A FREE STUDY RESOURCE

No Other Gospel

A Greek Word Study of the Letter to the Galatians

"the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

GALATIANS 2:20

By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · *Ordinary Means*

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A note on translations. Scripture quotations printed in the shaded text blocks are taken from the NET Bible (NET). The commentary regularly discusses the reading of the English Standard Version (ESV) and quotes brief ESV phrases where the exegesis turns on its wording. Galatians is a letter where the two translations occasionally part ways on the very phrases the whole argument hangs on — most notably the genitive pistis Christou (2:16; 2:20; 3:22), which the NET renders "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" and the ESV "faith in Jesus Christ." Readers with both open on the desk will find these places marked as we come to them.

Greek citations. Footnotes cite the author's companion volume, Just Enough Greek, by headword (and, where available, by chapter). The Greek text underlying this study is that of the New Testament in its standard critical and Byzantine editions; significant variants are noted where they bear on meaning.

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A Word Before We Begin

There is a reason Martin Luther called Galatians his own epistle, the one to which he said he had "betrothed" himself. It is short — six chapters, a single sitting — and it is hot to the touch. Paul did not write it to inform. He wrote it to rescue. Churches he had planted with his own hands were being talked out of the gospel, not by pagans and not by persecutors, but by earnest religious men who had arrived after Paul left and explained that faith in Christ was a fine beginning but that real belonging required something more: the law, circumcision, the old badges of the covenant. It sounded responsible. It sounded like maturity. And Paul saw it for what it was — a different gospel, which is no gospel at all.

So Galatians has no thanksgiving. Most of Paul's letters open with gratitude; this one opens with astonishment that the Galatians are "so quickly deserting" the One who called them (1:6). What follows is the most concentrated argument in the New Testament for the heart of the Christian faith: that a sinner is set right with God not by what he does but by what Christ has done, received as a gift through faith. Justification by faith apart from the works of the law — sola gratia, sola fide — is not a footnote in this letter. It is the whole letter. This is the soil the Reformation grew in.

And this is why a confessional Lutheran feels so immediately at home here. The letter runs on the distinction between Law and Gospel — between what God demands and what God gives — and it will not let the two be confused or mixed. The Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Formula of Concord: in Galatians you can watch the Book of Concord being born out of Paul's own argument. When the Apology says that the article of justification is the one "on which the chief point of all Christian doctrine depends," it is reading Galatians over Luther's shoulder.

This study works through the letter in eight sessions, not verse-by-verse but along the spine of its key words — the Greek terms where the argument actually turns. You do not need to read Greek to use it. Every word is transliterated and translated, and where a word also appears in the companion volume *Just Enough Greek*, a footnote points you there. The aim is not scholarship for its own sake. The aim is to hear Paul the way the Galatians first heard him — and to be set free, as they were set free.

How to Use This Study

Each of the eight sessions follows the same rhythm, so that after the first one you will know your way around: **The Text** — the verses themselves, to be read aloud if you are in a group. **Orientation** — where we are in the letter and what is at stake. **The Greek** — two to four words that carry the weight, opened up without jargon. **Verse by Verse** — the unhur-

ried walk through the passage. **What Confessional Lutherans Hear** — where the passage lands in the Book of Concord and in the life of faith. **For Reflection** — questions for the table or the journal. **Prayer** — a short collect to close.

A session can be read alone in twenty minutes or stretched across an hour of group discussion. There is no homework and no test. Read slowly. Galatians rewards it.

A Word on the Greek

A single Greek word can carry a whole reformation. Galatians proves it. If you want one key to put in your pocket before you begin, take this verb:

δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) — *to justify, to declare righteous, to pronounce in the right.* It is a courtroom word, and it is the heartbeat of the letter. Watch where it falls. No one is justified by the works of the law (2:16, three times in a single verse). Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith (3:8). It is clear that no one is justified before God by the law (3:11). The law was our guardian until Christ so that we could be justified by faith (3:24). And the warning: you who would be justified by the law have been severed from Christ (5:4).

Hold those together and the argument appears. To be justified is not to be *made* gradually good enough but to be *declared* righteous now, by God's verdict, for Christ's sake, received through faith. Everything Paul fights for in this letter is packed into that one verb — and everything the false teachers threaten is the attempt to win by *doing* (the works of the law) what God gives by *declaring* (justification by faith). When you meet *dikaioō* in Galatians, you are touching its spine.

Everywhere else, the method is simple: when a word does real work, we stop and look at it — its family, its range, the places you have met it before — and then we keep walking. No Greek is assumed. All of it is translated. None of it is wasted.

SESSION ONE

No Other Gospel

Galatians 1:6–10

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 1:6–10 · NET

> 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace
> of Christ and are following a different gospel — 7 not that there really is another gospel,
> but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. 8
> But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we
> preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! 9 As we have said before, and now I say
> again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be
> condemned to hell! 10 Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I
> trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of
> Christ!

ORIENTATION

Paul skips the thanksgiving. Most of Paul's letters open with gratitude; this one opens with astonishment. A lesser writer, facing an emergency in the churches, might have eased in. Paul names the crisis in his first breath, and his diagnosis is not "drifting" but "deserting." Something has gone wrong in Galatia, and Paul will not soften it with pleasantries.

Notice what the desertion is *from*. Not from a doctrine, in the first instance, but from a Person: "the one who called you by the grace of Christ." And notice what it is *to*: "a different gospel." The whole letter is contained in this opening shock. The Galatians thought they were *adding* to the gospel — being more thorough, more committed, more obedient. Paul tells them that to add to the gospel is to abandon it.

THE GREEK

εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) — neuter noun — *gospel, good news.* The word means an *announcement* — originally of a military victory or a royal birth. Its grammar is the grammar of news: it reports something that has *happened*, not something you must attempt. Paul has filled it with Christ — the announcement that God has won. The moment Galatia turns the

announcement into an assignment, it is no longer *euangelion*. News you must complete is not news; it is a task.

ἕτερον / ἄλλο (*heteron / allo*) — two words for *another.* Verse 6 says they are turning to a *different* gospel (ἕτερον); verse 7 says this is "not another" (οὐκ ἄλλο). Classically, ἕτερος means *another of a different kind* and ἄλλος *another of the same kind.* Be honest with your class: in everyday Koine the two words overlap, and no doctrine should be built on the distinction alone. But Paul's wordplay is deliberate, and the point lands either way — what is being sold as gospel-*plus* is in fact a thing of a *different kind* that is not really a gospel at all.

μετατίθεσθε (*metatithesthe*) — present-tense verb — *you are deserting, turning away, changing sides.* The verb was used of a soldier defecting or a man switching philosophical allegiance. Two things to see. First, it is **present tense** — *you are [in the process of] deserting.* It has not finished. There is still time, and the whole letter is Paul's bid to use it. Second, the present tense leaves the door open: this is a warning, not yet a verdict.

ἀνάθεμα (*anathema*) — noun — *accursed, devoted to destruction.* The NET renders it sharply: *let him be condemned to hell.* Twice Paul says it (1:8, 1:9), and he aims it even at himself or an angel from heaven, should they preach another gospel. This is not a tantrum. It is the measure of the stakes. A man does not call down a curse on himself over a matter of taste. He does it over a matter of salvation.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verse 6. "Deserting the one who called you *by the grace of Christ.*" The grammar of grace is everywhere in this sentence. They were *called*; the calling came *by grace*; the grace is *Christ's.* What they are leaving is not a system but a Giver. Apostasy in Galatians begins not as a lapse in conduct but as a turn away from grace.

Verse 7. "Not that there really is another gospel." Paul corrects himself almost in mid-sentence. There are not two gospels to choose between. There is the gospel, and there is its *distortion* — the verb is one of twisting or perverting. The agitators have not invented a rival truth; they have bent the only truth out of shape until it no longer saves.

Verses 8–9. The double curse. Paul subordinates everything — his own apostolic authority, even an angel's — to the gospel itself. The message is not true because Paul preaches it; Paul is to be believed only insofar as he preaches the message. This is the seed of the Reformation's *sola Scriptura*: the Word stands over the messenger, never the messenger over the Word.

