

Spirit-Filled Living Series

The Genuine Christian Life (Gal. 2:19-21)

By
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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

The Genuine Christian Life

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Saving Private Ryan

1. Have I led a good life? Am I a good man?¹ These questions were asked by James Ryan—private Ryan—to his wife as a reflection of the existential desire of humanity captured in the powerful movie *Saving Private Ryan*. While James Ryan is fictional, the basic human questions he was asking are not. As human beings, wondering if we are living a valuable, meaningful, and moral life is one of the fundamental questions we ask ourselves.
2. When visiting the grave of army captain John Miller, Ryan said, “I did the best I could. I hope it was enough. I hope that, at least in your eyes, I’ve earned what all of you have done for me.” He was referring to the final words spoken by Miller. As captain Miller, the commanding officer of the unit who lost several men to save private Ryan said with his dying breath, “Earn this, earn it.” Those words haunted James Ryan for the rest of his life—ever since he was a young man, but now pictured as an old man with grown adult children at the cemetery.
3. James Ryan carried a burden his entire life—seeking to be worthy of the other lives that were sacrificed for him. He felt that he must make his life count. He wasn’t just living for himself; he was also living for the other men who died so that he would be able to live.

B. The questions presented in *Saving Private Ryan* are basic human questions that almost everyone asks of themselves. How do we know if we’ve lived a good life? Or more specifically, how do we know if we’ve lived a good enough life from God’s perspective? These questions land closer to home for those who believe in Jesus because we know Jesus gave His life for us. Like private Ryan, another person died so that we could be rescued from the danger of battle. The battle we are rescued from is a spiritual one rather than World War Two.

C. For Paul, these questions are directly connected to how a person is made right with God. Those who are made right with God, by Jesus, also live lives that are pleasing to God. In Galatians 2:19-21, we are provided four indicators of a genuine Christian life that results from an accurate understanding of how a person is made right with God. If these indicators are true of us, we can be assured that our life is “good enough” from God’s perspective.

II. We Make Our Life About God

A. How do we develop our ideas about what a genuine Christian life is? Typically, most disciples learn about what a healthy Christian life is through observation absorbing their view by participating in the life of a local church. It is far less common for a disciple to be specifically instructed from Scripture about the dynamics that make up a genuine Christian life. Most of us figure out what it means to follow Jesus through osmosis—it is caught more than taught. Paul,

¹ While these were made as statements, “Tell me...” the character was clearly asking questions and hoping for the right answers. I’ve changed them into questions for my own purposes.

however, is very intentional about teaching the disciples in the churches in Galatia the type of lifestyle that follows from the true gospel message. A genuine Christian life is the natural outcome of trusting in and accepting the true gospel.

B. The first indicator of a genuine Christian life is:

¹⁹ For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, (Gal. 2:19-20)

- C. Individuals whose lives have been transformed by Jesus, die to themselves (“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live”, v. 20). In Paul’s thinking, to die to something means to cease to have any further relation to it—no further claim or control over the person.² This is a one-time, decisive turning away from a self-focused life that commits itself to God.³ The magnitude of this major life-altering commitment continues to impact the disciple for the rest of their lives. Once a person commits themselves to Jesus, their lives are never the same. These individuals are so deeply changed by Jesus that they move away from who they used to be and the life they lived prior to their commitment to Jesus. When we commit to Jesus, we acknowledge that we are no longer in charge of our own lives; we belong to God. Disciples no longer live as if their desires and perspective are the controlling influences of their lives that set the direction for them.⁴ So drastic is this change of being and lifestyle that it is as if we ourselves were nailed to the cross with Jesus.
- D. When we understand the importance and magnitude of who Jesus is and what He’s done for us, it radically changes our focus in life. Those who are living a genuine Christian life no longer live for themselves but for God (“so that I might live for God”, v. 19).⁵ In this, we follow the example of Jesus (Rm. 6:10). The direction and primary focal point of life transitions from the self to Jesus in the life of every true disciple. Paul is talking about what we are most deeply devoted to in life. While this change in priority grows and develops over time, it is present in every person’s soul that has spiritual life. So influential is this change that a person will prioritize pursuing the kingdom and righteousness of God ahead of securing the necessities for their physical survival (Mt. 6:31-33).⁶
- E. Every person who has a genuine encounter with the living Jesus can’t help but walk away a different person. Jesus changes us. Anyone who thinks they believe in Jesus and go back to living the same type of lifestyle they did before their encounter with Jesus have not

² Richard N. Longenecker, [Galatians](#), vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 91, Ronald Y. K. Fung, [The Epistle to the Galatians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 122.

