 16:17, Phil. 2:4). So, what Paul literally is saying is, “keep a careful eye on yourself” lest sin also takes you by surprise. To highlight this warning, Paul switches from the second person plural (“you all”) in the first half of Galatians 6:1 to the second person singular (“you”) in the last half of the verse. This is no general warning that applies to the whole congregation; it is a personal warning addressed to each individual within the church.

Paul does not explicitly identify the nature of the temptation that he so strongly warns the Galatians against. Perhaps he didn’t have one specific trespass in mind but was simply referring to the danger of committing the same sin, whatever it is, from which they are trying to restore another. At the same time, his words in Galatians 5:26 against becoming “conceited” (NKJV) suggest that he is warning them against feeling that they are in some way spiritually superior to those whom they are restoring.

Why would Paul need to warn the Galatians against spiritual pride?

Consider 1 Cor. 10:12, Matt. 26:34, 2 Sam. 12:1–7.

One of the greatest dangers to the Christian walk is a sense of spiritual pride that makes us think we are somehow immune to committing certain types of sin. The sobering fact is that we all have the same sinful nature—a nature that is opposed to God. Thus, without the restraining power of God’s Spirit, we could stoop to just about any sin, given the right circumstances. Such an awareness of our true identity outside of Christ can keep us from falling into the sin of self-righteousness, and it also can give us greater sympathy for others who make mistakes.

How many times have you found yourself condemning others (maybe even only in your heart) for doing sins that, one day, you were guilty of yourself?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God has commissioned the church as His transforming agent upon the earth.

The omnipotent Savior might have bypassed humanity when reaching the lost world. What could sinful, weakened, vacillating humans contribute to this noble enterprise? Dispatch the sinless angelic host, mobilize the faithful creatures from other galaxies, or utilize divine remote controls: the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of the universe had these and thousands of additional options at His disposal. Nevertheless, He included the fellowship of redeemed individuals, the church, as His distributing agency.

Care should be exercised in expressing this truth. The church has the privilege and opportunity of sharing and modeling the gospel before fallen humanity. This sacred responsibility, however, is not proprietary. Humans do not possess franchise authority, and they cannot deny access to God. The Holy Spirit is God’s primary disseminator of grace with the church, assuming the role of cooperating agency. Rather than denying access to God, the church’s work is to expand access. What glorious opportunities! The church works hand in hand with God to evangelize and nurture fallen human beings. Miraculous transformation and reformation occur constantly within this divinely originated and ordained fellowship. Changed lives, restored relationships, guilt-free consciences, and spiritual support form only a portion of the benefits enjoyed through association with God’s church.

Opening Activity: Every new year brings renewed hope. Fresh opportunities, coupled with release from the previous year’s missteps and mistakes, make this annual beginning a much-anticipated and celebrated event. Share print media articles, newscast downloads, and/or other information regarding the new year captured from current sources. Discuss why the prospect of something new generates widespread interest and high expectations. Compare the church’s role in pointing us to the Lord, who provides release from prior mistakes and a chance to start afresh, forgiven and cleansed.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Scripture proclaims release for captives, release from condemnation, and freedom from dominating propensities. This
Burden Bearing (Gal. 6:2–5)

In addition to restoring the fallen, what other instructions does Paul give to the believers in Galatia? Gal. 6:2–5; see also Rom. 15:1, Matt. 7:12.

The Greek word translated “burden” in Galatians 6:5 is baros. It literally referred to a heavy weight or load that someone had to carry a long distance. Over time, however, it became a metaphor for any type of trouble or difficulty, such as the burden of a long day’s work on a hot day (Matt. 20:12). While the immediate context of Paul’s injunction to “bear one another’s burdens” certainly includes the moral lapses of the fellow believers mentioned in the preceding verse, the concept of burden bearing that he has in mind is much broader. Paul’s instructions reveal several spiritual insights about the Christian life that should not be overlooked.

First, as Timothy George notes, “All Christians have burdens. Our burdens may differ in size and shape and will vary in kind depending on the providential order of our lives. For some it is the burden of temptation and the consequences of a moral lapse, as in verse 1 here. For others it may be a physical ailment, or a mental disorder, or a family crisis, or lack of employment, or demonic oppression, or a host of other things; but no Christian is exempt from burdens.”—Galatians, p. 413.