Verse 10. "Am I now trying to gain the approval of people?" The agitators' gospel was, among other things, *respectable* — it kept the peace with the synagogue, it avoided offense. Paul exposes the motive. A gospel trimmed to please people cannot be the gospel of the

One who was crucified for displeasing them. "I would not be a slave of Christ" — and a slave, *doulos,* has exactly one audience.

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

A confessional Lutheran reading these verses hears the first and chief article. In the Smalcald Articles, Luther sets down what may not be moved: that Jesus Christ "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification," that "he alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and that this article is the rock on which everything stands. Then comes the line that could serve as Paul's own commentary on Galatians 1: "Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth and everything temporal should sink to ruin."[1]

That is the temper of Galatians 1:8. Paul curses any other gospel — even from his own mouth, even from an angel — for the same reason Luther will not yield a syllable of this article: because the gospel is not one true thing among others we happen to prefer, but the single thing outside of which there is no rescue. The Augsburg Confession states the content the curse is protecting: that we "cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sins and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith."[2]

Hear what this does pastorally. The false gospel in Galatia did not arrive looking like sin. It arrived looking like sanctification — more law, more discipline, more seriousness. That is what makes it so dangerous and so recognizable. The counterfeit almost never knocks dressed as rebellion; it knocks dressed as a higher commitment. Luther's refusal to "concede or give up" anything of this article is the only posture that keeps a church from trading the gospel for its own improved religiosity.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul opens not with the alarm but with the word "astonished." What does it tell you about him that his first response to error is grief and shock rather than strategy?
2. The Galatians were not abandoning Christ for paganism; they were *adding* the law. Why does Paul treat addition as desertion?
3. Paul subordinates even an angel — even himself — to the gospel. Where are you tempted to trust a messenger more than the message?

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1. Luther, Smalcald Articles II.1 ("Christ and Faith"). The article confesses Christ's death and resurrection for our justification and declares: "Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth and everything temporal should sink to ruin." It is the standard against which every other gospel — including the agitators' in Galatia — is judged.
2. Augsburg Confession IV ("Justification"): we are justified "freely on account of Christ through faith," not by our own merits, works, or satisfactions.

4. Verse 10 connects pleasing people with unfaithfulness to Christ. Where does the desire to be respectable quietly edit your gospel?
5. Read the first article of the Smalcald Articles ("Christ and Faith") alongside verse 8. What does Luther refuse to surrender, and why?

PRAYER

Almighty God, you called us by the grace of your Son before we had done anything to deserve it. Keep us from every gospel but the true one — from the counterfeit that comes dressed as seriousness, and from the fear of displeasing people that would trim your Word to fit. Make us slaves of Christ alone, content to gain your approval and no other. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit is one God, now and forever. Amen.

SESSION TWO

Justified by Faith, Not Works of the Law

Galatians 2:15–16

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 2:15–16 · NET

> 15 We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, 16 yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

ORIENTATION

This is the verse. If Galatians has a thesis sentence, it is 2:16, and three Greek terms in it stand near the center of debates over Paul's doctrine of justification. Do not rush this session.

Paul has just finished recounting how he opposed Peter to his face at Antioch for drawing back from Gentile believers (2:11–14). Now he states the principle that Peter's hypocrisy had betrayed — and he states it as something "we know," common ground even for Jewish Christians. The argument is no longer about table fellowship. It is about how any sinner, Jew or Gentile, stands righteous before God at all.

THE GREEK

δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) — verb — *to justify, to declare righteous.* Everything turns on whether this verb means *to make righteous* (to renovate a person morally) or *to declare righteous* (to render a verdict). It is a **law-court word.** A judge who justifies the accused does not reform him; he pronounces him in the right. This is the hinge of the whole Reformation: justification is God's *verdict*, spoken over the sinner for Christ's sake, not God's *project* of slowly making the sinner good enough to earn the verdict. The righteousness is reckoned, not infused. Get this verb right and the rest of Galatians opens like a door.[3]

ἔργα νόμου (*erga nomou*) — *works of the law.* Paul says no one is justified *by* these. But which works? Here is a live modern debate. The "New Perspective on Paul" (J. D. G. Dunn, N. T.

Wright) narrows the phrase to the *boundary markers* — circumcision, food laws, Sabbath — the badges that said *Jew, not Gentile*. On that reading Paul is only ruling out ethnic exclusivism, not human effort as such. The confessional reading is broader: *erga nomou* means *anything done in obedience to the law as a basis for standing before God.* The boundary markers were the *flashpoint* in Galatia; they were never the *limit* of Paul's point. (We take this debate up more fully in the excursus.)

πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*pistis Iēsou Christou*) — *faith in Jesus Christ — or — the faithfulness of Jesus Christ?* This is the genitive crux, and the gospel is in the grammar. Notice that the NET printed above takes one side of it: "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." This is a **subjective genitive** (Christ is the subject — *his own* faithfulness). The ESV at your elbow takes the other side: "faith in Jesus Christ" — an **objective genitive** (Christ is the object — *our* faith in him). This is not a quibble of style; it is the exegetical question of the verse, and we will weigh it honestly in a moment.[4]

VERSE BY VERSE

Verse 15. "We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners." Paul begins on the agitators' own ground, almost with their own snobbery — *we* are the insiders, *they* are the "sinners." He grants the premise only to demolish what they build on it. Birth, pedigree, covenant membership: none of it justifies.

Verse 16. Read the verse slowly and watch the structure. Paul says the same thing three times, tightening the screw each time: (1) no one is justified by works of the law *but* through faith; (2) *we* believed in Christ in order to be justified by faith *and not* by works of law; (3) *because* by works of law *no one* will be justified. The threefold repetition is not redundancy; it is a hammer. And the middle clause — "we have come to *believe in* Christ Jesus" — is decisive for the genitive question below. Paul names the act of believing, with Christ as its object, in plain words.

The contrast is total and exclusive. It is not faith *plus* works, nor works *informed by* faith, nor a starting line of faith that works then carries forward. It is faith *and not* works. The little Greek words *ouk* ("not") and the strong adversative carry the whole Reformation: *sola fide.*

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

This verse is the seedbed of the single most important article in the Lutheran Confessions, and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession devotes its longest and most passionate art-

3. On dikaioō as a forensic, declarative verb — "to pronounce righteous," not "to make righteous" — see Larry Herzog Jr., Just Enough Greek, s.v. "Dikaioō, δικαιόω." The courtroom sense is the hinge of the Reformation reading of Galatians and Romans.

icle — Article IV — to defending exactly what Paul says here. Melanchthon insists that to be justified, in Paul's forensic sense, "does not mean that a wicked person is made righteous but that he is pronounced righteous in a forensic way" — the courtroom meaning of dikaioō — and that this verdict is received "by faith alone," because faith alone takes hold of the promise.[5]

Hold the three Greek terms together and you have the Lutheran confession in one sentence: God *declares* the sinner righteous (*dikaioō*), not on the basis of the sinner's *performance* (*erga nomou*), but through *faith that lays hold of Christ* (*pistis Christou*). Faith here is not a work we contribute. The Apology calls it the "empty hand" that receives — it justifies precisely because it brings nothing of its own and clings only to Christ. The Formula of Concord will later guard this against every attempt to smuggle our renewal into the verdict: our righteousness before God is "the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ" reckoned to us, and nothing in us.[6]

A word on the genitive, since the NET and ESV part ways here. The confessional tradition reads *pistis Christou* as the **objective genitive** — faith *in* Christ — and there are strong reasons to follow it even where the NET prints otherwise. The strongest is in the verse itself: Paul immediately adds, in unambiguous words, "we have come to *believe in* Christ Jesus." He interprets his own genitive for us. The faith that justifies is faith *directed toward Christ* — the empty hand that receives what he has done. It is worth saying plainly, though, that the doctrine does not collapse on the other reading: even if one renders it "the faithfulness of Christ," Paul still says in the same breath that *we believed in order to be justified by faith.* Christ's faithfulness is the ground; our faith is the empty hand that grasps it. The Lutheran instinct keeps both in their God-given order and refuses to let either become a *work*.

