

IT IS FOR
freedom
THAT CHRIST
HAS SET US FREE

Galatians 5:1

Galatians Calendar

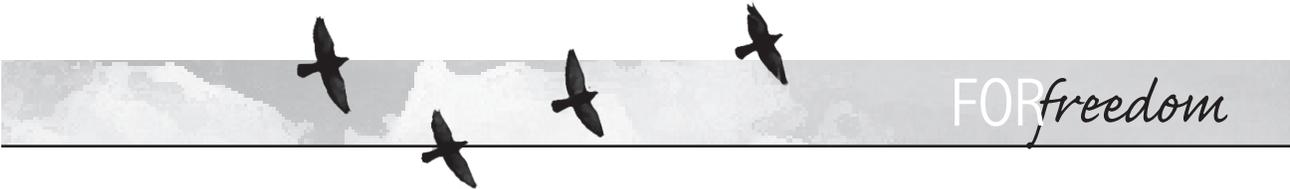
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Galatians Sources

Abbreviation	Source
ESV	English Standard Version
Gundry	Robert H. Gundry, <i>Commentary on the New Testament</i> , Hendrickson Publishers, 2010.
Keller	Timothy Keller, <i>Galatians For You</i> , The Good Book Company, 2013.
Lightfoot	J. B. Lightfoot, <i>Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians</i> , Zondervan, 1865.
McKnight	Scott McKnight, <i>Galatians, The NIV Application Commentary</i> , Zondervan, 2005.
Ryken	Philip Graham Ryken, <i>Galatians</i> , P & R Publishing, 2005.
Stott	John R. W. Stott, <i>The Message Of Galatians</i> , InterVarsity Press, 1968.
Wright	N.T. Wright, <i>Paul For Everyone: Galatians And Thessalonians</i> , Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

The following study is a group effort by several members of the staff of Santa Barbara Community Church. All biblical citations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Reed Jolley wrote studies 1, 2, and 6. Erin Patterson wrote studies 3 and 10. Benji Bruneel wrote study 4. Joanne Herdrich wrote studies 5 and 9. Bonnie Fearer wrote study 7. Steve Jolley wrote studies 8 and 13. Erik Anderson wrote study 11. Mike Willbanks wrote study 12. Carolee Peterson formatted this study guide. Tamara Erickson helped with editing and proofreading. Erin Patterson provided leadership, oversight, organization, and proofreading.



Homegroup Childcare

Why Do We Do This?

Our church philosophy is that everyone in our church is part of our church family and the larger family of God. We believe it is our privilege and responsibility to care for our church family, including the very youngest members. As you minister to the children in our family, we hope that in the process you would:

- Meet members of your church family you might not otherwise meet
- See God in unexpected ways and places
- Find a role you may enjoy and in which you like to serve
- Enjoy yourself!

What Is Involved?

- Each homegroup is scheduled to provide childcare helpers approximately every 3 months for a total of 2-3 times between September and June.
- This is strictly a helper role where you are assisting children's ministries leaders as they care for and lead the children.
- Be ready to be flexible and serve at a service time you don't normally attend!
- Helpers are placed in the following groups: Nursery, Toddlers, Preschool, and a very few Elementary (and one female Bathroom Monitor at all three services).
- You can request an age group, but Elementary spots are very limited and hard to accommodate.

Exemptions:

- Those who currently work as a Youth Leader or Children's Ministry Leader are exempt
- Exemptions are not given for the important ministries of Worship, Sound/Projection, Info Table etc. since they are not out for all of the adult service when they serve in those capacities.

- We do give exemptions for health reasons or if there are other reasons where it wouldn't be appropriate for someone to care for our children (psychologically, felony, etc.). We ask that if you fall into this category, please let your homegroup leader know so we can exempt you.

Substitutes:

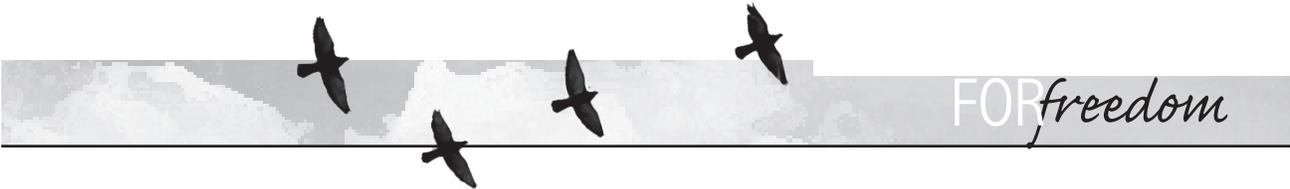
- If you can't do either Sunday your group is scheduled, **you are responsible to find a sub for yourself.**
- Holly Casady is a great resource if you need help finding a sub or working out a switch with another group (holly@sbcommunity.org).
- All subs need to be someone who attends SBCC regularly and should be in high school or older.
- We really do need every person scheduled every week!

The Day You Serve:

- **MOST IMPORTANT!** Please check in at the Info Table **20 minutes before the service starts.**
- Report to area right away. (Don't stop and talk.) **Kids are arriving!**
- Sick at the last minute? Call or text Holly at (805)896-4793.

Holly Casady

(805) 896-4793



FOR freedom

Vision for Homegroups at SBCC

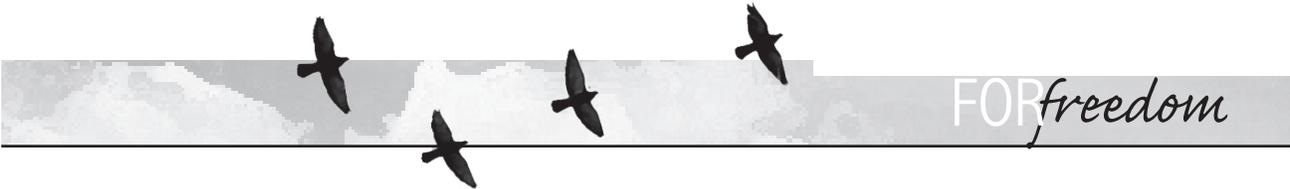
The mission of Santa Barbara Community Church is to be a community of believers looking upward to God, growing inward in Christ, and moving outward by the Spirit for the glory of God.

In homegroups, our goal is to live out this mission by meeting weekly in groups of approximately 6-18 people to:

- Read and study Scripture along with the sermon series
- Pray and worship together
- Build friendships
- Care for one another
- Encourage one another toward spiritual maturity and joy in Christ

Our vision for homegroups is that as we do these things, members will experience:

- The joy of life lived in community with other believers
- Ongoing growth in the knowledge, understanding, and love of God's Word
- Deepening faith and joy in God's salvation and love
- Deepening commitment to a prayer-filled life
- Safety and acceptance to share and grow through difficulties and struggles
- Accountability in areas of sin
- The increasing desire and ability to share the gospel with others
- Growth in our understanding of ourselves as uniquely gifted ministers to one another, to the larger body of Christ, and to the world.



FOR freedom

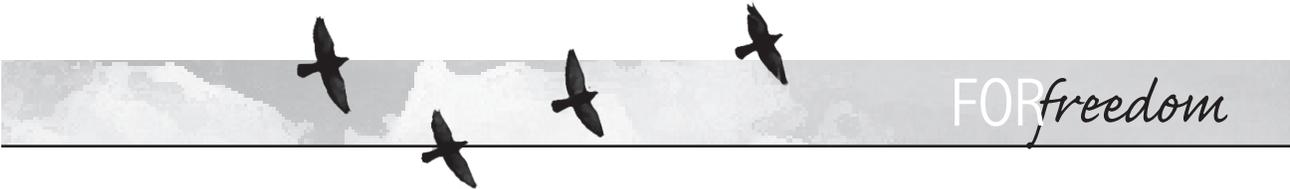


*When once the fiery law of God
Has chas'd me to the gospel-road;
Then back unto the holy law
Most kindly gospel-grace will draw.*

*The law most perfect still remains,
And ev'ry duty full contains:
The Gospel its perfection speaks,
And therefore gives whate'er it seeks.*

*A rigid master was the law,
Demanding brick, denying straw;
But when with gospel-tongue it sings,
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.*

Ralph Erskine (1685-1752)
Excerpts from *The Poetical Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Ralph Erskine,*
Minister of the Gospel in Dunfermline, 1778



FOR *freedom*

Mark Twain once said, *The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.*

Galatians is Paul's letter that has a great concern for finding the *right word*. The right word is *gospel*. The Apostle is adamant that the Galatians understand and rely on the true gospel as opposed to what we might call the way of religion.

Paul is addressing a group of churches in Galatia that consisted of new believers in Jesus Christ. These churches had been infiltrated by false, yet subtle, teachers. They dressed up their false teaching with religious language. They claimed they were teaching a fuller gospel than the Apostle had taught them. Their words were *almost right*. In reality, however, these teachers twisted the gospel of salvation by faith into something just as different as lightning bugs are from lightning.

