



2 Corinthians 12–13; Galatians 1–3

BRC
*Study the Bible
and follow Jesus*

NT #36 Bible Reading Class
Pastor: Wentang Wang

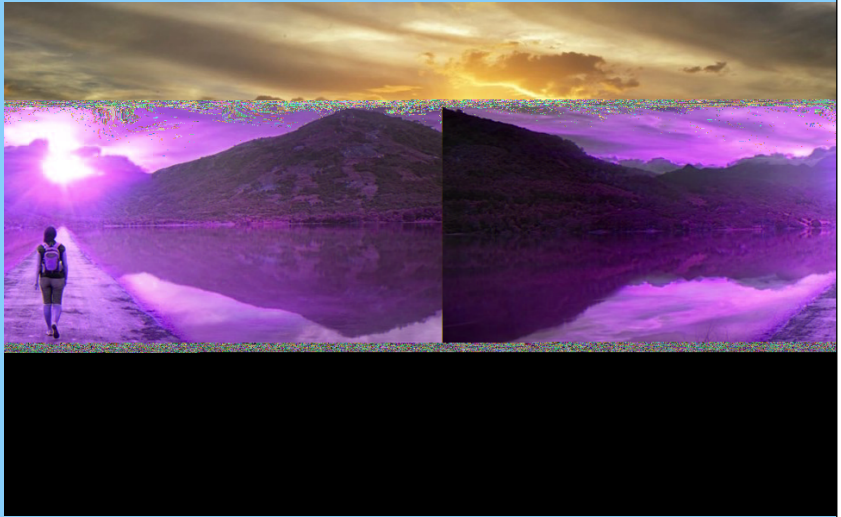
A Bible Reader's Conviction

- *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and **training in righteousness**, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NIV)*

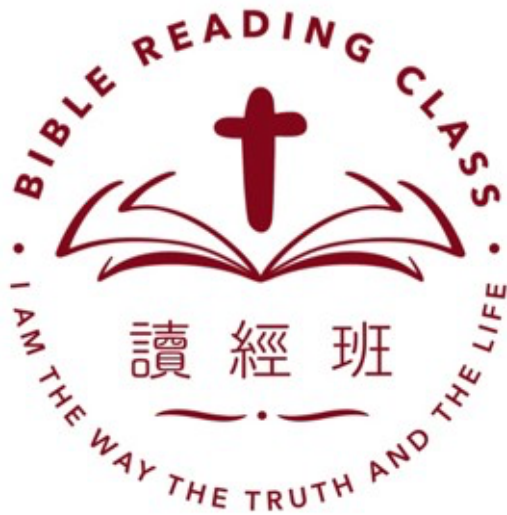
A Blessed Journey

1. May you study God's Word with a reverent heart and walk in His will.
2. May the Lord's Word flourish, and may He add to the church those who are being saved.
3. May the Lord bless your days of reading the Scriptures.

Study the Bible, follow Jesus

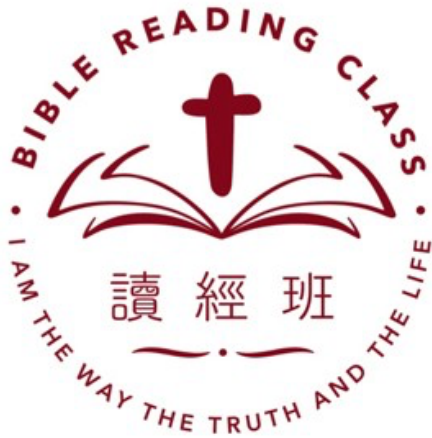


The Guiding Principles of BRC



- Christ-Centered
- Bible-Based
- Mission-Minded

BRC: A Gentleman's Agreement



I'll complete weekly reading assignment

I'll watch weekly teaching video in its entirety

I'll complete weekly quiz (closed book)

The Structure of the 27 Books of the New Testament

- The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) John
- The Fourfold Gospel, Acts, The Thirteen Pauline Epistles, The Other Nine Epistles (General Epistles and Others)
- Five Books of Historical Narrative, Twenty Two Books of Doctrinal Teaching

Outline of 2 Corinthians

- I. Paul's Defense of His Ministry — Chapters 1–7
 - II. Encouragement to Give for Relief — Chapters 8–9
 - III. Warnings to the Disobedient — Chapters 10–13
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Chapter 12: Boasting and Concern

- Chapter 12 can be divided into two sections:

1. Paul's **boasting** about the revelation he received (12:1–10)
2. Paul's **concern** for the Corinthians (12:11–21)

- Although the chapter can be divided into two parts, they actually share one central purpose—everything is for the benefit of the Corinthians. Paul's boasting is meant to gain the trust of the immature Corinthians, lowering himself to their level (*"I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it"*), so that they might accept his apostolic authority and be led into God's presence. His concern for them expresses his motivation (*"Dear brothers, everything we do is for your strengthening"*) and highlights several practical matters that require attention, so that when they meet again, neither side will feel disappointed.

Paul's Boasting: My Revelation and My Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:1–10)

1. My Revelation

- *“I must go on boasting, although **there is nothing to be gained**. I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord...”*
- *“I have made a fool of myself, **but you drove me to it...**” (2 Corinthians 12:1, 11)*
- Paul was pressured by the Corinthians. To help them understand, he reluctantly lowered himself to their level and became a boasting fool.
- What Paul boasted about was an experience from fourteen years earlier: he was caught up to the third heaven, into paradise, where he heard inexpressible words.
- Paul did not describe the details of this experience. How was he caught up?
“Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know—God knows.”
- As for the content of the secret words he heard, Paul did not reveal a single thing.

Paul's Boasting: My Revelation and My Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:1–10)



1. My Revelation

- Paul had never spoken to anyone about this experience. Why? Because he feared that others might think too highly of him: “But I refrain, so that no one will think more of me than is warranted.”
- A second reason for his silence was his fear that he himself might become overly proud: “Or because of these surpassingly great revelations, therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited...”

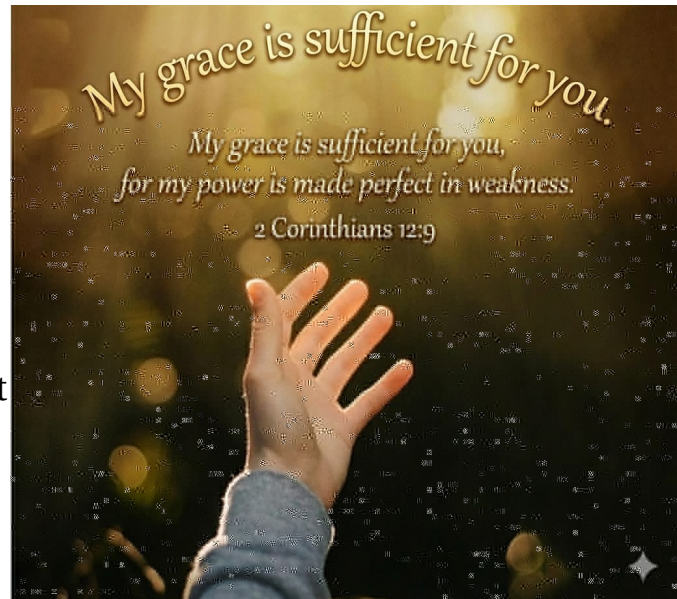
• **Paul’s “fears”:** These two concerns—the fear that others might overestimate him, and the fear that he himself might become conceited—led him to keep his experience of the third heaven hidden in his heart, never speaking of it to others. This attitude of refusing to exalt oneself is deeply worth reflecting on and imitating, especially for those who serve God in a modern society that values self-promotion.

