

Summary of Galatians 3-5

In Galatians 3, Paul forcefully reminds the believers that justification comes by faith, not by works of the law. He asks a penetrating question in verse 2: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?” The implied answer is clear—God gives His Spirit in response to faith, not performance. Paul challenges their inconsistency: having begun by the Spirit, why would they now try to finish by the flesh? Grace is not only the doorway into salvation; it is the sustaining power that carries believers to completion. Using Abraham as an example, Paul demonstrates that righteousness has always come through faith, and that the law was a temporary guardian pointing to Christ, not the means of salvation.

In Galatians 4, Paul expands on the idea of spiritual maturity and freedom, explaining that believers are no longer slaves under the law but adopted sons and daughters of God. Through Christ, we receive adoption and can cry out, “Abba, Father,” emphasizing both intimacy and security in our relationship with God. Returning to the law is portrayed as returning to slavery, trading sonship for bondage. Paul contrasts Hagar and Sarah as an allegory of slavery versus promise, underscoring that believers belong to the free woman—the covenant of grace. The chapter highlights that in Christ, we are set free not only from sin but from the burden of trying to earn God’s favor.

In Galatians 5, Paul declares that Christ has set us free for freedom’s sake, urging believers to stand firm and not submit again to a yoke of slavery. However, this freedom is not a license to indulge the sinful nature. Instead, believers are called to serve one another humbly in love. The central command is to “walk by the Spirit,” (let me give another plug for the Spiritual Disciplines here) for when we live under the Spirit’s leadership, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Paul contrasts the acts of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The chapter concludes by urging believers to crucify the flesh and keep in step with the Spirit, allowing transformed character to be the visible evidence of true freedom in Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. What does Paul's question in Galatians 3:2 reveal about how we receive the Spirit—and how does that challenge any tendency to try to “earn” spiritual growth?
2. In what areas of your life are you tempted to begin by grace but attempt to finish by effort alone? What would it look like to rely fully on the Spirit instead of the flesh?
3. Galatians 4 says we are adopted as sons and daughters who cry, “Abba, Father.” Do you relate to God more as a slave trying to perform or as a child secure in His love? Why?
4. What “old patterns of slavery” (legalism, performance, fear, sin, approval-seeking) are you tempted to return to, even though Christ has set you free?
5. Paul contrasts slavery and freedom in Galatians 4. How can religious activity sometimes become a form of bondage rather than an expression of grace?
6. Galatians 5 teaches that freedom is not permission to indulge the flesh. How can Christian freedom be misunderstood or misused in today's culture?
7. When you examine the “acts of the flesh” versus the “fruit of the Spirit,” which fruit is most evident in your life right now? Which one needs intentional cultivation?
8. What does it practically mean in your daily routine to “walk by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit”?
9. If someone evaluated your life, would they see increasing evidence of Spirit-produced transformation? What specific step can you take this week to cooperate more intentionally with the Spirit's work?