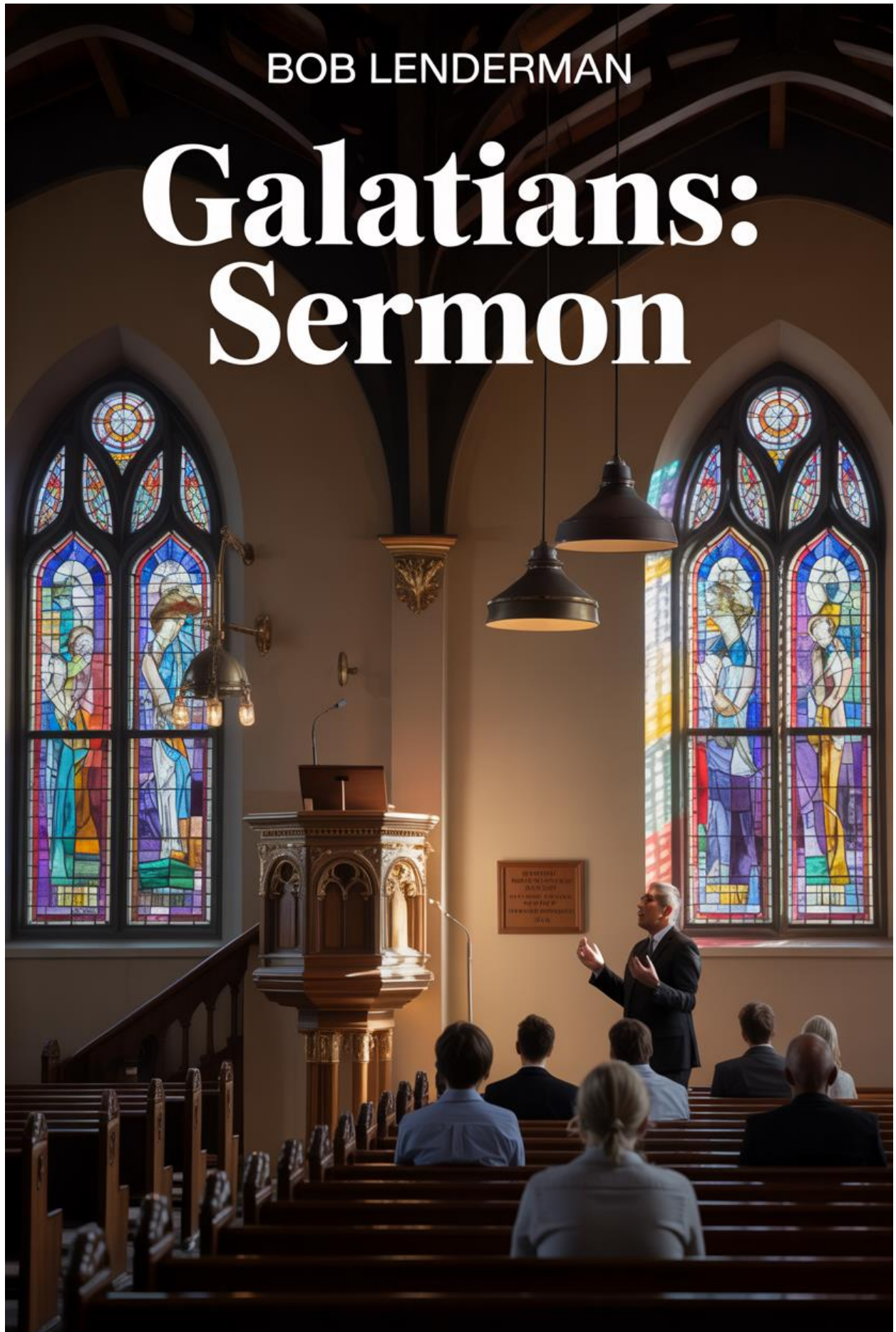


BOB LENDERMAN

# Galatians: Sermon



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*Bob Lenderman*

# **GALATIANS: SERMON**

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## **GALATIANS: Sermon**

### **"The Unburdened Life: Finding True Freedom in Galatians"**

Good morning, beloved church family! It's wonderful to see all of you here, ready to lean in, to listen, and to encounter God's living Word together.

Have you ever felt the weight of expectation? Not just the good kind, like the excitement of a new project, but the heavy, crushing kind? The feeling that no matter how hard you try, you're just not quite enough? Like you're constantly trying to measure up, to follow all the rules, to jump through every hoop, only to find another hoop waiting right after?

It's a feeling that can leave us exhausted, anxious, and deeply discouraged. And if we're honest, it's a feeling that can sometimes creep into our faith, too. We start to wonder, "Am I praying enough? Am I reading my Bible enough? Am I serving enough? Am I 'Christian enough'?"

Friends, into that very human experience, into that very poignant question of "Am I enough?", steps one of the most passionate, urgent, and liberating letters ever written: Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Imagine a bustling marketplace in ancient Galatia – a Roman province in what is now Turkey. People from all walks of life, with different backgrounds, different beliefs, all come together. And among them, a vibrant, relatively new Christian community. They had heard the good news – the

Gospel – from a fiery, passionate man named Paul, who himself had once been a zealous rule-follower, a Pharisee of Pharisees.