Paul's Boasting: My Revelation and My Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:1–10)

2. My Thorn

• To keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassingly great revelations, a thorn in my flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not become proud. For this, I pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from me. But He said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* Therefore, I will all the more gladly boast about my

weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. For Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10, NIV)



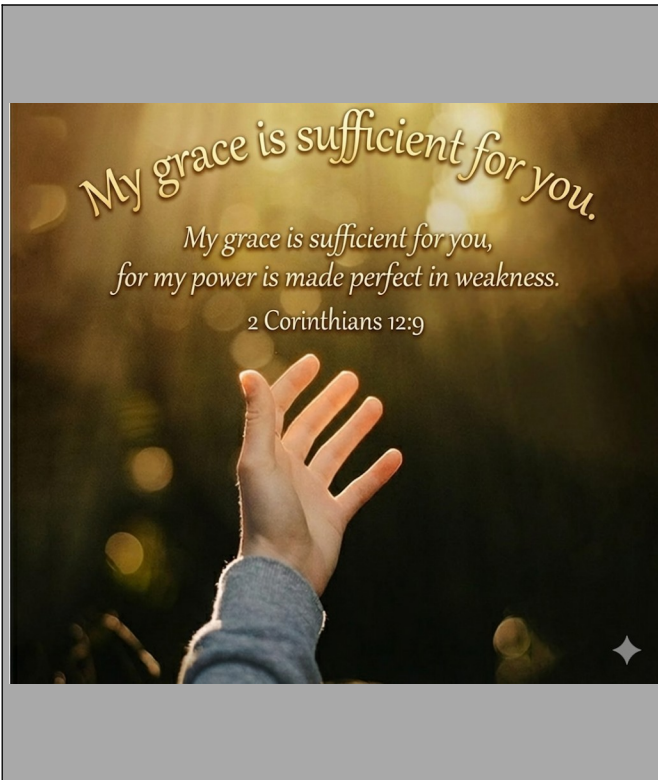
Paul's Boasting: My Revelation and My Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:1–10)

2. My Thorn

- Paul boasted about his revelation because of the Corinthians, but he boasted about his weaknesses because of Christ *“I will all the more gladly boast about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me”*.
- Paul’s weakness was “a thorn,” and this thorn has three characteristics:
 1. This thorn was given by the Lord and placed in Paul’s flesh so that he would not become conceited.
 2. This thorn “was a messenger of Satan, to torment me.”
 3. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times to remove this thorn, but the Lord said to him: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*



What Was Paul's Thorn? And Why?



A. What Was Paul's Thorn?

- This thorn was given by the Lord, yet it was also an attack from Satan, occurring in the life of the Lord's servant.
- Paul says that this thorn was placed in his flesh. Was he ill? Did he have an eye condition? (see Galatians 4:15) Was he beaten? Did he suffer **"insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties"**? (12:10) Paul did not explain in detail, and we do not need to speculate. What we need to know is that Paul prayed to the Lord three times for this thorn to be removed, but the Lord did not grant his request.

What Was Paul's Thorn? And Why?

B. Why Did Paul Have This Thorn?

- Why did the Lord allow His servant to have a thorn? Would it not be a wonderful testimony if God's servant were healthy, blessed, and prosperous in all things? Why would the Lord allow His servant to carry weakness?
 - Carrying weakness serves two purposes: first, to prevent the servant from becoming proud; second, to reveal the Lord's power through the servant's weakness.
 - The Lord knows the human heart is prone to pride. If a servant receives great revelations, possesses significant gifts, and experiences flourishing ministry, he may become proud and drift away from the Lord.
 - Because of the pain caused by the thorn, the servant earnestly pleads with the Lord. Although the Lord does not remove the thorn, He grants grace so that the servant may overcome, allowing the Lord's power to be made perfect in human weakness.
 - It is because of the thorn that the servant remains humble and learns to experience victory through the Lord. Paul understood this truth; therefore, he rejoiced in his weaknesses: ***"For when I am weak, then I am strong."***
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Speaking Foolish Words to Foolish People

- Paul spoke many “foolish words” in 2 Corinthians because such words were the only kind the Corinthians could understand. In the following passage, do you sense the tone of irony?
 - *I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am nothing, yet I am in no way inferior to those “super-apostles.” Among you, with great perseverance, I demonstrated the marks of a true apostle through signs, wonders, and miracles. In what way were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was not a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong.(2 Corinthians 12:11–13)*
 - **Two things are surprising—yet the second is even more astonishing than the first:**
 1. **First surprise:** After such a long period of Paul’s care and teaching, the Corinthians’ spiritual maturity remained so childish.
 2. **Second surprise:** Even though the Corinthians continually caused Paul grief and disappointment, Paul still loved them.
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When Good Intentions Are Maligned: “Yet Some of You Say...”

• *The more I love you, must I be loved less? Very well then—though I myself did not become a burden to you, **some say that** I was crafty and trapped you by deceit. Yet when I sent men to you, did I exploit you through any of them? I urged Titus to go to you, and I sent our brother with him. Did Titus exploit you? Did we not walk in the same spirit and follow the same footsteps? **All this time, you think we are defending ourselves to you; but we are speaking before God in Christ, and everything we do, dear brothers, is for your strengthening.**(2 Corinthians 12:15–19)*

• Human accusations are frightening, but accusations within the church are even more frightening, because many are corrupted. Speaking ill of one person harms only that individual; speaking ill of Paul harms the entire church. Some in the Corinthian church claimed that Paul was deceitful and used schemes to trap them. Paul responded: I never took wages from you, never took advantage of you, and neither did the people I sent. Yet you accuse me of manipulation? Dear brothers, our conduct has always come from sincerity—everything we do is for your edification!

When Good Intentions Refuse to Stop: “Let People Regard Us as Rejected!”

