

Paul's letter to the
GALATIANS

ONE GOSPEL

LifeGroup Studies

Freedom, and the desire for it, is instinctual in us all. The thought of the free being made slaves again is heartbreaking. This very threat is what drives the obvious passion of the Apostle Paul as he writes to the Galatian churches. He declares to them again the One Gospel of the Lord Jesus; the one who sets us free from slavery to guilt, shame, and the curse of every unattainable standard, and makes us the free children of God.

STUDY ONE

Galatians 1:1-11

When was the last time you wrote a handwritten letter and sent it? What are some of the steps lost in a world of electronic mail?

Read Galatians 1:1-11

1. Re-read Galatians 1:1-5 and compare with Philippians 1:1-9, Romans 1:1-10, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3. There is a significant element missing from Paul's usual introduction in Galatians. What is it, and what do you suspect this could indicate?
2. Verses 3-5 summarise Paul's gospel in three verses.
 - a. What does it say about God?
 - b. What two things do we learn about Jesus' work?
 - c. What is the ultimate goal of the gospel?
3. What is the issues Paul is raising in this letter? (verse 6)
4. What is the Gospel?
5. Why do you suppose Paul is so agitated by a 'different gospel', isn't this still a gospel?
6. What do you understand Paul to be saying about those who teach a different gospel?
 - a. How do you feel about this?
 - b. How can you safeguard against this?
 - c. What do you think can influence our gospel to shift into something false?
7. Explore and discuss where pleasing humans, and pleasing God can come into conflict when announcing the gospel. Do you think it makes sense that this happens?
8. What can we do when we find ourselves in a situation where our gospel is offensive to somebody?

STUDY TWO

Galatians 1:12-24

Imagine: You are a police officer, and you pull over a vehicle for a minor traffic offence. On requesting the license of the driver, you are told, *"I am a sovereign citizen traveling, you have no authority with me, and I don't need a license."* How do you respond?

Recap of Study 1: The chapter so far

Spend a moment recalling Galatians 1:1-11, What has been raised so far, what have you noticed. These should be quick-fire responses and simple (1-2 mins)

Read Galatians 1:12-24

1. Where does Paul say he received this gospel he is preaching?
 - a. Do you think that Paul loses authority or gains authority from this?

Refresh your memory of Paul's story by reading Acts 9. Take note of who he sees and what time in the biblical story this is. (What events have just happened?)

2. Take note of what Paul is talking about in Galatians 1:13-14.
 - a. Where has he come from and what is his previous history?
 - b. **Bonus** (Only if you want): Why is Paul talking about these things from his time in Judaism, do you think they are playing a part in what the Galatians are struggling with at the current time?

3. How is Paul trying to establish his authority as an apostle to the people of Galatia? (Verses 15-17)
 - a. What does this mean for Paul's message to the churches of Galatia?
 - b. What does it mean for us now?
4. How does this section (verses 12-24) contrast to verses 1-11?
 - a. How is Paul different in these sections? What his goal is through writing these things?
5. What is the meaning of what Paul is saying in verses 18-24?

Reflection Questions

6. Do you know what the gospel is?
 - a. Reflect, do you yourself know?
 - b. Reflect, can you articulate the gospel?
 - c. Discuss, why might some people reject the gospel when they hear it?
7. Silently think to yourself.
 - a. Do I follow the gospel with my whole heart or am I holding onto my own gospel?
 - b. Do I live my way or God's way?

STUDY THREE

Galatians 2:1-21

Recap Galatians 1 by reading the chapter summary in the appendix.

What is an Apostle? How is your Pastor an apostle and how are they not an apostle?

Read Galatians 2:1-21

Paul, a true Apostle

1. Paul has been establishing his credentials as an Apostle. How does he use his independence from those esteemed as leaders to argue his case? (Verses 1-5)
 - a. How does Paul use his later association to argue his case as a true Apostle?
2. How does Paul's conflict add to his case for authentic Apostolic authority?
 - a. Why do you think Paul's opposition was public? (Verses 11 and 14)
 - b. When do you suppose public opposition may be called for? What sorts of elements would call for this? (Verses 11-14)

The one true Gospel

3. What does it mean to be justified?
 - a. How does Paul say one can be justified?
 - b. What does the phrase 'works of the law' refer to?

There is a discussion over how verse 16 should be translated. A helpful alternative is offered by New Testament Scholars such as Peter T. O'Brien, 'So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by *the faith of Christ* [rather than *faith in Christ*] and not by works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.'