FOR REFLECTION

1. "Justify" can mean *declare righteous* or *make righteous.* Why does so much hang on the difference? What changes in how you wake up tomorrow, depending on the answer?
2. Paul says the same thing three times in one verse. What is he guarding against by refusing to say it only once?

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4. On pistis as both personal trust and the believer's faith directed toward Christ, see Just Enough Greek, ch. 17 ("Pistis, πίστις"). The pistis Christou genitive debate is treated in the excursus at the end of this study.
5. Melanchthon, Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV ("Justification"): to be justified "does not mean that a wicked person is made righteous but that he is pronounced righteous in a forensic way" — and this verdict is received by faith alone, which lays hold of the promise of Christ.
6. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III ("The Righteousness of Faith before God"): our righteousness before God is "the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ" reckoned to us through faith, and not our own renewal or virtue.

3. The NET reads "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ"; the ESV reads "faith in Jesus Christ." How does Paul's phrase "we have come to believe in Christ Jesus" help you weigh the two?
4. Faith is called an "empty hand." Why is it important that the hand be *empty* — that faith bring nothing of its own?
5. Read Apology IV alongside this verse. Where do you hear Melanchthon simply restating Paul?

PRAYER

Lord God, you justify the ungodly. You do not wait for us to become righteous before you declare us so; you declare us righteous in your Son and make the verdict true. Empty our hands of every work we would offer as payment, and fill them with Christ alone. Let us hear the threefold "not by works" of your apostle as the best news a sinner could be told. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SESSION THREE

Crucified with Christ

Galatians 2:19–21

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 2:19–21 · NET

> 19 For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!

ORIENTATION

Having stated the doctrine, Paul makes it personal — and he reaches for the most violent metaphor available. The justified life is not a turned-over new leaf. It is a death and a resurrection. The "I" that tried to justify itself by the law has been executed; the "I" that lives now lives by Another. This is the most autobiographical paragraph in the letter, and the most quoted, and it deserves to be felt and not just parsed.

THE GREEK

συνεσταύρωμαι (*synestaurōmai*) — perfect-tense verb — *I have been crucified together with.* The tense matters enormously. Greek has a tense — the **perfect** — for a completed action whose *result still stands.* Paul does not say "I am crucifying myself daily" (an ongoing program of self-improvement). He says: it *happened,* at the cross, and I am *living now* inside that finished fact. Your union with Christ's death is not a project you maintain. It is a verdict already executed, under which you now stand.

ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ (*zō de ouketi egō*) — *I live, yet no longer I.* This is not the erasure of the self into mysticism. It is the relocation of the self's *foundation.* The old "I" — the one who had to justify itself, defend itself, prove itself — that one was nailed up. The "I" that lives now lives "because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Here again the NET reads "the faithfulness of"; the ESV, "faith in." Either way, note the staggering personalization: *loved me, gave himself for me.* The doctrine of Session Two becomes the possessive pronoun of Session Three.)

ἀθετέω (*atheteō*) — verb — *to set aside, nullify, treat as void.* The NET renders it "I do not set aside God's grace." The word was used for annulling a contract or cancelling a legal provision. Paul's charge is breathtaking: to add law to grace as a basis of righteousness is not to *supplement* grace but to *cancel* it. Grace plus a requirement is no longer grace; it is wages with extra steps.

δωρεάν (*dōrean*) — adverb — *for nothing, in vain, without cause, as a free gift.* The NET captures the sting: "Christ died for nothing." The same word can mean *as a free gift* or *to no purpose*, and Paul presses the double sense. The cross was either the free gift that secures everything, or — if you can earn your standing — a pointless tragedy. There is no third option. The law-keeper's gospel does not honor the cross more highly; it makes it a waste.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verse 19. "Through the law I died to the law." The law itself did the killing. By exposing sin and pronouncing its curse, the law drove Paul to the end of himself — and that death is the doorway to living "to God." The law's deadliest work is also its most merciful: it kills the self-justifier so that grace can raise a believer.

Verse 20. The center of the letter in miniature. *Crucified with Christ* (the perfect tense — done, standing). *No longer I, but Christ.* And then the warmth: the life "in the body" — ordinary, daily, embodied life — is lived "because of the faithfulness of the Son of God." The Christian does not levitate above the body into pure spirit; he lives his bodily life from a new foundation. "Who loved me and gave himself for me": the universal gospel of Session Two ("no one is justified…") becomes, here, singular and personal. He loved *me.* He gave himself for *me.*

Verse 21. The closing logic is merciless and freeing at once. If righteousness were available through law-keeping, the cross would be the most extravagant waste in history. To insist on law as the ground of standing is, whether one means it or not, to call Calvary unnecessary. Paul will not "set aside" — *atheteō* — the grace that the cross poured out.

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

Here a confessional Lutheran hears the Second Article of the Creed in Luther's Small Catechism: that Jesus Christ "has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death."[7] *Who loved me and gave himself for me* — Paul's words and Luther's catechism say the same thing in the same key: the first person singular. The gospel is not merely that Christ died, but that he "gave himself for *me.*"

7. Luther, Small Catechism, Creed, Second Article. The explanation confesses redemption in the first person — Christ "has redeemed me… purchased and won me" — exactly the pro me of Galatians 2:20.

There is also a careful note to sound. When Paul says "Christ lives in me," he is not making Christ's indwelling the *ground* of justification. The Formula of Concord, against Andreas Osiander, insists that our righteousness before God is not Christ dwelling in us renewing our nature, but Christ's obedience and death reckoned to us — Christ *for* us, received by faith.[8] The indwelling Christ of verse 20 is the *fruit and companion* of justification, not its basis. Paul keeps the order exact in the very same verse: the life he lives, he lives "because of the faithfulness of the Son of God *who gave himself for me*" — the *pro me*, the "for me," is the foundation; the indwelling is the new life that follows.

And so verse 21 is the gospel's logic turned against every works-righteousness: grace that can be *earned* has been *nullified.* This is why Lutherans guard the little word "alone" so jealously. To add the law to grace is not to honor grace but to cancel it — and to make of the cross a tragic redundancy. Calvary is either everything or it is nothing. Paul, and the Confessions after him, will have it be everything.

FOR REFLECTION

1. "I have been crucified with Christ" is in the perfect tense — a finished act with a standing result. How is that different from "I am trying to die to self"? Which tense are you living in?
2. Paul says he died to the law *through the law.* How can the law's accusing work be a mercy and not only a threat?
3. Verse 20 moves from "no one is justified" (Session Two) to "loved *me* and gave himself for *me.*" Why does the gospel need the first person singular?
4. "Christ died for nothing" if righteousness comes by law. How does insisting on our own contribution quietly insult the cross?
5. Read the explanation of the Second Article in the Small Catechism beside verse 20. Where do Paul and Luther speak in the same person?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you loved me and gave yourself for me. I have been crucified with you; the self that had to earn its way is dead, and the life I now live, I live by your faithfulness and not my own. Let me never set aside your grace by trusting my own work, as though your cross were a thing I could improve upon or do without. Live in me, and let me live in you. Amen.

8. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III, against Andreas Osiander: our righteousness before God is Christ's obedience imputed to us (Christ for us), not the divine nature of Christ dwelling in us (Christ in us). The indwelling follows justification; it is not its ground.

SESSION FOUR

Abraham Believed, and It Was Credited

Galatians 3:1–9

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 3:1–9 · NET

> [1] You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified! [2] The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? [3] Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? [4] Have you suffered so many things for nothing? — if indeed it was for nothing. [5] Does God then give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard? [6] Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, [7] so then, understand that those who believe are the sons of Abraham. [8] And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham ahead of time, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." [9] So then those who believe are blessed along with Abraham the believer.

ORIENTATION

Paul turns from autobiography to argument, and he argues like a man who cannot believe he has to. He appeals first to the Galatians' own experience — *how did you receive the Spirit in the first place?* — and then to Abraham, the father of the faithful, where he hands us the word for imputation. The logic is devastatingly simple: you began by faith; the Spirit came by faith; Abraham was justified by faith; so why would you now turn to the law to *finish* what only faith could begin?