Second, God does not intend for us to bear all our burdens alone. Unfortunately, we often are far more willing to help others to carry their burdens than we are in allowing others to help us shoulder our own. Paul condemns this attitude of self-sufficiency (Gal. 6:3) as human pride—when we refuse to admit that we also have needs and weaknesses. Such pride not only robs us of the comfort of others but also prevents others from fulfilling the ministry that God has called them to perform.

Finally, God calls us to bear the burdens of others because it is through our actions that God’s comfort is made manifest. This concept is built on the fact that the church is the body of Christ. An illustration of this is in Paul’s words, “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:6, ESV). Notice that “God’s comfort was not given to Paul through his private prayer and waiting upon the Lord but through the companionship of a friend and through the good news that he brought.

“Human friendship, in which we bear one another’s burdens, is part of the purpose of God for His people.”—John R. W. Stott, The Message of Galatians, p. 158.

What keeps you from seeking help—pride, shame, lack of trust, a sense of self-sufficiency? If in need, why not seek out someone whom you trust and ask this person to share your burdens?
remains Heaven’s highest work. Jesus sacrificed everything at Calvary and then commissioned His representatives (the church), energized through His abiding Spirit, to enlighten a darkened planet with spiritual expectation. That expectation includes forgiveness for every transgression, deliverance from every imaginable temptation, and an increasing intimacy with God through which our lives are continuously transformed and renewed. Believers find meaning through assisting newer believers with encouragement, stimulating the confidence that matures only whenever obstacles have been successfully encountered and overcome.

Bible Commentary

I. Restoring the Fallen (Review Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15–17 with the class.)

The church’s constant objective is restoration, not condemnation. Many understand the terminology of church discipline punitively. Well-intentioned members, zealous to protect the church’s reputation, declare that the erring must be separated in order to avoid contamination. This is a very dangerous approach. The religious leadership of Christ’s time was anxious about condemning the adulterous woman in John 8; but were they themselves sinless? Had they no need for forgiveness? Was there no divine condemnation for their hypocrisy? Perhaps the notion of protecting the church’s reputation needs reexamination. Compare the work of a hospital. Hospitals exist for the purpose of physical healing and restoration. Does every patient leave the hospital alive? Obviously not. Does the presence of occasional casualties nullify the hospital’s mission and purpose? Would your community declare that the local hospital should close because it lost a patient? Should hospitals limit their services to those with common colds and other easily curable diseases in order to enhance their track record and bolster their reputation, turning away trauma patients, cancer victims, and other difficult cases? Rather than dismissing difficult cases, physicians aggressively tackle them, researching new methodologies and techniques to effect healing. Disease is meticulously studied, new therapies are developed, and yesterday’s death-sentence diseases become today’s miraculous breakthroughs.

Perhaps those who work with spiritual illness should adopt a similar attitude. Thus, discipline would become redemptive rather than punitive, and the church’s reputation would rest upon the compassionate and aggressively creative way believers fight the sin disease. Christians should forcefully battle sin, not sinners. Obviously, some will be lost. But should churches start limiting their ministry to good citizen types in order to bolster their success rate, their action would prove that they have forgotten their purpose. Discipline, in Paul’s usage, refers to

Paul’s use of the phrase “the law of Christ” (ton nomon tou Christou) occurs nowhere else in the Bible, although he uses a similar expression in 1 Corinthians 9:21 (ennomos Christou). The uniqueness of this phrase has resulted in a number of different interpretations. Some mistakenly argue that this is evidence that the law of God given at Sinai has been replaced by a different law, the law of Christ. Others claim the word law simply means a general “principle” (see Rom. 7:21), meaning that in bearing the burdens of others we are following the example of Jesus. While the latter interpretation has some merit, the context and similar terminology with Galatians 5:14 suggest that “fulfilling the law of Christ” is another reference to fulfilling the moral law through love. Paul showed earlier in his letter that the moral law was not annulled with the coming of Christ. Instead, the moral law as interpreted by love continues to play an important role in the Christian life. This is the epitome of what Jesus taught during His earthly ministry and also practiced throughout His life and even in His death. In bearing the burdens of others, we are not only following in the footsteps of Jesus, we are also fulfilling the law.

Another issue arises in these texts, the apparent contradiction between Galatians 6:2 and 6:5. This problem, however, is easily resolved when one realizes that Paul is using two different words to describe two different situations. As we have already seen, the word for burden in verse 2 (baros) refers to a heavy load that has to be carried for a long distance. The word phortion in verse 5, however, refers to a ship’s cargo, a soldier’s backpack, or even a child in the womb. Whereas the former burdens can be laid aside, the latter cannot. A pregnant mother must carry her own child. As this example suggests, there are some burdens that people can help us bear but others that no human can bear for us, such as the burden of a guilty conscience, suffering, and death. For these, we must rely on God’s help alone (Matt. 11:28–30).