4. What does this helpful alternate translation help us to see and understand?

In verse 17 Paul explains that both 'Jews by birth' and 'sinful gentiles' (verse 15) are found together as sinners who need Jesus for salvation. He goes on in verse 19 to argue that to now reintroduce the law of Moses would be anti-gospel.

5. What can we learn about the freedom we have in Jesus as Christians, and our expectations of one another?
6. How does salvation based on our moral merit or anything else empty the cross of power?
7. How does justification by grace alone change our life? (verse 20-21)
8. **Reflection question:** Who is justified? The wonderful person who serves in the community, gives to charity, never lies, and worships generously among all faiths, or the person struggling to tame their habit of theft, with a violent streak who continues to confess Christ and asks him for forgiveness and a changed life. Do you think this is fair, why/why not?

STUDY FOUR

Galatians 3:1-14

Recap Galatians 1-2 by reading the chapter summary in the appendix.

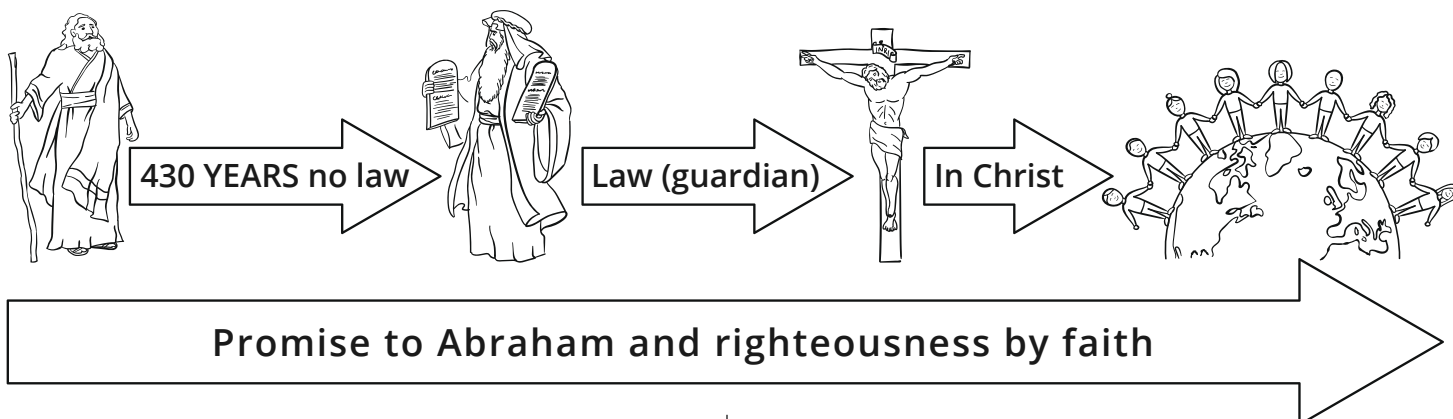
Do you find it difficult to let others know you disagree with them? Why/why not? Do you think it is important to disagree? When might disagreeing be important?

Read Galatians 3:1-14

1. Paul's language is sharp as he lets the Galatians know what he thinks. What is his concern here? (Verses 1-6)
2. What do verses 1-6 tell us about how the Spirit is received?
3. When do verses 1-6 suggest that believers receive the Spirit?
4. How would you respond to the following statements based on verses 1-6:
 - a. After becoming a follower of Jesus, believers should pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit as a second blessing.
 - b. You will know somebody has received the Spirit when their life is marked with holiness, and/or they speak in tongues.
 - c. The Spirit comes to dwell in Christians who are mature in their faith.
 - d. The Spirit's great joy is to point people to Jesus.
5. What is significant about being a child of Abraham? What is particularly supernatural in the statement 'those who have faith are children of Abraham'? (Verse 6-7)
6. How do you understand the gospel to have been announced in advance to Abraham? (Verses 8-9). Can you think of other times the gospel was 'announced in advance' in the Old Testament?
7. If the law brings curse, does that mean that God's law is bad? (Verses 10-12)
8. Who is the 'us' that Jesus redeems? (Think about how 'Us' might be used by Paul, and the meaning of the word redemption)
9. How does this redemption bring salvation to gentiles? (Verse 14)
10. Why is it foolish to add anything to the gospel?
11. Where do you think it is possible (even easy) to slip into foolishness?