THE GREEK

ἐβάσκανεν (*ebaskanen*) — aorist verb — *bewitched, cast the evil eye on.* The NET renders it "cast a spell on you." The word belongs to folk magic — the "evil eye." Paul's point is not superstition; it is that the Galatians' defection is *irrational*, the kind of thing that only makes sense if someone has enchanted them. They saw Christ crucified "vividly portrayed" — placarded — before their eyes, and somehow looked away. False teaching does not so much persuade as *bewitch.*

ἀκοὴ πίστεως (*akoē pisteōs*) — *the hearing of faith / believing what you heard.* The NET unpacks it as "by your believing what you heard," set against "doing the works of the law." The phrase is rich because *akoē* means both the *act of hearing* and the *thing heard* — the message itself. Either way the contrast is total: the Spirit came not through your *doing* but through your *hearing* — a Word proclaimed and received with the empty hand of faith. This is the Lutheran shape of everything: faith comes by hearing.

ἐλογίσθη (*elogisthē*) — aorist passive verb — *it was credited, reckoned, counted, imputed.* Now the keystone. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness" (3:6). The verb is λογίζομαι — an accounting term: to *post to someone's account*, to *enter to their credit.* Abraham did not *produce* righteousness; it was *credited* to him on the basis of faith. This is imputation in a single word. And the **passive voice** matters: Abraham is not the one doing the crediting. God is.

ἐκ πίστεως (*ek pisteōs*) — *of faith, from faith.* "Those who believe are the sons of Abraham" (3:7). Paul redraws the family tree. Descent is not biological but credal. The true children of Abraham are not those who share his circumcision but those who share his *believing*.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 1–5. Paul's argument from experience. He asks one question five ways: *how did the Spirit come to you?* Not by works of the law — they had none to offer when they first believed — but by hearing and believing the gospel. Then the barb of verse 3: "having begun with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?" The Galatian error is not denying Christ but *demoting* him — making faith the entrance and the law the staircase. Paul says you cannot change horses midstream; what began by grace is completed by grace or not at all.

Verse 6. "Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Paul reaches back to the very root of the covenant — *before* circumcision (Genesis 15 precedes Genesis 17), *before* the law (centuries before Sinai). Abraham was justified by believing a promise. The pattern was set at the beginning, and it has never changed.

Verses 7–9. "Those who believe are the sons of Abraham." The agitators were recruiting people *into* Abraham's family by circumcision. Paul says the family was always entered by faith. And he goes further: the gospel itself was "proclaimed to Abraham ahead of time" — "all the nations will be blessed in you." The mission to the Gentiles is not a New Testament innovation; it was the promise's intent from the start. Abraham is called, simply and gloriously, "the believer."

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

Genesis 15:6 — quoted here and again in Romans 4 — is the Old Testament proof-text the entire Lutheran doctrine of justification stands upon, and the *Apology* leans on it precisely

for the word *credited.* Melanchthon argues that righteousness is *imputed* — reckoned to us for Christ's sake — and not *infused* as a quality we then possess and present.[9] The passive voice of *elogisthē* is doing confessional work: the crediting is God's act, received, not achieved. The Formula of Concord makes the same point against every attempt to locate our righteousness in our own renewal: faith is reckoned for righteousness "not because it is so good a work or so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ."[10]

Hear, too, the Lutheran shape of *akoē pisteōs* — "by believing what you heard." The Augsburg Confession locates the giving of the Spirit exactly where Paul does: through the external Word that is heard. "Through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel."[11] The Galatians received the Spirit by *hearing*, not by *doing* — which is why a Lutheran is so stubborn about preaching, font, and Supper. The Spirit is not climbed up to by effort; he is *given* where Christ is *proclaimed.*

Put Sessions Two and Four together and you have both halves of the doctrine. Session Two: righteousness is *not by works.* Session Four: righteousness is *credited by faith.* The negative and the positive. Your standing before God is an entry in a ledger you did not write, posted to your account on the strength of Another's word — received, like Abraham's, by simply believing God.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul calls the Galatians "bewitched." What does it suggest that he treats their error as irrational enchantment rather than a reasonable difference of opinion?
2. "Having begun with the Spirit, are you finishing by human effort?" Where in your own walk does grace get the start and the law get the finish?
3. "Credited," not "produced." How does the accounting picture guard you from both despair (*I haven't produced enough*) and pride (*look what I've produced*)?
4. Abraham was justified by faith *before* circumcision and *before* the law. Why does the order matter so much to Paul's argument?

9. Apology IV: righteousness is imputed for Christ's sake and received by faith; it is not a quality infused into us that we then offer to God. Genesis 15:6, quoted in Galatians 3:6 and Romans 4, is Melanchthon's repeated proof.
10. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III: faith justifies "not because it is so good a work or so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the gospel."
11. Augsburg Confession V ("The Office of the Ministry"): "Through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel."

5. Read Augsburg Confession V beside verses 2 and
6. Where does the Confession say the Spirit is given, and how does that match "by believing what you heard"?

PRAYER

Father, you credited righteousness to Abraham because he believed your promise, and you credit it still to all who believe in your Son. We did not produce it; you posted it to our account in Christ. Give us the Spirit by the hearing of faith, as you gave him to the Galatians, and number us among the children of Abraham — those who simply believe you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SESSION FIVE

Christ Became a Curse for Us

Galatians 3:10–14

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 3:10–14 · NET

> 10 For all who rely on doing the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written,
> "Cursed is everyone who does not keep on doing everything written in the book of the
> law." 11 Now it is clear no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous
> one will live by faith. 12 But the law is not based on faith, but the one who does the works
> of the law will live by them. 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming
> a curse for us (because it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree") 14 in
> order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we
> could receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.

ORIENTATION

This is the heart of the letter and arguably the most concentrated statement of the atonement in all of Paul. Three words carry the great exchange. Paul has shown that the law cannot justify; now he shows *why* it could only condemn — and how Christ stepped into the condemnation in our place. If any session preaches itself, it is this one.

THE GREEK

κατάρα / ἐπικατάρατος (*katara / epikataratos*) — *curse / accursed.* Paul stacks two curses from the Old Testament. From Deuteronomy 27:26: *cursed* is everyone who does not keep on doing *everything* written in the law (3:10) — and since no one does, the law's own logic places the would-be law-keeper under a curse. Then from Deuteronomy 21:23: *cursed* is everyone who hangs on a tree (3:13). The trap is sprung — the law curses those who fail it, and a cross is itself a cursed death. Paul is about to put both curses in the same place at the same time.

γενόμενος … κατάρα (genomenos … katara) — becoming a curse. The NET reads "by becoming a curse for us." Christ did not merely bear a curse; Paul says he became (genomenos) one — the same shocking exchange proclaimed in 2 Corinthians 5:21 ("made him to be sin"). And the force of "for us" — hyper hēmōn, on our behalf, in our place — is the language of substitution. The curse the law pronounced on us landed on him. This is the ad-

mirabile commercium, the wondrous exchange the church has sung for centuries: he takes our curse and we take his blessing; he takes our death and we take his life.

ἐξαγοράζω (*exagorazō*) — verb — *to redeem, to buy out.* The NET says "Christ redeemed us." The verb pictures the slave market: to *buy out*, to purchase someone *out of* bondage and into freedom. A price is paid; ownership changes; the slave walks free. Note the destination of redemption in verse 14: it is *blessing* and *the promised Spirit.* We were not bought out of the curse to be left standing in an empty lot. We were bought out of the curse and *into* Abraham's blessing and the gift of the Spirit.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 10–12. The closing of every exit. Verse 10: to rely on the law is to come under its curse, because the law demands *everything*, continually, and no one delivers. Verse 11: quoting Habakkuk 2:4, "the righteous one will live by faith" — the law's road and faith's road run in opposite directions. Verse 12: "the one who does the works of the law will live by them" (Leviticus 18:5) — the law operates on a *do-and-live* principle that fallen sinners can never satisfy. Paul has walled off every path but one.

