

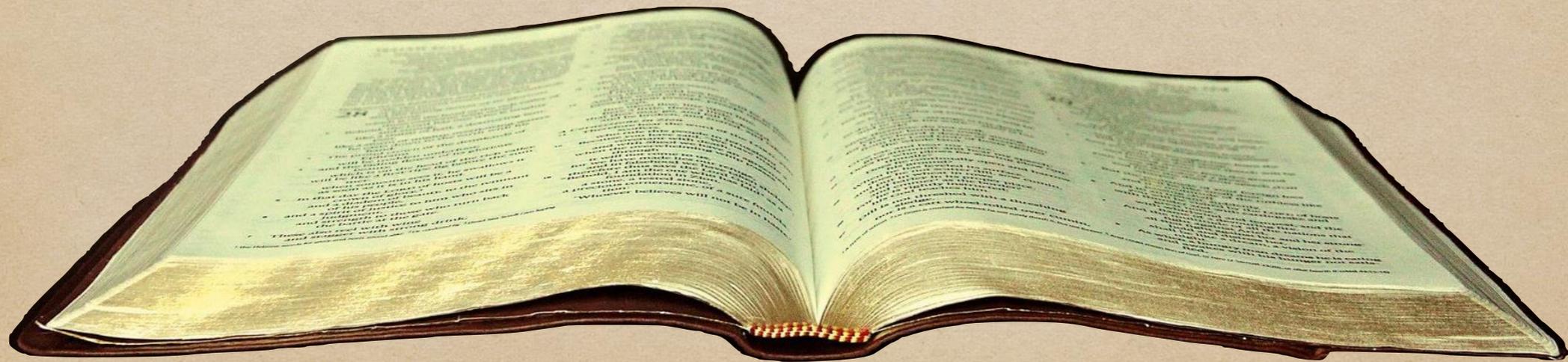


The Invasion of Legalism

Jan 4, 2026

Part 1

Galatians 5:7-9





-We are in the book of Galatians chapter five, beginning at verse seven.

-But first a review: A review accomplishes two things:

- (1) A review keeps the passage anchored in its proper context, while
- (2) repetition embeds God's Word into our thinking and living.

Phil 3:1 **Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.**

-Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul shortly after his first missionary journey to the Gauls in Galatia while he was in Antioch of Syria just north of Israel.

-Galatians is the first of Paul's writings in our New Testament.

-To understand the book of Galatians, we need to understand that Paul is very upset about how these new believers were being invaded by something called legalism.

-QUESTION -Is there a difference between a Judaizer and a legalist?

-A Judaizer corrupts the gospel, while a legalist distorts the spiritual life of the believer, even if the gospel is affirmed.

-The two terms in Galatians can be interchangeable, although the rest of Galatians will be dealing with the spiritual life of the believer.

THREE STAGES OF SALVATION

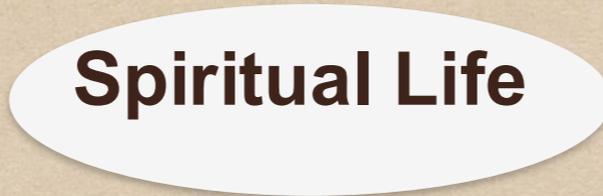


Phase One



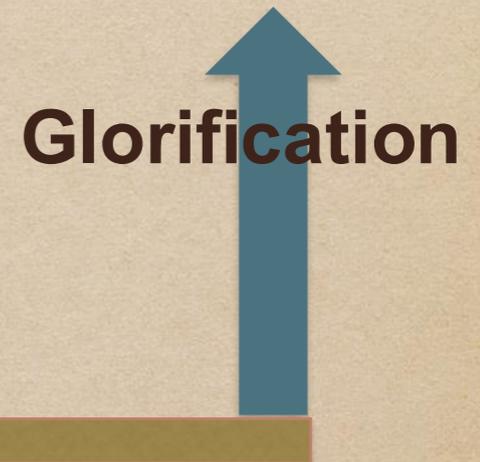
Justification

Phase Two



Spiritual Life

Phase Three



Glorification

**Saved From the
penalty of Sin**

**Saved from the
Power of Sin**

**Saved from the
Presence of Sin**

By Grace

**All Three Are Accomplished
By God's Grace**

By Grace

“you were saved”

“you are being saved”

“you will be saved”



-When we look at the three phases of salvation the Galatians were stumbling over that second phase; sanctification.

Paul writes this whole letter to rectify that problem.

