



# THE LOOKOUT

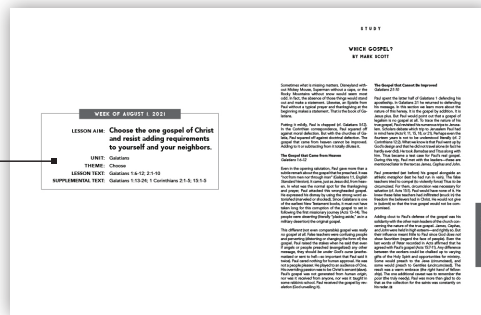
AUGUST 2021

## Unit: GALATIANS Theme: CHOOSE

**Overview:** Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of Christian freedom. In it, Paul defines the gospel in terms of liberation. If it feels like a straitjacket, it probably is not the gospel. One man said, “Since I became a Christian, I do anything I want to—the only difference is that Jesus changed all my want-tos.” This liberating gospel contains the righteousness found only in Christ, which is sufficient for living by the Spirit.

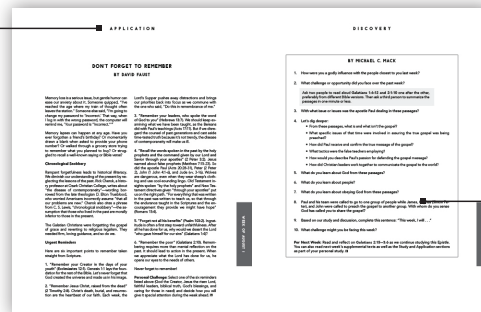
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF AUGUST 22, 2021**

**LESSON AIM: Choose to live free instead  
of shackled to a system  
of law-keeping.**

**UNIT:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 4:21–5:15

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Isaiah 54:1-3; Romans 7:1-6; 9:6-21;  
1 Corinthians 5:6-8

## WHICH COVENANT?

BY MARK SCOTT

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry said, “Give me liberty, or give me death!” New Hampshire license plates say, “Live Free or Die.” Patriots cherish freedom—so do Christians. In fact, if it binds, it probably is not the gospel.

As he wrote Galatians, Paul continued to unpack the true gospel that liberates. He concluded chapter 4 with his final argument about being saved by faith in Christ (as opposed to works of law). He spoke about the covenant under which one lives and highlighted dramatic contrasts.

**Women and the Covenant***Galatians 4:21-31*

The closing argument in chapters 3–4 about being saved by faith is intriguing to say the least. Who would have thought while reading the Abraham narrative (Genesis 11–25) that embedded in the story of his two wives were two different covenants? Probably no one—until Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, connected those dots. Paul used the narrative about Sarah sending her handmaiden (Hagar) away as an allegory, nuancing the difference between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Christ.

Paul particularly directed his appeal to *you who want to be under the law*. Paul’s opponents wanted Jesus plus the law. But they did not listen to what the law (Old Testament) said. Abraham “had many sons,” but he also had two wives. The contrast between them is sharp. Hagar was a slave woman. She could bear the child only according to *the flesh* (Ishmael). Sarah was Abraham’s free wife. She would bear the child of *divine promise* (Isaac). This promise was recorded in Genesis 15:4; 18:1-15.

Paul spoke of these two women *figuratively* (allegorically, emblematically, or representatively) and in terms of covenants. Hagar represented the Mosaic covenant given on *Mount Sinai* and continuing in the physical city of *Jerusalem*. Sarah represented the Christian covenant in the *Jerusalem that is above*. Paul connected a prophecy from Isaiah 54:1 with these women and their respective covenants. Sarah was the barren woman. She seemed destined not to bear a child, never to be in labor, and to forever be *desolate*. But with the coming of Christ (consider that Isaiah 54 follows the great suffering song of the Messiah in Isaiah 52:14—53:12), the seeming barren woman would give birth to thousands (spiritually speaking).

When Isaac was weaned, Ishmael was “laughing at” (teasing or making fun of) him (Genesis 21:8-14). Paul found something like that Old Testament narrative happening in his day. The people committed to being saved by works were persecuting the people committed to being saved by faith in Christ. Just as Sarah forced Hagar to leave, so also Paul forced (called for) God’s people to leave the slavery of the law and embrace freedom in Christ.

**Circumcision and the Covenant***Galatians 5:1-15*

Once again, we have an unfortunate chapter division. Even though Paul was moving into more practical aspects of being saved by faith in Christ, much of the thought about covenant continues in chapter 5. The first verse stands as a strong theme verse of the whole Epistle. Since *Christ has set us free*, we should not turn back to a *yoke of slavery*.

Circumcision was the seal (sign) of the covenant (Genesis 17). If you were circumcised (and women were to be, as with all of Israel, circumcised in their hearts), then you were bound to *obey the whole law* because that put you in the covenant family. The problem is that no one can obey the whole law (Romans 3:19-20). There must be a new way to be right with God. In fact, people who are bent on being justified by law actually have *fallen away from grace* (evidently falling from grace is possible, though the Greek word implies that one can recover from this fall). The Holy Spirit’s help and *faith expressing itself through love* give evidence that we are not trying to be saved by works of law.