The 149 verses which comprise the letter we call *Galatians* reveal the Apostle at his angriest. Indeed, after a very brief introduction (1:1-5) Paul says he is *astonished* that the Galatians are *deserting* the God who called them to the *grace of Christ* (1:6). The stakes are high and Paul is livid because these recent converts are buying into a lie that denies the free gift of God's grace.

Galatians is undoubtedly one of the doctrinal centers of the New Testament. The letter has been called the *Magna Carta of Christian liberty* (James Boice). Martin Luther called this letter his *Cathrine von Bora* (his wife) saying he was *wedded to Galatians*. It was, in fact, during his exposition of Galatians that Luther experienced his spiritual awakening. Likewise, John Wesley was deeply moved spiritually during his own sermon on the epistle.

Why all the excitement over six chapters of the Bible? Galatians has been, and is, loved due to its succinct presentation of the gospel. Paul says, clearly, *We know that a person is not justified by works of law but through faith in Jesus Christ...* (2:16). The false teachers were contradicting this simple gospel and Paul, the caring pastor, is chagrined.

Again, Paul is angry over false teachings that are creeping into the Galatian churches. To combat these teachings he uses his own spiritual autobiography, the theology of the Old Testament and the theology of the cross of Christ. At every juncture Paul affirms that we are justified before God through Christ and not through any good works of our own.

The net result of any study of Galatians should be a realization that the believer is truly free in Christ. In the New Testament the word *freedom* occurs 36 times. Twenty-eight of these occurrences are in Paul's letters and ten of these are found in Galatians (seven in Romans; seven in 1 Corinthians).

Again, the contentious backdrop of Galatians is the false teaching of the Judaizers. Judaizers were those in the early church who taught that to be a *true* Christian, an individual had to become a Jew. In other words, circumcision was necessary for salvation. The error of these teachers was not that they *substituted* something for the work of Christ but that they *added* something to it. Paul argues, forcefully, that if we attempt to add to the work of Christ then the cross becomes valueless (5:2-3).

And this is precisely where Galatians will be so practical and precious to those of us pondering Paul's letter in the second decade of the twenty-first century. It seems we often find ourselves with a Galatian-like virus, that is, we want to add to the completed work of Christ some work of our own. We move toward religion and good deeds to make sure God can save us, when all the while the gospel proclaims, *For freedom Christ has set us free* (5:1).

The following thirteen studies will guide us as a church through one of the great letters of all history. Lord willing, we will not simply *study* Galatians, but we will drink it, chew on it, digest it, and be changed by the wonder of the gospel of free grace. As we begin our look into this intriguing and crucial word from God, let us pause and pray that God's word will not return void in our lives. Rather, may his word have its powerful effect and lead us to a deeper trusting relationship with Jesus.

Study One

The Uniqueness of the Gospel

Galatians 1:1-9

As we pointed out in the introduction, Galatians is a masterpiece in the New Testament. If you haven't already done so, make an effort to read the entire book and appreciate the whole as we begin this study and enjoy the various parts.

Read Galatians 1:1-9 two or more times. Consider using two translations if available.

Galatians is a letter written to people who want to help God save them by adding some good works to the work of Jesus Christ. False teachers have crept into the church and told them *unless you are circumcised*, that is, unless you become religious, unless you do some good works of your own, *you cannot be saved* (see Acts 15:1).

What is the tone in the opening of Paul's letter? Underline any key words that are clues to the emotions he is conveying.

Imagine this letter is addressed to you. Are there any key words that Paul uses you'd want to ask him more about?

Paul's Greeting (1:1-5)

In verses 1-5 is Paul's salutation, his greeting to the Galatian churches. While there is some debate among scholars, most think Paul is writing to churches in southern Asia Minor that he planted during his first missionary journey (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, and probably others).

The book of Acts gives the account of the earliest days of the church. It also recounts one of Paul's first messages to the Jews. Standing in the synagogue on the Sabbath after a long sailing journey from Perga to Pisidian Antioch he lays out a whirlwind history of God's interaction with people, and summarizes the heart of the gospel message now given to them:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39)

Read Acts 13:42-49. What are the different responses to this initial summary of the gospel message?

How does Paul's summary of the gospel message in Galatians 1:1-4 compare to his summary in Acts 13: 38-39?

As you read these two passages, what do you find to be the essential components of what the New Testament calls *the gospel*?

Using only the Galatians 1:1-4 verses, think about what it means to be a Christian. . Write down your thoughts, and come to homegroup prepared to brainstorm together about how you might use this passage to talk to people in your life who have never heard the gospel. Expand on the major themes Paul includes as he opens his letter.

Paul spoke in a synagogue. What places in your life provide opportunities to share the good news about Christ?

Philip Ryken makes an important comment on these verses.

These [verses] do not contain a single word about anything we do. They simply document what God has done in human history through Jesus Christ. The gospel is not about what we do for God: it is about what God has done for us. God is the Father who came up with the gospel plan. (Ryken, p. 13)

We will ask this question many times in the coming weeks: How might you be tempted to see the gospel as something you do as opposed to something God has done?

Paul's Astonishment (1:6-9)

Normally Paul compliments his readers as he begins to write (compare, for example, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9). One of the striking features of the beginning of Galatians is the *lack* of any praise for the recipients of the letter. Notice Paul's tone as he immediately launches into his concern for the Galatians.

What have they done? Why is Paul *astonished*, or as other translations have it, *amazed* or *shocked*?

In our culture direct refutations concerning someone's beliefs are not popular. We tend to allow for a variety of perspectives to keep the peace, even within the church. Paul does the opposite. Commentators point out that Paul's choice of words is strong. He says the Galatians are *deserting* or *defecting*¹ from the gospel. The term used refers to military traitors, and to those who converted from one religion to another.²

As you look over these verses again, why do you think this is such a big deal to Paul? Can you imagine yourself ever making this kind of statement to another believer or group of believers?

1 Gundry, p. 732

2 Ryken, p. 16

Galatians 1:7 speaks of distorting or perverting the gospel. The word means to turn upside down, or to reverse.¹ Indeed, the stakes are high.

Respond to the following quotation by Philip Ryken.

When the good news about Jesus is right side up, we have the gospel. If we take it and stand it on its head, we end up with the law. But it is not always easy to tell the difference. (Ryken, p. 19)

Do you ever notice the gospel being distorted? Where do you see this, and what does it look like?

Paul uses a word in verses 8 and 9 that is almost shocking. He says of the false teachers who would pervert the gospel, *let them be accursed*. The Greek word for *accursed* is *anathema*.

Paul is not talking about censure from the church, but rather eternal damnation and separation from God. The word *anathema* refers to the Old Testament idea of *a person or thing set apart and devoted to destruction, because [he or it is] hateful to God*.² *Anathema* was used in the Greek Old Testament for the divine ban, the curse of God resting upon anything or anyone devoted by Him to destruction.³

Paul uses this word two times in the span of two verses. Reflect on these verses. Does Paul's strong language about what he wants to happen to false teachers who compromise the true gospel shock you? Explain.

1 Stott, p. 23

2 Lightfoot, p. 74

3 Stott, p. 24

Are you aware of any shifts in thought or diluting of the gospel in the books you read, sermons you hear, or conversations you have with other believers? Describe any that come to mind.

Do you have a clear understanding of the essentials of the gospel so that you would notice if they were being distorted, even subtly? Do Paul's summaries of the gospel in the Galatians and Acts passages help to clarify the essentials?

How can we encourage each other to speak out in love when we see or hear those around us turning to what Paul' Galatians calls *a different gospel*?

As Tim Keller describes below, this passage is also immensely practical for our own Christian lives. In which *different gospels* are you tempted to trust?

This [passage] means, ultimately, that to alter the gospel is to play with life and death. But it also means very practically that fear, anxiety and guilt (the sense of condemnation and curse) will always be attached to *different gospels* even in this life. As we will see later in Galatians, even Christians sometimes experience a sense of condemnation. When they do, it is because, functionally, they are trusting in *different gospels*, different ways to earn salvation. The *present evil age* (v. 4) can still influence believers. (Keller, p. 23)

Share with your homegroup ways in which we can avoid being tempted to trust a different gospel.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 1:1-9

- Consider the concise statement of the gospel in verses 1-4. Note that Christianity is a rescue religion! Spend some time thanking God for the sacrifice of Christ and what he has rescued or delivered you from. Note that God has not only rescued us from future judgment but also from this present evil age (v. 4).
- Confess those false beliefs that have crept into our thinking. Confess to God the ways in which we have subtly added our own works to the saving work of Christ. Name the false gospels of our time and repent of them for yourself and the church at large.
- Consider Paul's condemnation of those who preach a different gospel (v. 9). Pray for those who preach in our church and the churches of our city, that they would be faithful to the word of God, preaching with clarity the true gospel of Christ.

