

# (Education for Exultation) Fulfilling the Law of Love

by John Piper

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of education for exaltation, dependence on the Spirit, and the tension in the Christian life between already being accepted and still struggling with sin.*

**Duration:** 41:10

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:1-2, Galatians 5:4-5, Galatians 5:13-14, Galatians 5:18

**Topics:** "Christian Freedom", "Spiritual Maturity"

---

## Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the importance of living in freedom through Christ. He emphasizes the need to stand firm and not be enslaved by legalistic practices such as circumcision. Paul warns that those who seek justification through the law are severed from Christ. Piper also addresses the issue of adolescence being prolonged in our culture and churches, urging parents and teenagers to focus on the joy of giving rather than excessive dependence on youth programs. The sermon concludes with the message that education towards Godwardness, Christ-centeredness, and mission is achieved through the Spirit by faith.

---

## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) This morning, I invite you to open your Bibles to the text of Galatians, the fifth chapter. We'll be reading verses 1 through 6, and also 13 through 18.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery. Behold, I, Paul, say to you that you received circumcision, Christ will be no benefit to you.

And I testify again, every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace.

For we, through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. For you were called to freedom, brethren.

Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you are consumed by one another.

But I say, walk in the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Father, I ask you once more now as we come to the word, that you would help me to speak the truth, and to speak it in a demeanor that is fitting. The nature of the truth and its weight.

And I pray for an appropriate listening, as those who are listening to the word of God. I pray that the Holy Spirit would move in this room as we have heard in this text, in waiting through the Spirit, and walking by the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit. We need to hear by the Spirit.

I need to preach by the Spirit. And so come, Holy Spirit. And exalt Jesus Christ in this room.

Now, I pray. And if any is among us who doesn't trust and love Jesus, I pray that you would mercifully quicken a spiritual life in their souls, that they might see how compellingly, authentically, real, beautiful, and satisfying, true Jesus is. And so save and sanctify, I pray, in His, Jesus' great name.

Amen. Now, there's an order and a progression to these messages on education for exaltation, and I want to back up and do a little review so that you can get the order, and feel the way I'm trying to build things toward a climax. At the beginning of the last decade, we built a vision and a building for exaltation.

This one. 1991, we moved in here. And at the beginning of this decade, we want to build a vision, and Lord willing, a building for education.

And the way the two are related to each other, education and exaltation, is with this little word for, education for exaltation. Meaning that there is a foundation being laid in education for the sake of something more important than education, namely exaltation, or call it worship, if you want to. This gets right at the heart of the way we think God has set up the world, and set up our minds and hearts, and how human beings ought to tick.

And it goes like this. Education about God precedes and serves exaltation in God, or learning truth precedes loving truth, or right reflection on God precedes and serves right affections for God, or right clear seeing of the glory of Christ precedes savoring the glory of Christ, or good theology is the foundation of great doxology. You see the order in all of those pairs? That's crucial to get that in life.

Because if you don't get that, you can be vulnerable to some terrible, terrible mistakes. And the two biggest ones go like this. If we educate, and it does not produce exaltation, if we do education without exaltation, that education will degenerate into proud intellectualism.

And the other side works as well. If we try by various emotional and technical means to move into exaltation, not founded on, shaped by, sustained by, true truth-driven education, that exaltation will degenerate into proud emotionalism. Some people think you can get proud in terms of your intellect, but if you're emotional, you're safe from that.

It is proud emotionalism if it's not rooted in truth, and it is proud intellectualism if it isn't giving rise to God-exalting exaltation. Which is why keeping these together in this order is so crucial. It's the very warp and woof of what makes the church tick.

So that is underneath, that's the conception of education for exaltation that's underneath all of this reflection. Now, back up four weeks with me, and we began with education for exaltation in God. And from Isaiah 43, we lifted up two things.

We said God is God, deity, and God is sovereign, sovereignty. And we exalt in that, that God is God and God is sovereign, because His sovereignty undergirds and supports all of His blessings and promises to us. And if He weren't sovereign, we'd have no guarantee that all the blessings that He is for us and promises to us would, in fact, one day be ours in full.

Then, the second week, we added one three-word sentence to those two great truths. God is God, and God is sovereign. We added, Jesus is God.

He who has the Son has life, therefore. And he who does not have the Son does not have life, and we exalt in the Son. Not just the Father in His sovereignty, but the Son and His equality with the Father.

