

# Living as a Christian

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[0:00] Have you prayed every day? Have you been reading your Bible? Have you told someone about Jesus this week? Have you said no to sin and yes to God's ways?

! In fact, where do you rank on this scale? Zero being the worst Christian, 100 being the perfect Christian? Where are you on that scale?

Or maybe it's actually easier just to put a few others on there first, so you see where we compare. So Paul the Apostle, he wrote this book, Galatians. He must be pretty up there, right? He's a pretty good Christian.

What about Christian legend, Billy Graham? Great evangelist, preached the gospel to thousands, millions probably. He must be way up there.

Or Charles Spurgeon, prince of preachers. He must be a pretty good Christian, right? One more. Tim Keller. The late Tim Keller. What a blessing he's been to the church. He must be pretty high up on the scale.

[1:23] What about closer to home? Surely the elders at Calvary are okay. I'm one of them, so put them further down.

Person sitting next to you, where would you put them? And then what about you? Where are you here? How's your Christian performance been this week? Christian performance, that seems to be what Galatians 3, 1 to 14 is about, really.

It's a bit like a school report or appraisal at work. Performing, working out how your performance has been. Are you doing well? Imagine if your school report began something like this.

Foolish student who has been bewitched by someone, seems to be led away by others. They're not learning well anymore. They're not what they used to be. Foolish student.

You wouldn't want to take that back to your mum and dad, would you? But that's how Galatians 3, verse 1 begins.

[2:55] You foolish Galatians. You're foolish. Who has bewitched you?

Someone has bewitched them. They're under the power and influence of someone else. Some sort of foolish teaching. If you haven't been with us over the last week, you may not know much about the letter to Galatians.

Written to Christians, churches in an area called Galatia, where the apostle Paul himself had been and preached to many of them. People have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now some people are in this church and they're saying, you need more than just Jesus to save you. They've been bewitched.

They're foolish. Foolish. Foolish listening to the voices of false teachers. And yet in chapter 2, verse 16, we read this last week.

[4:22] Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law.

Because by the works of the law, no one will be justified. Not works that save you. By faith in Christ Jesus.

So how are the Galatians doing? Doesn't sound like they're doing very well in that. Doesn't sound like they're doing very well in having faith in Jesus alone to save them.

Well, let's get into the text. Three big points. Firstly, how are you living as a Christian? Paul asked them a series of questions.

And the first one is basically, how did it all begin? How did it all begin? Verse 2. I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law?

[5:33] Or by believing what you heard? How did you receive the Spirit? How did this supernatural change happen in you?

That God Himself would come to live with you. How did you receive the Spirit? How did you receive the Spirit? Was it by your works?

Or by your belief? He says to them in verse 1, after He's asked them who has bewitched you, He said, Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

Now, He's not saying that Jesus went to Galatia as well and died there in front of them. He's not saying that.

He's saying that as He, Paul, and others came and preached the gospel to them in Galatia, it was like Jesus was held up so high that they saw by faith that Jesus was crucified on the cross.

[6:47] So the work was finished for them, for their salvation. A work of the Spirit, opening their eyes to see Jesus as their Savior.

That's what He's saying happened to them. So you became a Christian, didn't you?

Not because of your works of the law, but by believing what you heard. Believing the gospel. That's how you became a Christian, isn't it, Galatians? Do you remember that?

And so Paul continues to question them. What about now? What about now? Verse 3. Are you so foolish?

After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? You began by this supernatural, wonderful change by the Spirit, opening your eyes to see Jesus.

[8:01] And now you're trying to finish the Christian life, not with the help of God who's in you, but by your own flesh. That word flesh, it means the sinful nature that's at work in them.

Their sinful self trying to finish off their salvation. Trying to obey God's law, go back to the Old Testament law.

Focus on obeying that by themselves. Rather than looking to the finished work of Christ. And all he gives us.

All the resources he gives us to go on in the Christian life. It's that performance-based Christianity. They're trying to get to 100 on the scale.

It's sort of a try-harder Christianity. I, in myself, need to try harder at praying and reading the Bible each day.

[9:13] And if I don't, if I fail, if I fail to do that this week, then I'm down at zero. But perhaps in a few weeks' time, five mornings out of seven, I'll have opened my Bible.

And then I'll be up there near 100. But then the next week, I might go backwards again, and I'll be somewhere in the middle. That's how they're living.

They're trying to do it themselves. One day, I would really love to visit Australia.

That would be a dream holiday of mine. And the best way to get there, according to my understanding, is to fly. Catch an airplane and fly.

So imagine, I've booked my ticket to go on the plane. But sort of long plane journey, long, long plane journey, I start thinking, I could do this quicker myself.

[10:21] So I abandon the flight, being flown by a professional airline pilot, and I jump off, and I start swimming.

I can do this on my own. I can beat this aircraft. I'm better by myself. That's how the Galatians are living.

