

FREED IN CHRIST



GALATIANS

BIBLE STUDIES FOR ASHFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BACKGROUND

There is good evidence that Galatians was written from Syrian Antioch, in the period just before the Jerusalem Council (about 48 A.D.) (see Acts 14:27-15:4). This means the Galatian letter is the earliest extant Pauline letter. He wrote to the churches he had planted on his first missionary journey in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe).

In trying to work out when Galatians was written, it is important to compare Galatians with material in Acts. The first visit to Jerusalem as recorded in Galatians 1:18 is usually identified with that of Acts 9:26-30. The second visit in Galatians 2:1-10 is identified with the famine relief visit of Acts 11:29f by some, but with the Council of Jerusalem visit in Acts 15 by others. The first view is most likely, as Paul is trying to give a careful account in the first two chapters of Galatians of all the visits he had made to Jerusalem, and therefore there is no clear reason why he would have omitted the famine relief visit. See also Gal 2:10, which would fit the situation of the Acts 11:30 visit. Also, if Galatians was written after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, it is hard to understand why no reference is made to its decisions, since they bear directly on the question of circumcision and the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians which dominate the argument of Galatians.

Bible project resources: <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-galatians/>



GALATIANS 1:1 – 2:10: MESSAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

1. How is a person made right with God?
2. Paul writes to the Galatian churches because of a serious problem in their understanding of how to be right with God, and because of the impact of this on the church community. He says: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all." (1:6-7b).

Look up the passages below to see how Paul describes the problem throughout his letter.

Gal 2:4-5	
Gal 3:1-4	
Gal 4:8-11	
Gal 5:1-4	
Gal 6:12-15	

3. False teachers were trying to compel Gentile believers to follow Jewish Law and religious practices such as circumcision. Why would this message NOT be good news for the Galatian churches?

Read Galatians 1:1-2:10

4. Paul gives good reasons for the Galatians to trust that the gospel he preaches is the true good news, and to reject the message preached by the false teachers. What are those reasons?

1:1

1:4

1:7

1:11-12

1:18-19

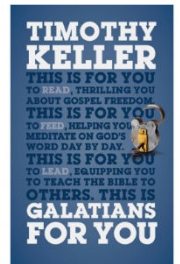
1:24

2:1-9

5. Paul says that he used to be “extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (1:14). He used to believe that he could be right with God by obeying God’s Law and following Jewish religious practices. What changed his heart and mind? (See 1:12, 15, 16. Compare with Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-16; 26:12-18)

6. What point is Paul making when he speaks about what happened with Titus on his second visit to Jerusalem? (2:1-5)

Paul is convinced that “gospel plus ...” is no gospel at all. Anything added to the gospel changes it and takes away its saving power. And this was a serious matter for the church in Galatia, and it’s a serious matter for the church today. As Tim Keller explains: “to alter the gospel is to play with life and death.” (Galatians for You, 2013)



7. Look back at your answer to the opening question in the study. Paul’s answer to that question is recorded in 1:3-5:

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

What things are Christians today tempted to add to the gospel?

8. Are there parts of church life that you think are essential to our salvation?

9. What habits do you, or your church, have that undermine the gospel of grace?

PRAYER POINTS

GALATIANS 2:11-21: DEAD RIGHT

1. What influences your actions – obedience to God, or approval from your community?
2. How do you recognise hypocrisy?

Read Galatians 2:11-14.

3. Why did Paul accuse Peter of hypocrisy?
4. What might Peter have been afraid of, and what does this tell us about the nature of the tensions between Jewish and Gentile believers in the church as it grew beyond Jerusalem and Judea?

Read Galatians 2:15-21.

Paul doesn't speak about Peter's hypocrisy over Jew-Gentile contact just to make a point about the ugliness of hypocrisy. There was something else at stake in this incident apart from Peter's character, and the fact that even Barnabas (who had been working with Paul to share the gospel as they travelled through Asia) had been led astray. Paul was concerned that Peter's actions were not "in line with the truth of the gospel" (2:14), but instead looked like law-keeping as a way of trying to be right with God (that is, justified).