Notes

Study Two

God's Amazing Grace

Galatians 1:10-24

Paul's letter to the Galatians has an obvious outline:

Chapters 1-2 = Paul's spiritual autobiography

Chapters 3-4 = Paul's in-depth explanation of the gospel

Chapters 5-6 = Paul's explanation of the effects of the gospel in our lives

Paul will speak in detail of the inner workings of the gospel in the middle of this letter. And he will spell out the implications of the gospel in our lives at the end of the letter. But first it is important that the Apostle explains how God rescued him from hopelessly trying to earn his right standing with God.

Read the first chapter of Galatians, giving careful attention to verses 11-24.

Where does Paul say the gospel he preaches comes from?

How did Paul receive it?

Why did Paul embrace the gospel?

Why does it appear the Apostle distances himself from the apostles in Jerusalem?

What stands out to you, overall, in these verses?

In verses 11-12, Paul is eager to explain the origin of the gospel he preaches. He is the great systematic thinker, the New Testament writer who spells out the great doctrines of our faith: redemption, calling, election, sanctification, etc. Where did the Apostle learn his theology? Lengthy books have been written on this subject, yet we need look no further than Galatians 1:11-12 for the answer.

Paul seems to want no confusion about the source of the gospel he preaches. What two likely sources does he eliminate right away?

Why would Paul want to eliminate speculation about the source of the gospel he preaches?

John Stott has a succinct outline of 1:13-24 that will help us glean insight from this passage.

1. What happened before Paul's conversion (vv. 13-14).

Paul must have had quite a reputation, and the early readers of Galatians had probably heard stories not familiar to us. What surprising things do you learn about the Apostle's pre-Christian life from these verses? Notice the irony of Paul's words about himself and the church of God.

What was Paul zealous for before he met Christ?

Is your life characterized by zeal, and if so, what are you zealous about?

Compare what we know about Paul's pre-conversion life elsewhere in the New Testament.

Acts 7:58–8:3

Acts 26:9-10 (Paul on trial before King Agrippa)

John Stott writes,

Such was the state of Saul of Tarsus before his conversion. He was a bigot and a fanatic, whole-hearted in his devotion to Judaism and his persecution of Christ and the church. Now a man in that mental and emotional state is in no mood to change his mind, or even to have it changed for him by men. No conditioned reflex or other psychological device could convert a man in that state. Only God could reach him—and God did! (Stott, pp. 32-33)

We all come to Christ in different ways. Do you know anyone with a conversion story like Paul's? How is your conversion similar to or different from the Apostle Paul's conversion?

2. What happened at Paul's conversion (vv.15-16a).

The details of Paul's conversion *experience* are unique. But in these verses Paul describes a conversion *process* that we all share if we are in Christ: He *set me apart...called me by his grace...was pleased to reveal his Son to me.*

Paul says this took place *in order that* some purpose might be accomplished. What was it? Why does Paul say God chose to bring him the gospel?

Have you seen any of the same stages of salvation in your life that Paul describes in these verses? How is it the same, and how has it been different?

Respond to the following:

This is astonishing. Paul can now recognize that God's sovereign grace was working in his life long before his actual conversion. When Paul says God *set me apart from birth*, he means that the grace of God had been shaping and preparing him all his life for the things God was going to call him to do... The gospel gives us a pair of spectacles through which we can review our own failures and sins, to become vessels of his grace in the world. (Keller, pp. 28-29)

3. What happened after Paul's conversion (vv. 16b-24).

Paul gives a bit of autobiography to show that he did not receive his gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem. He says,

I went to Arabia. (v. 17)

Some see *Arabia* to refer to the area near Mt. Sinai. If this is the case, Paul is retreating to the wilderness to commune with God, to re-think the scriptures from the perspective of Jesus and to receive, perhaps, direct revelation from Jesus himself.

Others think Paul is referring to the kingdom of Nabatea which was then known as Arabia¹. If this is the case, Paul may be saying he remained in Damascus, which was in the Nabatean kingdom.

I went up to Jerusalem. (vv. 18-20)

If Arabia = Damascus then we have a record of Paul's Jerusalem visit in Acts 9:24ff. Paul escapes from the city and makes his way to Jerusalem only to be rebuffed by the majority of the apostles because they are afraid of him.

What do we know about this Jerusalem visit according to Galatians 1:18-19?

¹ Ryken, p. 28

I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (vv. 20-24)

Stott summarizes the point of these verses:

The fanaticism of [Paul's] pre-conversion career, the divine initiative in his conversion, and his almost total isolation from the Jerusalem church leaders afterwards together combined to demonstrate that his message was not from man but from God. (Stott, p. 34)

God often uses our biggest failures and mistakes to show us his sovereignty and wisdom and love. Think about how God did this in Paul's life, a murderer and persecutor of the church.

Can you think of any specific instances when God has done this in your life? Encourage each other by sharing stories of God's redemption.

Paul was honest about his failures and gave God credit for his transformation as he shared his autobiography with his readers. How did God work in your life preparing you for your conversion, and how is he working now to accomplish the 'in order that' purposes and for your future ministry? Jot down some ideas and, if you're able, come to homegroup prepared to share your story.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 1:10-24

- Praise God that the gospel we believe is not a human gospel, but instead the revelation of Jesus Christ (vv. 11-12). Praise the Jesus who has been revealed to Paul and to us, and his power to turn persecutors like Paul into preachers and apostles. Thank him for your story of conversion.
- Ask God that the same power displayed in the conversion of Paul would be displayed in those around us. Pray for persecutors around the world to be stopped in their tracks as Paul was on the Damascus road, and pray that God would recruit many of them for the cause of the gospel.
- Pray that friends and family and those around us would experience the transforming power of Christ just as Paul did.

Notes

Study Three

Gospel Unity

Galatians 2:11-21

Read the passage through a couple of times. Consider reading it aloud or listening to an audio version from chapter 1 through this week's passage. Paul has been gradually building an argument by recounting some stories from his past ministry. As you listen, try to discern where he's headed rhetorically.

Jot down any key sentences that show the main points Paul is trying to make.

What is the point of this story in 2:1-10—why is Paul recounting to the Galatian Christians this series of events that happened in the past?

What reason does Paul give for having taken the trip to Jerusalem (hint: verse 2)? Why would he mention this reason to the Galatians?

Why do you think Paul brought Barnabas with him on the trip? (Take a quick look at Acts 4:36, 9:27, 11:22, and 13:2 for some background).

What about Titus—why would Paul have wanted him along also?

What does Paul mean by *the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles* (v. 2)?

How might Paul's gospel to the Gentiles resemble or differ from the message Peter was preaching to the Jews?

What do you make of the end of verse 2—*for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain*? What do you think Paul was most afraid of here?

What does Paul mean when he says the *false brothers* wanted to make them slaves (v. 4)?

What is your process for evaluating the things you read and hear to make sure they are consistent with the truth of the Bible? Describe a situation in which you were able to identify a false claim to truth.

What does Paul mean by the phrase *freedom in Christ Jesus*?

Paul's recounting this past visit to the leaders of the Jerusalem Christians shows the Galatians that on the one hand, his ministry has the approval and partnership of recognized authorities—but on the other hand, in God's sight, these men are no more important than anyone else. God does not take human status into consideration, but can reveal himself to anyone. In the words of one commentator,

The abundantly gracious revelation of God's Son to Paul the persecutor made him so confident of the freedom believers have in Christ Jesus because of sheer, unaugmented grace that the celebrity of church leaders in Jerusalem didn't faze him at all. (Gundry, p. 736)

Read verses 7-8 again. Do you sense that God has called, or is calling you, to ministry with a specific group of people? Or do you feel *entrusted with a task* in this season of your life as Peter and Paul did? Share with your group what living the gospel and sharing the gospel looks like in your unique context.

Why do you think James, Peter and John specifically ask Paul to *continue to remember the poor*? What does that have to do with the Jew/Gentile or law/freedom discussion? Take a stab at it yourself before reading ahead...

In case you were stumped by the last question, one commentator offers this explanation:

Peter, James and John wanted to encourage him *to keep the communication lines with Jerusalem open by spending energies on behalf of the poor saints in Jerusalem*, and Paul's eagerness to carry out this charge was also *partly to be explained by his desire to demonstrate to Judea that his gospel and his churches were one with the gospel and churches of Judea*. (NIV Application Commentary)

Now that you've worked through some of the main themes of this passage, try to retell in your own words what's going on here. Based on the argument Paul has been building up in chapters 1-2 so far, where do you think he's headed next with his message to the Galatians?

Praying the Passage: Galatians 2:1-10

- Marvel that God uses diverse and flawed men like Paul, Titus, Barnabas, Peter, James, and John to bring the gospel to Jews and Gentiles (2:8-9). Praise God for how he has used the men and women of your homegroup to accomplish his purposes!
- Pray that God might continue to be at work using your homegroup and using the churches of our city. Pray that we would be faithful to preach the message at home and around the world, and faithful to remember the poor (v. 10). Pray for our missionaries.