While you can get help from other people with some burdens, some you have to take to the Lord alone. How can you learn to give to the Lord the things that you, yourself, just can’t bear?
training in righteousness. It is a series of actions or behaviors whose objective is forming a more intimate relationship with God. Far from being punitive, Paul’s discipline is restorative and positive. Like fine-tuned triage units, churches become centers for cooperation and accountability in achieving a common goal: the healing of sin-scarred hearts through the life-giving love of God.

**Consider This:** What should characterize the attitude of those who take up the work of visiting backsliders? How did Jesus approach the fallen? How can Christians safeguard themselves against the temptations from which they would rescue the fallen? What does *sharing one another’s burden* mean?

### II. Sowing and Reaping *(Review Galatians 6:6–10 with the class.)*

In the context of bearing one’s burdens or responsibilities, Paul urged the responsibility of supporting the teachers who proclaimed sound doctrine. Using proverbial language familiar to his readers, he urged them to make sound investments because those who expected a bountiful harvest must plant abundantly. While the immediate context regards the material support of teachers, the text enjoys an even wider spiritual application. Spiritual attainments are proportionate with spiritual investments. Those who desire greater spiritual strength must engage in spiritual exercise and avoid spiritual fast food. Little investment equals little advancement. Spiritual profitability arises from investing time with spiritual things.

**Consider This:** Whenever believers’ lives are dominated by secular media—television, radio, Internet, and so on—how can they expect significant spiritual progress? What should dominate the Christian’s time should he or she desire intimate fellowship with God? How can Christians spiritually invest themselves in others, especially those who are not yet believers?

### STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Those concerned about their financial future understand the value of investment planning and are willing to expend significant financial resources in order to maximize the return on their investments.Sadly, churches often proceed haphazardly about business that far exceeds finances in importance. Christ’s sacrifice was infinitely more valuable than the world’s pooled monetary worth; yet, believers...
Sowing and Reaping (Gal. 6:6–10)

In Galatians 6:7, the word translated “mocked” (*mukterizo*) occurs only here in the New Testament, although it often appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It literally means “to turn up one’s nose in contempt.” In the Old Testament it typically refers to the despising of God’s prophets (2 Chron. 36:16, Jer. 20:7), and it even is used once to describe graphically a rebellious attitude toward God (Ezek. 8:17).

Paul’s point is that people may ignore God or even flout His commands, but they cannot outwit God. He is the ultimate judge, and in the end they will have to pay the price for their actions.


Paul’s metaphor about sowing and reaping is not unique. It is a fact of life that appears in many ancient proverbial sayings. What is significant, however, is how Paul uses it to highlight his previous comments about the flesh and the Spirit. James D. G. Dunn notes, “A modern equivalent is that we are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choice.”—*Galatians*, p. 330.

Although God does not always deliver us from the earthly consequences of our sins, we should not be overcome with despair for the bad choices we have made. We can rejoice that God has forgiven us of our sins and adopted us as His children. We should capitalize on the opportunities we have now to invest in those things that will yield a heavenly harvest.

Galatians 6:10, meanwhile, illustrates the point that “Christian ethics has a dual focus: one is universal and all-embracing, ‘Let us do good to all people’; the other is particular and specific, ‘especially to those who belong to the family of believers.’ Paul’s universalistic appeal was based on the fact that all persons everywhere are created in the image of God and are thus infinitely precious in his sight. Whenever Christians have forgotten this primary datum of biblical revelation, they have inevitably fallen victim to the blinding sins of racism, sexism, tribalism, classism, and a thousand other bigotries that have blighted the human community from Adam and Eve to the present day.”—Timothy George, *Galatians*, pp. 427, 428.

You are sowing, either for good or bad. Look at yourself. What kind of harvest are you going to reap?
randomly, rather than intentionally, approach the work of investing in the lives of nonbelievers. Through the eyes of the following exercise, seek to cultivate intentionality about spiritual investments that reach the spiritually drifting souls in your community.