³ Richard N. Longenecker, [Galatians](#), vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 92, R. Alan Cole, [Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 123–124. Paul affirms that disciples are crucified to: 1) the law (Gal. 2:19, Rm. 7:2-6), 2) the self (Gal. 2:20), 3) sin (Gal. 5:24, Rm. 6:1-2, Col. 3:5-7), and 4) the world (Gal. 6:14).

⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, [Galatians](#), vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 92.

⁵ This important point is repeatedly emphasized by Paul (Rm. 6:11, 14:7-8, 1 Thess. 5:10).

⁶ To pursue God’s kingdom is to invest ourselves in the activity God is doing on earth by bringing people into His kingdom and growing them spiritually to be like Jesus. To seek God’s righteousness is to invest ourselves into growing to be the person the Spirit of God is working in us to be.

experienced genuine spiritual life. Those who love Jesus can't help but express that love by redirecting their life toward God. They begin to love Jesus with all their being.

- F. As love for Jesus grows, so too does our dedication to living for God. Paul further explains this indicator:

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

- G. Love for Jesus motivates the disciple so much that it is as if it is controlling everything they do ("For the love of Christ controls us", v. 14). This affection for Jesus naturally leads to a life that is orientated toward Him ("live...for Him who died and rose on their behalf", v. 15). Individuals with genuine spiritual life in them through the power of the Holy Spirit will seek to obey, please, and serve Jesus as the highest priority of life.

- H. Dying to ourselves naturally leads to lifting our attention to heaven and that which pertains to the kingdom of God:

¹ Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things *that are* above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on the things *that are* above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3)

- I. Disciples care about and prioritize that which is important to God ("Set your minds on the things that are above", v. 2). Our greatest passions in life are not connected to the normal activity of this world, this life. There is an important contrast here ("not on the things that are on earth", v. 2). Disciples do this because they have been crucified to their own self-centeredness ("For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God", v. 3). A genuine Christian life cares about the interests of God instead of only pursuing their own interests (Phil. 2:19-21).⁷ All of life is lived with a view to give oneself to Jesus, to His interests, His agenda, His pleasure.⁸
- J. What do you want most in life? What are you pursuing? What are your greatest interests in life? In individuals who are spiritually healthy and are living a genuine Christian life, their greatest interests and passions are connected to God. In this, we are evaluating the desires of our heart. Jesus influences us at the core of who we are, in our deepest parts, when we live in connection with Him. Part of what it means to love God with our whole heart is to align our deepest passions with His interests and priorities. Do I care about the things God cares about?

III. We Focus on Becoming Like Jesus

- A. As the genuine spiritual life progresses through God working in us, individuals develop a heavenly, God-focused direction in their life. The main element of this new God-centered focus in life involves devoting time, energy, and attention to our own spiritual growth. We desire and act to move forward in a process of spiritual maturity. Genuine spiritual life focuses on the main

⁷ A significant part of caring about the interests of God is caring about the people of God (the church) and the work of the gospel and disciple making. Investing in and caring for the people of God is a reflecting of how much a person cares about the interests of God.

⁸ David A. deSilva, [*The Letter to the Galatians*](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 248.

work of God in our lives: the Holy Spirit transforming us to be like Jesus. The Christian life is significantly about what is happening inside us, not on our external behavior.