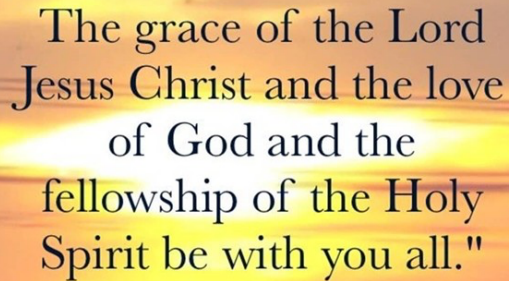
• *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I hope you will see that we ourselves have not failed. We pray to God that you will do nothing wrong—not so that people will think well of us, but so that you will do what is right, **even if it appears as though we have been rejected.**(2 Corinthians 13:5–7)*

• If you treat someone well and continually give of yourself, but that person repays you with hostility and spreads false accusations about you, would you still continue to treat them kindly? Most people would feel angry—betrayed, slandered, and hurt. Even if they do not retaliate, they would at least stop extending kindness.

Yet here we see the greatness of Paul. Even though the Corinthians treated him this way, he continued to love them. With earnest pleading, he continued to extend kindness to them, urging them to truly believe in Jesus and to avoid doing evil. Paul even said that as long as they behaved rightly, he did not care if others regarded him as “rejected.”

• Paul is admirable and deeply moving. He is a teacher of truth and a messenger of love. He is a true disciple of Christ!

The Blessing of the Triune God: Grace, Love, Fellowship




The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

• *“May the **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the **love** of God, and the **fellowship** of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13:14, NIV)*

• Pastors often use this verse to bless the congregation. Within it are three key words that convey important biblical truths:

The Blessing of the Triune God: Grace, Love, Fellowship

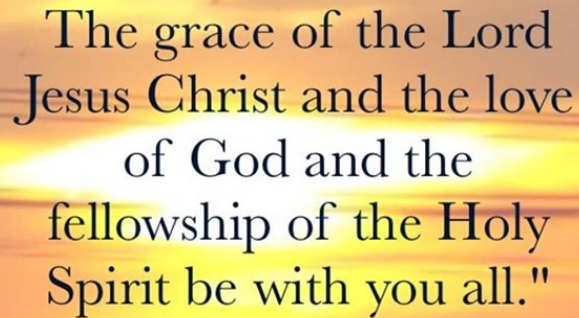


The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

1. The Grace of the Lord Jesus (charis, grace)

- The word “grace” can also be translated as “favor” or “unmerited kindness.” The blessing of the Triune God begins with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are justified by faith, our sins are forgiven, and we become children of God because of the redeeming grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Blessing of the Triune God: Grace, Love, Fellowship



The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

2. The Love of God (agape, love)

- The source of grace is God. God loved the world and even gave His one and only Son to them. Because of the Father's love, we are able to believe in the Lord Jesus and not perish but have eternal life.

3. The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit (koinonia, fellowship)

- The word "fellowship" can also be translated as "communion" or "participation." Through the grace of Christ, we become children of God, and in the Holy Spirit we share fellowship, communion, and participation—just like members of one family.

Loving the Corinthians

- In the New Testament, Paul wrote thirteen epistles, and 1 and 2 Corinthians account for two of them. In terms of length, 1 Corinthians has sixteen chapters and 2 Corinthians has thirteen chapters—a total of twenty-nine chapters. Among all the churches, Corinth received the most extensive “written instruction” from Paul. Why?
- First Corinthians chapter 13 is the famous “Love Chapter,” lifting believers to the highest spiritual plane and presenting the supreme biblical definition of love before God. Yet this most exalted passage was written to one of the least mature and most heartbreaking churches Paul ever shepherded. Why?
- When Paul came from Athens to Corinth, he first preached the gospel to the Jews, proving that Jesus is the Christ. But when the Jews opposed him, Paul shook out his clothes and said, ***“Your blood be on your own heads; I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*** So Paul turned to the Gentiles to preach the gospel, and many believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ***“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”*** Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, preaching the word of God—second only to Ephesus as the place where he remained the longest.(cf. Acts 18:5–11)

•While Paul was ministering in Corinth, an incident took place. At that time, Gallio—a Stoic philosopher known for his wisdom and calm temperament—was serving as the proconsul of Achaia (AD 51–52). One day the Jews seized Paul and brought him before the tribunal, accusing him of *“persuading people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”* Before Paul could speak, Gallio said to the Jews, *“If this were a matter of wrongdoing or serious crime, I would be willing to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words, names, and your own law, settle the matter yourselves. I will not judge such things.”* He then drove them out of the court. Frustrated, the Jews seized Sosthenes, the synagogue leader—who later believed the gospel, was baptized, and became a coworker of Paul (1 Corinthians 1:1)—and beat him in front of the tribunal. Gallio, with his characteristic nonchalance, simply ignored the commotion and let them quarrel in front of his court. (cf. Acts 18:12–16)

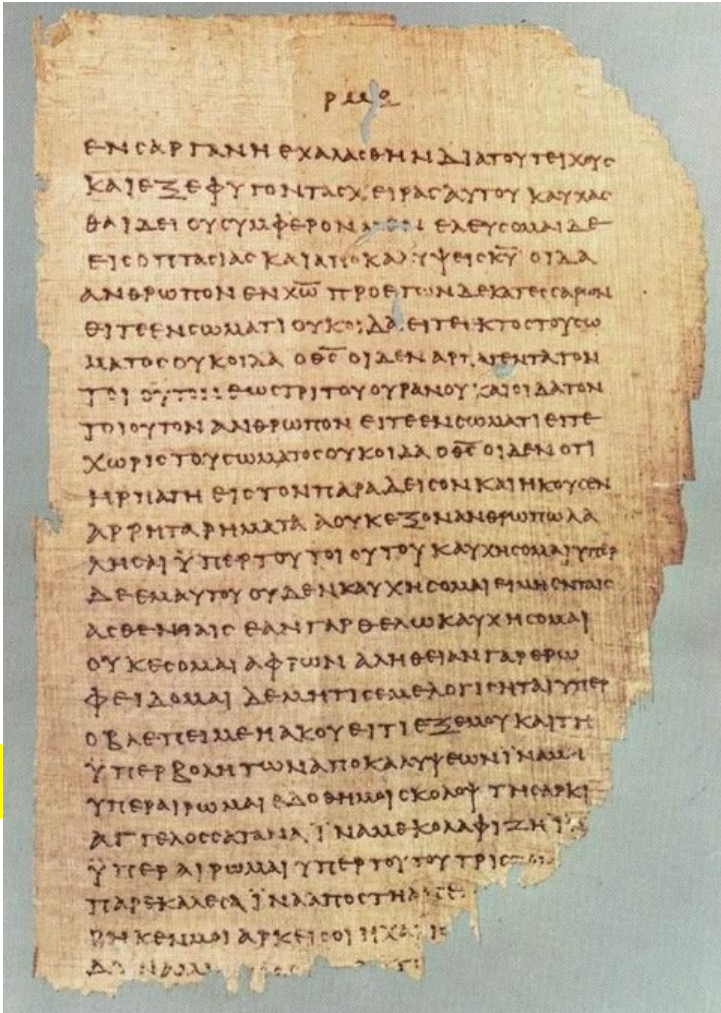
•The Corinthians lived in wealth and sophistication, shaped by deep Greek cultural roots and the most advanced knowledge of their time. The city was filled with temples—not only the great temple of the sun god in the city and the temple of the goddess of love on the hill, but also the Jewish synagogue and many other shrines. In such a city, it was remarkable that many people believed the gospel and were baptized. This was the result of Paul and his coworkers’ labor, but even more, it was the work of God.