-Paul divides this book into three sections:

1. Autobiographical - establishing his apostleship as coming from God.
2. Doctrinal - faith alone in Christ alone for Justification and Sanctification.
3. Application - applying that doctrine to our growth in Christ (sanctification).

-This third section is where we are at this morning.

-Our growth in Christ, sanctification, is obtained the exact same way that we are saved.

-Paul asks in Gal 3:3 **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**

-We came to Christ alone, by faith alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit alone.

-Chapters five and six will show us that not only are we saved by faith alone, but our spiritual life is one of faith alone through the power of the Holy Spirit and not of any good works we might possess.



-What's so great about Galatians is that it not only **tells us to be holy (set apart)**, but it tells us **how to be holy** in our everyday walk with Christ.

-In Chapter five verse one we have a common word that Paul uses in many of his epistles. The word "**therefore**".

Gal 5:1 **It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."**

-**Therefore** (οὖν - oun) Because this is true, then this should follow.

-When you see "**therefore**" in the Bible it usually signals an ongoing development:

From Doctrine to Application

From Truth explained to Action required

From What God has done to How believers should live

-Paul's method in many of his epistles is to teach doctrine first, then spend the rest of the book applying it.

-Examples: - We see this after Ephesians 4:1 There are at least 38 imperatives or commands.

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. . ."



-After Romans - 12:1 At least 46 imperatives or commands.

"Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.*"

-After Colossians - 3:1 At least 24 imperatives or commands.

"Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

-After Philippians - 2:1,2 At least 26 imperatives or commands.

"Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete. . ."

-After 1Thessalonians - 4:1 At least 22 imperatives or commands.

"Finally, then (*therefore*), brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God. . ."

-After Galatians - 5:1 At least 15 imperatives or commands.

"therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

-Now that sounds like a lot of rules to follow! I counted 171



-But as we study today's passage, we need to keep in mind the context.

-Not just the context before our passage, but also the context that follows.

-Let's pause for a commercial:



-We won't get to it for a few weeks, but here is what the rest of Galatians is all about:

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” (5:16)

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” (5:18)

-All those rules can be summed up in just one mandate:

-Put your faith in the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

-Walk by means of the Holy Spirit. **Now back to today's study →**



-Chapter five can be divided into three sections:

1. **Freedom Guarded:** Grace not Slavery (5:1-12)
2. **Freedom Directed:** Love not License (5:13-15)
3. **Freedom Empowered:** The Spirit not The Flesh (5:16-25)

-Today we are in still in that first section; Freedom Guarded (5:1-12)

-In verse one Paul tells us to "keep standing firm" in the freedom we have in Christ and say, "no" to returning to the law which is "a yoke of slavery".

-Paul proceeds to give us several reasons why we should stand firm in the faith and not rely on our own efforts to please God.

1. If you are depending on your own efforts such as circumcision or a set of rules, then all that we have 'In Christ' is of no benefit. (vs 2)

Gal 5:2 "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."

2. If you're going to live by the Law or a set of rules you are obligated to follow all of them. (vs 3)

James 2:10 "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all."



3. Legalism causes the believer to fall from grace. (vs 4)

-This is not a loss of salvation but a departure from grace in our daily life.

-This is the opposite of "being in fellowship", "abiding in Him", "walking in the light" and "walking by means of the Holy Spirit".

4. Legalism accomplishes nothing: what counts is faith working through love, as we wait in hope by the Holy Spirit.

-This is what the grace of God looks like in daily life.

"For we (by means of) the Spirit, by faith are waiting for the hope of righteousness (and by) faith working through love" (vs 5,6)

-It's not by our efforts, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

-This is further brought out in verse 14:

**"For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*,
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

1 Cor 13:13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

-The bottom line here: If you try to live your life under your own power, you have cut yourself off from the grace of God.

This brings us to our passage today.



Galatians 5:7-9

7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?

8 This persuasion *did not come* from Him who calls you.

9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*.

5. There is a fifth reason why Paul wants us to reject legalism and that is because it stops our spiritual progress.

-The point Paul is making in verses seven through nine is that legalism destroys the spiritual life.

I. “You were running well”

-As a Roman citizen, Paul frequently used metaphors of the military and athletes to illustrate the spiritual life.

-He refers to his own walk with the Lord as running a race.

-At Paul’s conversion, the running course was laid out for him:

“Go, for he (*Paul*) is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” Acts 9:15



-After Paul's conversion, he went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles:

I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did* so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that **I might be running, or had run, in vain.** Gal 2:2

-He encourages the Philippian believers to hold fast to the gospel which he delivered to them:

. . . .so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because **I did not run in vain** nor toil in vain. Phil 2:16

-He looks toward ultimate glorification, as a runner would to the finish line.