They think they can do this by themselves. They can get to 100 on the Christian performance scale. Just if only they tried a bit harder.

They're not. How foolish. They're forgetting.

That God, by his Spirit, opened their eyes to see Jesus, who has done it all for them. Jesus has paid it all. No more to add.

[11:27] To your salvation. You ask him another question. What about that time when you suffered? He says.

Verse 4. Have you experienced so much in vain, if it really was in vain? I think that word experience would be better. Have you suffered so much in vain?

Have you suffered for believing in the Lord Jesus alone? Suffered for knowing him? And now you're living like you don't need him. Was all that suffering for his sake, his name, really worth it?

What suffering might it be? I was reminding myself of when Paul was in Galatia, in that region, in the book of Acts. At one point he's threatened to be stoned to death.

[12:30] That's the sort of suffering these Galatians may have come across. Do you think, Galatians, you would stand firm in such persecution if the Spirit wasn't with you?

Surely you wouldn't. If it was all down to you to stand firm. When people are threatening to stone you to death.

Surely not many of you would have stood. But the Spirit was with you. Emboldening you.

Empowering you to face that. And so he rounds it off with this final question in verse 5.

Which I summarize as, do you get it now? Verse 5. So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit?

And work miracles in you by the works of the law?

Or by believing what you heard? Do you really think God has given you his Spirit? Because you have been such a good person.

[13:44] And obeyed his law. Do you really honestly think that, Galatians? So, Galatians, how are you living the Christian life?

Are you trusting in Jesus' work for you? Are you relying on the Spirit to help you? To turn to him? In prayer? To fight sin?

To face the sufferings that you're facing? Or are you just trying harder to be seen as a good Christian person? It's not a good report.

But remember, Paul also understands they are also being bewitched. They are being led astray by false teaching. They're under their spell.

They're a bit like scammers. They're a bit like scammers. He turned up to a relative of mine. He turned up to their home the other day. A man in a high-vis jacket, looking all important, knocking on the door and saying, Have you got any issues with your broadband?

[15:03] And saying, Well, if you just give me your bank details, I'll sort it for you. Thankfully, it was seen for what it is, a scam. But these Galatians, they've been caught by the Christian scammers, haven't they?

The ones who have come in and said, You know the Old Testament? You know it's full of all those laws. Well, I can tell you the secret to the Christian life.

Those laws, obey them. And then you'll get to heaven. So join us in obedience to the law and to show that you're serious about that.

If you're a man, you need to be circumcised. If you have a young child who's a boy, you need to get them circumcised to show that you're serious about this. Join us.

And you know what? As you live this way, you can become a child of Abraham. The father of all the Jewish people.

[16:21] And all those who live like Jewish people. But Paul knows about this. He knows what's going on. He knows what they're being bewitched by.

And he says to them next, Remember Abraham for his faith. Verse 6. So also, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

He says to them, As you live as a Christian, remember how Abraham lived. Do you see how he was counted as righteous?

How he had a right standing before God? He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Not he was circumcised and it was credited to him as righteousness.

But just to check, does Paul go on to talk about Abraham being circumcised?

[17:32] Verse 7. He doesn't mention circumcision here.

He talks about the faith of Abraham. Abraham might be the father of Jewish people in terms of ancestry.

But in terms of faith, he's the father of all those who also have faith in God, in his promises to save. You see, those words that Paul quotes from Abraham in verse 6 are from Genesis 50.

And it's not until two chapters later and at least 14 years later, I think possibly more, that Abraham was actually circumcised.

That's a long period of time. So do you get it, Galatians? Abraham wasn't standing righteous before God because of things he did.

[18:52] He was standing righteous before God because of his faith in God's promises. Right at the beginning of Abraham's life in Genesis 12, he heard those wonderful promises of God, which involved in verse 8 these words, all nations will be blessed through you.

All nations, people across the world will be blessed through you. Through you and your descendants. And when you follow the Bible's storyline carefully, you see that there was that one particular descendant of Abraham, who we rejoice in, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you'll know from the Gospels that Jesus, he had lots of interactions with some of the religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees, those very zealous law-keeping people.

And in one of their debates, Jesus said to them, do you realize your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day? And he saw it and he was glad.

Abraham had faith that blessing would indeed come through his descendants for the world. And it was coming in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[20:28] You foolish Galatians. Someone who's bewitched you, even about Abraham. Be careful who you're listening to.

They're deceiving you. They've got it round the wrong way. Abraham believed and stood righteous before God. Not he was circumcised and stood righteous before God. And that's actually a warning to us.

We should be careful about who we're listening to. Because there's a wealth of false teaching out there. But especially today, in our day of social media, of YouTube, you can find anybody preaching anything, really.

And there are people who will preach what was preached to the Galatians. Go back to the Old Testament laws. Because Christ's work isn't enough for you. We need to be careful who we're listening to.