- B. The second indicator of a genuine Christian life is the reality that Jesus is living and working in us:
- but Christ lives in me; (Gal. 2:20)
- C. Paul assumes, for good reason, individuals who are living for God having ceased living for themselves have Jesus living in their soul (“Christ lives in me”, v. 20). Disciples don’t just follow Jesus’ example and imitate Him (although they do this, too), but something much richer, deeper, and more profound happens. Disciples are so united to Jesus that Jesus permanently takes up residence within them. Our body and soul become Jesus’ new address for His vacation home. Like two people who live in the same house, Jesus and the disciple do life together, have frequent contact with one another, and have a shared experience of life. There is a deep sense of familiarity and relationship. Jesus comes to life in those individuals when the Spirit makes them a new creation.⁹
- D. What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus lives in those who are forgiven and rescued from the present evil age? How does Jesus live in those who belong to Him? Paul explains exactly how this works later in this letter:
- ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6)
- E. The Holy Spirit is how Jesus lives in us (“God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts”, v. 6). This internal spiritual reality occurs through the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-17, 14:23). Paul calls this a mystery (Col. 1:27). Jesus draws so near to those who believe in Him that He puts His Spirit into us. Once this happens, the presence and the power of the Spirit begins working in us to make us like Jesus.
- F. If Jesus is living in a person, that person will grow to become like Jesus:
- ¹⁹ My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—(Gal. 4:19)
- G. The outcome of Jesus living in a person is for the person to grow to imitate and be like Jesus (“until Christ is formed in you”, v. 19). Disciples are “formed” to be or become developed into being the same type of person that Jesus is.¹⁰ When we are fully trained, we will be like Jesus, our Teacher (Lk. 6:40). Going through a process of spiritual growth that changes us from the person we were to a person who is like Jesus by the power of God is the central feature of the Christian life (Col. 1:28-29).¹¹ Helping others to grow to become like Jesus was the fixed focal point in Paul’s ministry. It is what he worked for. This is perfectly aligned with the ministry activity of Jesus (Eph. 5:25-27). Jesus washed the church with the word of God so that they would be sanctified by a spiritual cleaning in becoming holy, blameless, and without defect.

⁹ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 249.

¹⁰ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 4:19 “formed”. Paul describes this more fully in Ephesians 4:13-15 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. As Jesus is in His humanity—His human nature—so to will we be when our sanctification is complete. Right now, disciples are in progress, in eternity we will be fully transformed to be the person God is shaping us to be.

¹¹ This doctrine is called sanctification and is taught throughout the New Testament.

- H. As you seek to obey Jesus, what do you focus your attention on: the performance of specific actions and avoiding other actions, or on Jesus living in you through the Holy Spirit? I suspect most of us are more focused on making sure we are checking all the right boxes. This seems to be what many people take away from the teachings of the church. I was one of them. I'm doing X, Y, Z because I know God wants me to do it and I'm avoiding to X, Y, Z because I know God doesn't want me to do it. A good Christian life involves doing the right things and not doing the wrong things. This is how a lot of disciples view the Christian life as they begin their Jesus journey.
- I. Instead, those who more adequately understand how the genuine Christian life works will strive to spend time in the presence of Jesus and look to Him to transform them as they learn from Jesus. Our focus is fixed on Jesus, and Jesus works in us through the Spirit as a result. After God changes our heart, we put effort into being obedient based on what God has already done in us. Spiritual growth largely happens in an unexplained, organic way. The Holy Spirit is actively working in us as we participate in the spiritual activities that cultivate a connection with Jesus. This isn't a mechanical process where we can point to spending fifteen minutes a day reading the word of God for a month and my kindness toward others will increase by five percent. Progress in the Christian life can't be measured this way. There is a real and deep relational connection between Jesus and those who have the Holy Spirit living in them. This connection transforms a person over time.

IV. We Trust Jesus in Everything

- A. As disciples experience the Holy Spirit working personally and powerfully in them and their life, they will develop a trust in God that those who don't know God will not understand. Their trust in God will be greatly strengthened as they gain experiential knowledge of who God is. God will be known to be reliable and trustworthy. Jesus will walk with them through the varying circumstances of life. His presence will be a constant reality. God will not be some abstract intellectual concept, but a deeply personal reality that they've encountered many times. Anyone unwilling to do the will of God will not experience this depth of relationship with Jesus.
- B. The third indicator of genuine spiritual life is:
 - and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20)
- C. An authentic connection with God is not marked by following the Jewish practices found in the Law of Moses, but by living with an attitude of trust in Jesus ("the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God", v. 20).¹² It is through living with an attitude of trust in Jesus that we are actually shaped to be like Jesus. Real change, being made into the person God wants us to be, happens not through our own efforts but through a life of faith. The way a disciple increases in godly character and desires is by relying on Jesus, asking Him to provide those qualities, and trusting Him enough to conform their life to the word of God. The more we spend time with Jesus and the closer we draw to Him, the more we will be changed. The greater our knowledge of Jesus becomes the deeper our trust in Him will be.