**Activity:** Create a deck of cards from plain 3 x 5 cards (minimum: 10). On each card, list a phrase that expresses one means by which the church can transform society. Focus on methods that your church has employed or those offering the most potential for your community. Have members pick cards at random. They should read the card and express the concept in their own words. Have them evaluate the effectiveness of the concept in terms of the church’s work of spiritual transformation using a numerical scale from 0 through 10 (10 being optimal and 0 representing total ineffectiveness). Members should justify their evaluations by offering their reasoning to the entire class, who, in turn, should offer their observations.

Gather the salient points and develop a profile of those characteristics that best prepare the church for its role of spiritual transformation. The list should not be limited to the following assortment of activities and approaches. Use whatever is appropriate and omit the rest. **List:** (1) distributing literature, (2) children’s summer camps, (3) parent-sitting the elderly, (4) inviting neighbors to evangelistic meetings, (5) visiting the imprisoned, (6) visiting the homebound, (7) coaching children’s baseball, (8) street-corner preaching, (9) door-to-door evangelism, (10) offering health classes, (11) acquiring clothing and basic necessities for the destitute and disadvantaged, (12) forgiving a fellow member for unkind words spoken, (13) mending a child’s pants, (14) taking single-parent children picnicking, (15) sharing with neighbors about Sabbath keeping.

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** While planning and committees are valuable tools, the church never transformed a life in a committee meeting (never say never, but you understand the point). Merely talking about the gospel’s transforming power (as in a Sabbath School discussion) does little to fulfill the gospel commission. Challenge your class to get outside the walls and into the streets, making a difference in those ways for which God has uniquely equipped your class.

**Activity:** Develop an approach to some community need during the final phase of your Sabbath School that the class commits to carry out. Set actual dates, times, and deadlines for accomplishing various phases of your endeavor.
**Further Study:** “The Spirit of God keeps evil under the control of conscience. When man exalts himself above the influence of the Spirit, he reaps a harvest of iniquity. Over such a man the Spirit has less and less influence to restrain him from sowing seeds of disobedience. Warnings have less and less power over him. He gradually loses his fear of God. He sows to the flesh; he will reap corruption. The harvest of the seed that he himself has sown, is ripening. He has a contempt for God’s holy commandments. His heart of flesh becomes a heart of stone. Resistance to truth confirms him in iniquity. It is because men sowed seeds of evil, that lawlessness, crime, and violence prevailed in the antediluvian world.

“All should be intelligent in regard to the agency by which the soul is destroyed. It is not because of any decree that God has sent out against man. He does not make man spiritually blind. God gives sufficient light and evidence to enable man to distinguish truth from error. But He does not force man to receive truth. He leaves him free to choose the good or to choose the evil. If man resists evidence that is sufficient to guide his judgment in the right direction, and chooses evil once, he will do this more readily the second time. The third time he will still more eagerly withdraw himself from God and choose to stand on the side of Satan. And in this course he will continue until he is confirmed in evil, and believes the lie he has cherished as truth. His resistance has produced its harvest (MS 126, 1901).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1112.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In a practical sense, what does it really mean to “restore” a fellow believer who has fallen into sin? In what ways does the nature of the sin committed affect the restoration process? Does restoration mean that everything will be the same as before? Discuss.

2. Because there are some burdens that people must bear on their own (Gal. 6:5), how does a believer determine if he or she should try to help someone?

3. How does your church measure up to Paul’s instructions in Galatians 6? What can you do personally to make a difference?

**Summary:** The indication of God’s presence among His people is in the Christlike spirit manifest within the church. It can be seen in the way forgiveness and restoration are extended to those who err, in how they help each other in trials, and in intentional acts of kindness shared not only among themselves but also with unbelievers.
Boasting in the Cross

SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Gal. 6:11–18, Rom. 6:1–6, 12:1–8, 2 Cor. 4:10, 5:17, 11:23–29.

**Memory Text:** “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14, ESV).

This study on Galatians has been intense. That’s because the letter itself is intense. Knowing his calling, knowing the truth of what he preached (after all, as he said numerous times, that truth came from the Lord), Paul wrote with the inspired passion of the Old Testament prophets, of an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, a Hosea. Just as they pleaded with the people of God in their time to turn away from their error, Paul here is doing the same with those in his time.

No matter how different the immediate circumstances were, in the end the words of Jeremiah could just as easily apply to the Galatians as they did to those in Jeremiah’s day: “Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorifieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jer. 9:23, 24).