We need to be discerning. Even here at Calvary, you need to be discerning about what we're preaching from the front. Check it in the Word of God. And if it's not right, come and tell us.

[21:43] Because it's not about our performance. It's about Christ's work. And that leads us on to see finally, thirdly and finally, rely on Christ's work.

Verse 10. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. As it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law.

Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God. Because the righteous will live by faith. A few days ago, we went as a family over to the Holmbush Centre in Shoreham.

There's several big shops there. The big Tesco, M&S, Next. Many of you will have been there. So that's where we went. And we started at Next, which has its own car park, parked there.

And then Micah doesn't particularly like the car at the moment. So Becky and Micah walked over to the Tesco whilst I drove over there. And Becky said, there's some parent and child parking just in front of the main entrance of Tesco.

[22:58] So great, I will go there. Ten minutes later, after driving round and round and round the car park, I wasn't getting anywhere. I couldn't find these spaces.

And that's what trying to obey the law is like. Verse 11 again. Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God.

If you're trying to be right with God because of things that you do, it's like driving round and round and round in circles. And you're never going to get anywhere.

But verse 12 says that the law is not based on faith.

On the contrary, it says the person who does these things will live by them. If we could live by them, great. But we can't. We can only be justified through faith in the finished work of Christ.

[24:06] So back to the car park. Something had to change. I had to take a different turn. And finally, I found the destination.

I found where I was meant to be. In Galatians, something's got to change, hasn't it? Got to take a different turn.

Because obedience to the law is just going to drive you round and round and round, and you're never going to get anywhere. So verse 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole. Rely on Christ's work. What's he done? He's become a curse, and he's hung on a pole.

Those are words taken from Deuteronomy. The procedure. If you were to go back to those words in Deuteronomy, are that people were executed if they'd done a serious crime against God's law, and their dead body would hang on a pole and just show them how shameful they are to others.

[25:33] And all of us, really, who break God's law, who don't do what he says, we should hang on a pole to you. Because we're cursed.

We've done wrong. We don't stand right before God. But the wonderful thing we see in verse 13 is that Christ has become a curse for us.

Christ hung on the cross in nakedness and shame. Because what happened at the cross, it was like a swap, wasn't it?

He who knew sin became, knew no sin became sin for us. He swapped places with us on the cross. He took our sins so that he could give us his righteousness.

So that by faith in his work, we can stand right before God. We rejoice in that. Verse 14.

[26:45] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through faith in Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promised Holy Spirit.

He took our sin. We get his righteousness. We get the blessing that Abraham knew. Faith in Christ. Faith in God. Faith in his promises.

Faith in his work. Means we stand righteous before him. And what more, we're told, at the end of verse 14, we receive the promise of the Spirit.

We get God with us. And that puts an end to any of that try harder Christianity.

Because that scale I put on the screen and ask you, where are you on that Christian scale? How good a Christian have you been this week? That's nonsense because of the cross.

[27:54] We don't need to be thinking, where do I stand on that scale? We don't need to be thinking, I need to try harder. We need to be resting in the finished work of Christ for us.

So instead of saying, what a good Christian I am, or what a rubbish Christian I am, we can say, thank you, Lord, that you have given me your Spirit.

Thank you, Lord, that you have helped me to see I need to turn to your Word. I need to read your words. Thank you for the understanding and insights you've given to me.

Thank you, if you use Bible reading notes to help you read the Bible, thank you for those that you've gifted to produce them so I can understand your words. Because it's not about our performance. It's about His work in us. Or if you're beating yourself up about not praying enough. We need to see, it's not try harder Christianity.

[29:00] It's not try as hard as I can to beat this prayerlessness. No, we need to turn to the Lord and ask Him to help us to pray. Teach me to pray.

Help me to depend on you in prayer because I am weak and you are strong. I can't do this on my own. I couldn't save myself on my own and I can't keep going on my own.

I need to turn to you. Help me, Lord. When we resist temptations to sin rather than boasting in ourselves, boasting God and what He's doing in our lives.

Praise Him. He's helped us to see that Christ is all sufficient for us. So we can't say no to sin. And when we're struggling with sin, instead of thinking, I myself need to try harder, we need to turn to Him and plead for the grace and help that we need.

And when we do fail, instead of beating ourselves up for not performing well, we go to the place we began the Christian life. We go to the cross and we say, thank you.

[30:17] Thank you, Jesus, that you have died for me. I'm sorry for where I am not living as I should, but thank you that it's not I, but Christ in me.

And so help me to live in the freedom that you give me. keep living in the gospel. Keep remembering it's not I, but through Christ in me and enjoy the freedom that that gives to us.

And how quickly, how quickly we do forget the gospel and how much we need this communion meal to remind us of it.  
we take the reminder of the bread and wine this morning, not because of our performance as a Christian, but we take freely from Christ, He says, take and eat for I have paid the price for you to bring you to God.  
We get to enjoy that in a minute, but first, let's pray and then we'll sing a song.