

June 19, 2022

3. Life Apart from the Spirit — Galatians 5:1–26, NRSV

Paul's letter to the Galatians is his most emphatic statement of the breach between the old Judaism and the new Christianity. Since all the disciples, and most of the early church leaders, were Jewish, it was natural for them to expect that Gentile converts to Christianity would also become converts to Judaism. Paul quickly put that notion to rest.

Central to Judaism was—and is—the Torah (the Mosaic law). On the plus side, it clearly defines righteousness and wickedness, with copious examples. The duty of a pious Hebrew was to love the righteous and hate the wicked (Psalm 119:53, 63). During New Testament times, the party of the Pharisees took it upon themselves to enforce the Law. Paul was convinced that a new approach to God had been brought about through Jesus: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

While it had been relatively easy to track saints and evildoers according to the Law of Moses, wisdom was required to identify the spiritual versus the unspiritual in the young church. Paul points to the believer's behavior as the way to assess who is Spirit-led and who isn't (that is, who is still living “according to the flesh”).

At one time, Paul had been proud of being a Pharisee, but in Galatians, he stands firm against the Pharisees' attempts to impose the Torah onto Gentile converts to Christianity. Paul asks the Galatian congregation whether their salvation was dependent on the Torah or the saving work of Jesus (as accepted through faith).

- What might be some reasons why Paul is convinced that keeping the Law is not, in and of itself, the way to go?
- On the other hand, what dangers might the gospel of love and freedom lead new believers toward?
- Why do you think Paul is so angry and unwavering in this letter? Are there any indications that he attempts to soften his harsh criticisms of the Galatian congregation?

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Resources for this session

- Richard Rohr, “Flesh and Spirit,” Center for Action and Contemplation, April 6, 2018, <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/flesh-and-spirit-2018-04-06/>
- “The Examen Video,” IgnatianSpirituality.com, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/the-examen-video/>
- “A Prayer to Celebrate Juneteenth: A Light of Hope for Freedom and Justice,” Archdiocese of Baltimore, June 19, 2020, <https://www.archbalt.org/a-prayer-to-celebrate-juneteenth-a-light-of-hope-for-freedom-and-justice/>

Salt & Light Videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. **Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach and Ron Tinsley** are the presenters for unit 1. The videos are closed captioned, free, and available on [MennoMedia’s YouTube channel](#).