Nowhere do our “glorious” human wisdom, our riches, and our might appear more clearly in all their futility and vanity than before the Cross of Christ—the focus of Paul’s letter to his erring flock in Galatia.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 31.*
Paul’s Own Hand

**Compare** Paul’s closing remarks in Galatians 6:11–18 to the final remarks he makes in his other letters. In what way is the ending of Galatians similar to, and different from, them? See the final remarks in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Paul’s closing remarks are not always uniform, but a number of common elements appear in them: (1) greetings to specific individuals, (2) a final exhortation, (3) a personal signature, and (4) a closing benediction. When these typical features are compared to Paul’s final remarks in Galatians, two significant differences appear.

First, unlike many of Paul’s letters, Galatians contains no personal greetings. Why? As with the absence of the traditional thanksgiving at the beginning of the letter, this is probably a further indication of the strained relationship between Paul and the Galatians. Paul is polite but formal.

Second, we must remember that it was Paul’s custom to dictate his letters to a scribe (Rom. 16:22). Then after finishing, Paul often would take the pen himself and write a few brief words with his own hand to end the letter (1 Cor. 16:21). In Galatians, however, Paul deviates from his practice. When he takes the pen from the scribe, Paul is still so concerned with the circumstances in Galatia that he ends up writing more instead. He simply cannot put the pen down until he pleads with the Galatians once more to turn from their foolish ways.

In Galatians 6:11 Paul stresses that he wrote the letter with large letters. We really don’t know why. Some have speculated that Paul was not referring to the size of the letters but to their misshaped form. They suggest that perhaps Paul’s hands were either so crippled from persecution or gnarled from tent making that he could not form his letters with precision. Others believe his comments provide further evidence of his poor eyesight. Although both views are possible, it seems far less speculative to conclude simply that Paul was intentionally writing with large letters in order to underscore and reemphasize his point, similar to the way we might emphasize an important word or concept by underlining it, putting it in italics, or writing it in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Whatever the reason, Paul certainly wanted the readers to heed his warning and admonitions.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Galatians 6:14

The Student Will:

Know: Analyze Paul’s closing comments to the Galatians as they reveal the heart of his passion for the gospel and the church.
Feel: Empathize with Paul’s deep concern over the Galatians’ spiritual condition and their relationships with him and the false teachers.
Do: Boast only in the cross as the heart of our life and mission.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Large Letters

A How is the closing of Paul’s letter to the Galatians different from the closings of many of his other letters?
B What is his most insistent theme in the letter, reflected in the closing?
C What is his only boast, and how has he suffered because of this passion?

II. Feel: Not Interested in Impressing

A If Paul had been interested in making a good impression on the church, how might his ending have been different?
B What strong feelings are evident in his closing?
C How might referring to his personal cost and the scars of his mission service on his body have touched the Galatians’ hearts?

III. Do: Our Only Boast

A What motivation lies at the heart of our lives?
B What things do we tend to boast about?
C How would our lives be different if we boasted only of the Cross?

Summary: Paul closes his letter to the Galatians with a strong personal appeal, rejecting any outward allegiance to custom and clinging only to the Cross as his reason for life and service, whatever the cost.
Boasting in the Flesh

Read Galatians 6:12, 13. What is Paul saying in these verses?

Although Paul has hinted previously about the agenda and motivation of his opponents (see Gal. 1:7, 4:17), his remarks in Galatians 6:12, 13 are the first explicit comments he makes about his opponents. He describes them as wanting “to make a good showing in the flesh” (ESV). The phrase “a good showing” in Greek literally means to put on “a good face.” In fact, the word for “face” is the same in Greek as the word for an actor’s mask, and this word was even used figuratively to refer to the role played by an actor. In other words, Paul is saying that these people were like actors seeking the approval of an audience. In a culture based on honor and shame, conformity is essential, and those teaching the errors appear to have been seeking to improve their honor rating before their fellow Jews in Galatia and other Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem.

Paul makes an important point about one of their motives—the desire to avoid persecution. Although persecution can certainly be understood in its more dramatic forms involving physical abuse, it can be just as damaging even in its more “mild” forms of harassment and exclusion. Paul and other fanatical zealots in Judea had once carried out the former type (Gal. 1:13), but the latter also had its effect on Christians.

The Jewish religious leaders still had significant political influence in many areas. They had the official sanction of Rome; hence, many Jewish believers were eager to maintain good relations with them. By circumcising Gentiles and teaching them to observe the Torah, the troublemakers in Galatia could find a point of common ground with the local Jews. Not only would this allow them to maintain friendly contact with the synagogues, but they could even strengthen their ties with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, who had a growing suspicion about the work being done with the Gentiles (Acts 21:20, 21). No doubt, too, in one sense their actions could have made their witness to the Jews more effective.