And then, in the third week, we asked this. Why did the Son become flesh and dwell among us? Why did He come? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. Glory is the only begotten of the Father, and we have received of His fullness grace upon grace.

Remember, waves of grace that last forever and ever and ever. And we asked, why did He come? And the answer is, to purchase that grace. Because there's not a person in this room who deserves any of it.

I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. Remember, the only thing we deserve from God is condemnation, judgment, and hell.

That's how far short we've fallen, and how infinitely worthy He is of our love, which He gets hardly any of. And therefore, if there's going to be any reconciliation between this holy, just, good God and us sinners, the only hope is that God would come, clothe Himself with the flesh, in which He could then die, rise again, so that He could give the obedience to God in perfection that we didn't give, and could pay the penalty that we couldn't pay, so that we could now in this age be accepted and loved and justified for Jesus' sake and in Jesus. That's why He came.

And so, two weeks ago, we exalted in the cross. And we said, with Paul in Galatians 6.14, God forbid that I should exalt or boast in anything except the cross. And we thought, now, how can that be? Because we do exalt in other things, and we are happy that we have clothes, and we have food, and we have health, and that we have relationships, and we have a church, and that we have friends.

We're happy in these things. And so what I said was, the meaning of that is, since we only deserve hell, and instead we get blessing after blessing after blessing, they're all blood-bought blessings. The only reason God can do anything good for you, or take all the bad things that happen to you and make them turn for good for you, the only reason He can do that is because Jesus died for you.

And therefore, all your exalting in those good things should be at root an exalting in the cross that bought them for you. That's the way I explained Galatians 6.14. So we are a God-centered, Christ-centered,

cross-centered, cross-permeated, Christ-permeated, God-permeated people which brought us to last week. And I said, come on now.

Lots of you, go with Rick Gamache, and go with Randy, and move to Grace-Richfield. Let's get a band of people and leave Bethlehem, and go down there and infuse that church with a rebirth of a God-centered vision, which they had invited us to do. And the banner that I would fly now, the words I would use to put over that sermon last week, and reinforce it this week, is this.

When I say education for exaltation, I'm not merely or maybe even mainly thinking about exaltation here, alone. I'm thinking about for exaltation in Guinea, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, China. We educate for the sake of exaltation, yes, here, so that we'll do it with all our heart, but so that it will spread.

So I've got a new phrase now. I have two new words to insert in this slogan. I'll try them both out on you.

Education is for the propagation of exaltation. That's one of them. And the other one is, education is for the multiplication of exaltation.

That's the other one. And we've already got everything printed, so we won't change anything. But everything is coming clearer to me as I preach on these things of what we're about here, in terms of sending out bands of worshippers to infuse a fresh God-centered dynamic into another church, and then go on planting churches throughout the next decade to relieve some of the growth pressures here, and then send out missionaries to the places where there isn't worship.

You know, one of the sentences we love in this church is, missions exist because worship doesn't. Well, now we can say education exists because exaltation doesn't, in lots of places, in the Twin Cities and among the unreached peoples of the world. So that brings us to where we are.

Now, where are we? Those four messages brings us to today in the sequence, God, Christ, cross, promulgation. Here we are now at a how question. This morning is the question, all right, if we're to educate toward God-wardness, and toward Christ-centeredness, and toward cross-centeredness, and toward going, if all of that exaltation is to be produced by this kind of education, then how do you do it? I'm not thinking mainly here in terms of lesson plans or something like that.

I'm thinking something deeper. And the answer in our text that I have chosen, and it's right there in your title of the message in the worship folder, is we do it through the Spirit by faith. Now, I didn't make up that phrase.

So open your Bibles again, and let's look at it. It's in verse 5 of Galatians 5. Through the Spirit by faith. Let's read verses 4 and 5. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the law.

You have fallen from grace. Don't do that. Don't seek to be justified by faith.

That is, I mean, by law. Don't seek to try to get yourself right with God by performances of things commanded in the law of commandments. Don't try to do that, because you will simply find yourself cut off from Christ if you do that, and cut off from grace if you do that.

A good way to keep yourself separated from Jesus is to try to get right with God by your efforts to obey the law. Instead of to go to Jesus and do it His way. So, verse 5 then says, For we, through the Spirit by faith, that's where I got that phrase.

See, I didn't make that up. That's there in the Bible. Through the Spirit by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

That's how we are to go about education for exaltation. So here we are now. Step back and try to picture this.