- However, just like the churches of today, the church in Corinth was deeply influenced by its environment. The divisions, immorality, lawsuits among believers, factionalism at the Lord's Supper, the exaltation of speaking in tongues, and the doubts about the resurrection of the dead mentioned in 1 Corinthians all reflected the culture of the city. By the time of 2 Corinthians, Paul sharply rebuked the false brothers and false apostles, showing the influence of Jewish legalism. A church that began well deteriorated quickly under the pressure of social and religious forces—something that remains common even today.
 - What is heartbreaking is the Corinthians' attitude toward Paul. From the beginning, Paul knew that they were spiritually immature, so he chose to work with Aquila and Priscilla as tentmakers, supporting himself rather than accepting financial help from the Corinthians. Yet the Corinthians failed to see Paul's hard work and integrity. Even though he served them wholeheartedly, some accused him of being crafty and of trapping people through deceit (12:16). Faced with such believers and such a church, most people would have given up. But Paul did not. He continued to write to them and visit them in person. No matter how the Corinthians treated him, he continued to love them. When Paul taught the true meaning of love, the very first words were ***“Love is patient, love is kind.”*** I believe this was drawn from his own personal experience.
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- When reading 1 and 2 Corinthians, beyond studying spiritual truths and learning the principles and methods for handling church problems, there is an even greater lesson—the lesson of **“loving the Corinthians.”**

- The Corinthians were, in many ways, unlovely. They were ungrateful; Paul treated them well, yet they treated Paul poorly. Their spiritual life was shallow, their faith unstable, and they easily drifted away from the truth. Their words and actions were disappointing, even disheartening. How, then, can one love the Corinthians? God loved me—a sinner—and Christ died for me, a sinner. Paul’s love for the Corinthians reflects the same principle, and it is something worth learning.

Galatians



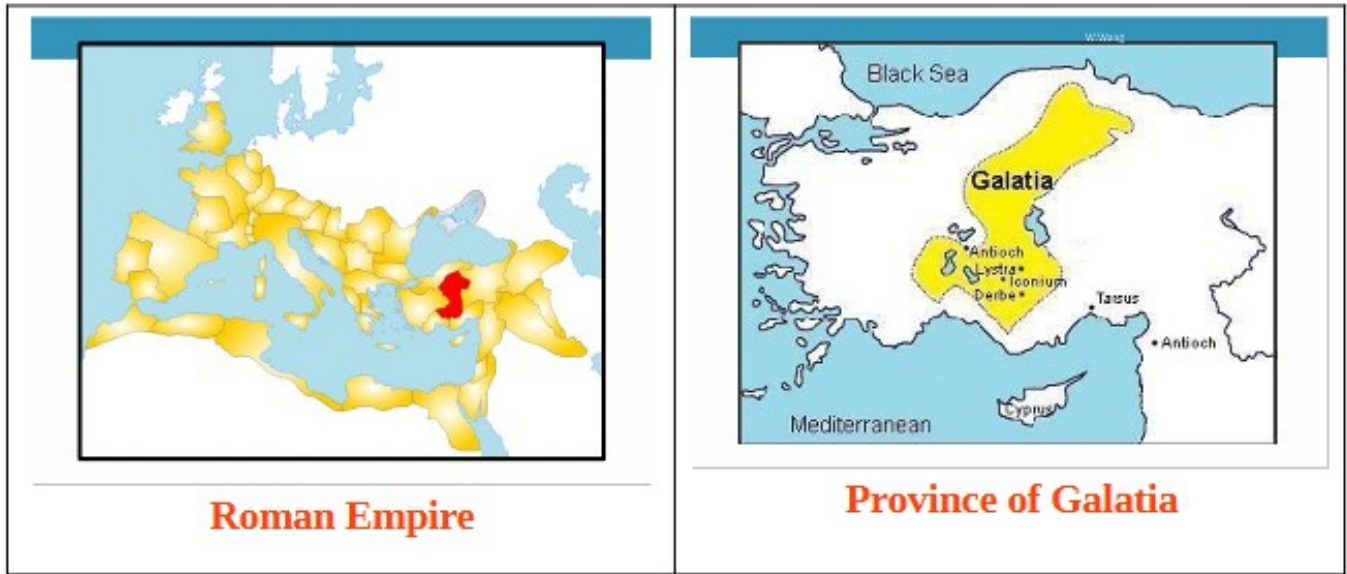
The Classification of Paul's Thirteen Epistles

• According to doctrine, Paul's thirteen epistles can be categorized into four groups in order: Soteriology (Salvation), Christology, Eschatology, and Ecclesiology.

Soteriology (Salvation)		Christology		Eschatology		Ecclesiology	
1.	Romans	5.	Ephesians	8.	I Thessalonians	10.	I Timothy
2.	I Corinthians	6.	Philippians	9.	II Thessalonians	11.	II Timothy
3.	II Corinthians	7.	Colossians			12.	Titus
4.	Galatians					13.	Philemon

A Book That Teaches Justification by Faith

- Galatians is also called “the Little Romans,” for it focuses specifically on the doctrine of justification by faith. It is the book most frequently quoted by Martin Luther.
 - Galatians is known as “The Magna Carta of Christian Liberty,” emphasizing that Christians are not bound by the law, nor enslaved by the desires of the flesh, but are free to walk in Christ.
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1. Northern Galatia Theory:

Written to the churches in northern Galatia, composed around AD 53–57.

✓ 2. Southern Galatia Theory:

Written to the churches in southern Galatia—Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe—composed around AD 48–49.