GOING DEEPER – PETER AND THE JEWISH FOOD LAWS

Read Acts 10

What had Peter once believed was the right way for Jews (and Jewish Christians) to engage with Gentiles? (Acts 10:28)

What did God teach him through his encounter with the family of Cornelius, who was a God-fearing Gentile man? (Acts 10:28, 34-35, 43)

Read Acts 11:1-19. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, how did he explain his actions in Antioch to the Jewish leadership of the church in Jerusalem?

And what was their response?

Read Acts 15. The Jerusalem Council gathered in about 49 AD to deal with a complaint from the church in Antioch that Jewish believers had come to them from Jerusalem and were teaching that Gentile believers must also follow Jewish practices such as circumcision. What was Peter's contribution to the debate?

Follow Paul’s argument step by step.

Paul and Peter, who are Jews by birth, know that person is not made right with God by

_____ the _____, but by _____ in _____ (2:15, NIV 1984)
...

... therefore, Paul and Peter have put their faith in Christ, so that they no longer need to rely on observing the law in order to be right with God (2:16) ...

... because by observing the law _____ will be _____ (2:16, NIV 1984)

... for if righteousness could be gained through the law, _____ died for _____ (2:21, NIV 1984)

Paul’s point is that Jewish believers and Gentile believers are both in the same position before God – no one will become right with him through observing the Jewish Law, but anyone can become right with God by faith in Jesus Christ!

- 5. Paul’s argument about the Law’s inability to make people right with God leaves him open, however, to an accusation from some Jewish believers. What is that accusation? (2:17)

And what is Paul’s answer? (2:18-19)

GOING DEEPER - “FAITH IN CHRIST” OR “FAITH OF CHRIST”?

Both the NIV and ESV translations use the phrase “faith in Christ” at 2:16 and 3:22.

Eg (NIV) 2:16 yet 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.

The NIV footnotes offers an alternative translation (which is equally correct) at 2:16 “know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but **through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ**”

and at 3:22 “so that what was promised, being given **through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ**, might be given to those who believe.”

If this is the correct translation, the point is that Jesus was the one Person who was truly obedient to the Law. It’s his faithfulness to the Law that satisfies God’s requirement for obedience, and earns life and salvation. When we trust Jesus’ obedience, God makes us one with Jesus 3:26), so that we share in everything he has achieved. Paul uses the language of being “in Christ” (2:17; 3:28), “Christ lives in me” (2:20), and being baptised into Christ and being clothed with Christ (3:27).

This understanding highlights an overlooked part of Jesus’ work. He not only dies in our place, earning our forgiveness for breaking God’s law (sometimes called his **passive obedience**), but he perfectly keeps God’s law, so we might be credited with perfect righteousness (4:4) (sometimes called his **active obedience**).

Westminster Confession of Faith 8.5 The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him.

If this is true, what is the place of obedience to the Law in the life of a Christian?

6. Believing the gospel is not just how we begin as a Christian – it's how we continue. From v20-21, how does Paul describe life for the Christian who dies to the law and lives for God (who trusts Jesus rather than law-keeping as a means of becoming right with God)?

How well does this describe your Christian life?