From verse 5. Here we are, waiting. For what? The hope of righteousness. You mean we're not righteous? Well, we know we are.

Romans 5.1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. Romans 5.9 Therefore, having been justified by His blood. Romans 5.10 Therefore, since we have been reconciled by His death.

Ephesians 2.8 We have been saved by grace through faith. These are done things. They're done.

We're justified. We're reconciled. We're saved.

And therefore there is a sense of confidence and triumph and exaltation in the Christian life. And then comes verse 5. And we are waiting. Waiting.

Waiting. Waiting. For the hope of righteousness.

What does that mean? It means that while I have a legal standing of acquittal and forgiveness and acceptance and justification. Reckoned, counted, just. Christ's righteousness imputed to me.

And my guilt laid on Him. And all my forgiveness purchased, finished on the cross. Though we have that glorious title to life and eternity and sonship.

There is in the Christian life a not yet of groaning and waiting. Paul says it in Romans 8.23, right? We who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly. Waiting for our adoption.

The redemption of our bodies. Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Not that I am already perfected or have already attained.

But I press on to make Him my own who has made me His own. This is the tension in which we live. I want to just stop here for a moment and linger on this.

Because I want in this whole thing of education for exaltation. I want you, especially newer people among us. To feel the flavor or we like to use sometimes the word ethos about this place.

And it's not unique to us. Every place that has tasted these two things. The already of I'm right with God.

I'm forgiven. There's now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. I am reconciled to God.

I have, as our fighter verse says, eternal life. I will not perish. Yet, I hate my sin.

One of you sent me a letter recently. Pouring out your heart about your battles, your struggles. And one sentence just so riveted me.

I wish I could be as detailed as the letter was detailed. But I feel that might be inappropriate. But one sentence said, with the sin that you're struggling with.

As I do it, I weep. That's where we are. As I, and then you named the sin.

As I do it, I weep. We, as a church, have not arrived. I get that not by experience, though I could easily.

I get it from verse five. We await the hope of righteousness. That speaks volumes about what we're like.

And we're not there yet. We're not there yet in the parking lot. When somebody tells us, don't park here.

We're not there yet as we move into the pews. And an usher gives us a glance, a pleading glance. Could you please move your coat and make some room for somebody? And righteousness doesn't happen.

Mercy doesn't happen. It's not there in the marriages. Our beloved, we lay down our life for each other.

And we drive each other up the wall. Doesn't happen in parenting. Who's more precious to us than our children are precious to us? And how many tears, how many tears can a parent shed? We're not there yet.

And that creates a kind of ethos because we're walking this razor's edge as a people. On the one side, with a shout, I'm accepted, I'm loved, I'm forgiven, I'm justified. I have eternal life, I'm secure.

Nobody can pluck me out of the Father's hand. Amen. Let's sing, let's dance, let's exult.

And I sin. And I hate my sin. And I hurt others with my sin.

And they hurt me with my sin. And I sink sometimes to the lowest emotional level of wondering whether you can keep on for one more day. That's where we live.

And I say it and I stress it because I want you to know that this church is made up of those people on that continuum. Every Sunday morning. Some so paralyzed with their own failures that they can barely get out of bed in the morning.

And some so excited about the triumphs of grace in their lives that they wonder why everybody's not as happy as they are. And if we both know that we're here, it will create a certain kind of ethos here. Every joy will have a pain in it.

And every pain will have a joy in it. It'll be that way until Jesus comes. It'll affect the way we do music.

It'll affect the way we do preaching. It'll affect the way we talk to each other in the commons. It'll affect everything we do that there's a broken hearted boldness about this place.

There's a confident meekness. There's a hope filled humility about this place. That's my desire anyway.

I see all that in verse five. We are waiting, waiting, waiting. I'm waiting.

I'm groaning. I groan every day. God make me a better husband.

God make me a better father. God make me a better pastor. God triumph over my crummy attitudes.

God give me more zeal for your name. God give me more boldness in witness. Oh God, why am I so far behind your standards at age 54 having been saved? Now, I professed faith when I was six.

You do the math. Why? So my answer to the question how do we do education for exaltation is we do it with broken hearted boldness. That's not the main point of the message.

Is that kind of a parenthesis that gripped me? Here's the main point of the message. When I ask how the verse says through the spirit by faith, what does that mean? And let's do this quickly. Through the spirit by faith.