Notes

Study Four

Living In Line With The Gospel

Galatians 2:11-21

As last week's passage concluded, the Apostle Paul painted a picture of warm unity and common mission between himself and the leaders in Jerusalem: James, Peter and John (see 2:9-10). As we return to the story, however, we see that unity quickly undone. Read Galatians 2:11-21.

Use the section below to take special note of what you learn about the conduct of Peter and Paul in this passage.

Peter

What he did

Why he did it

Paul

What he did

Why he did it

The conflict between these two apostles is no small matter. In the words of John Stott,

This is without a doubt one of the most tense and dramatic episodes in the New Testament. Here are two leading apostles of Jesus Christ face to face in complete and open conflict. (Stott, p. 49)

Read Acts 15. How does what you read there help to fill in the picture of what is going on between Paul and Peter in Galatians 2?

Paul doesn't pull his punches when assessing Peter's behavior, accusing his fellow apostle in verse 13 of acting *hypocritically*. According to verses 14-16, what does Paul believe is at stake in this conflict with Peter?

Can you think of a time that you experienced a conflict with another believer? What was at stake in that conflict?

One of the main tenets of the Protestant Reformation was *sola fide*, Latin for *faith alone*. In passages like this one, and many others, the Reformers recognized the truth that salvation comes through faith alone, not by works or by merit.

Try to imagine Martin Luther or John Calvin working through this passage. How would these verses have contributed to their understanding of *sola fide*?

Yet, the principle of *sola fide* should not be misunderstood as excusing faith that is not wedded with action. True faith always results in obedience. See, for example, this excerpt from John Calvin's *Antidote to the Council of Trent*.

I wish the reader to understand that as often as we mention faith alone in this question, we are not thinking of a dead faith, which worketh not by love, but holding faith to be the only cause of justification (Galatians 5:6; Romans 3:22). It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light.

As this interaction between Paul and Peter demonstrates, our theological and practical alignment matters. Both what we say we believe and how we *live* what we believe matter, not only in the context of the church, but also for the church's witness in the watching world. The connection is highlighted in this quote from early church leader Cyprian of Carthage. After reading the following, use the space below to respond.

But for us, beloved brethren, who are philosophers not in words, but in deeds, and do not put forward our wisdom in our garb, but in truth. . . who do not speak great things, but live them, let us, as servants and worshippers of God, show, in our spiritual obedience, the patience which we learn from heavenly teachings. (Treatise 9)

Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to help you do a self-assessment. Does your life show great alignment between what you believe and how you live? Can you think of specific examples? Don't be surprised if this takes a few days or if realizations occur more often as you begin to think about this. Living what we believe isn't easy, and we can't do it without his power and grace. Be prepared to share these things with your homegroup so that they can celebrate and/or pray with you.

In verse 20, Paul pens one of the great statements of Christian freedom and the transformation available through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

What does it mean to be *crucified with Christ*'?

The passage says, *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.* How do you see this demonstrated in your life?

Often, evangelism efforts focus in on forgiveness and justification, our legal position before God. How might the truths of verse 20 add an additional experiential element to our attempts to share our faith?

Spend some time with your homegroup celebrating the freedom and forgiveness available through faith in Christ and asking the Holy Spirit to continue to bring your conduct into alignment with your confession.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 2:11-21

- Read out loud together 2:20. Ponder in silence for a moment, and proclaim to God, in the presence of each other, what this means. Thank Him for how Jesus has loved you and given Himself for you, and for the freedom you now enjoy.
- Thank Him for how you have died and how Jesus now lives in you because of what he did (v. 20).
- Confess the ways in which we still fear men as Peter did or are ashamed of the gospel (2:12). Confess our inability to be justified by observing the law or any of our works.
- Pray for one another by name, to have increasing faith in the Son of God, in the various realms in which you live. Express your faith in the Son of God, and in his power to transform the members of your homegroup into his image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Notes

Study Five

You Never Leave It Behind

Galatians 3:1-14

If we were pole vaulters and God's law was the bar, we would never make it over. Nobody but Jesus will ever live a life that fulfills that high standard. Paul has made this clear in the previous chapter when he writes, *by the works of the law, no one will be justified* (Galatians 2:16). Only faith in the work of Jesus can save us. Like us, the Galatians apparently needed to hear this more than once.

Read Galatians 3:1-14. Make a note of anything that surprises you or stands out. What questions do you have?

Paul is upset! The first six verses are rhetorical questions in which Paul both chastises and instructs. He starts by reminding the Galatians that Jesus' crucifixion had already been clearly portrayed to them (also see 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). What is Paul's point? Why should this make a difference?

Read verses 1-6. Paul's rhetorical questions seem written to both vent his frustration and remind them of what they (should) already know. How would you answer these?

Do we receive the Spirit by works of the law or hearing with faith? (v. 2)

Having begun in the Spirit are we perfected by the flesh (our efforts)? (v. 3)

Do the Spirit and miracles come through works of the law or by hearing with faith? (v. 5)

Author Tim Keller says,

The way to progress in life as a Christ follower is by *vivid depiction (and re-depiction) of Christ's saving work for us, and the abandoning of self-trusting efforts to complete ourselves.* (Keller, p. 30)

In place of Christ's saving work on the cross, what self-trusting efforts are you prone to hold on to?

As if making a case in court, Paul cites Abraham, the father of the Jews, as a key witness. In Galatians 3:6 Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. (Read Genesis 15:1-6 for context.) What does Abraham do to be *counted* as righteous (v. 6)?

Paul uses the Greek word *elogisthan*, translated *it was counted to him*, an accounting term that indicates a payment has been received and applied. One commentator writes:

If we compare other verses in which the same grammatical construction is used as in Genesis 15:6 we arrive at the conclusion...that the (crediting) of Abram's faith as righteousness means 'to account him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him'.¹

Have you ever had anything credited to you that you didn't earn? Share the experience.

Read Galatians 3:7-9. Also look up Genesis 12:1-3 for context. Who are the true sons of Abraham?

Paul wants us to know that not only are we saved by faith alone, this has been God's plan for all people all along!

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the New International Commentary series (Erdmans, 1996), p. 262.

There is a tension here. Those who put their faith in Jesus are what Martin Luther famously describes as *simul justus et peccator* - righteous and sinful at the same time. Faith ushers us into a new status, not because we've cleaned up our life, but because we have been credited with unearned righteousness. *And yet we still sin.*

Respond to Martin Luther's comment from a letter he wrote to fellow reformer Philip Melancthon:

Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong [or sin boldly], but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides. We, however, says Peter (2 Peter 3:13) are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign. It suffices that through God's glory we have recognized the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

But for those who are relying on works, there is another word: cursed. Read Galatians 3:10-12.

The Law of God includes all his statutes and commands. There are 613 specific commands listed in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). God promises blessings to those who keep them all, but curses those who fail. (If you have time, read Deuteronomy 28:15-68 to see what a cursed life looks like.)

Yet even if we could keep all these commands and live a life pleasing to God on our own, Genesis 3:17-19 reminds us of the original sin of Adam and Eve, and God's response. Read it.

It was a curse. Cursed ground. Cursed creation. Everything from mosquitoes to viruses to natural disasters stems from the fall. And physical death, the worst of all for people who were intended for eternal life. Even obeying all of the law would not reverse the ultimate curse of death.

Feel overwhelmed? That is the point of Paul's argument. And now comes the hope for us all to escape those horrible curses, even ultimately death.

Read Galatians 3:13. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:22-23. Look it up for context. According to Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, how exactly did Jesus redeem us from the curse of the law?

What does that make us?

What is the promise for us found in Galatians 3:14?

How is living in the Spirit different from living by your own power? What does that look like in your life?

Salvation is the beginning of a new life in the Spirit. The law, legalism, trying to be good enough for God on your own by doing the right things, is a dead end. Discuss together how you can encourage each other to stop striving to earn his favor and rest in the truth that you are accepted because of what Jesus did for you at the cross.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 3:1-14

- Consider the centrality of the cross in Paul's rebuke of the Galatians (3:1). Spend some time in prayer marveling at the cross. The cross reminds us simultaneously of the magnitude of our sin and the greatness of our Savior. Praise God that his work was completed on the cross, and that we can add nothing to it!
- Consider that the Galatians forgot how they had received the Spirit by faith. Spend some time remembering and thanking God for when you first believed and first experienced the Spirit in your life.
- Confess and repent of the ways in which we neglect the Holy Spirit and operate in our own fleshly power (v. 3).
- Pray that our church, in this generation and the next, would be more full of and dependent on the Holy Spirit, and that our pastors and elders would live by faith instead of human effort. Pray that as we do this, God would add more children of Abraham (v. 7) to us and to the nations through us.

