

The Matter With You, Part 2: Your Choice in the Matter

Andy Stanley · Galatians 5:1; Galatians 5:2-4; Galatians 5:6; Galatians 5:16-17; Galatians 5:19-21; Galatians 5:22-23; Galatians 5:25; Galatians 2:20; John 13:34

AT A GLANCE

The Christian life is not a performance of discipline but a surrender to the life of Christ living through us. Andy Stanley argues, from Paul's letter to the Galatians, that rule-keeping neither empowers obedience nor pleases God — only faith expressing itself through love does — and that real transformation begins when God's unconditional love moves from intellectual assent to settled conviction.

- Rules identify what is wrong but carry no power to make you do what is right — only the Spirit can do that.
- The orientation Jesus introduces is not 'I promise' but 'I can't, but you can through me.'
- The fruit of the Spirit is produced through you when invited, not manufactured by your willpower or discipline.

“The Christian life is the life of Christ lived through us, not by us.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

[Galatians 5:1](#) — We have freedom now, because Christ made us free. So stand strong in that freedom. Don't go back into slavery again. (ERV)

[Galatians 5:2-4](#) — Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you start following the law by being circumcised, then Christ cannot help you. Again, I warn everyone: If you allow yourselves to be circumcised, then you must follow the whole law. If you try to be made right with God through the law, your life with Christ is finished—you have left God's grace. (ERV)

[Galatians 5:6](#) — When someone belongs to Christ Jesus, it is not important if they are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith—the kind of faith that works through love. (ERV)

[Galatians 5:16-17](#) — So I tell you, live the way the Spirit leads you. Then you will not do the evil things your sinful self wants. The sinful self wants what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants

what is against the sinful self. They are always fighting against each other, so that you don't do what you really want to do. (ERV)

[Galatians 5:19-21](#) — The wrong things the sinful self does are clear: committing sexual sin, being morally bad, doing all kinds of shameful things, worshiping false gods, taking part in witchcraft, hating people, causing trouble, being jealous, angry or selfish, causing people to argue and divide into separate groups, being filled with envy, getting drunk, having wild parties, and doing other things like this. I warn you now as I warned you before: The people who do these things will not have a part in God's kingdom. (ERV)

[Galatians 5:22-23](#) — But the fruit that the Spirit produces in a person's life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these kinds of things. (ERV)

[Galatians 5:25](#) — We get our new life from the Spirit, so we should follow the Spirit. (ERV)

[Galatians 2:20](#) — So I am not the one living now—it is Christ living in me. I still live in my body, but I live by faith in the Son of God. He is the one who loved me and gave himself to save me. (ERV)

[John 13:34](#) — "I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other just as I loved you." (ERV)

The argument

The Letter to Galatia Was Written in Fury Over Diluted Grace — How the context of the letter sharpens everything Paul says in it

Andy Stanley grounds the entire passage in its occasion: Paul had planted churches in Galatia preaching an unrestricted gospel, and after he left, Jerusalem Christians arrived insisting that following Jesus required first embracing Torah and, for the men, circumcision. Paul's response is volcanic — Stanley notes that Paul uses language in Galatians so crude he declines to read one verse aloud, saying only, 'it is like so crude because he's so angry that this group would come and pollute and diminish the grace of God.' Understanding that energy matters: every command in the letter is written against the backdrop of people trying to make the good news less good, and Paul's argument is not a cool doctrinal treatise but a passionate defense of something he believes is being stolen from people who need it most.

Insight — The intensity of Paul's argument signals that diluting grace is not a minor theological error but a pastoral emergency.

Trying to Be Justified by Law Moves You Away from God, Not Toward Him — Paul's counterintuitive claim that rule-keeping is a form of resistance

Andy Stanley unpacks Galatians 5:4 — that those trying to be justified by law have 'fallen away from grace' and been 'alienated from Christ' — and names the paradox precisely: 'In your attempt to please God, you're moving away from God. In your attempt to have a right standing

with God, you're moving in the opposite direction.' He reaches for a domestic analogy: the workaholic who insists he is laboring for his family while in fact alienating his children and eroding his marriage. The motives are real; the method defeats itself. Evaluating your standing with God by your behavior, Stanley argues, amounts to resisting the way God has actually chosen to operate — which is from unconditional love outward, not from performance inward.

Insight — Measuring your standing before God by your behavior is not humility but a subtle refusal of how God has said the relationship works.

The New Covenant Replaces the Law's Entire Logic, Not Just Its Harshest Rules — Why Paul says circumcision — and by extension Torah itself — 'has no value' in Christ

Stanley makes an exegetical observation about Galatians 5:6 that is easy to miss: he argues that Paul's reference to circumcision functions as shorthand for the entire Torah, including the Ten Commandments. 'In Christ, Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value' is therefore not a narrow ritual ruling but a sweeping claim that the entire law-covenant framework is no longer the operating system for relationship with God. The only thing that counts, Paul says, is 'faith expressing itself through love' — and Stanley is careful to define what that love means: not a vague feeling but 'the love of God as experienced and expressed and demonstrated through the life of Jesus.' Jesus himself made the same compression at the Last Supper: one command, love one another as I have loved you, with no loopholes.

Insight — When Jesus said there is one new command, he was not simplifying the law — he was replacing its entire logic with something both more demanding and more livable.