Those two phrases are the answer to the question in this message. How do you do education? How do you do exaltation? How do you do music? How do you do preaching? How do you do listening? How do you do car driving? How do you do housewife whiffing or whatever it is? How do you do computer work? How do you do teaching? How do you do doctoring and lawyering and bricklaying and carpentering and whatever else we do? How do you do it through the spirit by faith? So let's take a few minutes to unpack each of those. Here are the verses that will unpack through the spirit.

Verse 16, you see it? But I say, walk by the spirit. So there we're walking by the spirit. Verse 18.

If you are led, there you have the spirit pulling us and drawing us and leading us. If we're led by the spirit, you're not under the law. Then verse 22.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace. So there you got three different images. Walking by the spirit, led by the spirit, bearing the fruit of the spirit.

Now, what's the point of all those? Isn't the point that we have to find the demeanor and the mindset whereby we trust in, depend upon the spirit to do those things in us. If we have the mindset, I'm going to run my life. I'm going to do these things.

I'm going to get this accomplished. I'm going to be the right preacher. I'm going to be the right husband.

I'm going to be this. I can do this. Failure.

So we have to get that whole mindset changed and realize that we depend upon the spirit. And the reason is because if you depend upon the strength of another, the other gets the glory. And that comes from first Peter 4:11, which goes like this.

Whoever serves, let him do so as one who is serving by the strength, which God supplies so that in everything, God may get the glory. The giver of the strength gets the glory for the deed. So we must learn how to do education and exaltation and everything else we do in another person's strength, namely the spirit through the spirit.

We are waiting through the spirit. We endure the hardships of this life through the spirit. We enjoy the joys of this life.

Everything must be through the spirit. So God gets the glory. Phrase number two.

Here's how you get that mindset, namely by faith through the spirit. By faith, we are waiting. Now, there are just two other verses to unpack that Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 3:5.

We read them to you. Galatians 2:20. I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Now, there you have life lived in the strength of another. I'm not living.

Christ is living in and through me by his spirit. Well, then what do you do? That's the next phrase. 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 for me.

So through the spirit, by faith. So if you say, OK, through the spirit, that sounds like God is doing it. Yes, yes, that's true.

So what do I do? What's my role? How do I get connected? How do I become a channel? What's the role of my head, my will? Where do I fit in this? And the answer comes in this little phrase by faith. You trust, you trust. And what do you trust? You trust promises.

You trust words coming out of the mouth of God. I get that from Galatians three, five. Look at it.

Galatians three, five. How does he who provides the spirit to you? Notice the spirit is coming now into you. How does he come? How does he work? Does he who provides the spirit and works miracles among you do it by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Answer not works of law, but hearing with faith.

Notice the word hearing. Hearing what? Words, the word of God. God speaks words of promise to us and warning to us and guidance to us.

And faith takes those words and says, yes. And in that, yes, the spirit is moving. The channel through which the spirit moves on us so that we can say I'm waiting through the spirit is faith.

Now, let me close with a very practical illustration. Last week, I threw out the net to everybody. Come on.

Come on. Let's consider going with Rick and Randy to Grace Church, Richfield and gather on Wednesday night and gather on the following Sunday nights and dream a dream. Get a new venture.

And suppose last Sunday that God had been readying you and there had been stirring in your heart something like, oh, I want a new venture for God. I'm so stuck in a rut. I want to move beyond where I am in my devotional life and my service life and I'm married life and my parenting life and my vocational life.

I want a new day in my life. I'm so tired of the same old, same old here. I want to get moving with God.

And then you heard that challenge. Maybe that's it. Maybe I'm too comfortable at Bethlehem and I need to pour my energies into a new vision with Rick and Grace, Richfield.

And so you began to dream. You came on Wednesday night. God stirred you up.

And then come these bombarding thoughts. Thought number one. You may be excited now, but you know what? You're going to get real discouraged down there.

Then what are you going to do? Thought number two. I have so many friends here. I got so many friends here.

I love my friends. I lean on my friends. If I go there, I hardly know anybody.

I don't know if anybody's going to go that I know. Thought number three. My teenager doesn't want to go.

Now, here's the question. How do you go to do exaltation at Grace Church, Richfield in spite of those three obstacles? And the answer is through the spirit, by faith. By faith in what? Three tailor-made promises for each fear.