Whatever situation Paul has in mind, his meaning is clear: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12, NKJV).

Think through the reason these people had for teaching their errors. It sounds pretty reasonable, all things considered. What should this tell us about how even the “best” of motives can lead us astray if we aren’t careful? When was the last time you ended up doing wrong things for the right motives?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Sincere believers boast, not about their achievements but only about the sacrifice that Christ has made in their behalf.

The distinction between authentic Christianity and self-serving religion sometimes appears minuscule. Appearances aside, the divide is gargantuan. Christianity boasts about Christ alone. Self-serving religion speaks glowingly about Christ and churchly achievements. People, even at times ministers, have to be careful about boasting about their spiritual accomplishments, especially in contrast to others who might not, at least on the surface, be as “successful.” Only one comparison, though, is worth noting: Christ versus humanity. Here there is really no comparison. The most distinguished labor, the most eloquent speech, the most accomplished academics, the most polished administration, equals rubbish apart from Christ.

Implicitly contrasting his spiritual approach with his opponents’ self-aggrandizing approach, Paul declares that his only boast is Christ. Recognizing that Christ alone shapes the mission and guarantees its successful accomplishment, Paul acknowledges that human effort, apart from Christ, is nothing. Christ is the beginning. Christ is the conclusion. Christ is everything.

Opening Activity: Purchase an inexpensive, easily recognizable figurine from some thrift store. During class, coat the figurine with paint. Discuss how painting affects the shape of the figurine (it changes nothing). While the paint is drying, sprinkle glitter on the figurine. Discuss how the glitter affects the shape (again, it changes nothing). If supplies for this activity are unavailable, describe the activity in your own words, emphasizing the following points: the substance or basic shape of the figurine remains unchanged; therefore, any recognition for the paint and glitter must be secondary, for they would have no shape without the figurine. Christians are the paint and glitter, but Christ is the substance and, therefore, deserves complete glory. Ask: How are believers nothing apart from the Christ figurine, who shapes and vitalizes the church’s mission?
Boasting in the Cross (Gal. 6:14)

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14).

Having exposed the motives that prompted some to insist on circumcision, Paul presents his gospel message to the Galatians one final time, although only in summary form. For Paul, the gospel is based on two fundamental tenets: (1) the centrality of the Cross (vs. 14) and (2) the doctrine of justification (vs. 15). In today’s lesson the focus is on the former.

Living in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to comprehend the shock that Paul’s comments about the Cross (Gal. 6:14) originally conveyed. Today the cross of Christ is a common and cherished symbol that evokes positive feelings for most people. In Paul’s day, however, the cross was not something to boast of but something to be despised. Jews found the idea of a crucified Messiah offensive, and Romans found crucifixion so repulsive that it was not even mentioned as a form of punishment suitable for a Roman citizen.

The contempt with which the ancient world looked upon the cross of Christ is clearly seen in the earliest drawing of the crucifixion on record. Dating back to the early second century, a piece of ancient graffiti depicts the crucifixion of a man with the head of a donkey. Below the cross and adjacent to a drawing of a man with his hands raised in worship, an inscription reads, “Alexander worships his god.” The point is clear: the cross of Christ is deemed ridiculous. It is in this context that Paul boldly declares that he can boast of nothing other than the cross of Christ!

What difference did the cross of Christ make in Paul’s relationship to the world? Gal. 6:14, Rom. 6:1–6, 12:1–8, Phil. 3:8.

The cross of Christ changes everything for the believer. It challenges us not only to reevaluate how we view ourselves but also how we relate to the world. The world—this present evil age and all that it entails (1 John 2:16)—stands in opposition to God. Because we have died with Christ, the world no longer has the enslaving power it once held over us, and the old life that we once lived for the world is no longer. Following Paul’s analogy, the break between the believer and the world should be as if the two died to each other.

What has the Cross done to affect your relationship to the world? What difference has it made in your life? How differently do you live now than you did before giving yourself to the Lord, who died for you?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The Old Testament understanding of glory comes from the concept of weight. Modern languages reflect this understanding. Some slang sometimes refers to criminal leaders as the heavies. Another phrase says “throw your weight around,” indicating, as with the slang phrase, influence, importance, elevated social position, and widespread authority. The New Testament continues this tradition, applying the term primarily to our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, and only in a secondary sense to humans (Luke 12:27, John 7:18). Glory, authority, perfection—that is, “weight”—belong to God. By comparison, humanity’s noblest achievements are filthy.

