

Study 5
Galatians 3:1-5

1. In Galatians 3:1-3, what is Paul chastising the Galatians about? Do you see elements of this in our church setting? Please share

Paul chastises the Galatians for foolishly turning away from faith in Christ to rely on their own efforts. Paul accuses them of living a life that had begun by the Spirit but were now trying to be perfected by the flesh—adding works to grace.

2. It is not uncommon for churches to impose an external moral code like no drinking on-premises or swearing to induce character transformation. What is the danger in that? What is the basis of eternally imposed moralistic change?

The danger of imposing external rules is that it creates a false sense of righteousness. People may conform outwardly but remain unchanged in their hearts. This leads to pride, judgmentalism, and hypocrisy. On the other hand these externally imposed rules are not necessarily bad things. It is generally not a bad thing to ban drinking on church premises on the basis of the danger of it being abused or swearing as it abuses others and leaves a bad witness for others to malign the gospel. The tension is to understand the spirit of these rules and not slavishly adhere to the letter of the law. So we must be aware of the danger to pride, judgmentalism, and hypocrisy but we must also be cognizant of encouraging people to good behaviour as a reflection of Christ.

True transformation comes from the Holy Spirit working through faith in Christ (Galatians 5:22-23). The law cannot change a person's heart—only Christ can.

3. The church has traditionally introduced prayer meetings, communion, mission trips, fasting, life groups, and discipleship classes as means of grace. How can these be misconstrued and become a form of legalism with selfish achievement becoming the main motivation for spiritual transformation? How does legalism lead to divisions and strife within the church?

These practices are meant for us to express our adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication to God, not because of what we have done but because of what God has already done on the cross. These practices can be misconstrued if people use them to prove their spirituality or earn favor with God.

Legalism leads to divisions because people begin comparing their spirituality—judging others based on religious performance instead of faith in Christ.

4. How do we actually grow in our Christian life? Galatians 3:5. How do the same means or disciplines of grace as mentioned in the previous question be instead instruments to true spiritual growth? What is the difference between legalism and discipline? What do we do if we do not feel like going to church or our Gamma group and we are doing it simply to keep up appearances? How do we help each other in this area?

Galatians 3:5 says that the Spirit works through faith, not through works of the law. The same practices (prayer, fasting, etc.) help when motivated by faith, love, and dependence on Christ rather than duty or performance.

Legalism is driven through external means (trying to earn favor). Discipline is driven through faith in God's already accomplished work (seeking God out of love).

If we are attending Gamma / church out of guilt or appearance, we should examine our hearts and renew our focus on Christ.

Case Histories

Jackie who came from a poor family, worked at a massage parlour and had come to an Alpha course at the 3rd Baptist church. She realized that all her life she had ignored God and now wanted to come back into a relationship with Him. She realized her sin especially since she had to provide "extra" services to her clients. She wanted to turn over a new leaf and become a Christian so she started attending church. She started serving at the street feeding ministry. When she was asked if she believed that Jesus is the Son of God and who died and rose again for her sins she said "Yes" When she was asked if she would take the step of faith and commit herself to Jesus she said she was not ready yet. She did not want to be a hypocrite and when she was ready she would do it right.

She had been trying to cut down on the "extra" services she was giving customers. She had been trying to cut down on the vulgar language she was using and was still struggling to overcome her great desire for more money. She was involved in some shady deals with some underworld characters.

1. Is Jackie doing the right thing by getting her act cleaned up before making a commitment to ensure it was a genuine commitment?

While it is commendable that Jackie wants to change in response to the Christian message, it is important to distinguish between turning over a new leaf as a result of salvation versus as a requirement for it.

If she believes she must first clean up her life before committing to Christ, she is misunderstanding the gospel. Galatians makes it clear that justification is by faith alone, not by works. If she waits until she feels "ready," she will never come, because true transformation happens after receiving Christ, not before.

The gospel invites her to come as she is, trusting that God will change her from the inside out.

2. If you were her friend from the church how would you guide her into the correct course of action?

We should encourage Jackie and inform her that salvation is not based on her ability to clean up her life but on faith in Christ alone. We should gently remind her that Jesus came to save sinners, not those who have already made themselves righteous. Instead of trying to fix herself before committing, she should trust that God's grace is sufficient and that transformation happens through the Spirit after she puts her faith in Christ.

We should also walk alongside her, pray for her, study Scripture with her, and help her see that her struggles do not disqualify her from receiving Christ—they are precisely why she needs Him.

3. Suppose Jackie made a commitment to Jesus after your sharing with her and she still feels depressed as no matter how she tries she inevitably falls into "extra" services at her place of work. She does not come to worship because she feels she is not worthy. She cannot lift up her hands to worship Jesus because they are covered with filth and blood she feels. How do you minister to her?

I would reassure Jackie that her worthiness before God is not based on her actions but on Christ's righteousness. Galatians teaches that we are justified by faith, not by works, which means her standing before God does not depend on how well she performs but on what Christ has done for her.

Sanctification is a lifelong process and that struggling with sin does not mean she is beyond God's grace. Instead of withdrawing in shame, she needs to lean into God's grace, confessing her struggles and trusting the Holy Spirit to work in her over time. We should also encourage her to stay connected to the church community, where she can find support, accountability, and encouragement to walk in the new life Christ has given her.

Takeaway

The Christian life begins and continues by faith, not by human effort or self-cleansing, for justification comes through Christ alone. Rather than striving to make ourselves worthy before coming to God, we must trust in His grace, knowing that true transformation happens through the Spirit after we place our faith in Christ.