Number one. Over against the first fear of, I'm going to be discouraged down there. I know I can have an emotional high here, but there I'm going to have a low.

And what will I do if I get into a low? And you go to the promise of Psalm 23. Three. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. Makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

He, what's the next phrase? He restores my soul. Really? Will He do that? Do you believe that? Do you believe that God restores the soul in Richfield and not just Minneapolis? He only restores souls in Minneapolis. Or you could take the specific application of that in Psalm 19, 7. The law of the Lord is perfect.

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. How does He do it? He does it with His Word. The Word exists in Richfield.

God is in Richfield. The Word is in Richfield. This promise is therefore true in Richfield.

And you take the promise, you embrace it, and you slay the lie of fear with it. Second, you take that, but Lord, I have friends here. I have so many friends.

It's going to be so hard to leave so many people that I've known for these years. And you take a promise like this from Mark 10, 29. Truly, truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake or for the gospel's sake that will not receive back 100 times as much now in the present age.

Houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life. In other words, if you embrace that and move on that promise, Jesus says your needs will be met 100 fold. Your needs will be met 100 fold.

And it gets better in the age to come. And lastly, the teenager. I'd love to preach a whole sermon on this because I've got such strong feelings about the way our culture and sometimes churches deal with teenagers.

Most of them are not here in this room now. They were in the first hour, though some may be. I have two promises for parents and teenagers at this point.

One is this. Jesus said in Acts 20, 35. It is more blessed, Barnabas.

That's my 16 year old. It is more blessed to give than to receive. I think we probably labor with trembling to provide for our children a youth program and a youth ministry that makes them excessively dependent on it.

And I love this church's youth ministry. And I'm thankful that my four sons have grown up in it and through it. And it's getting better all the time.

But I know that the average mindset of the teenager is I come here to get, not to give. I don't come to usher. I don't come to work in the nursery.

I don't come to teach Sunday school. I don't come to direct traffic in the parking lot. I come here to have a good time with my friends and a happy worship experience.

And we're thrilled if they'll come because we don't want them somewhere else. And there may be a higher vision for teenagers than that. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

So I would say to my Barnabas, perhaps, you know, it may be that God has a joy for you and a happiness for you and a depth for you and a strength for you as you throw yourself into serving at Grace Richfield rather than being served. And the other text I would use would be this one. Jesus said, follow me, Barnabas, and I will make you fishers of men.

In other words, build a youth group. Get a vision for your life. We in this culture specialize in elongating adolescence almost to age 80.

We do. Watch the advertising. Watch men and women in their middle years and what they're commended to look like and act like and do.

We are in the big business of lengthening adolescence as long as we possibly can for one reason. It makes money. Because adolescents are peer-driven.

And the longer you can produce peer-driven immature people, the more money you can make off of them by shifting styles every six months. From the thickness of the soles of their shoes to the wideness of their lapels or anything else. Money is driven here.

And frankly, I don't want to be a part of it. The church doesn't need to do that. Why can't we take our young people and say, talk your parents into going to grace because you have a dream of founding a youth ministry.

Building a youth ministry. Are there a few teenagers in the world who could be so counter-cultural that they don't think in terms of leaning on and needing and needing and needing and needing and needing and needing that they could actually find Christ sufficient for their needs and say, I'll go there and I'll work with fifth grade and in the meantime, we're going to pray into existence one of the most dynamic youth ministries in Minneapolis. Only it'll be in Richfield.

Well, that's what I would say to my Barnabas. And I'm done. Let me close by simply summarizing like this.

How do we do education for exaltation? We do it as sinners saved by grace, justified and yet not yet made just because we're waiting for the hope of righteousness and therefore we're all broken people, we're all discouraged people from time to time and yet from time to time we're exalting people and thrilled people and happy people. And that's where we are. I'll be here at the front.

Others will be here to pray about your soul or anything else you want to pray about. You're dismissed. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission. We invite you to visit [Desiring God](#) online at

www.DesiringGod.org. There you'll find hundreds of sermons, articles, radio broadcasts and much more all available to you at no charge. Our online store carries all of Pastor John's books, audio and video resources.

You can also stay up to date on what's new at Desiring God. Again, our website is [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) or call us toll free at 1-888-346-4700. Our mailing address is Desiring God, 2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406.

Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/7/SID7150.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/education-for-exultation-fulfilling-the-law-of-love/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**