STUDY FIVE

Galatians 3:15-4:7



Why do you value (or not value) the saying, 'A deal is a deal?'

Read Galatians 3:15 - 4:7

A deal is a deal
Galatians 3:15-18

1. Recall the previous study, what is Paul trying to give an example of?
2. Use the diagram above to talk through and explain verses 16-18. (You may like to return to it at stages throughout this chapter)
3. Apply Paul's theology:
 - a. How was Abraham saved?
 - b. How was Isaac saved?
 - c. How was Moses saved?
 - d. How was David saved?
 - e. How was Daniel saved?
 - f. How was John the Baptist saved?
 - g. How was Paul saved?
 - h. How are you saved?

4. Now Paul asks the question on everybody's lips (verse 19). Based on verses 19-25, can you explain what the law is for (and not for), what it does, and why it is good?

'Guardian' (verses 24-25) or 'Paidagogos' in the original Greek was a paid teacher and governor of children in the household. Think like Fräulein Maria from the Sound of Music, or Nanny Fran Fine from The Nanny.

5. Read carefully verses 23-25, and think about what it is to mature. Do you think God expects His people to be more holy and obedient under the law of Moses, or under the freedom of Christ?
 - a. What does this teach us about grace, and being a disciple of Jesus?
6. Remembering the context and reading verses 26-29, what does Paul truly mean by moving beyond these categories, that we know he holds to extremely carefully in the broader library of his writing? Does he really mean there is no difference between a Jew and a gentile, or a free person and a slave, or a man and a woman, or is his point something specific?

STUDY FIVE CONTINUED

7. What is the most important thing a human can have? Are you sure? When does this seem to come into question for many of us?
8. The final section Galatians 4:1-7 continues the analogy of 'coming of age' and no longer being like the slave under a guardian. Jesus has brought God's people into an age of maturity and freedom. How does this effect your thinking on:
 - a. Obedience to God as a matter of obligation or joy
 - b. Kingdom service as a duty or an opportunity
 - c. Fellowship with God as religion or relationship
9. Worship, properly understood, is joyful obedience to the Lord. Explore how this may be true?

Reflection: Are there times where you or others live like Christian slaves rather than free heirs? What things may drive Christian slavery?

STUDY SIX

Galatians 4:8-31

What is one of the best gifts you ever received?

Consider the difference between Grace, mercy, and leniency/ clemency.

Read Galatians 4:8-31

1. What do you understand an 'idol' to be?
2. Why do you think Idolatry is so common, and why is God so concerned about it? (1st and 2nd commandments).

Tim Keller identifies surface and deep idols, with surface idols existing to serve the common deep idols of Comfort, Power, Control, and Approval in his excellent book Counterfeit Gods.

3. What do Idols promise, what do they demand?
4. Now reread Galatians 4:8-10. What sorts of things do you think these gentile Galatians may have been enslaved by before hearing the gospel of Jesus?
 - a. How may they now be returning to slavery?
 - b. Can God's law be an idol?
 - c. Why is Paul now fearful that he may laboured in vain?

In verse 12-15 Paul draws upon the Galatian's Spiritual journey with him. He appeals 'become like me' – free of the letter of the law, because he became like them as gentiles also

free of the letter of the law. He explains we had a common position in Christ, justification apart from the law, you received me and my gospel whole heartedly!

5. How do you understand Paul's logic in verse 16?
6. Who is trying to alienate the Galatians from Paul, how are they seeking to do this? (verse 17-20)

An illustration of slavery and freedom *Galatians 4:21-30*

7. Read Genesis 16:1-5 and 17:15-22, this is the essential backdrop for Galatians 4:21-30. Discuss any details you are unclear on.

Galatians 4:24 'These things are being taken figuratively.' Remember Paul lives in a time without television or movies. So, he refers to a well-known story in Israel's (and Islam's) history. He uses this story as an illustration, like a preacher might use a movie as an illustration. He is not expounding Genesis in the usual way, but using the story as an illustration, hence 'figuratively' as opposed to literally, or typologically.

8. How is being under the law (which was given by Moses at Mt Sinai) akin to being fleshly? (It may help to recall how the birth of Ishmael was engineered)
 - a. Why is this fleshly approach considered slavery?

STUDY SIX CONTINUED

9. Paul seeks to redirect the Galatian churches' attention. Where does he urge them to focus?
10. How does being children of promise make Christians free and not slaves?
11. Why do you suspect there has always been a temptation for followers of Jesus to want to contribute something to salvation?