Study Six

The Law in Gospel Life

Galatians 3:15-25

During the 16th century Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and a host of others searched the Bible and found a principle that summarizes how every sinful person has ever been saved from consequences of sin. The reformers called this principle *sola fide*, faith alone.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul cannot be more clear about this principle. Before reading our passage, look back at Galatians 2:16.

... we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

Paul will continue this theme of *sola fide*, faith alone, with urgency because the false teachers are teaching the opposite, and the Galatians are tempted to go right along with them. As John Stott writes, *They insisted that men must contribute something to their salvation.*¹

It will be helpful to read Galatians 3:1-14 again for context, thinking through what we learned last week in our study.

Now read Galatians 3:15-29. Before going on, make a few notes.

What is confusing (this list will probably be substantial)?

¹ Stott, p. 85

Do you have a sense of Paul's main point?

What verses would be helpful to discuss as a homegroup?

Paul is urging the Galatians to be grounded in the gospel of grace and not the gospel of grace *and* works. He reminds the readers (and us) that this is not a new principle: Even their forefathers Abraham and Moses were saved by faith alone, not faith *and* works!

The Promise

Look at verses 15-18. Abraham lived about 2,000 years before the time of Christ. Paul begins (v. 15) by comparing the covenant (or promise) God made with Abraham to the law that he gave Moses 430 years later.

Notice the main point of verse 15. No one annuls a human covenant once it has been ratified. Paul is referring to an ancient Near Eastern covenant that was absolutely binding. Once the covenant had been entered into, it could not be broken, or even altered, by either party.

Verse 16 looks back to Genesis, which describes how God will fulfill his covenant with Abram to provide land (Genesis 12:7), descendants (Genesis 15:5), greatness and protection.

Read Genesis 15:9-10, 17-18. There is a startling distinction. Normally when a covenant was made (literally *cut*), the two parties would cut an animal in half and pass between the parts as if to say, *If I break my side of this covenant, may I be cut in half like this animal!* In Genesis 15 only God passes between the cut animals! This is God's irrevocable promise to Abraham; it has nothing to do with Abraham's response, nothing to do with Abraham's good works.

How does God's promise to Abraham remind you of his promise to us?

Look again at Galatians 3:16 and see how the Apostle is looking back to God's covenant with Abraham. Verse 16b contains something that might confuse us. Paul points out that the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. Then Paul clarifies that offspring is in the singular and not the plural. Why does this matter? What is Paul's answer at the end of verse 16?

Philip Ryken offers us help.

Paul wanted to explain that God's covenant promises referred to someone in particular. In Galatians 3:16 he is not so much making an argument based on Old Testament grammar as he is explaining what the Old Testament really means. The promise of the offspring referred first of all to Abraham's son Isaac. Ultimately it referred to all of God's children, but especially to God's Son, Jesus Christ. (Ryken, p. 123)

What can this verse teach you about your own salvation?

The Law

In verse 17, Paul moves immediately to a discussion of Moses and the law he received on Mount Sinai. Why do you think he mentions the number 430? (Hint: see Exodus 12:40, Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6).

What is Paul's main point in 3:17-18?

Paul asks and answers two questions in this section:

In verse 19, *Why then the law?* As if to say, *If the promise was so valuable and irrevocable, why did God bother to give the law?*

In verse 21, *Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?* As if to say, *Did God make a mistake in giving the law?*

Read verse 19. Take this verse at face value. Why do you think God gave the law?

What does Paul mean when he says, the law *was* added *because of transgressions*? Two main possibilities have been suggested:

1. The law was added *because of transgressions*, that is, the law was added to restrain our sins, to keep us in line, to prevent societal and spiritual anarchy.
2. The law was added *because of transgressions*, that is, the law was added to *increase* our transgressions, to show us our need for the grace of God, to show us our imperfections.

The New Living Translation takes the latter understanding and paraphrases this verse: *Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins* (3:19).

Either way, the outcome is the same. We are no different than the contemporaries of Abraham, Moses and Paul. We cannot meet God's standard, and we need his grace.

What comes to mind when you think of *God's law*? What function does it have in your life?

Read verses 23-25. Paul makes one more profound point about the Old Testament law of God in these verses. What is his point, and how might it contribute to our understanding of the law?

Paul's discussion of the Old Testament law in light of the work of Christ can sometimes sound harsh, as though the law were a terrible punishment. Glance through Psalm 119; is this a view of the law (*statutes, precepts, word, decrees, commands*) that the Psalmist takes? How might these two viewpoints point to the same truth? Reflect on this as a group.

For a little extra help on understanding the Old Testament law, see The Bible Project's six-minute video entitled The Law (available on YouTube or at thebibleproject.com/explore/the-law/). Consider watching it together as a group.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 3:15-25

- Thank God for his promise of the *offspring* through Abraham, and for its fulfillment in Christ. Marvel at and worship the God who keeps his promises. Consider how privileged we are to live in the age of this fulfilled promise thousands of years later.
- Consider that the law was *added because of transgressions*. Acknowledge before God that we cannot keep the law and that it only highlights our transgressions.
- Pray that we might no longer live as *prisoners of the law* (v. 23), but instead live by faith. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in you by faith what the law could never do.

Notes

Study Seven

Children of God

Galatians 3:26–4:7

From time to time we hear stories in the news about prisoners who are released from jail, and then purposely commit a crime so that they can then return to the relative safety and predictability of prison life. Why is that? Could it be that freedom is demanding and sometimes scary?

This may be a little of what was going on in the Galatian church – a return to what was familiar and predictable. In our text for this week, Paul is addressing this issue by imploring the Galatian Christians to consider what they were before (prisoners under the law), and what they are now – free people in Christ.

Read Galatians 3:26–4:7

Jot down any questions you have, or particular phrases you find encouraging or challenging.

In last week's study, Paul explained that, prior to this new faith in Christ, *we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came...* (3:23-24). The word choice here is interesting. The Greek for "held in custody" (or "confined") is a word that describes protection by military guards. Don't think of a prison where we are kept because of our wrongdoing, but rather a military presence surrounding a city, to keep the enemy out and the inhabitants in. In other words, the law was for our protection.

In verse 24, Paul switches his descriptor to *guardian*, and the Greek word, *paidagogos*, here better translates to *tutor*. In the historical/geographical context here, the word would have implied someone who was probably a slave and who was responsible for the upbringing of the children in a wealthy household. It doesn't mean the kind of *tutor* who helps with schoolwork, but rather the disciplinarian in the children's lives.

In this way, Paul gives us a picture of what we were under the law. The law protects us, confines us, and it disciplines us, but the law was never intended to be the end of the story. The law served to make the Promise (Jesus) more desirable. What is the good news of verse 25?

Re-read verses 26-28. These three short verses contain some seismic information. Some consider these verses the high point of Galatians, and the center of the gospel message! Because of Jesus, everything is different.

List the changes you see in:

Our relationship to/with God:

Our relationship to/with others:

What would it mean for the Galatians to hear that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ?

Slave or free?

Male or female?

This was revolutionary. Who has power in *our* society, and who doesn't? Name some of the cultural markers of what it means to be important or not important in the eyes of our world today.

Importantly, erasing these distinctions does not mean that we are all the *same*, and that our different life experiences don't matter. It means that our differences actually *contribute to - and enhance* - the diversity of the Body of Christ. Have you seen this reality at work in the Christian community? Describe any examples for your group.

How could these verses challenge any *preferential* (or biased) thinking you have had?

How might Paul's statement in verse 3:29 directly oppose the lies false believers were using to confuse the Galatians?

Our inheritance as offspring of our natural parents will vary from person to person – big, small, maybe nothing. We all share the same inheritance as people in Christ – Abraham's offspring - guaranteed by God's promise.

Re-read 4:1-6.

What does it mean for God to send the Spirit of his Son into our hearts (verse 4:6)?

What effect does it have on us?

Each of us chooses each day whether to live according to the law (and our own strenuous efforts to earn God's approval through keeping it), or according to the Promise, which is dependence on the strength and the grace of Christ. Sometimes the distinction between the two can be confusing.

John Stott says:

Everybody is either held captive by the law because he is still awaiting the fulfillment of the promise, or delivered from the law because he has inherited the promise. More simply, everybody is either living in the Old Testament or the New, and derives his religion from either Moses or Jesus. . . . God's purpose for our spiritual pilgrimage is that we should pass through the law into an experience of the promise.¹

Spend some time as a group praising God for our full adoption into the family of God which makes us heirs together!

Praying the Passage: Galatians 3:26–4:7

- Celebrate your identity as *sons of God* (3:26, 4:7). Thank God for all that you enjoy as his son, *clothed with Christ*, and for the breaking down of walls between ethnic groups, genders, socio-economic classes (3:28). Thank God for what a diverse family we enjoy because these walls have come down.
- Pray for more of the Holy Spirit in our lives, that we enjoy more intimate communion with our *Abba Father* (4:6). Lay before your *Abba Father* your joys, your burdens, and your requests, as your homegroup prays together in the Spirit.