Paul's First Missionary Journey:

Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe



Outline of the Book of Galatians

- Introduction, 1:1–5

I. Argumentation, 1:6–4:11

1. Defending the Gospel, 1:6–10
2. Defending Himself, 1:11–2:21
3. Defending the Truth of Justification by Faith, 3:1–4:11

II. Exhortation, 4:12–6:10

1. Live as Free People—Do Not Be Enslaved by the Law, 4:12–5:12
2. Live as Free People—Do Not Be Enslaved by the Flesh, 5:13–6:10

- Conclusion, 6:11–18

Key Verses in Galatians

1. Key theme of Galatians: Justification by Faith

- *“We 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 no one with human flesh will be justified by the works of the law.” (Galatians 2:16)*

2. Children of Abraham

- *“Understand, then, that those who live by faith are the children of Abraham.” (Galatians 3:7)*

Key Verses in Galatians

3. Christ lives in me

- *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)*

4. Christ sets us free

- *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)*

Key Verses in Galatians

5. Love your neighbor as yourself

- *“For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Galatians 5:14)*

6. The fruit of the Spirit

- *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22–23)*

7. Do not grow weary in doing good

- *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9)*
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When Evil Men Kidnap Your Children

- Ever since the beginning of the Christian faith, there have always been false teachers, false prophets, and false brothers. They existed in the apostolic era, and they still exist in the twenty-first century. What they teach often sounds plausible, even correct, yet is fundamentally wrong—seriously misleading believers and causing deep spiritual harm.
- Jesus once foretold the coming of false prophets and false brothers, saying that they are *“wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15)*. Peter said that they *“secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1)*.
- Paul’s first missionary focus was the province of Galatia in Asia Minor. Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, leading many to Christ and establishing churches. These churches were like Paul’s own children—born through his early gospel ministry—and he cherished them deeply.

When Evil Men Kidnap Your Children

- After Paul left, certain false teachers entered these churches, preaching “another gospel” and questioning Paul’s apostolic authority. What pained Paul deeply was that many people actually followed them.
 - Galatians is a letter written to win back his children. It contains the apostle’s unwavering commitment to the truth, but also the heartbreak, anger, and anxiety of a father watching his children abandon him to follow harmful influences. Paul made up his mind—he must bring them back.
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Striving Earnestly for the Gospel

- Galatians is written with boldness and clarity, and it is equally refreshing to read. The entire letter is orderly and forceful, presenting the truth of justification by faith with unmistakable precision. Paul contends earnestly for the gospel, and from the very beginning he emphasizes that his authority does not come from human beings but directly from Jesus Christ: *“Paul, an apostle—not sent from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. Brothers, I want you to know that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1:1,11-12)*
- Paul is anything but gentle with the Galatians; he speaks plainly and rebukes sharply: *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. You foolish Galatians! Are you truly so senseless? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if indeed it really was for nothing?” (1:6,3:1,3-4)*

Striving Earnestly for the Gospel

•To explain the truth of justification by faith, Paul even exposed Peter’s fault publicly: *“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” (2:11)* He then recounted the embarrassing incident in which Peter, out of fear of those who insisted on circumcision, pretended not to eat with the Gentiles. (We have previously discussed how offensive “eating with Gentiles” was to those who upheld circumcision.)

If Paul could speak so bluntly to Peter, he was even more uncompromising toward those who preached a false gospel: *“Some false brothers had secretly slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. The one who is troubling you, whoever he may be, will bear his judgment. I wish those who unsettle you would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!” (2:4-5,5:10,12)* The Greek word translated “cut off” in the Chinese Bible is rendered “emasculate” in the NIV, meaning “to castrate.” In other words: “These people keep insisting on cutting this and cutting that—why don’t they just go and cut themselves off completely!” Can an apostle speak with such severity? Paul already answered that question—if you doubt it, go and read Galatians.

Striving Earnestly for the Gospel

- This does not mean that we may also “speak our minds” and start scolding people. In the entire book of Galatians, Paul defends the purity of the gospel and upholds the truth of justification by faith. Toward the false teachers who misled believers, he showed no mercy and argued on the basis of truth. Conversations among believers do not carry this level of doctrinal weight, and therefore we must not lose control of our emotions and lash out at others. The difference between the two situations should be obvious.
- Galatians is a book about freedom: *“Christ has set us free so that we may live in freedom. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (5:1) ”*

Paul is remarkable—he rebukes, mocks, and even lashes out, expressing his emotions, yet his mind remains clear. Through every line, he explains the truth of the gospel with precision, ensuring that the Galatians would not be deceived and lose their freedom in Christ: “Brothers and sisters, do not be enslaved by the law, nor by the desires of the flesh—be people who live in freedom. As for those who deserve rebuke, I have already rebuked them. And if they were to stir up trouble in the twenty-first century and disrupt the church of Jesus Christ, I would rebuke them again.”

The Judaizers

- The entire book of Galatians can be seen as Paul’s response against the Judaizers. These individuals were originally Jews who, after believing in Jesus, continued to follow Jewish traditions—such as circumcision, dietary laws, Jewish festivals, and ceremonial practices. They claimed that a person who believed in Jesus but was not circumcised could not be saved.
 - Paul was extremely blunt toward the false teachers of the Judaizing party, as well as toward the Galatian believers who blindly followed them:
 - *“I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different ‘gospel.’” (Galatians 1:6)*
 - *“Some false brothers had secretly slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, in order to make us slaves.” (Galatians 2:4)*
 - *“You foolish Galatians! Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified before your very eyes. Who has bewitched you? Are you truly so senseless? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if indeed it really was for nothing?” (Galatians 3:1, 3–4)*
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Doctrine and Life

- The central focus of Galatians is the doctrine of justification by faith. When this doctrine is abandoned, faith becomes bound by religious constraints (in Paul's time, Judaism). When this doctrine is upheld, believers are able to walk freely in Christ.
 - In the history of the Christian faith, there were two major moments in which believers broke free from bondage through the doctrine of justification by faith. The first was when Paul upheld justification by faith and broke free from the bondage of Judaism. The second was when Martin Luther upheld justification by faith and broke free from the bondage of Roman Catholicism.
 - Justification by faith is a pure and complete doctrine: everything is sufficient in Christ, the cross has fully paid the debt of sin, and one is justified simply by believing in Jesus—nothing needs to be added.
 - **Doctrine and life are closely connected. Pure doctrine brings a life of clarity and freedom, enabling believers to live unbound, walking in the sunlight of truth, and living freely in Christ.**
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The Pure Gospel, the Radiant Life

Chapter	The Pure Gospel:
1	The Gospel of Jesus Christ
2	Christ Alone — Justification by Faith
3	God's Children Receiving the Blessing of the Promise
4	God's Children No Longer Bound by the Law
5	God's Children No Longer Bound by the Flesh
6	God's Children Bearing One Another's Burdens

Chapter	The Radiant Life:
1	Turning Toward a Life of Light
2	Friendships That Stand the Test
3	The Joy of Unity
4	Walking Freely in Grace
5	Walking Freely in the Spirit
6	Not Growing Weary in Doing Good

1A. The Gospel of Jesus Christ

- *“I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel. That gospel is really no gospel at all; there are some who are troubling you and trying to distort the gospel of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6–7)*
- *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20a)*

1. The Gospel Truth Is Jesus Christ:

The gospel is Jesus Christ Himself—His suffering, His resurrection, and His glorification. To preach the gospel is to preach Jesus; to believe the gospel is to believe in Jesus.