Verse 13. The hinge of the universe. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Every door Paul just shut, Christ opens from the other side — by walking under the curse himself. The cross is the one place where Deuteronomy's two curses meet: the curse on the lawbreaker and the curse on the crucified. Christ, who broke no law, hangs on the tree under both — *ours.*

Verse 14. The purpose of the exchange. "In order that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles" and "that we could receive the promise of the Spirit by faith." The curse was lifted so the blessing could run — all the way out to the nations, all the way down to you. Redemption is not merely rescue *from*; it is rescue *into* — into blessing, into the Spirit, into Abraham's family.

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

This is the gospel Luther called the "joyous exchange" (*fröhlicher Wechsel*). In *The Freedom of a Christian*, he describes faith as a wedding ring that unites the soul to Christ, so that "Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them, and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's."[12] That is Galatians 3:13 set to music. He *became* our curse; we *become* his blessing.

12. Luther, The Freedom of a Christian (1520), on the "joyous exchange" (fröhlicher Wechsel): by faith the soul is united to Christ as a bride to her bridegroom, so that what is hers (sin, death, condemnation) becomes his, and what is his (grace, life, salvation) becomes hers. This is Galatians 3:13 in narrative form.

The Small Catechism confesses the same transaction in the language of purchase: Christ "redeemed me… purchased and won me… with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death."[13] *Exagorazō* — "bought out of the slave market" — is precisely the word the catechism is unfolding. And the Confessions are careful to say that this redemption rests on Christ's whole obedience: his *active* obedience (keeping the law we could not keep) and his *passive* obedience (bearing the curse we had earned).[14] Verse 10 names what we owed — *everything* in the book of the law, kept continually — and Christ paid both sides of the ledger: he did all the law required and he suffered all its curse threatened.

Here the Law and the Gospel stand at their sharpest and most beautiful. The Law's last and truest word to the sinner is *cursed.* The Gospel's answer is not that the curse was waived but that it was *borne* — by Another, in our place. A Christian does not escape the curse by being excused; he escapes it because Christ absorbed it. That is why the cross can never be a mere example. It is a substitution, or it is nothing.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul says the law demands *everything*, kept *continually.* Why does that turn even sincere law-keeping into a curse rather than a hope?
2. Christ "became a curse for us." Why does it matter that he *became* our curse — substitution — rather than merely showing us a brave example of suffering?
3. The image is the slave market: *redeemed*, bought out. What does "purchased" add that "forgiven" alone might not?
4. Redemption in verse 14 ends in *blessing* and *the Spirit.* How does it change things to see that you were bought not just *from* something but *into* something?
5. Read Luther's "joyous exchange" in *The Freedom of a Christian* beside verse 13. What does faith give to Christ, and what does it receive from him?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you became a curse for us. The condemnation the law pronounced over our heads, you took upon your own; you hung on the tree in our place and bought us out of bondage with your blood. Now the blessing of Abraham is ours, and the Spirit is poured out, and there is no curse left for those who are in you. Receive our thanks, who can never repay what you have already paid in full. Amen.

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13. Luther, Small Catechism, Creed, Second Article. The verb of redemption — "purchased and won" — unfolds the exagorazō ("bought out of the slave market") of Galatians 3:13 and 4:5.

14. On Christ's active and passive obedience as the ground of our righteousness, see Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III. Galatians 3:10–13 names both: the law's full demand (active obedience) and its curse (passive obedience), both met by Christ.

SESSION SIX

The Law as Guardian

Galatians 3:15–29

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 3:15–29 · NET

[15] Brothers and sisters, I offer an example from everyday life: When a covenant has been ratified, even though it is only a human contract, no one can set it aside or add anything to it. [16] Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant. Scripture does not say, "and to the descendants," referring to many, but "and to your descendant," referring to one, who is Christ. [17] What I am saying is this: The law that came 430 years later does not cancel a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to invalidate the promise. [18] For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise, but God graciously gave it to Abraham through the promise. [19] Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions, until the arrival of the descendant to whom the promise had been made. It was administered through angels by an intermediary. [20] Now an intermediary is not for one party alone, but God is one. [21] Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. [22] But the scripture imprisoned everything under sin so that the promise could be given — because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ — to those who believe. [23] Now before faith came we were held in custody under the law, being kept as prisoners until the coming faith would be revealed. [24] Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith. [25] But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. [26] For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. [27] For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female — for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.

ORIENTATION

If justification is by faith, and was promised to Abraham four hundred thirty years before Sinai, then what was the law *for*? This is the question Paul now answers, and his answer reframes the whole Old Testament. The law is not the enemy of the promise, and it is not

the ladder to God. It has a real and good and temporary job — and naming that job rightly is the difference between a gospel and a treadmill.

THE GREEK

σπέρμα (*sperma*) — noun — *seed, offspring, descendant.* Paul notices that the promise to Abraham used the *singular* "seed" (the NET renders it "descendant"), not the plural, and argues that the singular points to one offspring: Christ (3:16). Be honest with your class here, because skeptics love this verse: *sperma* is a *collective* noun — like the English "offspring," it is grammatically singular but can refer to many. Paul knows that. He is not making a naïve grammatical claim; he is making a *typological* one — that the whole line of promise was always converging on one Person, and the singular form is the textual hook on which that christological reading hangs. The promise was never a crowd earning its keep; it was always headed toward the *one* Seed in whom the many are blessed.

διαθήκη (diathēkē) — noun — covenant and also will, testament. Paul works with the word's legal range (3:15, 17). In biblical Greek it commonly names a covenant; in ordinary legal use it could also name a disposition such as a will. Paul's argument does not depend on a tidy contrast with synthēkē. It depends on what he says about a ratified arrangement: no one annuls it or adds to it. The promise was confirmed by God; the law arriving 430 years later cannot rewrite it. The gospel lies not in an etymology but in the promise's source and stability: God gave the inheritance, and God does not amend his gift.

παιδαγωγός (paidagōgos) — noun — guardian, custodian, child-minder. The NET and ESV both render it "guardian"; older renderings such as the KJV's "schoolmaster" can mislead modern ears, because the paidagōgos was not a classroom teacher. He was the household slave who walked the child to school, kept him out of trouble, and disciplined him until he came of age. The law's role, then, is not to educate us into righteousness but to escort and restrain us — to hold us in custody and march us, exposed and unable to free ourselves, straight to Christ. Once the heir comes of age, the custodian's job is finished.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 15–18. The argument from a will. A ratified human will cannot be set aside or added to by someone who shows up 430 years later; how much less God's. The promise to Abraham was a *testament*, freely disposed, and the law that came at Sinai cannot annul it. Therefore the inheritance rests on *promise*, not *law* — on what God gives, not on what we contract to do. Verse 16's "one descendant, who is Christ" funnels the whole promise to a single point: every blessing flows through him.

Verses 19–20. "Why then the law?" Paul answers: "It was added because of transgressions." The law was given not to *cure* sin but to *expose* and *restrain* it — to make sin show up as the trespass it is, to pen it in until the Seed should come. And it was given

through mediators (angels, Moses), whereas the promise came straight from God's own hand — "God is one." The promise is more direct, more personal, more original than the law.

Verses 21–25. "Is the law opposed to the promise? Absolutely not!" The law and the gospel are not enemies; they are different offices. The law could never *give life* — that was never its job. Its job (v. 22) was to "imprison everything under sin," to lock the whole world up so tightly that the only exit is the promise received by faith. And so (v. 24) the law "had become our guardian until Christ" — the stern escort marching the prisoner to the one place freedom could be found. "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." The custodian is dismissed not because we outgrew discipline but because we arrived at the One he was delivering us to.

Verses 26–29. The guardian's custody gives way not to independence but to sonship: "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith." Paul does not leave union with Christ as an abstraction. "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism names the concrete act in which Christ is put on the sinner, and therefore the old status-markers cannot establish rank before God: Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female are one in Christ. The paragraph closes where the promise began. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise.

