



Time to Reflect

- How can we 'go for growth' as we seek to live in ways that bring glory and honour to God?
- Can you think of any reasons why we might regress in our Christian faith? How can we avoid falling back into old and familiar practices?

In our previous study, we reflected on the law and its promise. Ultimately the underlying message of the passage was revealed simply in (v24): "...the law was our guardian until Christ came..." Once again, our attention was drawn to God's grace and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This week we are reminded about the importance of spiritual growth and our need to keep pressing forward in the direction that God wants us to travel.

"The Galatian Christians, like most believers, wanted to grow and go forward for Christ, but they were going about it in the wrong way. Their experience is not too different from that of Christians today who get involved in various legalistic movements, hoping to become better Christians. Their motives may be right, but their methods are wrong."

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p91)

Specifics

- In this study series we have already discussed the nature and restraints of the law. Yet, there is something about legalism that seems to be comfortable. By keeping rules and adhering to religious practices we can develop a sense of achievement.
- Apparent results are much easier to measure and we can feel a sense of pride. We can reflect that we are doing well because the obvious boxes are being ticked. Many of these actions and practices are actually commendable, but are they helping us to grow spiritually?
- This is the underlying question that Paul was asking as he wrote to the Galatians. The opening verses of the passage draw our attention to the issue of spiritual adoption. Paul reminds us that Christ was sent into the world "...to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (v5).
- (v4-5) are actually a concise summary of God's redemptive plan. He sent Jesus into the world at an exact time and with a definite purpose. This is a description of the Incarnation.
- God wants all of us to have life in all it's fullness. We are not to be bound by legalism or constrained in our relationship with Him. We are called to faith and from the moment that we accept Christ as Saviour and Lord we need to go for growth.
- Warren Wiersbe helpfully writes, "When a sinner trusts Christ and is saved, as far as his condition is concerned, he is a 'spiritual babe' who needs to grow (1 Peter 2:2-3).¹"
- As we seek to live in ways that please and bring honour to God, and grow in our faith, we must never forget that we are deeply precious to God – we are His children (v7).

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (David C Cook, 2009), p92.

- Paul suggested that the Galatians had regressed back into the bondage of legalism and that they were not enjoying freedom in Christ.
- As he articulated his concerns, Paul reflected on where the Galatians had been and where they had progressed to (v8-9a). The opening words of (v8) are interesting as the Judaisers and those who were bound to the law would not agree with Paul's observation.
- However, Paul makes a very important point. Many people can be engaged in a variety of good works and they would claim to know God, yet they actually don't really know Him. It is one thing to know about God and something entirely different to actually know God.
- With a true pastoral heart, Paul lamented the regression of the Galatians (v8-11). We can discern his anguish in (v9b and v11). He was literally heartbroken.
- Paul wanted to see the Galatians grow in their faith, stepping forward with spiritual confidence and a deep-rooted love for God. Instead, he watched them fall back into old and familiar practices. This hindered their spiritual growth.
- Wiersbe offers a point of application as he writes, "...all of us must beware of that legalistic spirit that caters to the flesh, leads to pride, and makes the outward event a substitute for the inward experience²."
- The remaining verses in our passage (v12-18) are personal as we see how Paul sought the affection of the Galatians. As a good spiritual father, he knew how to offer rebuke and balance it with love.
- As he pleaded with the Galatians to follow his example, he was not displaying arrogance (v12). Rather he wanted them to enjoy the freedom that only Jesus can offer.
- Paul also reminded the Galatians of how warmly they had welcomed him in the past and he highlighted the extent of their care and devotion (v14-15). By doing so, Paul emphasised just how far the Galatians had drifted.
- The Judaisers had led the Galatians in totally the wrong direction and this troubled Paul. Whereas Paul taught the truth (v16), the Judaisers taught lies.
- Paul was concerned about advancing the gospel and winning souls for Christ. The Judaisers were concerned about advancing their own cause (v17).
- Wiersbe observes, "The task of a spiritual leader is to get people to love and follow Christ, not to promote himself and his ministry.³"
- There is a challenge and a warning for us in this. We need to be aware that false shepherds do exist and that heretical teaching does occur. This calls us to be a biblical people, grounded in the truth of God's Word, and aligned to His will for our lives.
- This week we are reminded about the importance of growing and developing in our Christian faith. We are to strive, every day, to be more and more like Jesus.
- As he concludes his reflections on this passage, Wiersbe asks a searching and insightful question, while also offering a word of warning. He writes, "Is your Christian life moving forward into liberty or backward into bondage? Think carefully before you answer.⁴"

² Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p97.

³ Ibid, p99.

⁴ Ibid, p99.