- ## 2. Life Is Jesus:
- In doctrine, we believe in Jesus; in daily living, we follow Jesus. This is a shift from a self-centered life to a Christ-centered life. It is not merely believing in the heart without following in action; rather, it is both believing and following.
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1B. Turning Toward a Radiant Life

•“At that time, the churches of Judea that are in Christ did not know me personally. They had only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.’ And they praised God because of me.” (Galatians 1:22–24)

1. **A Bright Present:** Paul was once a persecutor of the church, yet now he is “proclaiming the very faith he once tried to destroy.” No matter what your past may have been, in Christ you have a bright present and a bright future. In Christ, every day is new; today is always brighter than yesterday.

2. **Freedom of the Soul:** Paul did not hide his past; this is a mark of true inner freedom. He was released from it and faced his former failures with gratitude. Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus loves you. He knows everything about you, covers you with His precious blood, and gives you a new beginning. We can face our past with ease and live today with a thankful heart.

The Rare “Repetition for Emphasis”

- *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel to you that is different from the one we preached to you, let him be under God’s curse. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel other than what you received, let him be under God’s curse.” (Galatians 1:8–9)*

- Was Paul confused or emotional? Why did he repeat the same words twice? He was not confused—he did it deliberately. Paul made it very clear: *“As we have already said, so now I say again!”* This was a common Jewish rhetorical style—when something is extremely important, it is stated twice. Yet in the ancient world, where writing was laborious, repeating such a long sentence was rare, which shows just how important this matter was in Paul’s mind.

- *“If anyone preaches a different gospel to you—different from the one we preached—even if he were an angel, he should be cursed! And I will say it again: If anyone preaches a gospel to you that is not the one you received, he should be cursed!”* All right, I’ve said it twice—now you should understand how serious this is.

- But then, what exactly is this “different gospel”?

A Different Gospel = A False Gospel

- A “different gospel” is simply “a gospel that is not the same as the one preached by the apostles”—it is a false gospel. The apostles proclaimed only one message: “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Their preaching never deviated. No matter where they preached, to whom they preached, or how long they preached, it was always the same gospel—nothing added, nothing taken away, nothing distorted.
- We, however, are not the same. We tend to adjust the content of the gospel according to the situation or the audience, thinking we know better. When facing someone hard-hearted, we speak less about sin and more about God’s grace. When facing someone pragmatic, we speak less about Jesus being the Son of God and more about how effective prayer is. When facing someone in trouble, we speak less about Christ’s suffering and more about testimonies of overcoming hardship. When facing someone lonely, we speak less about the loneliness of the cross and more about how loving Christians are and how warm the church feels.
- This is why the Bible says that the church is “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*” (*Ephesians 2:20*). The churches built by the apostles were one hundred percent founded on Jesus Christ. The churches we build today may be seventy or eighty percent Christ—and the remaining twenty or thirty percent, we are not even sure what it is.

A Different Gospel = A False Gospel

- Every era has its own “**different gospels**”—in the plural. In the apostolic age, the two most prominent were the legalistic gospel and the Gnostic gospel. The legalistic gospel mixed Jesus Christ with the laws of Judaism, while the Gnostic gospel mixed Jesus Christ with Gnostic philosophy. The heresies refuted in Paul’s letters were mainly the legalistic gospel, whereas the heresies refuted in the letters of Peter and John were primarily the Gnostic gospel.
- The twenty-first century is an age in which “different gospels” flourish. We have the prosperity gospel, the social gospel, the psychological gospel, the Calvinist-theology gospel, the nationalist gospel, and of course the charismatic gospel. These “gospels” include Jesus, but He is not the main character. Health and wealth become the main characters; social concern becomes the main character; psychology becomes the main character; Calvin becomes the main character; nation and ethnicity become the main characters; speaking in tongues and healing and exorcism become the main characters. Any “gospel” that pushes Jesus into a supporting role—or even a background extra—is what Paul calls a “different gospel.” If anyone preaches a different gospel, he is to be cursed!

A Different Gospel = A False Gospel

- **The Pure Gospel**

- Gospel = Jesus Christ

- **A Different Gospel (False Gospel)**

- Gospel = Jesus Christ + Circumcision + Law
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ + Divine Knowledge (Gnosticism)
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ + Health & Wealth
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ + Speaking in Tongues + Healing & Deliverance
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ + Calvin
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ + Nation & Ethnicity
 - Gospel = Jesus Christ + Political Position
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The Pure Gospel

- The gospel preached by the apostles is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” and it contains two essential truths:

1. **Jesus Christ:** Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah. At His birth, the angel announced, *“Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11)*. After Jesus rose from the dead, the apostles began to preach the gospel, *“proving that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 2:36; 9:22)*. The true identity of Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Paul says that He *“was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4)*.

2. **The Cross:** Jesus Christ, the Son of God, bore the sins of the world and became the sacrificial Lamb, nailed to the cross. *“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21)*.

- Faith comes from hearing. Those who hear the pure gospel, repent, and believe in the Lord are justified by faith and received by God as His children. Such people, from the very beginning, believe in the Lord—not merely in a religion. What they hear is Jesus, and what they believe is Jesus. Those who believe in the Lord gather together and become the church, following Jesus as one body.

The Origin of the New Testament

- *“Brothers, I want you to know that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11–12)*

- In our Bible “Reading” Class , we read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 each time: *“All Scripture is God-breathed...”* We understand that the “Scripture” mentioned there refers to the Old Testament. But what about the New Testament? Is it also God-breathed?

- In this passage, Paul says, *“The gospel I preached came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Paul is the author of thirteen New Testament letters, and he declares that the gospel he preached came directly from the revelation of Jesus Christ. This assures us that the “inspiration of God” did not end with the Old Testament.

- On the road to Damascus, Paul encountered the risen Lord, believed, and was transformed—from persecuting Jesus to following Jesus. The risen Lord guided him and revealed truth to him, enabling him to preach the gospel widely, lead many to the Lord, establish churches, and write precious letters that have become a guide to truth and a source of spiritual comfort for believers throughout the ages. We believe that both the New Testament and the Old Testament are inspired by God, trustworthy, and the highest authority for our faith and our daily living.

Did Paul Live in Arabia for Three Years?

• *“I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. After three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.” (Galatians 1:17–18)*

• Many people say that after Paul believed in the Lord, he first went to the wilderness of Arabia and lived there for three years, meditating on God’s word before beginning his ministry. The passage they rely on is Galatians 1:17–18.

• **Bible quiz:** Does this passage actually say that Paul lived in Arabia for three years?

2A. Christ Alone — Justification by Faith

• *“We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)*

• Pure doctrine: In salvation there is only God’s grace and no human merit. A person is justified not by himself but by Christ alone. The salvation of Jesus Christ is complete and needs no addition. Any addition is profanity—and heresy. Adding law is heresy; adding experiences is heresy. To add anything to the cross of Jesus is profanity and heresy.