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

No passage in Paul is closer to the Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel than this one, and the Formula of Concord treats that distinction as "an especially brilliant light" by which the Word is rightly divided.[15] Verse 19 — the law "added because of transgressions" — and verse 22 — Scripture "imprisoned everything under sin" — name what the Confessions call the law's chief theological work: not to save, but to accuse, expose, and drive the sinner to Christ. The old phrase is *lex semper accusat* — the law always accuses.[16] A *paidagōgos* that hands you over to Christ has not failed; it has done exactly the work God sent it to do. The error is only in asking the custodian to do the Heir's job — to *justify* — which it was never given the power to do (v. 21, "if a law had been given that could give life…").

Hear, too, the gospel in Paul's use of diathēkē. The Confessions confess a God who saves monergistically — by his work alone, not as a partner in a bargain. Paul's point is not that one Greek noun automatically means a unilateral gift. His point is that God's promise was already ratified and cannot be annulled or supplemented by the law that came 430 years

15. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration V ("Law and Gospel"): the proper distinction of Law and Gospel is "an especially brilliant light" that serves to divide God's Word rightly.
16. lex semper accusat — "the law always accuses." The maxim runs through the Apology (esp. Article IV) as the description of the law's chief theological work: to expose sin and drive the conscience to Christ. Galatians 3:19, 22 — the law "added because of transgressions," Scripture "imprisoning everything under sin" — is its scriptural ground.

later. The inheritance rests on what God gave and is received, not negotiated. Grace was first, grace is the ground, and grace cannot be amended by a latecomer.

And Paul gives that inheritance a baptismal shape. Those baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ (3:27); they do not present a status of their own but wear the Son's. The promise is not merely discussed in their hearing. It is given to them, with Christ himself, through the means he appointed.

And so the law remains *good* — Paul is emphatic, "Absolutely not!" that it opposes the promise — but it is good *for what it is for.* It escorts; it does not adopt. It convicts; it does not console. It marches us to the door; Christ alone opens it. A Christian who hears the law's "you must" and despairs of himself has not misheard it; he has heard it exactly right, and the despair is the doorway to grace.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul calls the law a guardian (an escort-slave), not a schoolmaster. How does that change the way you hear the demands of God's law?
2. Paul says a ratified covenant cannot be annulled or supplemented. How does that stability clarify the relation of promise and law?
3. The law was added "because of transgressions" — to expose and restrain sin, not to remove it. What goes wrong when we ask the law to do the gospel's job?
4. "Scripture imprisoned everything under sin so that the promise could be given." How can being locked up by the law be a mercy?
5. Read what the Formula of Concord says about distinguishing Law and Gospel (the "brilliant light") beside verses 19–24. Where do you hear the same two offices?

PRAYER

O God, you gave the law to expose our sin and to escort us to your Son, and you gave the promise to set us free. Keep us from confusing the two — from asking your law to comfort us or your gospel to threaten us. When the law accuses, let it drive us not to despair but to Christ, in whom alone the inheritance you promised to Abraham is freely ours. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SESSION SEVEN

From Slaves to Sons

Galatians 4:1–7

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 4:1–7 · NET

> [1] Now I mean that the heir, as long as he is a minor, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. [2] But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. [3] So also we, when we were minors, were enslaved under the basic forces of the world. [4] But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights. [6] And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who calls "Abba! Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son, then you are also an heir through God.

ORIENTATION

Paul takes the legal language of inheritance — heirs, guardians, dates set by the father — and turns it into the warmest paragraph in the letter. The argument that began in a courtroom (Session Two) ends at a Father's knee. The same gospel that *declares* the sinner righteous now *embraces* him as a son. This is justification's other side: not only acquittal, but adoption.

This session concentrates on 4:1–7. Later in the chapter Paul returns to slavery and inheritance through Hagar and Sarah (4:21–31). That allegory is not traced in full here, but it presses the same contrast: slavery under the law and freedom as children of the promise.

THE GREEK

τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου (*to plērōma tou chronou*) — *the fullness of time.* The NET reads "when the appropriate time had come." *Plērōma* means *that which fills, the full measure.* The redemption did not happen at a random moment but at the *appointed* one — the time God had been filling all along. History is not drift; it is gestation. Everything before was the clock running toward this.

ἐξαπέστειλεν (*exapesteilen*) — verb — *sent out, sent forth from.* Watch the parallel. God *sent out* his Son (4:4); then God *sent* the Spirit of his Son into our hearts (4:6) — the same family of sending. Two sendings, one saving mission. The Son is sent to *accomplish* our adoption;

the Spirit is sent to *assure* us of it. The whole Trinity is at work in your salvation: the Father sends, the Son redeems, the Spirit witnesses.

υἱοθεσία (*huiothesia*) — noun — *adoption as sons.* The NET renders it "adopted as sons with full rights." It is a Roman legal term — the formal conferral of *full filial status*, including the right of inheritance, on one who was not a son by birth. God "sent his Son… so that we might receive *adoption*" (4:5). This is not a sentimental metaphor; it is a status conferred. Note the sequence in verse 4: the Son was "born under the law" so that those *under the law* might be brought *out* and reclassified as *sons.* He took our status so we could take his.

Αββα ὁ πατήρ (Abba ho patēr) — Abba! Father! The Spirit cries out from within us, "Abba, Father" (4:6) — an Aramaic family word for father, kept untranslated because it was the very word Jesus prayed in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). This is the proof of adoption: not your feeling of being God's child, but the Spirit himself crying the Son's own word from inside you. You do not work this cry up. It is given.

VERSE BY VERSE

Verses 1–3. The picture of the underage heir. Even the rightful owner of everything, while a minor, lives "no different from a slave" — under guardians and managers, waiting for the day his father has set. So it was with us "under the basic forces of the world" (*ta stoicheia*) — the elemental principles, the religious scaffolding of a world not yet come of age. We were heirs in waiting, but heirs living like slaves.

Verses 4–5. "When the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son." Two phrases hold the whole incarnation: "born of a woman" (truly human, one of us) and "born under the law" (placed exactly where we were, under the law's demand and curse). And the purpose: "to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted." *Redemption* (Session Five) is the means; *adoption* is the goal. He bought the slaves in order to make them sons.

Verses 6–7. "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." Notice the order — you are made sons, *and therefore* the Spirit is sent; the Spirit confirms a sonship already given, he does not earn it. And the Spirit's work is to cry "Abba, Father" — to give the adopted child the family voice. The conclusion lands with full weight: "no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir." The whole distance of the letter, from the law's wage-economy to the gospel's inheritance, is travelled in that one sentence.

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

Here a confessional Lutheran hears the Third Article of the Creed and the whole Lutheran doctrine of the Spirit's work. The Spirit who cries "Abba, Father" is the Spirit who, in Luther's Small Catechism, "has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."[17] And the order Paul gives in verses 6–7 — *sonship first, then the Spirit's cry* — is the order the Confessions guard: the Spirit does not *make* us acceptable; he *assures* us we already are, in Christ. Adoption is conferred in the gospel; the Spirit seals it in the heart.

Notice that the Spirit is *sent* (v. 6), and the Augsburg Confession insists he is sent through means — "through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments."[18] The "Abba" of the believing heart is not a mystical achievement reached by introspection; it is the answering cry the Spirit works through preaching and baptism. This is precisely the comfort the catechism aims at: assurance is not found by gazing inward to measure the strength of our feeling, but by hearing the gospel that says *you are a son* and letting the Spirit teach us to say *Father* back.

And so verses 4–7 trace the very shape of the Apostles' Creed: the *Father* sends, the *Son* is born and redeems, the *Spirit* is poured out to cry "Abba." Justification (Session Two) is the verdict; adoption is the embrace. You are not God's acquitted defendant, kept at a respectful legal distance. You are his child, with the Son's own Spirit in your chest, and the inheritance is yours — not as wages you fear to lose, but as a birthright you did not earn and cannot be disinherited from.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Paul says even the rightful heir, while underage, lives "no different from a slave." How does that describe the difference between life under law and life as a son?
2. The Son was "born under the law" — placed exactly where we were. Why does our adoption depend on his taking our position first?
3. The Spirit is sent *because* you are already a son, not in order to make you one. How does that order protect your assurance?
4. "Abba" is the cry the Spirit works in you, not a feeling you generate. Where do you tend to look *inward* for assurance instead of to the gospel?
5. Read the explanation of the Third Article in the Small Catechism beside verses 6–7. How does the Spirit's work there match the "Abba, Father" here?