¹² Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,** ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Phi 3:12-14



-Not knowing what would happen to him in Jerusalem, Paul tells the elders in Asia Minor:

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24

-Finally, near the end of his life Paul tells Timothy:

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. 2 Tim 4:6,7

“You were running well”

-The phrase “running well” (Ἐτρέχετε - Etrechete) is in the imperfect, active, indicative mood. Meaning a continuous action in the past.

-When Paul was with the Galatians, their spiritual life was on track.

-In Acts 12 and 13, not only had Paul and Barnabas brought the gospel to southern Galatia, but on their way home they went back through the cities establishing churches and elders;

” . . .strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith. Acts 14:22



-They started off well. They were in the race, not sitting on the sidelines as spectators.

-Paul is addressing believers who are already justified and had been moving forward in their spiritual life.

“Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (vs 7)

-obeying - (πείθεσθαι - peithesthai) to trust in or believe.

-The truth has already been defined in Gal 2:5 and 2:14:

“the truth of the gospel”

-With the Galatians, it was the Judaizing teachers who entered the churches after Paul’s departure.

-With us today, it’s not necessarily **who**, but also **what**, has hindered us.

-After listing the faith of Old Testament saints, notice what the writer of Hebrews says in Heb 12:1,2

¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” Heb 12:1



“Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” Gal 3:3

“¹Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us. . .² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, Heb 12:1,2

-Taking your eyes off the finished work of Christ and depending on your own efforts is a recipe for disaster.

-Who is hindering you from running well?

-Paul does not say “what” hindered you, but “who”.

-That log that tripped up ‘old number 7’ was put there by legalists that have departed from grace and are depending on their own works to live the spiritual life.

II. This persuasion *did not come* from Him who calls you. (vs 8)

-In Galatia it was the Judaizers who taught that keeping the Mosaic Law was necessary for living a spiritual life.

-Today, in many churches, it is the pastors and teachers that are promoting Legalism as a way of living the spiritual life.



-This did not come from **“Him who calls you”**.

-This points back to Gal 1:6.

”I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel. . .”

-Anything that undermines grace as the operating principle of the Christian life cannot originate from God.

-God is never the source of teaching that substitutes grace with performance.

-God’s calling is by grace resulting in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A whole new life of the believer.

-The same grace that initiated our salvation also governs our growth.

-Teaching that law is a means of spiritual standing contradicts the very nature of God’s calling.

-Hang around this false **“persuasion”** (vs 8) for very long and it becomes contagious.

-Which brings us to verse nine:

III. A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*. (vs 9)



-In the Bible, leaven functions as a metaphor of permeation. Something small that works its way through the whole.

-It is used throughout scripture as both good and bad.

1. Leaven as a Literal and Ritual Background

-This memorialized the last dinner before leaving Egypt as there was no time to let the bread rise.

-Over time, removal of leaven came to symbolize separation from Egypt—the old life left behind.

-Every year, seven days before Passover all leaven was removed from the home to celebrate the Jews leaving Egypt.

2. Leaven as Positive Influence

-Feast of Weeks at Pentecost

Most grain offerings forbade leaven (Lev 2:11), reinforcing the association of leaven with what is unsuitable for the altar.

Notable exception: the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) included leavened loaves (Lev 23:17), showing that leaven itself is not inherently evil.



-Parable of the Leaven as a positive influence

Matthew 13:33 He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

3. Leaven as Corrupting Influence

-Jesus warns of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees as false teaching and hypocrisy. An inner corruption that spreads outwardly in Matthew 16:6,12 and Luke 12:1

-Paul relates leaven to malice and wickedness and unleavened bread with sincerity and truth in 1 Corinthians 5:8

-In Galatians, leaven is not about bread. It is about influence.

-Even the smallest addition to grace ultimately corrupts the whole gospel.

-Once altered, grace is no longer grace.”

-Although leaven in the Bible represents sin, here in Galatians it illustrates how false teaching gradually corrupts the truth.

-Allow in a little bit of leaven, and grace is destroyed.



-Why does Paul use leaven as an illustration instead of a metaphor like poison or disease?

-It is subtle – hard to detect at first.

-It is progressive – spreads over time.

-It is comprehensive – infects the whole lump, not just a part.

-Add anything to grace, no matter how small, and it will destroy the spiritual life of the believer.

Next Week

-Paul changes from exhorting the Galatians, to judging the Judaizers.

-It is a message that is intentionally offensive, designed to shock the Galatians back to sound doctrine.



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