Reflection:

Are some Christians better Christians than others?

Salvation is by grace alone; but discipleship has a cost... Discuss.

STUDY SEVEN

Galatians 5:1-15

- a. You discover an animal:
- It has four legs.
 - It is taller than you.
 - It is in the desert and there is no water near-by, yet the animal seems healthy.
 - The animal has a hump on its back.

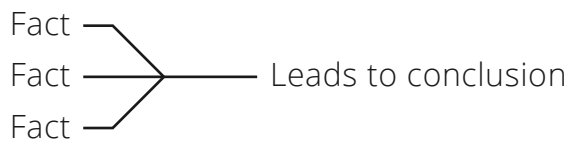
What kind of animal have you discovered?

b. "Pigs can't actually fly!"

Give 3 reasons why you might hold this opinion.

In questions a. and b. above you have used to different kinds of reasoning. In a. you were *inductive* in your reasoning, and in b. you needed to be *deductive* in your reasoning.

Inductive:



Deductive:



1. There is no true freedom outside of a relationship with Jesus
2. To try and add to God's grace is to lose God's grace
3. It does not matter what you believe, the only thing that matters is that you have faith.
4. You can't have grace without truth, and you can't have truth without grace.
5. It is right to separate from false teachers, and false doctrine.
6. When opportunity knocks you should take it.
7. Freedom is to be without constraint.
8. God's law is good.
9. God's laws is good for everyone.
10. God's law protects.
11. God's law can't save anyone or make them righteous.

Reflection:

What does it mean to be truly free to you?

Why should Christians continue to study God's law in the Old Testament?

Can you think of ways God's Old Testament law teaches us to love our neighbour?

Today we will try something a little different, and study Galatians 5:1-15 with a deductive approach.

Read Galatians 5:1-15

See if you are able to find support for the propositions listed to the right, or perhaps some are not supported by what we find in Galatians and should be rejected or revised.

STUDY EIGHT

Galatians 5:16-26

The Swedish Method:

Each member reads the chosen passage and then approximately ten minutes is set aside for individual thinking and study.



At the question mark, make a note of any word, expression, or verse which you would question, either because you don't understand it or because you don't agree with it.



The light bulb stands for those thoughts which, after the passage has been considered several times, throw light on the rest of the passage or some personal concern.



At the Arrow, a note is made of the point which most sharply challenges or pricks the conscience.

At the end of the time, the group comes together again, and each member has a chance to comment on the notes made. Spend some time in discussion and working to tidy up thoughts together.

Read Galatians 5:16-26



STUDY NINE

Galatians 6:1-17

Praying and concluding

Read Galatians 6:1-17

Spend the first part of your study time in Galatians 6:1-17. Read through the passage once together. Now spend some time in group prayer, both praying these scriptures, and praying about what you understand in them. Allow the scripture to direct the groups prayer.