Bible Commentary

I. Boasting in the Cross (Review Galatians 6:14 with the class.)

Paul boasted about the suffering and shame represented by the cross. The most despised criminals received crucifixion. A more ignominious demise did not exist. Were Paul plebeian, outcast, educationally deficient, or religiously scorned, his identification with crucifixion might be understandable. We readily understand why persons of impoverished upbringing become social revolutionaries and terrorists, but Paul’s identification with crucifixion defies reasoning. His personal testimony was “I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:4–8, ESV). Paul was the ultimate insider, possessing the most impressive religious, educational, and social credentials available. Nevertheless, Paul’s boast became nothing other than Christ Himself. His writing demonstrates

CONTINUED
A New Creation

Having emphasized the centrality of the cross of Christ to the Christian life, Paul now emphasizes the second fundamental tenet of his gospel message: justification by faith.

As we have seen all quarter, Paul has basically pitted circumcision against the gospel. Yet, he’s not against the practice itself. Paul has made several strong statements against circumcision (see Gal. 5:2–4), but he does not want the Galatians to conclude that being uncircumcised is more pleasing to God than being circumcised. That is not his point, because one can be just as legalistic about what one does as about what one doesn’t do. Spiritually speaking, the issue of circumcision by itself is irrelevant. True religion is not rooted in external behavior but in the condition of the human heart. As Jesus Himself said, a person can look wonderful on the outside but be spiritually rotten on the inside (Matt. 23:27).

What does it mean to be a new creation? Gal. 6:15, 2 Cor. 5:17. How have you yourself experienced what this means?

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Ktisis is the Greek word translated “creation.” It either can refer to an individual “creature” (Heb. 4:13) or to all of the “created” order itself (Rom. 8:22). In either case, the word implies the action of a Creator. That is Paul’s point. Becoming a “new creature” is not something that can be brought about by any human effort—whether it be circumcision or anything else. Jesus refers to this process as the “new birth” (John 3:5–8). It is the divine act in which God takes a person who is spiritually dead and breathes spiritual life into him. This is yet another metaphor to describe the saving act that Paul typically describes as justification by faith.

Paul refers to this new creation experience in greater detail in 2 Corinthians 5:17. In this verse, Paul explains that becoming a new creation means far more than just a change in our status in the books of heaven; it brings about a change in our lives today. As Timothy George notes, it “involves the whole process of conversion: the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit leading to repentance and faith, the daily process of mortification and vivification, continual growth in holiness leading to eventual conformity to the image of Christ.”—Galatians, p. 438.

Becoming a new creature, however, is not what justifies us. This radical change is, instead, the unmistakable manifestation of what it means to be justified.
remarkable consistency about this point. Galatians, written early in Paul’s ministry, exclaims that Paul glories only in the Cross. Philippians, written during his later imprisonment, states the same. Paul, writer of more than a dozen New Testament letters, the most celebrated first-century Christian missionary, the framer of New Testament theology, counted all his accomplishments but rubbish, seeking no praise for himself but everything for Jesus.

**Consider This:** Whenever Christians share their testimonies, do they center more on themselves than upon Christ’s work? Why is self-crucifixion so difficult? What dangers are inherent to emphasizing self-esteem? From where should Christians draw their sense of worthiness?

II. A New Creation  *(Review Galatians 5:2–4 with the class.)*

Unfortunately, certain Christian theologies equate conversion with changing the jar’s label rather than its contents. Salvation becomes a judicial transaction that introduces another status. Biblical Christianity, however, declares that life content must undergo transformation. Whenever ownership switches from Satan to Christ, a process is initiated that, upon completion, will have revolutionized the individual’s life. While that process involves the believer’s cooperation, because sanctification is never imposed but willingly accepted, Christians should never suppose that their efforts are meritorious. Statues cannot exclaim, “Look what I made of myself!” Statues cannot create themselves any more than Christians can transform themselves. Jeremiah rhetorically questioned, “Can leopards change their spots?” *(see Jer. 13:23).* Obviously, both testaments agree that believers become new creations through divine grace rather than self-will and superficial external changes.