Paul used three metaphors to drive home his point: a race, some yeast, and a knife. If they were running the race, they should not let anyone “cut them off.” It does not take much yeast to work *through a whole batch of dough*. So be careful of what gets added to the dough. The knife is the most aggressive metaphor. If circumcision is the key to being saved, then be careful of letting the knife slip. More might get taken off than desired.

Paul added one disclaimer before getting into the practical applications of the Epistle. Being free in Christ does not give license to *the flesh*. Love is the finest expression of someone saved by faith in Christ. Love fulfills the law. So, believers should not *bite and devour* one another in arguing for being saved the right way. ■

## THOSE UNUSED GIFT CARDS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you have any gift cards lying around your house? News reports indicate more than half of U.S. consumers purchase at least one prepaid gift card each year. However, about \$3 billion of annual value goes unredeemed. What good is a gift card if you don't use it?

My family contributes to the problem. When we receive gift cards, my wife stuffs them into an envelope she keeps on her dresser. Unfortunately, we often forget about them. I bite into my hamburger and Candy exclaims, "Wait a minute! Don't we have a \$10 gift card for this restaurant?" Somehow the burger doesn't taste as good when you realize you could have gotten it for free.

Back in 1994, my family traveled to Walt Disney World to soak up the Florida sunshine and hang out with Mickey Mouse. To save money, we bought 4-Day Value Passes. At the end of our vacation, somehow we ended up with one unused ticket good for a one-day park admission. I tossed the ticket into a folder where it remained until recently. Looking closely at the fine print, I couldn't find an expiration date. I contacted the friendly staff at Disney and said, "I have an unredeemed Value Pass that I purchased from you guys in 1994. Can I still use it?" Their answer? "Yes." After 27 years, that faded piece of cardboard will still get me into the theme park—as long as I cough up the money to travel there and pay the admission fee for anyone else who joins me!

### Appreciating Christian Liberty

The word *free* gets tossed around a lot. Advertisers push fat-free, sugar-free, and gluten-free foods. Financial planners coach us to be debt-free so we can enjoy a worry-free retirement. Our church offers first-time guests a "free gift." (Is there any other kind?)

True freedom, though, seems elusive. Is my life stress-free? Nope. Am I free from responsibility? Not

as long as I have a job. Carefree? Not when I have adult children and grandchildren to be concerned about. Pain-free? No. Free from moral obligations? Definitely not. I wonder: In America, is freedom *respected* and *protected*, or merely *expected*? In the church, do we appreciate what it cost the Lord to liberate our souls?

Sometimes we treat God's grace a bit like an unused gift card, as if we're trying to pay the price for something God already has paid. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1), and this freedom results in many blessings.

*It makes our burdens lighter.* When we're free in Christ, we don't have to lug around the heavy yoke of religious expectations.

*It makes serving sweeter.* We can give and serve from the overflow of a grateful heart without trying to impress others or earn God's approval.

*It makes our priorities clearer.* The slogan "in essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; and in all things, love" helps us avoid unnecessary distractions and divisions over personal preferences. The Galatians fussed and fumed about the circumcision ritual, but the apostle Paul insisted, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6).

I am determined to cherish my Christian liberty. And once in a while, a less important goal crosses my mind: I hope my family will join me at Walt Disney World someday so I can use the rest of that 4-Day Value Pass.

**Personal Challenge:** On a piece of paper or in your journal, write your personal reflections about what it means to be free in Christ. How are you experiencing Christian liberty? In what ways do you feel constrained or enslaved instead of free? **L**

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. With whom did you share the gospel message using the Scripture verses from last week's study? How did that go?
2. What dilemma or struggle did you deal with over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 4:21—5:15** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What would you say is the main theme for this section of Scripture?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What contrasts do you see in this passage?
  - What comparisons (or even similes) do you see?
  - What metaphors do you see?
  - What significance do you see in the contrast of being "born according to the flesh" (by "human plotting" in *The Message* translation) and being "born as a result of a divine promise"?
  - Circumcision is not a concern for most modern Christ followers. What religious law-keeping activities or systems—be they self-imposed or imposed on us by others—do we sometimes undertake to try to find favor with God?
  - In your own words, according to this passage, what does and doesn't matter for us as Christ followers?
  - Have you ever experienced or seen in others a time when Christian freedom was taken too far or even exploited self-indulgently? If so, what was the result?
  - How are Christ followers called to live out their freedom in Christ?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. What commands do you find in this passage? (Hint: See verses 5:1, 13, 14.)
  - Which of these commands will you focus on obeying this week? How specifically will you do that?
8. Think of someone you know who is living according to a law-keeping system to try to find favor with God. (Perhaps they have "fallen away from grace.") What verses from this week's lesson will you share with that person to help them accept God's grace?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What circumstance do you anticipate you will need to deal with this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Galatians 5:16-26; 6:7-10**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■