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Galatians 3 – 6

“The Battle Within”

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Since being a good person or doing good works no longer saves us, we’re free! We’re free from all of the rules and regulations of religion, and we’re free from a legal relationship with God. We’re free to have a loving relationship with God. But, we’re only free through faith in Jesus! Paul wrote in [Galatians 5:1](#): *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”*

There are a few points of caution concerning all of this “freedom.” First, you can fall back into legalism. And, because we have conditioned ourselves to think that we are accepted, promoted, respected, and honored from hard work, we can be fooled into believing that the same thinking and approach works with God. According to [Ephesians 1:6](#), it’s all about what the Lord has done, and not something we do that “made us accepted in the beloved.” Just think of it, we’re accepted in Jesus because of what he’s done, not by our human effort or good works, because you cannot improve upon the cross of Christ. Again, the finished work of Jesus cannot be matched by any work of man. The simple fact is that it’s a gift of God that we’re accepted through Jesus.

The second caution is that you can fall into sin and abuse your freedom by taking advantage of freedom to the extreme. That’s why Paul wrote in [Galatians 5:13](#): *“You my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature¹; rather serve one another in love.”* Paul cautions Christians to be careful that they never confuse liberty with a license to sin. Yes, it’s true that we’re free, but we’re not free to do whatever we want!

God knows that we need help, which is why he has given Christians the Holy Spirit to live within us as a “governor” over our sinful nature. And, in these closing chapters of Galatians, Paul spends a lot of time contrasting our sinful nature (flesh) with the Spirit within us.

¹ The KJV uses the word *flesh*.

Paul uses the account of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar as a textbook example of the war between our flesh and the Spirit, and the mess it creates when we yield to the flesh instead of the Spirit. (**Galatians 4:21–23**) Paul refers to the fact that Abraham had two sons – one by the slave woman (Hagar) and one by the free woman (Sarah). In **Genesis 12**, when Abraham was 75 years old, God appeared to Abraham to give him the promise that he was going to be the father of a great nation, and that the land of Israel would belong to his offspring. Well, there was just a little problem – Abraham was 75 and his wife, Sarah, was 65 and they were childless!

Later, when Abraham was in his 80s (**Genesis 15**), the Lord appeared again. Abraham was so disheartened that it had been almost 10 years and they still had no children. In Abraham's mind "God's delay" caused him to consider the possibility that his servant, Eliezer, would be his heir and inherit his estate. God, however, had something to say on the subject in **Genesis 15:4–5**: *"Then the word of the LORD came to him; 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"*

Time continued to march on, and Abraham and Sarah became impatient. Abraham was now 85 years old and Sarah was 75 years old. Sarah came up with what she thought was a workable solution to jumpstart things. (**Genesis 16**) She would give her maidservant, Hagar, to Abraham for the purpose of bearing children. Abraham went along with the plan, and Hagar conceived and bore a son, Ishmael.

This whole account is one in which things were done according to the flesh, and not according to God's will. Abraham and Sarah resorted to their own plan instead of trusting God and walking in the Spirit, no matter how long it took God to work. God's will was for Abraham and Sarah to have a child of promise – Isaac. The wait would be 25 years, which means Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born.

As a result of yielding to the flesh they invited all kinds of strife and difficulty in the home between the two women and the two boys. Finally, Sarah said to Abraham, "Send this woman and her boy away!" In **Genesis 21**, God appeared to Abraham and told him to listen to his wife. But the damage was already done. There were not only serious family troubles, but another result of their efforts was the igniting of a little thing called the Middle East conflict!²

So, here in Galatians, the slave woman was Hagar, and the child born "in the ordinary way" (KJV *flesh*) was Ishmael. The free woman was Sarah, and the child "of the promise" born to her was Isaac. Paul brings home the point very clearly in **Galatians 4:28–31**: *"Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.' Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman."*

There are two applications Paul makes here. First, in the one sense, Hagar represents the Law, and Sarah represents God's promise, meaning grace and salvation through faith in Jesus. He tells them to put away the Law and all the rules, and come to God through faith in Jesus. Second, Hagar represents the sinful nature

² Ishmael was the father of the Arab people and Isaac was the father of the Jewish people.

(KJV *flesh*) and Sarah represents God's promise (the Spirit). Paul is calling Christians to put away the sinful nature and live according to the Spirit. Paul ends his letter with two directives: live by the spirit and crucify the sinful nature (KJV *flesh*).

Live By The Spirit

1. The sinful nature is in conflict with the Spirit.
2. Living by the Spirit is a choice.
3. **Galatians 5:16–17** – *“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”*
4. In **Galatians 5:19–23**, Paul writes about the “acts” of the sinful nature and the “fruit” (singular) of the Spirit.
5. The fruit of the Spirit should be seen as a single cluster, and Christians should demonstrate evidence that all of these are increasing in measure.

Crucify The Sinful Nature

6. **Galatians 5:24** – *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”*
7. There should be an intentional, deliberate decision to turn away from sinful things.
8. **1 Peter 2:11** – *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”*
9. In **Colossians 3:5**, Paul instructs Christians to “[p]ut to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...”
10. The more you feed on something, the more you develop an appetite for it; and the more you deny yourself, the less you crave it.

Paul's Final Exhortation

11. **Galatians 6:7–9** – *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Galatians 5:1, 13–26; 6:7–8** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences regarding the degree of legalism in their church backgrounds.
 - a. Was there a strong emphasis on keeping the rules and doing good things?
 - b. Was there an understanding that because you did so-and-so, God would be pleased with you?
4. Spend time talking about examples of people embracing the idea that freedom is really a license to sin, and not really liberty in Christ.
5. Read and review the account of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in **Galatians 4:21–23**.
 - a. Share examples of times when you were impatient concerning God’s timing and you “did your own thing.”
 - i. What was the outcome?
 - ii. Are there ongoing consequences from your decision(s)?
 - iii. Was there a time when something happened or someone intervened in a situation that caused you to make a different decision from the one that would have had serious consequences?
6. How can you tell if you are really living by the Spirit or according to the sinful nature (flesh)?
 - a. What does living by the Spirit look like?
 - b. What does living according the sinful nature look like?
7. Read and review Paul’s list of the “*acts of the sinful nature*.” (**Galatians 5:19–21**)³
 - a. Think about your life before Christ when you review Paul’s partial (“*and the like*”) list of sin.
 - i. Allow the people in your group to share their stories about the sins the Lord has forgiven and freed them from.
 - ii. How do you go about the business of crucifying the sinful nature?
8. Read and review the fruit (singular) of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:19–23**.
 - a. Think about your life since you came to faith in Jesus.
 - i. Has there been an increasing measure of the fruit of the Spirit in your life?
 - ii. Allow the people in your group to describe the changes the Lord has made in their life.
 - iii. If there hasn’t been an increase in the fruit of the Spirit, what has held you back from maturing into the kind of person the Lord wants you to be?

³ The Greek word for “*witchcraft*” is *farmakeio*, which is translated pharmacy (drugs). Someone involved in debauchery participates in open and shameless sin.

9. Close your time in prayer by: allowing time for each person to examine their life to consider whether or not their life is really Spirit-led; ask the Lord's forgiveness for the times when life was lived according to the flesh and not by the Spirit; ask the Holy Spirit to help each person with their individual struggles in this area; ask the Holy Spirit to reign in their lives and empower them to make the choice to deny the flesh and choose holy living; ask the Holy Spirit help them to bear an increasing measure of the fruit of the Spirit in their life.