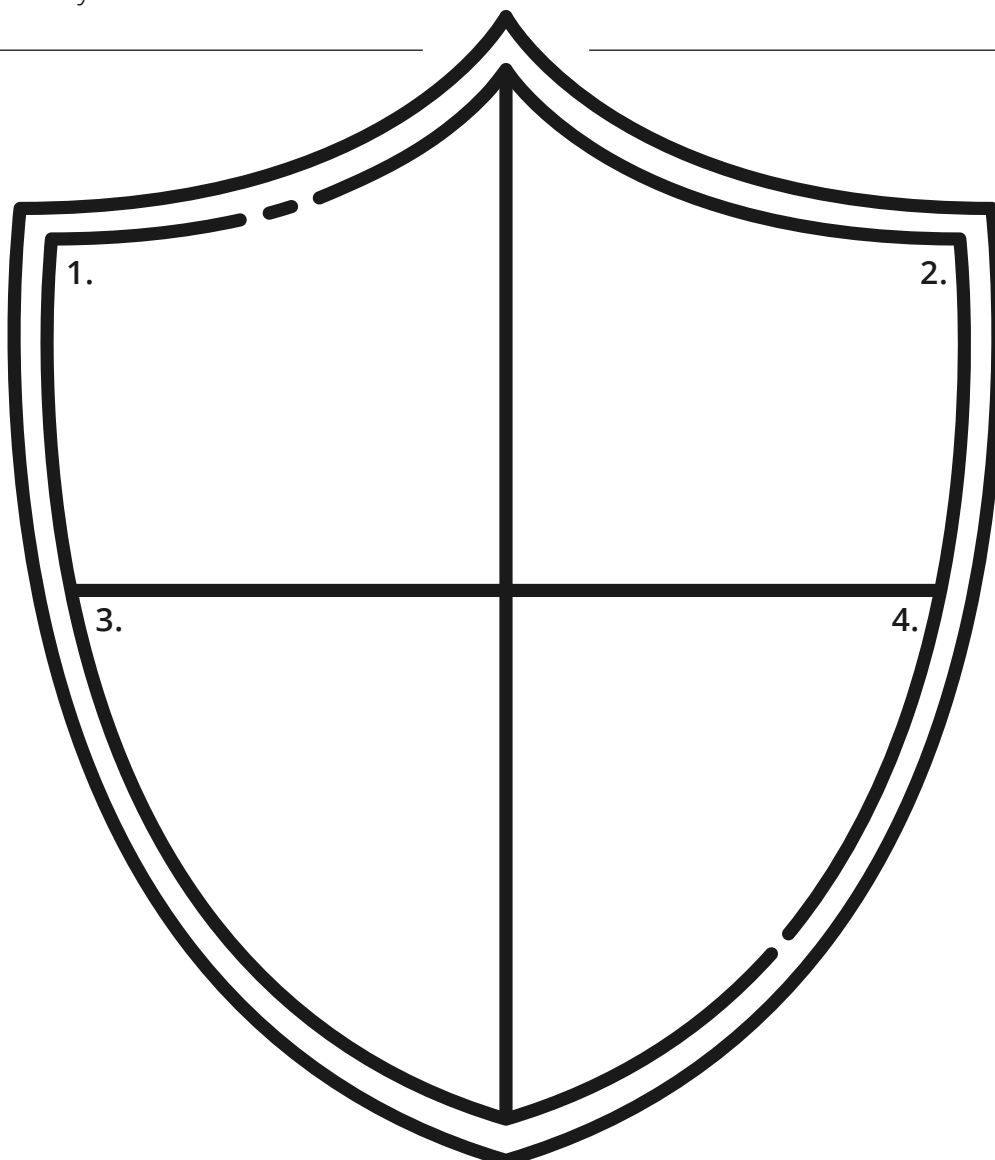
Next

Well, we have travelled through Galatians for 9 weeks. What have you recalled, or been touched by?

Fill in the shield emblem below by entering in the segments:

1. Something you learnt about God
2. Something you learnt or were challenged in for yourself
3. Something you discovered in this letter (can be anything you like)
4. Something you would like to share with others.

Do this activity individually, and then spend some time sharing.



Appendix

GALATIANS CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter One

- I'm Paul sent by Jesus.
- (Usual thanksgiving is omitted)
- You have departed from the gospel, and now have a false gospel.
- A false gospel is the work of false teachers.
- I previously taught you the true gospel.
- It was revealed to me by Jesus himself.
- I taught you what was taught to me not by people but Jesus, I am an Apostle.
- I have been accepted as an Apostle by the other Apostles too.

Chapters One - Two

- You have departed from the Gospel I, Paul, your Apostle taught you.
- My Gospel is from Jesus, and I am in fellowship with the other Apostles.
- I have been sent just as they have, my mission is to the gentiles.
- Here is where your gospel has derailed:
 - You have become confused regarding the Law of Moses. There have been some people who have influenced your thinking, and not for the better.
 - You have started with grace and now are seeking to complete your journey with works of the law. That's a big mistake.
 - If righteousness came from what we can do, Christ died for nothing.

Chapters One - Three

- You have departed from the Gospel I Paul your Apostle taught you.
- My Gospel is from Jesus, and I am in fellowship with the other Apostles.
- Here is where your gospel has derailed:
 - You have become confused by some people who have influenced your thinking that you need to keep the law of Moses.
 - If righteousness came from what we can do, Christ died for nothing.
- It feels like you are under a spell, somebody has you thinking you can be saved by works!
- Don't forget God's promise to Abraham! God was saving by grace through faith for 430 years before there was the Law of Moses.
- The Law of Moses was a gift, and its purpose was to guard you and point you in the way of wisdom, never to declare you righteous.
- The Law taught you, whilst you waited for Abraham's seed, Jesus. He has come, now it's time to be mature, you are not little kids anymore baby sat by the law, you have been set free to follow Jesus as children of God and heirs.



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