**Consider This:** Because Christians cannot change themselves, toward what goal should believers exert their religious efforts, and why? Because Bible study and prayer are not inherently meritorious, why should Christians study and pray?
Final Remarks (Gal. 6:16–18)

Paul bestows his blessing on those who, he says, “follow this rule” (Gal. 6:16, NIV, NRSV). Given the context, what “rule” do you think Paul is talking about?

The word translated “rule” literally refers to a straight rod or bar used by masons and carpenters for measuring. The word eventually took on a figurative meaning referring to the rules or standards by which a person evaluates something. For example, when people talk about the New Testament canon, they are referring to the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, which are seen as authoritative for determining both the belief and practice of the church. Therefore, if a teaching does not “measure up” to what is found in these books, it is not accepted.

What are the “marks of the Lord Jesus” that Paul bears on his body? What does he mean when he writes that no one should “trouble” him because of them? Might Galatians 6:14 help answer this question? Gal. 6:17, 2 Cor. 4:10, 11:23–29.

The word mark comes from the Greek word stigmata, from which the English word stigma also is derived. Paul may be referring to the common practice of the branding of slaves with the insignia of their master as a form of identification, or to the practice in some mystery religions where a devotee branded himself or herself as a sign of devotion. In any case, “by ‘the marks of the Lord Jesus’ Paul doubtless refers to the scars left upon his body by persecution and hardship (see 2 Cor. 4:10, 11:24–27). His opponents now insist on compelling his Gentile converts to accept the mark of circumcision as a token of their submission to Judaism. But Paul has marks that indicate whose slave he has become, and for him there is no other loyalty than to Christ. . . . The scars Paul had received from his enemies while in the service of his Master spoke most eloquently of his devotion to Christ.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 989.

What are the “marks,” physical or otherwise, that you have accumulated because of your faith in Jesus? In other words, what has your faith cost you?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Sports employers measure speed, athleticism, and strength. Concern about measuring, proving, and justifying ourselves often works untold psychological damage. Humanity desperately needs the unconditional acceptance that Christ alone offers.

Thought Questions:
1. Is God interested primarily in recruiting talent or building relationships? Explain.

2. When we approach God, what should we bring?

Application Question:
As we read in the commentary, statues cannot exclaim, “Look what I made of myself!” Statues cannot create themselves any more than Christians can transform themselves. How does the grace of God awaken and transform the spiritually dead and lifeless soul into a living, breathing masterpiece?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Humans observe outward appearances. God considers hearts. Beginning this new year, many will make resolutions regarding behaviors they wish to change. Several have already been broken! What God wants, however, is heart admittance. Once Christ enters human hearts, habits, lifestyles, viewpoints, and behaviors automatically change. Self-centered concerns are supplanted with kingdom directives. Respectability (outward appearance) may exist without integrity (produced by internal transformation), but God is not impressed.

Activity: Sing “He Lives” (The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 251) or choose another selection from the Glory and Praise section. Invite members to give short responses regarding how the lyrics lead them to praise God rather than themselves.
Further Study: “The cross of Calvary challenges, and will finally vanquish every earthly and hellish power. In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence goes forth. It is the great center of attraction; for on it Christ gave up His life for the human race. This sacrifice was offered for the purpose of restoring man to his original perfection. Yea, more, it was offered to give him an entire transformation of character, making him more than a conqueror.

“Those who in the strength of Christ overcome the great enemy of God and man, will occupy a position in the heavenly courts above angels who have never fallen.

Christ declares, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.’ If the cross does not find an influence in its favor, it creates an influence. Through generation succeeding generation, the truth for this time is revealed as present truth. Christ on the cross was the medium whereby mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. This is the means that is to move the world (MS 56, 1899).”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1113.

Discussion Questions:

1. What significance do you find in the fact that Paul both begins and ends his letter with reference to God’s grace? Compare Gal. 1:3 and 6:18.

2. In light of Paul’s statement about having been “crucified . . . to the world” (Gal. 6:14), what relationship should Christians have with the world today? How should Christians relate to issues dealing with the environment, racism, abortion, and so on, if they have died to the world?

3. How does a person know if he or she has experienced the “new creation” about which Paul writes?

4. Based on what you have learned this quarter, how would you summarize Paul’s views on the following topics: the law, works of law, justification by faith, the old and new covenants, the work of Christ, and the nature of the Christian life?

Summary: True religion does not consist of outward behavior but the condition of the heart. When the heart is surrendered to God, a person’s life will more and more reflect the character of Christ as he or she grows in faith. The heart must be subdued by Christ; when that happens, all else will follow.
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