Walking by the Spirit Is Not a Feeling — It Is a Reorientation of Agency — From 'I promise' and 'I will' to 'I can't, but you can through me'

The practical hinge of the message is Stanley's reading of Galatians 5:16-18 and 25. 'Walk by the spirit' and 'led by the spirit' are, he notes, relational and directional words — contrasted deliberately with 'under the law,' which is a weight word. 'Lead is relational. Lead is an invitation. Under is a weight, and under is a burden.' The reorientation he describes moves across three axes: from 'I promise' to 'I surrender,' from obedience to dependence, from 'I will' to 'I can't, but you can through me.' This is not passivity — it is a daily, moment-by-moment practice of invitation. His friend's story embodies the mechanics: years of listening, praying 'I believe, I just can't do this stuff,' and then discovering that 'I started changing on the inside — I didn't change me.'

Insight — Surrender is not the abandonment of effort but the redirection of effort toward invitation — opening the door rather than trying to build the house.

The Fruit of the Spirit Has No Law Against It Because Love Cannot Be Over-Legislated — Why the list in Galatians 5:22-23 is both the alternative to law and the proof that the

Spirit's way is categorically different

Stanley calls Paul's observation in Galatians 5:23 — 'against such things there is no law' — a 'brilliant paradigm shift.' Against every item on the works-of-the-flesh list there are civil and religious laws; against love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, no law is needed or possible. 'You can't be too patient. You can't be too good. You can't be too faithful.' He pauses on kindness to define it memorably: 'loaning someone your strength rather than reminding them of their weakness' — and illustrates it from the father in the prodigal son story, who lends the returning son his coat and ring rather than making him recite his failures. The fruit is not a checklist to achieve; it is what the Spirit produces through a person who has surrendered, the overflow of Christ's own character.

Insight — A life shaped by the Spirit's fruit requires no external law to restrain it because the motivation driving it is already the love that the law was always trying, imperfectly, to protect.

Cross-references

- [Galatians 2:20](#) — Andy Stanley calls this a verse every Christian should memorize — Paul's personal statement that he was crucified with Christ, no longer lives himself, and now invites Christ to live through him — as the summary of the entire reorientation from self-effort to indwelling.
- [John 13:34](#) — Used to show that Jesus at the Last Supper compressed the 613 commandments into one: love one another as I have loved you — which Stanley calls not the golden rule but the platinum rule, a new standard set by the love demonstrated in Christ's own life.
- [Luke 15:11-32](#) — The prodigal son story is used twice: once to explain Paul's 'inherit the kingdom' language — the son who returned was still a son but had spent his inheritance outside the family — and once to illustrate kindness as loaning strength, the father who silences the son's confession with a coat and a ring.

DEVOTIONAL

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes not from overwork but from trying to be someone you cannot manufacture — from standing at the back of the room with your arms crossed, watching people who seem to have something you know you lack, and telling yourself the gap is discipline. Andy Stanley's friend stood there for months before he realized the people in the pews were not more disciplined than he was. Something had happened on the inside of them, and it could happen on the inside of him. Paul's letter to the Galatians is addressed to people who had received exactly that kind of inside change and were now being talked out of it — told that the good news was not quite that good, that there was paperwork, that freedom needed to be fenced. Paul's response is almost incandescent with frustration, because he had

been the fence-builder once, and he knew what it cost, and he knew it had never worked. What he offers instead is not a looser set of rules but a different kind of relationship: not under, but led. Not the weight of obligation pressing down from above, but the quiet internal prompting of a God who loves you without condition and wants to express that love outward through your particular personality, your particular life. The fruit that results — patience, kindness, peace in the middle of a falling world — is not something you grow by clenching harder. It is what appears when you stop trying to grow it yourself and simply stay close to the one who is already growing it through you. The posture is not passivity. It is daily, honest surrender: I can't. You can. Do it through me. That prayer, repeated at the start of a morning, before a hard conversation, on the drive home when your arguments are already assembled — that prayer is not weakness. It is the threshold of the kingdom.

Reflection

- Where in your life right now are you approaching God with a posture of 'I promise' or 'I will try harder' — and what would it look like to replace that with 'I can't, but you can through me'?
- Think of the person in your life who is hardest to be patient or kind toward. What would it mean to loan them your strength rather than remind them of their weakness — and what would you need from God to actually do that?
- Andy Stanley's friend changed not through sudden resolve but through years of listening, praying, and asking God for help he couldn't explain. What practices — however slow or unspectacular — are you currently using to renew your mind and inform your conscience, and are they pointed toward surrender or toward self-improvement?

Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for preserving this ancient letter — copied and recopied for two thousand years until it reached us. Wherever it has landed today, give us the wisdom to know what to do with it and the courage to do it. Grant us the humility to begin each day with the only honest prayer we have: I can't, but you can. I can't, but you can. I can't, but you can — I am inviting you to do it through me. And when we take back the reins, when we drift into the old posture of promising and performing, bring us quickly back to that place of laying them down again. We cannot. You can. We invite you to do what you created us for all along — to surrender to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

The Christian life is not a discipline you summon but a surrender you offer — Christ living through you, not performance you produce for him.

This week

This week, choose one relationship or situation where you have been trying to manage your behavior by willpower alone. Before you enter it — the conversation, the commute home, the moment your ego starts talking — pause and pray the three-line prayer from Galatians 2:20: I can't. You can. Do it through me. Return to that verse once each day and sit with it for two minutes.

Return to [Galatians 2:20](#)