17. Luther, Small Catechism, Creed, Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The Spirit who cries "Abba" (Gal 4:6) is the Spirit of this article.

18. Augsburg Confession V: the Holy Spirit is given "through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments." The "Abba" of Galatians 4:6 is worked through the means of grace, not found by introspection.

PRAYER

Father, in the fullness of time you sent your Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to buy us out of slavery and make us your children. And because we are your children, you have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts, teaching us to call you “Abba.” We are no longer slaves but sons and daughters, heirs of everything in Christ. Let us live today not in the fear of wages we might lose, but in the freedom of an inheritance we cannot. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SESSION EIGHT

For Freedom, Set Free

Galatians 5:1–6, 13–24; 6:14–17

THE TEXT

GALATIANS 5:1–6 · NET

5.[1] For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to the
yoke of slavery. [2] Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ
will be of no benefit to you at all! [3] And I testify again to every man who lets himself be
circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. [4] You who are trying to be de-
clared righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from
grace! [5] For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait expectantly for the hope of righteous-
ness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight —
the only thing that matters is faith working through love.

GALATIANS 5:13–24 · NET

[13] For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as
an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the
whole law can be summed up in a single commandment, namely, "You must love your
neighbor as yourself." [15] However, if you continually bite and devour one another, be-
ware that you are not consumed by one another. [16] But I say, live by the Spirit and you
will not carry out the desires of the flesh. [17] For the flesh has desires that are opposed to
the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposi-
tion to each other, so that you cannot do what you want. [18] But if you are led by the Spir-
it, you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immoral-
ity, impurity, depravity, [20] idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of
anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, [21] envying, murder, drunkenness, carous-
ing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who prac-
tice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God! [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love,
joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, and self-control.
Against such things there is no law. [24] Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the
flesh with its passions and desires.

GALATIANS 6:14–17 · NET

> 14 But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that matters is a new creation! 16 And all who will behave in accordance with this rule, peace and mercy be on them, and on the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.

ORIENTATION

The doctrine is finished; now Paul tells the freed slave how to live free — without sliding back into bondage on one side or into chaos on the other. The closing word of Galatians is *freedom*, but it is a freedom with a particular shape: freedom *from* the curse and the wage-economy, *for* a life of love lived in the Spirit. The agitators offered a yoke and called it maturity; Paul offers liberty and warns it is not a license. This session gathers the high points of the letter's last two chapters.

THE GREEK

ἐλευθερία (*eleutheria*) — noun — *freedom, liberty.* "For freedom Christ has set us free; … do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery" (5:1). The grammar is emphatic — *for freedom* he freed us, freedom as the very goal. And it must be *guarded*: the freed man's standing temptation is to walk back into the cell because the cell felt safe. Christian liberty is not the absence of a master; it is the right Master and no other yoke.

κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ (katērgēthēte apo Christou) — you have been alienated from Christ. The verb is katargeō, to render inoperative, nullify, or sever from effective relation. It answers the warning of 2:21: if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. To seek the verdict from the law is not a harmless supplement to faith; it cuts the sinner off from the only One who justifies.

πίστις δι' ἀγά**πη**ς ἐνεργου**μέ**νη (*pistis di' agapēs energoumenē*) — *faith working through love.* This phrase (5:6) is the answer to the charge that "faith alone" breeds laziness, and it must be handled with care, because Rome reads it one way and the Reformation another. The verb *energoumenē* means faith is *energized, made active, expresses itself* through love. Love is not the *form* that makes faith count; love is the *fruit* that justifying faith inevitably bears.[19]

σάρξ **/ πν**εῦ**μα** (*sarx / pneuma*) — *flesh / Spirit.* The freed life is lived in a war zone (5:16–17). *Sarx* here does not mean the physical body — it means the *old self*, the sin-bent nature, the

old Adam who still lobbies for control. *Pneuma* is the Holy Spirit, now indwelling. The Christian is not yet a peaceful country; he is contested territory, and the freedom of Galatians is freedom to "live by the Spirit" against the pull of the flesh, not freedom *from* the conflict.

καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματος (*karpos tou pneumatos*) — *the fruit of the Spirit.* Note the **singular** — "fruit," not "fruits" (5:22). Against the scattered "works of the flesh," the Spirit grows *one* integrated fruit with many facets. And it is *fruit* — what a living branch *produces*, not what a laborer *manufactures.* You do not assemble it by effort; you *bear* it by abiding. The agriculture is grace.

καινὴ κτίσις (*kainē ktisis*) — *new creation.* Paul's closing thesis (6:15): neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, "what matters instead is a new creation." The whole letter resolves here — not a mark you make on the body or a rule you keep, but the wholly new thing God *makes.*

στίγματα (*stigmata*) — noun — *marks, brand-marks.* The last word, almost a signature: "I bear the marks of Jesus on my body" (6:17). The *stigma* was the brand burned into a slave to show whose he was. The agitators were proud of circumcision — the mark cut to belong to the law. Paul answers with the only mark he owns: the scars of persecution, the brand that says he belongs to *Christ.*

VERSE BY VERSE

5:1–6. The thesis of the section. Freedom is the goal Christ died to give, and it must be held against the pull back toward the yoke. Paul states the danger without reserve: accepting circumcision as necessary obligates a person to keep the whole law, and those trying to be declared righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ and fallen away from grace. The warning completes the dikaioō spine announced at the beginning of this study. While the agitators are anxious about a mark in the flesh, the believer "waits expectantly for the hope of righteousness" by the Spirit, by faith — already justified, awaiting the consummation. And what counts in Christ is neither circumcision nor its absence but "faith working through love" — the single phrase that holds the whole Christian life together.

5:13–15. Freedom's guardrails. "You were called to freedom" — but not "as an opportunity to indulge the flesh." Christian liberty is liberated for love: "through love serve one another." And in a stroke Paul shows that gospel freedom does not abolish the law's substance but fulfills it — "the whole law is summed up in… love your neighbor as yourself." The

19. On agapē as the cross-shaped, self-giving love that is the fruit of faith rather than its ground, see Just Enough Greek, ch. 39 ("Agapē, ἀγάπη"). On the fides caritate formata debate, see the discussion under "What Confessional Lutherans Hear" in this session.

freed person keeps the law not to be justified but because he is. Verse 15 shows the alternative with teeth: a community that bites and devours will finally consume itself.

5:16–24. The war, the works, and the fruit. "Live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh." The conflict is real and lifelong — flesh against Spirit, so that "you cannot do what you want." Between the conflict and the fruit Paul names the works of the flesh plainly, not as isolated lapses to be managed but as the old nature's visible harvest; those who practice such things will not inherit God's kingdom. But the outcome is not in doubt for those in Christ: the Spirit bears his fruit, and "those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh." Note that this crucifying (5:24) echoes Paul's own "I have been crucified with Christ" (2:20) — the same death, now worked out in daily mortification.

6:14–17. The final boast. Everything the letter has fought for comes to rest on the cross: "may I never boast except in the cross." Through it, Paul is dead to the world's systems and the world dead to him. What matters is not a rule but "a new creation." And the closing image: the *stigmata*, the brand-marks of the crucified — Paul's body bears the proof of whose he is. The man who refused to boast in circumcision boasts only in the marks of his Master.