PRAYER POINTS

GOING DEEPER – THE LAW AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

Obedience to the moral law – the Ten Commandments - is not *how we are saved*, but it is *how we live because we have been saved*.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 19:6) puts it this way, and provides proofs from the Bible:

“Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned;^a yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly;^b discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives;^c so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin;^d together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience.^e It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin;^f and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law.^g The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof;^h although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works:ⁱ so as a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace.”

a. Acts 13:39; Rom 6:14; 8:1; Gal 2:16; 3:13; 4:4-5.

b. Ps 119:4-6; Rom 7:12, 22, 25; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:14, 16, 18-23.

c. Rom 3:20; 7:7.

d. Rom 7:9, 14, 24; James 1:23-25.

e. Rom 7:24-25; 8:3-4; Gal 3:24.

f. Ps 119:101, 104, 128; James 2:11.

g. Ezra 9:13-14; Ps 89:30-34.

h. Lev 26:1-14 with 2 Cor 6:16; Ps 19:11; 37:11 with Mat 5:5; Eph 6:2-3.

i. Luke 17:10; Gal 2:16.

j. Rom 6:12, 14; 1 Pet 3:8.

GALATIANS 3:1-14: DEADLY DECEPTION

1. How were you made right with God? What does this mean for you each day?

Paul has been emphatic about how people are made right with God: "... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." (2:16). To prove this is true, he reminds the Galatians of three things: their own experience, the example of Abraham, and the work of Christ.

Read Galatians 3:1-5, where Paul reminds the Galatians of their own experience.

2. What answer is Paul expecting when he asks the Galatians how they received the Holy Spirit? (3:2)
3. What point is he making by contrasting the way they began their Christian lives (by faith) with the way they were living now (trying to be perfected, that is sanctified, by obedience to the Law)? (3:3)
4. Why does Paul remind the Galatians of their suffering? (3:4)

Read Galatians 3:6-9, where Paul speaks about Abraham's salvation experience. You can read more about this in Genesis 12:1-5, and 15:1-6.

5. Why does Paul remind the Jewish Christians of how Abraham was made right with God? (You'll find a hint in John 8:31-41)
6. How would this challenge the Jewish Christians' understanding of their place in God's kingdom? How does it challenge our thinking about the traditions and habits we follow in our families and churches?

Read Galatians 3:10-14, in which Paul speaks about Christ's work to redeem his people.

7. In these verses, Paul quotes from the Old Testament to show that that salvation through faith was always God's plan. What does Paul want his readers to understand about obedience to the law as a way of trying to be right with God?

8. What conclusion should we draw about our standing before God when we cannot keep the whole Law?

Why is this good news for Jews?

Why is it good news for Gentiles (like many of us!)?

PRAYER POINTS

GOING DEEPER – CURSED FOR SIN

Look up the verses and make a quick note about the Old Testament context, and the point Paul is making by quoting it.

Deuteronomy 27:26 (quoted in 3:10)

Habakkuk 2:4 (quoted in 3:11)

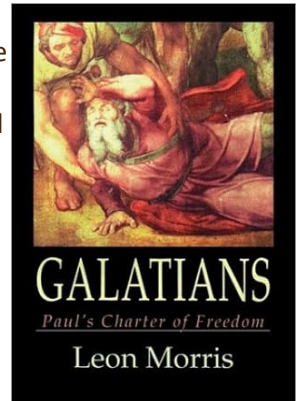
Leviticus 18:4-5 (quoted in 3:12)

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (quoted in 3:13)

The crucifixion of Jesus is a powerful illustration of what was achieved by his death. Australian theologian Leon Morris explains it like this:

“Paul relates the slavery of sinners to their being under a curse, a truth he demonstrates by quoting Deuteronomy 21:23. This passage did not refer to crucifixion (which the Jews did not practice), but to the hanging on a tree or wooden post of the corpse of a man who had been executed. But in New Testament times a cross was often called a tree and there is no doubting that this is what Paul has in mind here. The curse meant a death sentence and sinners are ransomed from this by the death of Jesus. Paul does not let his readers escape from the truth that sin is serious, for it brings God’s curse on the sinner. But he insists just as firmly on the truth that those who put their trust in Christ have nothing to fear. They are redeemed, bought out of the effect of the curse that rested on them, and brought into the glorious liberty of the people of God.”