¹ Stott, *The Incomparable Christ*, p. 42

Study Eight

Two Religions, Two Ministries

Galatians 4:8-20

Before digging into Galatians 4:8-20, this would be a good time to remind yourself of the main point of the letter to the Galatians. Try to succinctly state the theme of this letter in no more than three sentences. As a homegroup, enjoy reading and listening to these summaries.

Read Galatians 4:8-20. Keep in mind the larger purpose for which Paul is writing to the Galatians. How would you describe Paul's tone?

What stands out in these verses? What is confusing?

How do these verses fit with the big purpose of the letter?

How does Paul correct himself in verse 9?

For the second time in chapter 4, Paul refers to *elementary principles* (v. 3, 9). What is he talking about? What are these *elementary principles*? Verse 10 should be of help in answering this question.

Respond to the statement below by commentator Scott McKnight.

What is revolutionary here is that Paul considers “moving into Judaism” as nothing other than a reversion to “paganism,” to “non-gods” (Galatians 1:6). He asks, “Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” Their move from idolatry to Christianity and now to Judaism is for Paul no different than a venture back into “idolatry” or “paganism.” (McKnight, p. 217)

Paul seems dumbfounded that, after knowing Christ (and being known by him) they have turned back to what he calls ‘weak and worthless’ elementary principles. What are some of the ‘weak and worthless’ principles or traditions of our era?

Have you seen the tendency in well-meaning Christians to try to impose these kinds of external religious requirements on others? Have you seen it in yourself?

Paul has already used some dramatic language in this letter, and he's doing so again in verse 11 when he says, *I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain*. Write a few versions of this question in modern day vernacular.

Is Paul being overly theatrical? What is at stake?

In verse 12 Paul says, *become as I am, for I have become as you are*. The first part of this statement makes sense in that Paul wants these Galatians to know Christ and become one with Christ in the same way he did. But what does Paul mean by *I also have become as you are*? Read 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 for help.

Now think about your own life, our culture, and the non-Christian friends you know in Santa Barbara. Using Paul's reasoning above, in what way have you, or should you, become like them? Give practical examples.

Paul obviously had some sort of physical illness. Some have guessed it may have been malaria, epilepsy or an eye disease. It must have been difficult, not only for Paul, but for those around him, because he says his condition was *a trial to you* (v. 14). What can we learn from Paul's work as an apostle, missionary and pastor with a broken body?

Paul's uses emotional terms in this letter, but his motivation is clear. How would you describe Paul's commitment to the Galatians?

Has anyone ever cared about your spiritual life to the point of exasperation, or been perplexed about how you think spiritually, as Paul is? Describe this for your group.

Do you have any Christian friends who *perplex* or *baffle* you? What are some ways you can care for, love, and disciple those people?

Gather up your thoughts from our study and discussion of Galatians 4:8-20. Can you name one or two lessons that are encouraging to you? Can you pinpoint something you would like to change about your Christian life from this passage?

Praying the Passage: Galatians 4:8-20

- Remember what we have been saved from, and what we are no longer enslaved to. Thank God for what a privilege it is to know and be known by Him (v. 9).
- Confess and repent of how you may have returned to some of your pre-Christian ways, or have turned the gospel into a joyless burden instead of a joy-filled blessing.
- Consider Paul's deep love and pastoral concern for the wandering Galatian church, even in the midst of his own physical trials (vv. 13-15). Ask God to raise up more men and women with the heart and the zeal of Paul to shepherd his people. Pray for those already in leadership to have enlarged hearts for the body of Christ.
- Pray for God to restore *joy* among you (v. 15), and to make you *zealous* for his purposes.

Study Nine

Two Mothers, Two Sons

Galatians 4:21-31

Read through Galatians 4:21-31. Remember, false teachers have been telling the Galatians: *You are not really children of Abraham unless you obey the law of Moses*. Paul uses this opportunity to turn the tables on the performance-oriented Galatians intent on living *under the law*. Instead of gaining access by their works to God's promises through Abraham's heirs, he makes use of an ironic allegory to humble them. Reliance on works will land them in a family line of Abraham all right, but not the one they think.

First let's get familiar with the Old Testament context and people in today's passage. The family line of Abraham is important because of God's promise, an unconditional covenant, to redeem humankind. The promise to Abram¹ is first found in Genesis 12:1-3. What does God promise?

In order for Abraham to become a great nation through which all the families of the earth will be blessed, he needs an heir. Who does God say is Abram's heir with descendants more numerous than the stars (Genesis 15:1-6)?

Who is Sarai (Genesis 16:1:1)?

Who is Hagar (Genesis 16:1:1)?

What is Sarai's plan to bring forth the promised heir (Genesis 16:2-4)?

Who are Ishmael's parents (Genesis 16:15)?

¹ God changed the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah 14 years after the birth of Ishmael and just before the birth of Isaac.

Who are Isaac's parents (Genesis 17:15-21)?

With which son does God establish his everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:19)?

Now that we know the background, read through Galatians 4:21-31 again. Write down the questions and comments you have.

The Judaizers, false teachers relying on works for their salvation, traced their status to their relationship to Abraham. That's why Paul mentions Abraham eight times in this letter. But Abraham had two sons,¹ *one through a slave woman* (Ishmael by Hagar) *and one by a free woman* (Isaac by Sarah). And the nature of their births led to crucial differences between the two.

The history

Read verses 22-23. How does the text represent the meaning of their births?

Describe a time when you tried to give God's plan some help and make things happen on your own. How did it turn out?

¹ Abraham actually had 8 sons because he married Keturah after Sarah died and she had 6 sons. (Genesis 25:1)

The Allegory

Now Paul uses the true historical story and turns it in to an allegory. There is no hidden meaning here. Read Galatians 4:24 and fill in the blank.

These women are two _____ . Two different ways to be in relationship with God: one by works and one by faith.

What locations does Hagar represent in verse 25? Why does Paul pick those places?

Jerusalem is where the Judaizers are from. Paul is turning the tables on them and saying in essence they are really Ishmaelites and slaves, spiritually speaking. What a slap in the face!

In contrast, look at verse 26. The Jerusalem above here is a synonym for heaven itself; the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God (Hebrews 12:22) which will one day come to earth (Revelation 21:2). This is the true eternal home for those who come by faith alone, whether Gentile or Jew, with Sarah as their spiritual mother.

Journal what it means to be citizens of the Jerusalem above.

Paul now quotes Isaiah 54:1 to show that God's grace has been the same all along.

Originally this prophetic word was for the Jewish exiles in Babylon around 1200 years after Abraham's time, and 600 years before Paul's. God says to them, through Isaiah: *Now that you are helpless, you will see it is the weak in whose lives my grace works! The strong are too busy relying on themselves.* (Keller, p. 124)

Review the chart below for a summary so far.

	SLAVERY	FREEDOM
TWO MOTHERS	HAGAR A SLAVE WOMAN	SARAH A FREE WOMAN
TWO SONS	ISHMAEL BORN THROUGH HUMAN EFFORT INHERITS SLAVERY	ISAAC BORN THROUGH GOD'S PROMISE INHERITS FREEDOM
TWO COVENANTS	THE COVENANT OF LAW BASED ON WORKS	THE COVENANT OF PROMISE BASED ON FAITH
TWO WAYS TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD	LAW & WORKS	FAITH & GRACE

The Application

Beginning in verse 28, Paul turns back to the Galatians to apply his analogy. And it applies to us in the same way. Read verse 28. Who does Paul tell them they really are?

Paul encourages the Galatians in verse 30 to get rid of their reliance on the law like Sarah and Abraham got rid of Hagar and Ishmael. What might you need to get rid of for the sake of your freedom in Christ?

Believers who live by faith are like Isaac: born of the Spirit, sons and daughters, heirs of God's promise to Abraham fulfilled in Christ, citizens of heaven. And like Isaac, they can expect to be persecuted by the Ishmaels of the world (v. 29), but they are the true heirs of the promise (v. 30) and free (v. 31).

Where have you felt pressure to live by works? Who or what is putting the pressure on you?

These verses are explosive. They round off the themes Paul has been highlighting since the middle of chapter 2. His point here is not only that the gospel makes absolutely anyone a child of God, but that the most proud and moral and religiously "able" are often the ones left out of God's family. The gospel reverses the world's values. (Keller, p. 117)

Praying the Passage: Galatians 4:21-31

- Once again, thank God that we are children of promise like Isaac (v. 28). Thank Him specifically for what promises He has fulfilled in you. Consider the promise of being a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), abundant life (John 10:10), a large extended family (Mark 10:30), the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7), and the promise of his provision (Philippians 4:19) as just a few examples.
- Pray for those who are children of law. Pray for friends and family who have yet to enter a life of faith in Christ. Pray for the Muslim world, coming from the line of Hagar and Ishmael, to meet Christ, and to also become children of promise. Consider parts of the world where our missionaries serve.