WHAT CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS HEAR

"Faith working through love" (5:6) is the verse on which the whole Lutheran account of good works turns, and the Confessions handle it with great care. Rome read the phrase as *fides caritate formata* — "faith *formed* by love" — making love the thing that gives faith its justifying power. The Apology answers directly: faith justifies not because love perfects it, but because faith *takes hold of Christ*; love is the *fruit* that follows, never the *form* that justifies.[20] The Augsburg Confession says it plainly: "faith should yield good fruits… it is necessary to do the good works commanded by God, but not that we should rely on those works to merit justification."[21] So the Reformation watchword: we are justified by faith *alone*, but the faith that justifies is *never* alone. The empty hand that received Christ is, the very next moment, a working hand.

This is why Galatians is not — as critics of *sola fide* always fear — a charter for license. Paul himself slams that door (5:13): freedom is not "an opportunity for the flesh." The Formula of Concord teaches that good works follow justifying faith necessarily and freely, as fruit follows from a good tree — not coerced by the law's threat, but flowing from the Spirit

20. Apology IV: against the scholastic fides caritate formata ("faith formed by love"), faith justifies because it lays hold of Christ, not because love perfects it; love and good works are the necessary fruit of justifying faith, not its formative cause.

21. Augsburg Confession VI ("The New Obedience") and XX ("Faith and Good Works"): faith must yield good fruits, and it is necessary to do the good works God commands — but not in order to merit justification, which is received by faith for Christ's sake.

who has been given.[22] The *fruit* of the Spirit (singular, organic, grown) is exactly the opposite of the *works* of the law (manufactured, anxious, for hire).

And the freedom itself is the gospel's own paradox, the one Luther set at the head of *The Freedom of a Christian*: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[23] Free from the law as a way of salvation; bound to the neighbor in love. Verse 13 holds both in one breath — "called to freedom… through love serve one another." The believer ends where the letter began: not under a yoke, but in Christ — branded as his own, a new creation, boasting in nothing but the cross.

FOR REFLECTION

1. "For freedom Christ has set us free" — yet Paul immediately warns against using freedom "as an opportunity for the flesh." Why is Christian liberty so easily mistaken for license, and how does Paul guard it?
2. "Faith working through love." How does this phrase answer the accusation that justification by faith alone makes obedience optional?
3. The flesh and the Spirit are at war "so that you cannot do what you want." How is it actually comforting that the Christian life is described as a conflict and not a victory lap?
4. Paul calls it the *fruit* of the Spirit, not the *works* of the Spirit. What changes when you see love and patience as things *borne* rather than *manufactured*?
5. Paul boasts only in the cross and bears the "marks of Jesus." Where are you tempted to boast in your own marks — your circumcisions, your achievements — instead?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, for freedom you have set us free. Do not let us slip back under the yoke, and do not let us turn freedom into license; but by your Spirit make our faith active in love, serving our neighbors as those who have been served by you. Bear your fruit in us; crucify the flesh; make us new creations. And let us boast in nothing but your cross, bearing your marks, belonging wholly to you, now and forever. Amen.

Excursus: Pistis Christou — Faith in Christ, or the Faithfulness of Christ?

22. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration IV ("Good Works"): good works follow justifying faith necessarily, freely, and spontaneously, as good fruit from a good tree, worked by the indwelling Spirit — not coerced by the threat of the law.
23. Luther, The Freedom of a Christian (1520), opening theses: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." This is the paradox of Galatians 5:1 and 5:13 — free from the law, bound to the neighbor in love.

Three times in Galatians (2:16; 2:20; 3:22) Paul uses the genitive phrase *pistis Christou* — literally "faith of Christ" — and the NET printed in this study renders it each time "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ," while the ESV reads "faith in Jesus Christ." This is not a difference of style. It is one of the most debated questions in the study of Paul, and because the verses are load-bearing for the doctrine of justification, it is worth weighing carefully.

The grammar is genuinely ambiguous. A genitive can be **objective** (Christ is the object of the action — *our faith in him*) or **subjective** (Christ is the subject — *his own faithfulness*). Greek alone cannot settle which Paul intends; the decision is made on context and on Paul's wider argument. The "subjective" reading — favored by Richard Hays, and reflected in the NET — hears Paul pointing to Christ's own faithful obedience, even unto death, as the ground of our salvation. The "objective" reading — the traditional and confessional one, reflected in the ESV — hears Paul naming the faith by which a sinner receives Christ.

There are real attractions to the subjective reading. It exalts Christ's faithfulness; it avoids what can sound like redundancy ("justified by faith… through faith"); and it fits a wider scholarly project of re-centering Paul on what God has done in Christ rather than on the believer's act of believing.

But there are stronger reasons to follow the objective reading, and a Lutheran will want to. First and decisively, **Paul interprets his own phrase.** In 2:16, immediately after "the *pistis* of Jesus Christ," he writes, "we have come to *believe in* Christ Jesus" — using the verb *to believe* with Christ as its explicit object. He is telling us how to hear the genitive. Second, the contrast all through Galatians is between two human responses — *doing* the works of the law and *believing* — not between Christ's faithfulness and our works; the antithesis requires that *pistis* name the believing. Third, the whole pastoral thrust of the letter is to direct the anxious Galatian away from his own performance and toward Christ as the *object* of trust.

It must be said plainly that the gospel does not collapse on either reading. Christ's faithfulness *is* the ground of our salvation; our faith *is* the empty hand that receives it. The danger is only in letting the subjective reading quietly erase the believer's faith altogether, as if trust in Christ were optional or merely a consequence — or, conversely, in letting the objective reading turn faith into a *work* we perform to earn the verdict. The confessional instinct keeps both in their God-given order: Christ's faithful, finished work is everything; faith is the hand that holds it, and even that hand is the Spirit's gift. When you meet this phrase in Galatians, you are standing exactly where the Reformation stood — and the printed difference between your NET and your ESV is a standing invitation to think it through.

A Greek Word Index to Galatians

The principal Greek words treated in this study, in the order they first appear.

- εὐαγγέλιον *euangelion* — gospel, good news (1:6, 7, 11)
- ἕτερος / ἄλλος *heteros / allos* — another (of a different kind / of the same kind) (1:6–7)
- μετατίθημι *metatithēmi* — to desert, turn away, change sides (1:6)
- ἀνάθεμα *anathema* — accursed, devoted to destruction (1:8–9)
- δικαιόω *dikaioō* — to justify, declare righteous (2:16, 17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4)
- ἔργα νόμου *erga nomou* — works of the law (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10)
- πίστις *pistis* — faith, trust; faith in Christ (2:16, 20; 3:2, 7–9, 22–26; 5:5–6)
- συσταυρόω *systauroō* — to crucify together with (2:20; cf. 5:24, 6:14)
- ἀθετέω *atheteō* — to set aside, nullify (2:21)
- δωρεάν *dōrean* — for nothing, freely, in vain (2:21)
- βασκαίνω *baskainō* — to bewitch, cast a spell on (3:1)
- ἀκοὴ πίστεως *akoē pisteōs* — the hearing of faith (3:2, 5)
- λογίζομαι *logizomai* — to credit, reckon, impute (3:6)
- κατάρα / ἐπικατάρατος *katara / epikataratos* — curse / accursed (3:10, 13)
- ἐξαγοράζω *exagorazō* — to redeem, buy out (3:13; 4:5)
- σπέρμα *sperma* — seed, offspring, descendant (3:16, 19, 29)
- διαθήκη *diathēkē* — covenant; will, testament (3:15, 17)
- παιδαγωγός *paidagōgos* — guardian, custodian, escort (3:24–25)
- στοιχεῖα *stoicheia* — basic forces, elemental principles (4:3, 9)
- πλήρωμα *plērōma* — fullness, full measure (4:4)
- ἐξαποστέλλω *exapostellō* — to send out, send forth (4:4, 6)
- υἱοθεσία *huiothesia* — adoption as sons (4:5)
- ἐλευθερία *eleutheria* — freedom, liberty (5:1, 13)
- καταργέω *katargeō* — to render inoperative; be alienated or severed (5:4)
- σάρξ / πνεῦμα *sarx / pneuma* — flesh / Spirit (5:16–25)
- καρπός *karpos* — fruit (5:22)
- καινὴ κτίσις *kainē ktisis* — new creation (6:15)
- στίγματα *stigmata* — marks, brand-marks (6:17)

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