2B. Friendship That Stands the Test

• **Paul opposed Peter:** *“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned...”* (Galatians 2:11–16)

• **Peter praised Paul:** *“Our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters...”* (2 Peter 3:15–16)

1. **In matters of priority, truth is greater than personal feelings:** Paul upheld the truth and, for the sake of the Gentile believers, confronted Peter to his face.

2. **In life’s choices, friendship is greater than pride:** Although Peter was rebuked by Paul, he still loved and respected him, urging believers to listen to Paul’s teaching. The deeds of these two apostles became a beautiful testimony—a cherished story in church history.

No Longer I, but Christ

• *“We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, does that mean Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I once destroyed, then I prove that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing.” (Galatians 2:15–21)*

• This is the most powerful and majestic argument for justification by faith in all of Scripture—eloquent, forceful, and full of emotion. Paul says that they were born as Jews and not “Gentile sinners.” Paul is not claiming that Jews are not sinners while Gentiles are. He is not speaking about ethnicity, but about how Jews of that time viewed the law.

No Longer I, but Christ

- In those days, the Jews believed that anyone who did not keep the law was a sinner. If you did not keep the Sabbath, did not observe the purification rituals, or did not fast and pray at the appointed times, you were considered a sinner. This is what the Gospels mean when they speak of “tax collectors and sinners.” And when it came to the law, the most basic requirement of all was circumcision. Every Jewish male was circumcised on the eighth day after birth, while Gentiles were never circumcised. If someone had not even received circumcision and knew nothing about the law, what else could he be but a sinner? Therefore, they said, ‘We are Jews by birth,’ while others were ‘Gentile sinners by birth.’ This was the mindset of the Jews at that time.
- Paul says, Fine—let’s assume you are a Jew by birth. Tell me, have you been justified by God? You keep this law and that law, yet in the end, are you not justified by faith in Christ? Why? Because no one can keep the whole law without breaking a single command. There is not a single person in the world who is justified by works of the law; all who are justified are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Since this is the case, why are you forcing those Gentile brothers—who have already been justified by God—to be circumcised and to keep the law? What is wrong with you? Do you intend to nullify the grace of God? As for me, Paul, I will never set aside God’s grace! For if righteousness could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

No Longer I, but Christ

- Paul says, *“If I rebuild what I once destroyed, then I prove that I am a transgressor.”* What Paul had once destroyed was the idea of **being justified by the law**. Gentiles do not need to keep the law in order to be saved—believing in Jesus is enough! Paul is saying, If I now turn around and urge people to keep the law, would that not prove that I am still a sinner? Would that not imply that believing in Jesus is not enough, and that one must keep the law in order to be justified by God?
 - Paul then declares one of the most important verses concerning the Christian life: *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* To live toward the law is a dead end; only living toward Christ is the way of life. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loves me and died for me, and I live by faith in Him. Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus loves you and gave Himself for you. You have been crucified with Christ, and the risen Lord lives in you, expressing Himself through your life. This is the path of grace—and the only path of life.
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3A. God's Children Receiving the Blessing of the Promise

- *“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16)*
- God promised Abraham, *“All nations on earth will be blessed through your offspring” (Genesis 22:18)*. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and all who believe in Him receive the blessing of salvation. This is God's promise.

3B The Joy of Unity

• *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26–29)*

1. The Disappearance of Distinctions: When we are baptized into Christ, the greatest human distinctions—race, class, wealth, and gender—disappear in Him.
 2. The Joy of Unity: What remains is the “oneness” we share in Christ, and the joy of being united.
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“You Foolish Galatians!”

• *“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain?” (Galatians 3:1–4)*

• Love rebukes deeply, and among all of Paul’s letters, this is one of the most severe confrontations. The word “foolish” translates the Greek *anoētos*, meaning “not-knowing,” and the Chinese rendering “無知” captures the original sense even better. Paul asks the Galatians: Do you not even know how you were saved? I preached the pure gospel to you and set Jesus Christ before your eyes as crucified, yet no sooner had I left than you were led astray. Are you really this ignorant? You received the promised Holy Spirit by faith (3:14). Having begun by the Spirit, are you now trying to be perfected by the flesh? You were justified by faith in Christ, yet now you abandon Christ and turn to the law. Are you truly this foolish?

“You Foolish Galatians!”

- Who are the “foolish Galatians”? Many Christians do not know Jesus Christ, do not follow Jesus Christ, and do not love Jesus Christ. Their hearts are attached to something else, they follow something else, and they pursue knowledge of something else. They refuse to be crucified with Christ and will not allow Christ to live in them. They have itching ears when listening to sermons and feel bored when reading Scripture. They appoint teachers for themselves and listen only to what they like to hear. Because they do not read the Bible, they do not know what the Jesus of the Gospels is truly like. They claim to believe in the Lord without having Jesus, and they drift far from Christ without realizing it. Paul calls such people “foolish Galatians.”
 - Brothers and sisters, let us not be foolish Galatians. Let nothing take the place of Jesus Christ. Christ is our only Savior and our only Lord. You must acknowledge Christ, love Him alone, and follow Him with an undivided heart.
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The Descendants of Abraham

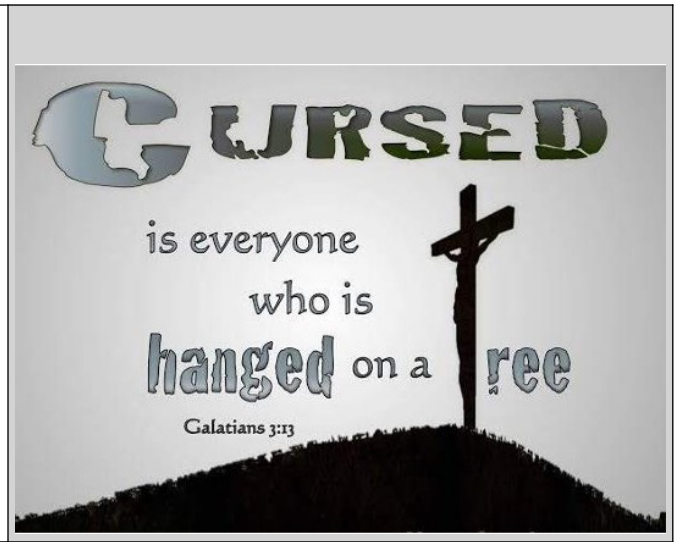
• *“So understand that those who have faith are the children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (Galatians 3:7–9)*

• The Jews took great pride in being God’s chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, enjoying a special status among all nations. Paul says that the era in which one’s relationship with God was determined by bloodline has passed. In Christ, the determining factor is not ancestry but faith. Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a descendant of Abraham.