Notes

Study Ten

Gospel Freedom

Galatians 5:1-15

Read through the passage carefully. Paul gets especially heated here, using strongly emotional (and sometimes hyperbolic) language to show his passionate concern that the good news of Jesus not be overshadowed by lies or half-truths.

Then read it again, writing down any words or phrases you think are especially key. Is there one sentence or verse you think effectively sums up Paul's whole message?

Sometimes our growth happens as a result of God's invisible work in us. And sometimes we are asked to take part. Jot down the active words Paul uses to encourage the Galatians in what they can do – or not do – to take part in their own growth.

Note any words you don't understand. Either look them up in a Bible dictionary or ask your homegroup to help clarify.

In verse 6, Paul states that *neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value*. In that case, why is he so adamant that they NOT be circumcised (v. 2)?

The second half of verse six connects love with faith. Why do you think it's so important that faith be expressed through love, and what might that look like as a day-to-day example in your life?

This passage has several important things to say about the freedom Christ gives to those who trust him. What is that freedom like according to this passage—what are its qualities? How does it affect us? Jot down any clues you can find in the passage, or in the previous chapters of Galatians.

In verse 1, Paul urges his friends to *stand firm* in their freedom. Tim Keller points out the implication that vigilance is required here.

Despite the fact that we already have been saved by Christ, we must be continually diligent to remember, preserve, rejoice in and live in accord with our salvation. We cannot lose our salvation, but we can lose our freedom [through] enslavement to fear.¹

What do you think a life of enslavement to fear looks like? Be as concrete as you can.

Sometimes you will hear the word *theology* scoffed at—or yawned at—as though it were a highly technical field for intellectual giants or Christian superheroes, a concept divorced from simple, ordinary Jesus-following. Paul's arguments here and in all of Galatians state emphatically otherwise. He gives a passionate plea for the everyday believer to remember that what we believe has concrete consequences, and that false or incomplete ideas about God are actually harmful to the people who believe them.

Have you ever experienced or witnessed the effects of a false or distorted gospel, entrapping the people who believed it? Share with your group what that looked like.

¹ Keller, p. 132

List some of the safeguards and tools we might use to help us avoid a false or distorted gospel.

Keller describes the very real outcome of buying into a distorted belief system—either pagan idolatry or legalism—as a life that will be both *proud and guilt-ridden*, characterized by the *touchiness, insecurity, pride, discouragement and weariness of people who are never sure that they have worth (i.e. righteousness)*.¹

Does this ring true to you? Have you ever tried to live the Christian life in this way?

Conversely, think about what a life lived ‘serving one another humbly in love, in gospel freedom, looks like. Describe for your group someone you have known who you feel embodies this.

Rather than being consumed with regulations and social identity markers (circumcision, Jewish food laws etc.), Paul urges his friends to focus their attention on *real* righteousness—the *righteousness for which we hope* (v. 5). What do you think Paul means by this phrase?

Another quote from Tim Keller may throw some light on it:

The biblical word *elpida*, translated “hope,” does not have the much weaker meaning that it has in English. In the Bible, “hope” does not mean “hope so,” as in: “*Will it be sunny tomorrow? I hope so (but I have no way of being confident it will be so)*.” It means a powerful assurance and certainty of something (see Hebrews 11:1). (Keller, p. 135)

¹ Keller, p. 133

Stop and think about what all this means. Pray that God would allow this truth to penetrate deeply into your being.

In verse 13, Paul's argument takes a turn. He is encouraging the Galatians to freedom, but he has a warning to give about the outcome of that freedom. As Keller sums it up, *Gospel freedom from fear and condemnation leads us to obey God, not to please ourselves.* (Keller, p. 131 & 133)

What are some ways you might be prone to use your freedom to *indulge the flesh*? Keep this private if you prefer, but pray as a group for each other.

Brainstorm some ways you can avoid *indulging the flesh* without becoming legalistic.

Do you know someone who, like the Galatians, needs to be encouraged to persist in the gospel? Ask God if he would have you reach out with a word of love and encouragement this week, and how. Share with your group, pray for each other, and check back in with each other next week.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 5:1-15

- Consider that *it is for freedom* that Christ has set us free (v. 1). Flesh out what this freedom means, by reading out loud a few related passages such as John 8:31-36, Romans 6:6-7, 6:18, 8:2, 8:21, and 2 Corinthians 3:17. Consider and celebrate this freedom by thanking God for it!
- Confess how we have let ourselves be burdened again by slavery, by trying to please men instead of God. Confess, for yourself and the church at large, how we have bought into a false freedom that indulges the sinful nature and destroys fellowship (v. 15)
- Pray for our staff and elders, and our whole congregation, that we would be filled with the Spirit (v. 5), and live a life of faith expressing itself through love (v. 6). Pray that our church would be marked by Spirit-led freedom!

Study Eleven

Gospel Character

Galatians 5:16-25

Last week's passage and study looked at the freedom we have in Christ, and saw Paul's warnings about how it can be jeopardized: some lapse from freedom back into slavery (5:1), others turn their freedom into *indulging the flesh* (5:13). This week's passage provides hope and inspiration as Paul gives some practical encouragement, instruction, and a warning.

Before reading on, stop and ask God to speak to you through these verses.

Now read Galatians 5:16-25 a few times. Note the major contrast, any lists, and any repetition.

What stands out in this passage? What questions arise from your reading?

Look again at verses 16-18. Paul describes the conflict between two opposing forces - The Spirit and the flesh. We don't have to look far beyond our own experience to understand exactly what he's talking about.

What do you think Paul means when he writes, *the works of the flesh are evident* (v. 20)? (Consult another translation to get a wider perspective).

Try to categorize his list and put them into groups. What do you notice about these *works of the flesh*?

He ends his list with a form of *et cetera*, when he writes, *and things like these*. Clearly, this list is not exhaustive. Based on all of this, how would you define *the flesh*?

Last week's passage reminded us that we have been called to freedom. But look again at the latter half of verse 17. Paul takes the idea that freedom is getting what you want when you want it – what he calls gratifying *the desires of the flesh* – and turns it on its head.

Can you think of a time when the conflict between *the spirit and the flesh* has kept you from doing the things you want to do?

Compare this with what Paul writes in Romans 7:13-8:2. Verse 15 describes a familiar situation. How is it similar to the conflict described in our Galatians passage?

Describe a situation in which you felt this kind of conflict in your own life.

Thankfully, our passage does not end here. Reflect on what John Stott writes about this part of the passage:

This is the Christian conflict—fierce, bitter, and unremitting. Moreover, it is a conflict in which *by himself* the Christian simply cannot be victorious. . . . ‘Is that the whole story?’ some perplexed reader will be asking. ‘Is the tragic confession that “I cannot do what I want to do” the last word about a Christian’s inner moral conflict? Is this all Christianity offers—an experience of continuous defeat?’

Indeed, it is not. If we were left to ourselves, we could not do what we would; instead we would succumb to the desires of our old nature. But if we ‘walk by the Spirit’ (v. 16), *then* we shall not gratify the desires of the flesh. We shall still experience them, but we shall not indulge them. On the contrary, we shall bear the fruit of the Spirit. (Stott, p. 149)

Notice that while in verse 19 the *works* of the flesh prevent inheriting the kingdom of God, verse 22 describes the *fruit* of the Spirit. Why do you think he uses the word *fruit*?

What does this imply about *walking by the Spirit*?

Take a look at his list again. Which of these seem to come naturally to you?

Which of these do not?

Paul describes these qualities as the product of the Spirit. So if we are growing in Christ, or *walking by the Spirit*, we can expect to see them cropping up, especially where they are not as natural to us. What is your experience of this? Can you think of a time when one of these qualities cropped up in your life in a way that seemed Spirit-fuelled or Spirit-given?

Look back at verses 16, 18, and 25 for four action phrases Paul uses that can teach us about our relationship to his Spirit.

Look at verses 24 and 25. What do you think Paul means by each of these?

And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh...

live by the Spirit...

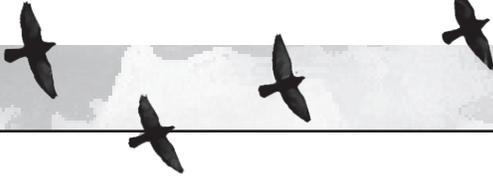
keep in step with the Spirit.

Think about your own life. How have you done these things? How might you have borne fruit as a result?

Try to summarize what this week's passage is about. As you close in prayer, ask God what he wants you specifically to remember from this passage.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 5:16-25

- Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and how He has manifested Himself in your life. Consider how the Spirit enables us to live in a way that we could never do in our own strength.
- Consider what is contrary to the Spirit in verses 19-21, and confess for yourself and the church at large how we have exhibited these.
- Pray for a deeper understanding of the Spirit in our churches and a greater fullness of the Spirit. Pray for one another to *keep in step with the Spirit* (v. 25), and to live lives overflowing with the *fruit of the Spirit* (vv. 22-23).