Paul had preached a simple, profound message: salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Not by what you *do*, but by what Christ *did*. Not by human effort, but by divine love. This message had set their hearts ablaze! They were filled with joy, with freedom, with a new purpose.

But then, as often happens, new voices arrived. These teachers, sometimes called "Judaizers," came in with their own "additions" to the Gospel. They said, "Oh, yes, Jesus is great. But He's not quite *enough*. You also need to be circumcised. You also need to follow all these specific Jewish laws and traditions. If you truly want to be part of God's family, if you truly want to be saved, you need to do *these things* too."

Can you feel the burden creeping back in? It's like someone telling you, "Your payment was almost enough, but you owe just a little bit more." Or, "You almost won the race, but you need to run one more lap." The joy, the freedom, the simplicity of the Gospel began to be suffocated under a new weight of rules and regulations.

And Paul, who loved these Galatian believers like spiritual children, was absolutely furious – heartbroken, even. He wasn't just annoyed; he was profoundly distressed because the very essence of the Gospel, the very heart of Christ's sacrifice, was being undermined.

## Paul's Fierce Defense of the Gospel

So, Paul writes this letter, and he doesn't pull any punches. He starts by defending his own authority, making it clear that his message came not from men, but "through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1). He wasn't peddling his own ideas; he was delivering God's truth. And he says, in no uncertain terms, that there is **only one Gospel**. If anyone preaches a different Gospel, even an angel from heaven, "let them be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8-9). That's strong language, isn't it? It shows just how vital this truth was to Paul.

He then tells his powerful personal story: from persecutor of Christians to Christ's apostle, an undeniable testimony to God's transformative grace. He showed them that his faith wasn't about following rules to *earn* God's favor, but about encountering God's favor and *then* living in response.

## The Heart of the Matter: Justification by Faith, Not Works of the Law

This brings us to the very core of Galatians, the truth that still resonates so powerfully today: **We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law.**

What does "justify" mean? It simply means "declared righteous," "made right with God." It means that God looks at us, through the lens of Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death, and says, "Not guilty! You are clean. You are mine."

Paul uses the example of Abraham, the father of their faith, who lived centuries before the Mosaic Law was even given.

Genesis 15:6 tells us, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Abraham didn't earn it; he believed it. He trusted God's promise. And that trust, that faith, was counted as righteousness. This is a crucial reference (Galatians 3:6).

Paul then explains the purpose of the Law. If Abraham was justified by faith, what was the Law for? He describes the Law as a "guardian" or "tutor" (Galatians 3:24). Think of it like a roadmap that shows you exactly where you've gone wrong, or a mirror that reveals your imperfections. The Law never made anyone righteous; it simply showed us our desperate *need* for righteousness – a need that only Christ could fulfill. It led us to Christ, showing us our inability to save ourselves.

## **Standing Firm in Freedom**

So, what does all this mean for us? It means what Paul passionately declares in Galatians 5:1: **"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."**

This is the glorious, liberating truth! We don't have to earn God's love; we already have it in Christ. We don't have to perform to gain His acceptance; we are already accepted in Him. We don't have to follow a long list of rules to prove our worth; our worth is already established by His divine decree.

But here's the crucial point: this freedom is not a license to do whatever we want. It's not freedom *from* responsibility; it's freedom *for* something far greater. Paul clarifies this

immediately: "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13).

True freedom in Christ empowers us to live not by external compulsion, but by internal transformation. When we are truly free, we don't ask, "What am I *allowed* to do?" We ask, "What does love compel me to do? How can I honor God and bless others?"

This is why Paul then contrasts the "works of the flesh" – things like hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition – with the "fruit of the Spirit" – love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:19-23). This is a simple, powerful reference that we easily understand. When we walk in the Spirit, when we allow Christ's life to flow through us, these beautiful qualities naturally blossom. We don't try to *produce* the fruit; we simply abide in the vine, and the fruit grows.

### **Our Call to Action: Embrace the Unburdened Life**

So, where does this leave us today, in this very church, in this very community?

1. **Examine Your Backpack:** What "extra rules" have you unconsciously added to your faith? Are you carrying burdens that Christ never intended for you? Are you trying to earn what has already been freely given? Let go of the heavy backpack of self-effort and legalism.



2. **Stand Firm in Christ Alone:** Remind yourself daily that Jesus is enough. His sacrifice is complete. Your salvation is secure, not because of your goodness, but because of His.
3. **Live Out Your Freedom in Love:** Don't let your freedom become selfish. Let it fuel a life of humble service, compassion, and radical love for God and for your neighbor. If someone in our church is struggling with a burden, Galatians 6:2 tells us, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." This is what loving freedom looks like.
4. **Walk in the Spirit:** Cultivate a daily relationship with the Holy Spirit. Listen to His promptings. Allow Him to transform your desires, so that living a life pleasing to God becomes not a chore, but a joy, a natural outflow of His presence within you.

My friends, the letter to the Galatians is not just an ancient theological debate; it is a vibrant, urgent call to live the unburdened life that Christ died to give us. It's an invitation to shed the weight of performance, to stop striving, and to simply, joyfully, gratefully **be**.

May we all truly grasp the astounding truth of Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer 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."

Let us stand firm in the freedom Christ has given us. Let us live unburdened, not by our own strength, but by the power of His Spirit. And let our lives be a testament to the glorious, liberating, enough-ness of Jesus Christ.

Amen.