• When “God’s chosen people” is mentioned, many Christians immediately think of the Jews but do not think of themselves. Brothers and sisters, let us not be foolish Galatians. We must know that *“those who rely on faith are the children of Abraham”* and are also God’s chosen people (1 Peter 2:9). Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. We believe in Jesus Christ, and it is likewise credited to us as righteousness. Like Abraham, we establish our relationship with God by faith and follow the Lord by faith. We are God’s chosen people, the descendants of Abraham—never forget this.

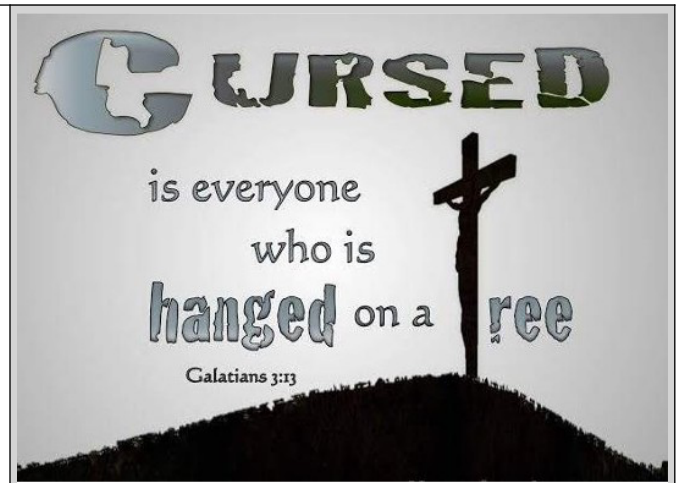
He Became a Curse on the Cross

• *“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 tree.’ He did this so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” (Galatians 3:13–14)*



He Became a Curse on the Cross

- The cross is Christ's suffering and our redemption; the cross is Christ's curse and our blessing. Scripture says, "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deuteronomy 21:23).



Paul quotes this verse to explain the power of the cross: on the cross, Christ bore the curse that we sinners deserved, so that the blessing of Abraham ("All nations will be blessed through you," 3:8) might come to us. Christ loves me and gave Himself for me—this is the message of the cross. Christ was cursed, and I receive blessing—this is the effect of the cross. I follow Christ, deny myself, and save others—this is the mission of the cross.

Receiving the Promised Holy Spirit by Faith

- When you believe in the Lord, you receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in you as the guarantee of your inheritance until Christ returns and God's people are redeemed. (Ephesians 1:14)
 - You receive the Holy Spirit simply by believing in the Lord—you do not need to speak in tongues, fast and pray, or have any special experience. As long as you believe in Jesus, you will receive the Holy Spirit. All who believe in the Lord ***“begin by the Spirit” (3:3)***, meaning that from the very moment they believe, they receive the Holy Spirit. There is no believer who does not receive the Holy Spirit, and anyone who has not received the Holy Spirit has not yet believed in the Lord. Paul says that because Christ became a curse for us on the cross, the blessing of Abraham can come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we may receive the promised Holy Spirit by faith. “Receiving the Holy Spirit” and “being in Christ” are synonymous—they both describe our position after believing in the Lord. By faith in Christ, we become those who have received the Holy Spirit. By faith in Christ, we are ***“rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” (Colossians 1:13)***
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No Distinction

• *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26–29)*



• “No distinction” is the mark of Christians. Society divides people by race, nationality, class, status, wealth, and gender, but in Christ there is no such division.

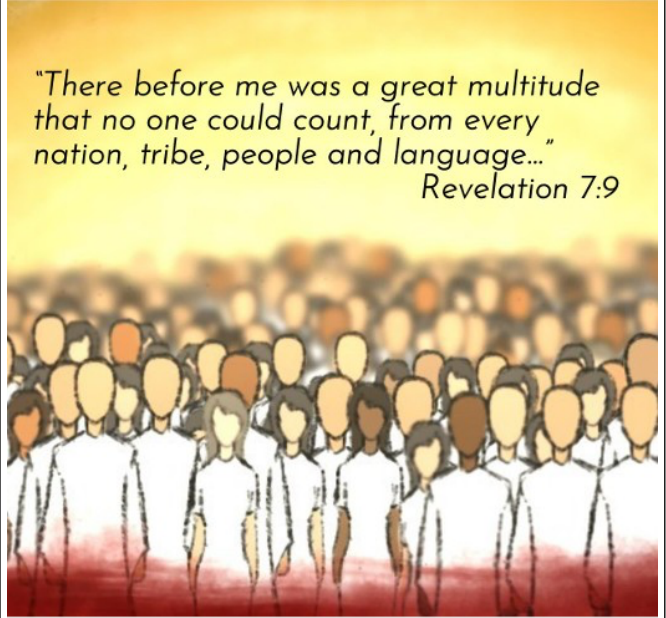
No Distinction

• Jews who believe in the Lord become children of God. Gentiles who believe in the Lord also become children of God. Free people who believe in the Lord become children of God, and slaves who believe in the Lord also become children of God. Men who believe in the Lord become children of God; women who believe in the Lord also become children of God. In those days, “son” meant “heir,” so women who believed in the Lord were also considered “sons of God.” Whoever believes in Jesus Christ—no matter who they are—becomes a child of God, a descendant of Abraham, and an heir according to the promise.



No Distinction

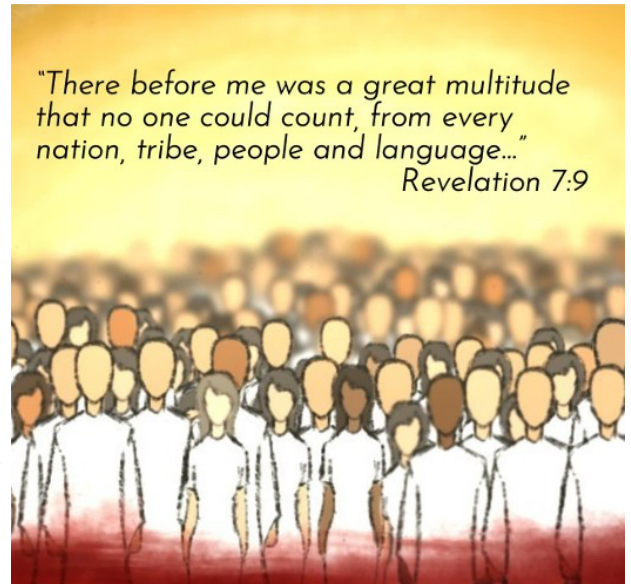
- Such a level of “no distinction” was unheard of in those days. Ordinary people were shocked, yet those who believed in the Lord gladly accepted it and put it into practice, becoming a beautiful testimony.



*“There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language...”
Revelation 7:9*

Every Nation, Tribe, People, and Language

• *“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9–10)*



*“There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language...”
Revelation 7:9*