¹² Thomas R. Schreiner, [Galatians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 173.

- D. To live by faith is to operate in life with a focus on Jesus and maintain a commitment to Jesus while we continue to trust Him moment by moment. A person who has genuine saving faith in Jesus constantly learns about and from Jesus (Mt. 11:29). Increasing in a true knowledge of who Jesus is allows us to understand who God is (2 Pet. 1:5-8, Jn. 14:7-11). Genuine faith involves learning from Jesus in such a way that it naturally results in a commitment to obey Him (Jn. 14:15).
- E. More specifically, Biblical faith is directed toward specific content related to Jesus. Disciples trust that Jesus is the Son of God (“faith in the Son of God”, v. 20). This title summarizes one of the main features of the identity of Jesus (Mk. 1:1). As the Son of God, Jesus is equal with God the Father as the Father’s one of a kind, unique Ruler—which even Satan (Mt. 4:3, 4:6) and the demons recognized (Mt. 8:29, Mk. 3:11). There are obvious supernatural and authoritative elements to Jesus being the Son of God. There was a unique expression of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through Jesus as the Son of God (Lk. 1:35, 3:22, 4:1, 4:18).
- F. The identity of Jesus is not the only object of the faith of Paul, as a representative of all believers, but also what Jesus did to make those who have the Spirit right with God (“who loved me”, v. 20). A genuine trust in Jesus results in the realization and assurance that Jesus loves us as an individual and we are in a loving relationship with Him.
- G. The last object of faith mentioned is the basis of our salvation (“and gave Himself up for me”, v. 20).¹³ Jesus’ death on the cross is the decisive event in salvation history.¹⁴ It is what the entire plan of salvation is built around. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the main event, the climax, of the entire Biblical story. For all true disciples, this event is not just a fact to be believed, it is an act of love done for their personal benefit by Jesus. The impact of this historical event touches disciples on an individual level.
- H. There are many people who are busy serving Jesus and working for Him, while at the same time, they don’t have a strong confidence and trust in who Jesus is and what Jesus says. The new life is not fundamentally characterized by working for God, but by believing in the Son.¹⁵ While serving and working for God is important, we must realize it can be done separated from genuine spiritual life. It is possible to do the right actions while at the same time not having the right perspective or attitude. If we are so busy doing things for God that we fail to foster our connection with God, we are in danger of missing the genuine Christian life.
- I. If a person’s Christian life only consists of doing work for God such as helping the poor, working in a ministry of the church, doing projects to help others in need, visiting with and talking to others, it is a problem. All this service and work should flow from a person’s ongoing connection to Jesus through time in the word of God, prayer, worship, building authentic relationships with God’s people, a growing love for God, a deepening understand of God, etc. What we do for God flows out of being with God. If we are too busy serving God that we don’t have time to sit with God, we aren’t living a balanced and healthy Christian life.

¹³ Ephesians 5:2, 5:25

¹⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, [Galatians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 171.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, [Galatians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 173.

- J. Some disciples, due to personality and spiritual gifting, will lean more heavily toward the service and help of others. These wonderful servants are desperately needed and valued in the church. Other disciples, due to personality and spiritual gifting, will be less equipped and motivated to function in these roles. Clarity is critical here: it is not wrong to work for God by serving others. However, it becomes a problem when our connection with God and spiritual growth as an individual suffers as a result.