Study Twelve

Gospel Relationships

Galatians 5:26–6:5

We're getting close to the end of studying this amazing letter from Paul to the Galatians. We've seen Paul's great intensity and intellect on display. If you struggled at all to track with his theological arguments, take heart! Paul never wades into deep theological waters without practical concerns for the church and as we near the end of this letter, these practical implications again take center stage.

In chapter 5, Paul has emphasized that Christians live in freedom from the law and are now guided by the Spirit of Christ. He *now gives some concrete illustrations of what it means to live as a Christian individual within a community when that community is guided by freedom in the Spirit.* (McKnight, p. 283)

Take some time to read these 6 verses slowly and in a few different translations if possible. This can be a tough section to immediately see the flow of Paul's thoughts. Try to connect the dots... jot some notes on how the thoughts of one verse might lead to the next. Make note of any questions that arise.

Since we've been studying this letter to the Galatians for 11 weeks now, hopefully we have some good ideas about what issues these believers were dealing with. In light of these ideas, why might the Galatians specifically have needed to hear Paul's admonition to *not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another?*

The word *conceited* is the same one Paul plays with in another classic section of Scripture that deals with how we ought to relate to one another. The word literally means *empty glory*. Read Philippians 2:3-8 and notice the connection between the command not to be motivated by a concern for our own hollow glory (vain conceit) and Jesus, who emptied himself of true glory for us. According to these verses, what is the opposite of a life of rivalry and conceit?

The next two words, *provoking* and *envying*, are two ways this conceit can show itself. Provoking is born out of feeling superior to others while envying comes from feeling inferior. And yet both show a preoccupation with our own glory.

How have you noticed conceit showing up in your life and in your relationships?

Do you have a tendency to compare yourself favorably to others (looking down on others) or unfavorably (low self-esteem and envy of others)?

Tim Keller draws this conclusion:

Only the gospel makes us neither self-confident nor self-disdaining, but both bold and humble... The gospel creates a new self-image... It humbles me before anyone, telling me I am a sinner saved only by grace. But it also emboldens me before anyone, telling me I am loved and honored by the only eyes in the universe that really count. So the gospel gives me a boldness and a humility that can co-exist, and that can increase together. Practically speaking, you have to use the gospel by preaching it to yourself right in the midst of the situations where you are trying to act in newness of life.

In what ways will having a self-image based on the gospel change the way you see yourself and see others?

When do you particularly need to preach the gospel to yourself?

In 6:1 Paul tells us that living in the Spirit entails helping one another when we are caught in sin. This cuts against the grain of our very individualistic culture. Have you had any experience with this – either as one seeking to restore another or being the one who is caught in sin? How did it go? Was it well received?

What are some common obstacles in helping to restore a brother or sister in Christ who is caught in sin? (Some obstacles may be in you and others may be in them.)

What advice does Paul give about how to restore a brother or sister? What are some key things to be aware of as we go about this important work of helping each other get unstuck from sinful patterns?

The law of Christ is of course the law of love. Paul both identifies love as the fulfillment of the law and was himself the great model of how to embody a life of love. Keller, with characteristic insight, explains, *Paul is telling the Galatians that, rather than placing themselves under the burden of law-fulfillment, they should be lifting burdens off others– and that, ultimately, this is the way to fulfill the law!*

What opportunities has God given you to carry another's burdens? What is something practical you can do this week?

In 6:3-5, Paul returns to warn us of the danger of comparing ourselves with others, which can keep us from giving ourselves in love. Did you wrestle with the apparent contradiction in these verses between carrying each other's burdens and each one having to carry his own load? How do you make sense of this?

Here is how two scholars explain the connection:

The issue is not contradictory but two sides of one coin. Christians need to help one another in the struggles of life, but each Christian will also have to answer to God individually. Part of that individual responsibility is carrying the burdens of others. (McKnight, p. 286)

There is one burden that we cannot share . . . and that is our responsibility to God on the day of judgment. On that day you cannot carry my pack and I cannot carry yours. (Stott, p. 160)

So these verses teach that you will only answer for your own load and not how you've lived compared to others. Do you find these verses about personal responsibility before God more liberating or more challenging? Why?

Praying the Passage: Galatians 5:26–6:5

- Thank God for the nearly 40 years of unity that our church has enjoyed! Thank Him for all the ways He has protected us from our own sin, both individually and as a church.
- Confess that this unity is fragile, and that we are capable of *biting and devouring one another* (5:26). Confess our proclivity to sin, and our vulnerability to temptation (6:1). Confess the ways that we have sinned, both individually and as a church.
- Pray that we may be a church where those who sin are restored with gentleness and humility (6:1). Pray that we may *bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ* (6:2).

Study Thirteen

Sowing and Reaping

Galatians 6:6-18

As we come to the end of Galatians and our study of the letter, Paul is wrapping up his thoughts. As we have seen throughout the entire letter Paul is concerned that the Galatians let the gospel of God's grace permeate their faith and lives. He ends his letter with one final plea that they live by the gospel.

Read Galatians 6:6-18. How is the theme of the letter once again finding expression in this passage?

What is confusing? What is encouraging?

Verse 6 seems to be a parenthetical remark near the end of this letter. Tim Keller comments that *all good things* almost certainly means financial support. (Keller, p. 174) Other passages in the New Testament point out the importance of financial support for those who work at teaching and preaching (1 Corinthians 9:14, 2 Corinthians 11:7-12, Philippians 4:10-19, 1 Thessalonians 2:6 & 9, 1 Timothy 5:17-18). One of the dangers of supporting teachers and pastors financially is that the rest of the believers in a church can feel free of the responsibility of ministry since a few individuals are financially remunerated. How can our church guard against this type of ministry laziness and make sure all her members are involved in the work of ministry?

In verses 7-10 the agricultural metaphor of sowing and reaping is introduced and applied to the Christian life. How would you define these two words?

There are two types of *sowing* described here. The contrast is vivid between *sowing to the flesh* and *sowing to the Spirit*. What might these two types of sowing look like?

Sowing to the flesh

Sowing to the Spirit

Give some practical examples of how you have seen this sowing principle to be true in your life. How has sowing to please your sinful nature brought about *corruption* (*destruction* in the NIV)? How has sowing to the Spirit enabled you to *reap eternal life*?

In light of these two types of sowing respond and discuss the Tim Keller quote below. If appropriate be ready to share with your homegroup how this has been true in your Christian experience.

Throughout the epistle, Paul has indicated that Christians can, and very often do, fall back into some kind of slavery to sin and, for that period of time or that part of their lives, lose their grip on the gospel. They don't then cease to be Christians, saved by grace. (Keller, p. 176)

What do you think it means to *reap eternal life*? Is this something we experience here and now, or sometime in the future, or both...?

What causes you to *grow weary of doing good*? (v. 9)

What does it practically mean for a Christian to *do good to everyone, and especially those who are of the household of faith?* (v. 10) Give practical examples.

In verse 11 Paul takes the pen from his secretary (called an amanuensis) and adds his signature to the letter. What do you make of his point that he is writing in *large letters*?

Just when you think the letter would end with a usual greeting and benediction, Paul, who seemingly can't help himself, gets in a few more jabs at the Judaizers (vv. 12-16). The issue is circumcision and how this religious practice can cause inappropriate *spiritual boasting*. Paul uses the word *boast* twice and sets up a contrast between two types of boasting. One is legitimate and one is not. How does he characterize these two types of *boasting*?

Have you ever been tempted to try to impress people with your spiritual practices, or to make yourself feel spiritually superior to others?

Tim Keller says,

Religion leads us to boast about something in us. The gospel leads us to boast in the cross of Christ . . . If I truly boast in Christ alone, there is a stunning turnaround in my life. (Keller, p. 182)

What do you think it might look like to *boast in Christ alone*?

Have you experience the *stunning turnaround* Keller talks about? How would you describe this *turnaround*?

Compare Galatians 1:3 with Galatians 6:18. We begin with *grace* and we end with *grace*. How has your study of Galatians deepened your understanding and appreciation of grace? Share with your group.

Sum up the message of the entire book of Galatians in just a few words.

Praying the Passage: Galatians 6:6-18

- Thank God for the gift of his word, and for gifted teachers who have taught it to us (v. 6). Thank him again for what we have learned about the Spirit-filled life from the book of Galatians. Pray that we would be a church that honors our teachers, and shares all *good things* with them (v. 6).
- Pray for our church and missionaries to never become weary in doing good (v. 9). Pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit our church and the churches of our city, that we may abound in Spirit-led good works and bear much fruit.
- Pray that we may never be ashamed of the cross, but proclaim it boldly in this generation and the generations to come (v. 14). Pray this for the churches of our city, for our missionaries, and for our children and grandchildren. Pray for sustained boldness and fearlessness in the face of persecution (v. 12).