(from *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom*)



GALATIANS 3:15 – 4:7: THE BRADY BUNCH

1. How do you react when you're asked to change old habits?

Read Galatians 3: 15-18

Paul adds to what he has already said about God's relationship with Abraham, by using an example from everyday life: he compares God's promises and covenant with Abraham with what his readers understand about human contracts and covenants.

2. What is a contract? What happens when it is broken? How easy is it to set it aside?
3. Which came first – God's promises to Abraham? Or the Law given to God's people at Mt Sinai? (3:17)
4. What does this tell us about the promises made to Abraham? (3:17)
5. What is the point being made in the discussion of "seed" (NIV 1984) and "offspring" (ESV) in 3:16?

Read Galatians 3:19 – 4:7

6. If the promises made to Abraham and his seed/offspring are not set aside by the Law, why was the Law given to God's people?

3:19, 25

3:24, 25

4:1-7

7. What has changed for Jewish believers when Jesus came?

What did this mean for the early church? (3:26-29)

Paul says that because believers all have faith in Jesus, there is no distinction between them. He makes a particular point about the gospel removing division based on religious background, because this is the problem in the Galatian churches. But he also says that the gospel removes division based on social status ("slave" and "free") or gender ("male" and "female"), which would also have been potentially divisive issues in the first century AD.

8. How does being “clothed with Christ” remove all distinctions between believers? (3:26)

9. What does this mean for the church today? What other distinctions have been removed by the gospel? Think about your own circle of Christian friends, and about your church family – who is included that would probably not be if you didn’t share faith in Jesus? Who do you still find difficult to include?

10. What does it mean in your daily life to be God’s child, not God’s slave?

PRAYER POINTS

GALATIANS 4:8-31: WHERE'S YOUR JOY?

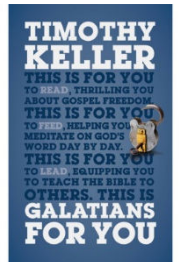
1. Think back to 2020 and the impact of COVID 19 on our celebrations of Easter and Christmas that year. How did you feel about not meeting for church that Easter, and of having restrictions on the number of people who could gather in your home that Christmas? What, if anything, was lost by not being able to celebrate as usual? What difference does it make to you now?

Read Galatians 4:8-11

Paul wants to know why the Galatians are “turning back to those weak and miserable principles” that they followed before they knew, and were known by, God. These principles, he says, are a form of slavery (4:8 and 4:9).

2. What behaviour does he focus on as an example of “weak and miserable principles”? (4:10)

“So how can turning to works-salvation be considered an enslavement to false gods? ... whatever we choose to use, whether it is achievement or morality or religion or serving our family, we turn that thing into a Savior, and thus into a “god”. Works-righteousness always creates idols; it is simply that the false saviors it produces – church attendance, ministry to others, Bible-reading – are things we would not normally think of as idols ... If anything, the idolatry and slavery of religion is more dangerous than the idolatry and slavery or irreligion, because it is less obvious. The irreligious person knows he is far away from God, but the religious person does not.” (Tim Keller, *Galatians for You*)



3. This is challenging! What “weak and miserable principles” are you tempted to follow, thinking they will make you (or keep you) right with God?

Read Galatians 4:12-20

4. What does this part of Paul’s letter tell you about ...

... his relationship with the Galatian church?

... his feelings about the false teachers?

... the danger ahead for the Galatian Christians?

5. How can we use Paul’s relationship with the Galatian Christians as a model for how we engage with Christians who are in spiritual danger?

Read Galatians 4:21-31

Paul returns to the story of Abraham to expand his argument about the desirability of freedom over slavery. He retells Genesis 16 as an allegory to contrast the Law with faith in the promises of God.