V. We Receive Our Moral Goodness from God

- A. Individuals living a genuine Christian life stop living for themselves and turn their attention toward God. As they do this, God draws near to them and works in them to make them more like Jesus. As God is doing this work, His presence and power become personal and real so that a deep trust in Jesus develops. All this experience of God working leads to the conclusion that it would be impossible for us to have done all that God has done on our own. God makes us a far better person than we could ever hope to be by our own effort.
- B. The fourth indicator of a genuine Christian life in this text is:
 - ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. (Gal. 2:19-21)
- C. There is a realization that happens as the Spirit of Jesus works in us: we can't produce our own moral goodness through our unaided effort ("if righteousness comes through the Law", v. 21). When we attempt to work hard enough to be the person God wants us to be, we realize we fail regularly. We need God's help. We need His power inside us to be able to do all the difficult things He asks us to do. Paul realized this on a personal level. He will explain this in greater detail in chapters five and six of Galatians. The Holy Spirit creates a personal righteousness (morally upright character) that goes well beyond anything we could create ourselves.
- D. The lifestyle of righteousness that flows from being made righteous in justification only comes from the spiritual life the Spirit of God puts inside us. It is impossible for the Law (and the word of God, more generally) to create a righteous person because it does not create spiritual life:
 - ²¹ Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? Far from it! For if a law had been given that was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. (Gal. 3:21)
- E. Jesus communicated the same truth that Paul did on this topic (Jn. 5:39). The only source of spiritual life that is needed to create the internal righteousness that pleases God is Jesus. This righteousness comes to humanity by the Spirit because of an attitude of trust in Jesus (Gal. 5:5). Human effort invested into obeying the word of God will not produce this righteousness. Both the word of God and the moral corruption of humanity make this impossible. The gospel message reveals how to gain access to the righteousness God requires (Rm. 1:16-17). The word of God, including the Law itself, teaches that righteousness comes from God and not the Law (Rm. 3:21-22). Through a trust in Jesus (faith), individuals are made the type of person God requires them to be (Rm. 4:13). This is another gift from God (Rm. 5:17). Paul's thinking on the connection between justification and sanctification is complex.

- F. The righteousness Paul is talking about here is justification—being made right with God (“then Christ died needlessly”, v. 21).¹⁶ However, justification can’t be separated from righteousness in the sense of how a person lives—the right type of lifestyle before God that pleases Him. Righteous living (living the way God wants a person to live) is inseparably connected to being made right with God throughout Paul’s writings.¹⁷ When a person is genuinely made right with God in justification, they are empowered by God to grow into the type of person God wants them to be. When this happens, the person’s life is carried out in a way that is pleasing to God.
- G. The ability to become a morally good person, the person God wants us to be, is only possible through a lifestyle of active trust in Jesus (called living by faith):

³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, but the righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ however, Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. ³² Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *they could* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ just as it is written: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And the one who believes in Him will not be put to shame.” (Rm. 9:30-33)

⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, (Phil. 3:9)

- H. What should we expect when we commit our life to Jesus?¹⁸ What does God promise to those who believe in Jesus? We will hear several answers. It is common for people to expect material blessing from Jesus. Some teachers claim God wants you to be financially prosperous—to have a good career and nice possessions. Others will tell you Jesus will provide bodily health if you have enough faith that He will heal you. While claiming to speak for Jesus, you might be told that God will protect you so that harm and disaster won’t come into your life. Also, you may have heard that Jesus will give you comfort and ease of life. God will open doors to better opportunities in life.
- I. What does Jesus actually promise? We should expect the Spirit of God to be at work in our lives, so we are changed to possess and express the character traits of Jesus. We will grow and develop in our love and devotion to God. We will become spiritually fruitful as God uses us to accomplish His work in the world. We will learn to see the world from the same perspective as Jesus, and we have discernment to identify what God thinks is good. We are not left alone to navigate this world on our own: God’s permanent presence is with us every step of the way. When this life comes to an end, we will be brought safely to Jesus, the person we have been pursuing our entire lives. This is what God promises to those who believe in Jesus.

¹⁶ Throughout Galatians Paul emphasizes BOTH the inability through human effort to be made right with God (justification) and the inability to live a life that pleases God through human effort (sanctification). This will be explained further in a later message.

¹⁷ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 248-249.

¹⁸ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 253.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Every person can know if they have experienced the genuine Christian life or are following a distorted version of the spiritual life God intends for them. The genuine Christian life is primarily a matter of what is happening inside us, not how we act on the outside. Jesus lives inside those who have received a right standing with God through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus comes to live in our soul, God's power transforms us to be the type of person that is pleasing to Him.
- B. Those who have trusted in the true gospel communicated by Jesus put Jesus in control of their life and focus on living for Him. The primary way this happens is through focusing on the work the Holy Spirit is doing in them to make them become like Jesus. Jesus takes over more of who they are. As this is happening, our personal experience with Jesus motivates us to trust Him as He works in amazing ways. With enough experience with Jesus, we come to realize Jesus is shaping us into a much better person than we could have ever hoped to be.