6. Complete the table. What/who do the characters in the Abraham story represent?

	<i>Genesis 12, 15, 16 (the original narrative)</i>	<i>Galatians 4 (the allegory)</i>
<i>Hagar</i>	The slave woman, servant of Sarah	
<i>Ishmael</i>	The son born to Abraham because he and Sarah tried to solve the family problem themselves	
<i>Sarah</i>	The free woman, who God said would bear the child promised to Abraham	
<i>Isaac</i>	The son born to Sarah because of God's promise to Abraham	

7. In the allegory, who does Paul say believers are? (4:31) What does this mean for believers who rely on law-keeping (traditions, rules, religious practices etc) to make them right with God?

PRAYER POINTS:

GALATIANS 5: FREEDOM

1. What freedoms do you value most? What restrictions do you resent the most?

Read Galatians 5:1-15

2. Paul urges his readers not to go back into submission to “a yoke of slavery”. What particular religious practice is he thinking of? (5:1-3)

What “yokes of slavery” are you tempted to submit to?

3. Why would obedience to one part of the law become an obligation to keep the whole law? (5:3-4)
4. Keeping the law does not count toward righteousness. But what does? (5:6)
5. What is warning does Paul give to teachers who keep others from obeying the truth? (5:7-12)

Read Galatians 5:16-26

Paul tells his readers that those who “walk by the Spirit” will not be “under the law” (5:16-18). He then contrasts the “acts of the sinful nature” with the “fruit of the Spirit”. Having been released from slavery to the Law, the Christian is now free to “walk by the Spirit” and live in obedience to God.

In the phrase “fruit of the Spirit”, the Greek word translated in English as “fruit” is singular, but it’s followed by a list of many fruits. Tim Keller, in *Galatians for You*, says this means “the real fruit of the Spirit always grow up together.” That is, Christians produce a whole crop of all the “fruits” together. Growth of just one or two of the fruits on their own is more likely to be due to natural temperament or “gifts” than the work of the Spirit. Keller warns us to stop counting our natural temperament and “gifts” as signs that we are growing in the fruit of the Spirit, and to start looking for how the fruits are growing *together* to make us more Christlike. And we should be on guard for fake fruit!

6. The table below is based on Keller’s discussion of this passage. Spend some time as a group, or in pairs or triplets, thinking about the fruit the Spirit will cultivate in us, the opposites that are acts of the sinful nature, and the fake fruit that deceives us. The first two, love and joy, have been filled in for you as an example.

Fruit of the Spirit	Opposites	Fakes	Scripture to help us grow in the fruit of the Spirit
LOVE	Fear, abuse, self-protection	Selfish affection because of how people make us feel	
JOY	Hopelessness, despair	Happiness over the blessings we receive, but no thankfulness toward the blesser, God	
PEACE			
PATIENCE			
KINDNESS			
GOODNESS			
FAITHFULNESS			
GENTLENESS			
SELF-CONTROL			

7. What is our role in the growth of the fruit of the Spirit? (5:24-26)

PRAYER POINTS

Share Bible passages that help us focus on cultivating the truth fruit of the Spirit. Then pray about these things.

GALATIANS 6: LIVING UNDER THE LAW OF LOVE

1. Describe the church that you want to be part of.

Read Galatians 6:1-10

2. Paul now gives some instruction about what church life should look like when the members of the church are living by the Spirit. List the key things he describes.
3. How closely does this match your description of the church you want to be part of? How closely does it match your church now?
4. Paul says we cannot “sow” from our sinful natures and expect to reap a “harvest” of eternal life. What are you, and your church, harvesting? Is there anything that needs to change?
5. Sowing is hard work. How can we use our resources well, and prioritise where we sow? (6:9-10)

Read Galatians 6:11-18

Paul grabs the pen from his scribe and, with characteristic passion, has the last word on what really counts in the Christian life, by contrasting the false teachers and their message with the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. What matters to the false teachers? (6:12)

What matters to Paul (6:14)

7. What is the only thing that counts in the Christian life? (6:15, with 5:6)
8. How has Paul’s letter to the Galatians changed your view of what “counts” in the Christian life?

PRAYER POINTS: