



# 1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

## OVERVIEW

### Study: 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.

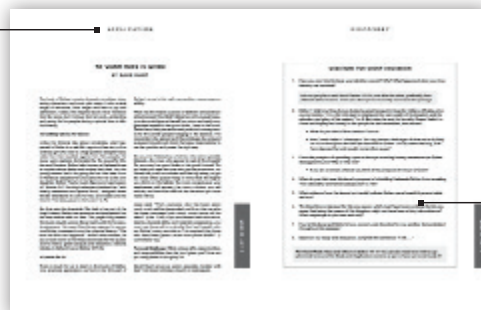
## HOW TO USE

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



**Tab**s 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.

# INTRODUCTION

## Author

The apostle Paul identified himself as the author of Galatians in the first verse of the first chapter of his letter. Acceptance of Paul's authorship is almost universally acknowledged by Bible scholars.

## Audience

Paul didn't write this letter to a single congregation, but rather to a group of churches most likely in the southern region of Galatia, a Roman province that included the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul and Barnabas had planted churches in these cities after being set apart by the Holy Spirit and sent out by the leaders in the church at Antioch (see Acts 13-14).

## Date

While it's difficult to pinpoint the exact time of Paul's writing, it's most probable that Paul wrote Galatians from Antioch sometime between AD 49 and 51.

## Setting

Concluding his first missionary journey, Paul returned to Antioch, his sending church. Soon after he received a report that the churches, he helped establish in the region of Galatia had fallen into error. A group of Christians known as Judaizers (who wanted to make following the Mosaic law a requirement for all Christians, even Gentile believers) were gaining influence and encouraging the

Galatians to follow the Old Testament law, including the ritual of circumcision.

The timing of Paul's writing seems to indicate that he wrote his letter to the Galatian churches before he and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders (see Acts 15) to refute the claims of the Judaizers. We might view the message of Galatians as a preview to Paul's arguments and counsel in Jerusalem.

## Theme

While there are many important truths found in Galatians, the theme of Paul's letter can be summed up in Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Paul wanted believers in Galatia—and believers today—to experience the true freedom of life in the Spirit.

## Why Study Galatians?

Paul must have been surprised by how quickly the Galatian Christians were rejecting the message of grace he had preached among them. It may seem strange to us as well. Why would anyone who has experienced the freedom of life in the Spirit willingly exchange it for bondage to a set of rules and regulations? Sadly, it happens. Some people today choose the "security" of a rules-based religion over the freedom of living in the Spirit. Paul's letter to the Galatians challenges us to live in obedience to Christ without falling into the trap of legalism.

## STUDY CONTENT

**WEEK 1:** Galatians 1:6-12; 2:1-10

**WEEK 2:** Galatians 2:15-3:6

**WEEK 3:** Galatians 3:23-4:10

**WEEK 4:** Galatians 4:21-5:15

**WEEK 5:** Galatians 5:16-26; 6:7-10

## WEEK ONE

**LESSON AIM:** Choose the one gospel of Christ and resist adding requirements to yourself and your neighbors.

**STUDY:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 1:6-12; 2:1-10

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Galatians 1:13-24; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 15:1-5

## WHICH GOSPEL?

BY MARK SCOTT

Sometimes what is missing matters. Disneyland without Mickey Mouse, Superman without a cape, or the Rocky Mountains without snow would seem most odd. In fact, the absence of those things would stand out and make a statement. Likewise, an Epistle from Paul without a typical prayer and thanksgiving at the beginning makes a statement. That is the book of Galatians.

Putting it mildly, Paul is chapped (cf. Galatians 5:12). In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul squared off against moral defection. But with the churches of Galatia, Paul squared off against doctrinal defection. The gospel that came from heaven cannot be improved. Adding to it or subtracting from it totally dilutes it.

**The Gospel that Came from Heaven (Galatians 1:6-12)**

Even in the opening salutation, Paul gave more than a subtle remark about the gospel that he preached. It was “not from men nor through man” (Galatians 1:1, *English Standard Version*). It came, just as Jesus did, from heaven. In what was the normal spot for the thanksgiving and prayer, Paul attacked this wrongheaded gospel. He expressed his dismay by using the strong word *astonished* (marveled or shocked). Since Galatians is one of the earliest New Testament books, it must not have taken long for this corruption of the gospel to set in following the first missionary journey (Acts 13–14). The people were *deserting* (literally “placing aside,” as in a military desertion) the original gospel.

This *different* (not even comparable) gospel was *really no gospel at all*. False teachers were confusing people and perverting (distorting or changing the form of) the gospel. Paul raised the stakes when he said that even if angels or people preached (evangelized) any other message, they should be *under God’s curse* (anathematized or sent to hell—so important that Paul said it twice). Paul cared nothing for human approval. He was not a people pleaser. He played to an audience of One. His overriding passion was to be Christ’s *servant* (slave). Paul’s gospel was not generated from *human origin*, nor was it *received* from anyone, nor was it *taught* in some rabbinic school. Paul received the gospel by *revelation* (God unveiling it).

**The Gospel that Cannot Be Improved (Galatians 2:1-10)**

Paul spent the latter half of Galatians 1 defending his apostleship. In Galatians 2:1 he returned to defending

his message. In this section we learn more about the nature of this heresy. It is the gospel by addition. It is Jesus plus. But Paul would point out that a gospel of legalism is no gospel at all. To trace the nature of his true gospel, Paul revisited his numerous trips to Jerusalem. Scholars debate which trip to Jerusalem Paul had in mind here (Acts 9, 11, 15, 18, or 21). Perhaps even the *fourteen years* is not to be understood literally (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2). What we know is that Paul went up by God’s design and that he did not travel alone (in fact he hardly ever did). He took *Barnabas* and *Titus* along with him. Titus became a test case for Paul’s real gospel. During this trip, Paul met with the leaders—these are mentioned later in the text as *James, Cephas, and John*.

Paul *presented* (set before) his gospel alongside an athletic metaphor (lest he had run in vain). The false teachers tried to compel (to violently force) Titus to be *circumcised*. For them, circumcision was necessary for salvation (cf. Acts 15:1). Paul would have none of it. He knew these false teachers had *infiltrated* (snuck in) the freedom the believers had in Christ. He would not *give in* (submit) so that the true gospel would not be compromised.

Adding clout to Paul’s defense of the gospel was his solidarity with the other main leaders of the church concerning the nature of the true gospel. *James, Cephas, and John* were *held in high esteem*—and rightly so. But their influence meant little to Paul since God *does not show favoritism* (regard the face of people). Even the last words of Peter recorded in Acts affirmed that he agreed with Paul’s gospel (Acts 15:7-11). Any difference between the workers could be chalked up to varying gifts of the Holy Spirit and opportunities for ministry. Some would preach to the Jews (circumcised), and some would preach to Gentiles (uncircumcised). The result was a warm embrace (*the right hand of fellowship*). The one additional caveat was to *remember the poor* (the truly needy). Paul was more than glad to do that as the collection for the saints was constantly on his radar.

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## APPLICATION

### DON'T FORGET TO REMEMBER

BY DAVID FAUST

Memory loss is a serious issue, but gentle humor can ease our anxiety about it. Someone quipped, "I've reached the age where my train of thought often leaves the station." Someone else said, "I'm going to change my password to 'Incorrect.' That way, when I log in with the wrong password, the computer will remind me, 'Your password is "Incorrect.'""

Memory lapses can happen at any age. Have you ever forgotten a friend's birthday? Or momentarily drawn a blank when asked to provide your phone number? Or walked through a grocery store trying to remember what you planned to buy? Or struggled to recall a well-known saying or Bible verse?

#### Chronological Snobbery

Rampant forgetfulness leads to historical illiteracy. We diminish our understanding of the present by neglecting the lessons of the past. Rick Cherok, who served as a history professor at Cincinnati Christian University, Ozark Christian College, and Kentucky Christian University writes about "the disease of contemporaneity"—wording borrowed from the late theologian D. Elton Trueblood, who worried Americans incorrectly assume "that all our problems are new." Cherok also cites a phrase from C. S. Lewis, "chronological snobbery"—the assumption that those who lived in the past are morally inferior to those in the present.

The Galatian Christians were forgetting the gospel of grace and reverting to religious legalism. They needed firm, loving guidance, and so do we.

#### Urgent Reminders

Here are six important points to remember taken straight from Scripture.

**1. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).** Genesis 1:1 lays the foundation for the rest of the Bible. Let's never forget that God created the universe and made us in his image.

**2. "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead" (2 Timothy 2:8).** Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are the heartbeat of our faith. Each week, the Lord's Supper pushes away distractions and brings our prior-

ities back into focus as we commune with the one who said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

**3. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you" (Hebrews 13:7).** We should keep examining what we have been taught, as the Bereans did with Paul's teachings (Acts 17:11). But if we disregard the counsel of past generations and cast aside time-tested truth because it's not trendy, the disease of contemporaneity will make us ill.

**4. "Recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles" (2 Peter 3:2).** Jesus warned about false prophets (Matthew 7:15-23). So did the apostle Paul (Acts 20:28-31), Peter (2 Peter 2), John (1 John 4:1-6), and Jude (vv. 3-16). Wolves are dangerous, even when they wear sheep's clothing and use cool-sounding lingo. Old Testament insights spoken "by the holy prophets" and New Testament directives given "through your apostles" put us on the right path. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

**5. "Forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2).** Ingratitude is often a first step toward unfaithfulness. After all he has done for us, why would we desert the Lord "who gave himself for our sins" (Galatians 1:4)?

**6. "Remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10).** Remembering requires more than mental reflection on the past. It should lead to action in the present. When we appreciate what the Lord has done for us, he opens our eyes to the needs of others.

Never forget to remember!

#### Personal Challenge:

Select one of the six reminders listed above (God the Creator, Jesus the risen Lord, faithful leaders, biblical truth, God's blessings, and caring for those in need) and decide how you will give it special attention during the week ahead.

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## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How were you a godly influence with the people close to you last week?
2. What challenge or opportunity did you face last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 1:6-12 and 2:1-10**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. With what issue or issues was the apostle Paul dealing in these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - From these passages, what is and what isn't the gospel?
  - What specific issues of that time were involved in assuring the true gospel was being preached?
  - How did Paul receive and confirm the true message of the gospel?
  - What tactics were the false teachers employing?
  - How would you describe Paul's passion for defending the gospel message?
  - How did Christian leaders work together to communicate the gospel to the world?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do you learn about obeying God from these passages?
8. Paul and his team were called to go to one group of people while James, Cephas (Simon Peter), and John were called to preach the gospel to another group. With whom do you sense God has called you to share the gospel?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge might you be facing this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Galatians 2:15-3:6**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

**WEEK TWO**

**LESSON AIM:** **Choose the righteousness that is gained through faith in Christ because it cannot be achieved any other way.**

**STUDY:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 2:15-3:6

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Galatians 3:7-14; Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-26, 8:1-4

## STUDY

### BE FAITHFUL

BY MARK SCOTT

What could be more important than being in a right relationship with one's God? All world religions strive to articulate how that can be achieved. Islam has its five pillars. Buddhism strives for Nirvana. Hinduism reads through the Vedas with the goal of advancing to different levels of reincarnation. Native American spirituality attempts to become one with the earth. (These are all overgeneralizations.) The gospel claims that being right with God comes through the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness has a God side to it (i.e., the faithfulness of Jesus) and a human side to it (i.e., faith in Jesus).

Having called the Galatians back to the true gospel (1:6-10), having defended his own apostleship in that gospel (1:11-2:10), and having confronted Peter (i.e., Cephas) when he failed to act in conjunction with that gospel (2:11-15), Paul begins to argue for the gospel of righteousness.

Righteousness is probably the third most famous quality of God (following his love and holiness). The terms *right*, *righteous*, *righteousness*, *just*, *justify*, *justifier*, and *justification* are all translated from one basic family of words. That family of words originally had a legal context to them; they come from the court. A judge can decide if a person is righteous in the eyes of the law. In the case of the true gospel, God plays the role of both the one who is just and the one who justifies (Romans 3:26). His law and mercy are in tension, play, and union in making someone righteous.

#### The Thesis of Which Righteousness (Galatians 2:15-21)

In many ways the thesis of the Epistle to the Galatians is in this paragraph. Paul stated the thesis in these verses, and then in Galatians 3-4 he made several arguments for that thesis. How can Jews and Gentiles be righteous before God? The answer is, "The same way." Jews have an advantage *by birth* (not being *sinful Gentiles*), but both must be righteous the same way.

Verse 16 might be one of the most wonderfully redundant verses in the Bible. Three times in one verse Paul reminded the Galatians they were not right with God by *works of the law*. No one can obey the law that specifically or completely. Being justified comes through *faith in Jesus Christ*. A person must trust in the complete atoning work of Christ on the cross to be righteous.

In verses 17-18, Paul anticipated what critics of his thesis might say. They figured that if righteousness came from

faith in Christ, then that would open the door for sinning without restraint (cf. Romans 6:1-4). In a twisted sort of way, Paul's opponents would argue, this means that Christ *promotes* (is a servant of) *sin*. To this, Paul gave an unqualified no (*Absolutely not!*). If Paul were promoting this, he would be destroying his whole righteousness system and end up breaking the law.

The law was fulfilled in Jesus in the same way an apple fulfills itself from the apple blossom (Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4). The apple blossom must die for the apple to live. Paul's sin died through the law so he *might live for God*. This new life is viewed in terms of being in union with Christ. If verse 16 is the clearest statement of the thesis, then verse 20 is its loftiest expression. Spiritually speaking, Christians died to their sins and their old way of life when Jesus died on the cross. Christian living is just gratitude for this grace. Believers live by faith in Christ. Any other way of living would be to *set aside* (nullify or abolish) *the grace of God* and strive for one's own righteousness.

#### The First Argument of that Thesis (Galatians 3:1-6)

With fiery logic and the passion of a courtroom lawyer, Paul argued for this righteousness. The first argument had to do with the Holy Spirit. Paul's put-down was strong: "*You foolish Galatians.*" He followed this with a harsh question: "*Who has bewitched* (cast an evil eye or spell on) *you?*" The Galatians saw Jesus crucified through the preaching of Paul.

But more to the point, the Galatians did not receive the Holy Spirit because they obeyed the law. They received the Spirit (and all the attending miraculous aspects of his work) through faith in Christ. One cannot start with the Spirit and then add the flesh (i.e., the fleshliness of living by the law) and think that one is making progress. That would be ludicrous.

In Romans and Galatians, the spotlight shined on Abraham. Paul leaned into him to transition to his next argument. The famous Genesis 15:6 was invoked. Abraham *believed God*. That got *credited* (reckoned or counted) *as righteousness*. On the Day of Judgment, we will want the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ—not our own.

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## APPLICATION

### NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE

BY DAVID FAUST

It's possible to study the Bible the way a hiker enjoys mountain scenery. Look at the big picture. Read straight through several chapters and try to take it all in. Ponder the panorama of God's redemption story.

We also can study the Bible the way a scientist uses a microscope. Pay attention to the details. Look closely at every sentence. See what you can learn by examining a single word or meditating on a short phrase like "justified by faith" (Galatians 2:16).

#### Astonishing Truth

A biblical text normally has a single meaning, but it can have many applications. Consider these memorable words from the apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). This one astonishing verse compels us to think about

- what happened at the cross ("I have been crucified with Christ"),
- the work of the Holy Spirit ("Christ lives in me"),
- what it means to be saved by grace ("I live by faith"), and
- the depth of God's love for the individual ("the Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me").

According to a commentary by William Barclay, the apostle Paul "had tried the way of the law; he had tried with all the terrible intensity of his hot heart to put himself right with God by a life that sought to obey every single item of that law." But this approach led to frustration, for the more Paul tried to keep God's law, the more he realized his own imperfection and helplessness. When Paul finally cast himself on the mercy of God, Barclay says, "So great was the change that the only way he could describe it was to say that he had been crucified with Christ so that the man he used to be was dead and the living power within him now was Christ himself."

#### Making It Personal

How does Galatians 2:20 apply to us? Here are three ideas that come to mind.

*My sins were nailed to the cross.* A classic gospel song asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Yes, I was. He carried all of my mischief and mistakes, recklessness and rebellion in his body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). He paid a price too steep for me to afford to give me a gift I could never earn. I was crucified with Christ.

*My ego was nailed to the cross.* That word, ego, literally appears in the original text of Galatians 2:20. Paul insists that his ego (Greek for "I" or "self") no longer lives. In baptism, the old sinful self dies and we rise to new life (Romans 6:1-4). Instead of striving for recognition and approval, our goal should be to shine the spotlight on Christ.

*My death was nailed to the cross.* "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies" (Romans 8:11). We don't need to fear death when the crucified and risen Christ lives in us.

Whether we take a big-picture view of the Bible or focus on the microscopic details, let's cultivate a vibrant relationship with the Lord. Then, like the apostle Paul, we can say with confidence, "I live by faith in the Son of God."

#### Personal Challenge:

In your personal journal or on a piece of paper, copy down the words of Galatians 2:20 in your own handwriting. After prayerful reflection, write a few sentences expressing how you will apply this verse in your life.

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## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. With whom did you share the gospel last week?
2. What challenge did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 2:15-3:6**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What sets of contrasts do you see in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What are we justified by and not justified by?
  - How does Paul respond to those who say God's grace promotes more sin?
  - What does it look like in the average day of a Christ follower for Christ to live in them?
  - Using this passage, how would you explain to someone who is not a Christian how they can be right with God?
  - How would you explain how one receives the Holy Spirit?
  - How would you explain how one continues to live (finishes) as a Christian?
  - How would you explain how one can experience God's miracles in their life?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do you learn about obeying God from this passage?
8. From this passage alone, develop a simple plan for presenting the gospel to someone. (*You may want to take time during the meeting for each person to write out their plan. Then have each person take a minute or two to read it aloud.*) With whom will you share this in the coming week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What new opportunities do you expect this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Galatians 3:23-4:10**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

**WEEK THREE**

**LESSON AIM:** **Choose the identity of a son and heir of God instead of a slave.**

**STUDY:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 3:23-4-10

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** 1 John 3:1-3; Romans 8:14-17; Titus 3:3-8

## WHICH INHERITANCE?

BY MARK SCOTT

The rich young ruler and the lawyer framed up their questions about eternal life to Jesus in telling ways (Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25). They both wanted to know what to do to “inherit” eternal life. One does not normally do anything to inherit something. That is based on what someone else does. Do their questions betray a works righteousness system?

Paul continued his arguments about being made right with God by faith in Christ as opposed to works of the law. He argued his point by speaking of the timing of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the place of Abraham, the purpose of the law, and when the promise of God to save the world through Jesus entered the progressive revelation (i.e., the unfolding of the biblical story).

In this section, Paul used several metaphors to drive home his point about being saved by faith in Christ as opposed to works of the law; the primary metaphor Paul used was *inheritance*.

**Prison (Galatians 3:23)**

We were *held in custody* until God turned a new page in history (think about the old and new covenants and the Epistle to the Hebrews). *Custody* is a military word implying being in prison. We were *locked up* (shut up or enclosed) until the time of Christ. Prison cannot “fix” the prisoner any more than a flashlight can “fix” a broken car. Prison and the flashlight can only reveal the problem.

**Guardian and Trustee (Galatians 3:24-25; 4:2)**

The word *guardian* translates two different Greek words in our text. In Galatians 3:24, the word means schoolmaster or governess (maybe even bus driver). It is the person who escorts the kids to the main teacher (i.e., Christ). Paul said the law was to function in that role until Christ came.

In 4:2 (after an unfortunate chapter division) *guardians* means the people entrusted to act in another’s name. The word alongside of this (*trustees*) means the ones who manage the house. A person could be the legal heir of a vast fortune, but until that person “comes of age,” others must take care of the inheritance. Example: Josiah became king of Judah at age 8 (2 Kings 22:1), but he obviously did not immediately begin running the country.

**Heirs (Galatians 3:26-29)**

*Heirs* is the metaphor that is closest to our key word of *inheritance*. Of course, *heir* refers to the one who is set

to inherit something. When heirs “come of age” they can possess the full rights of the inheritance. We see this in these verses. Faith in Christ brings us into God’s family, and we get the privilege of being called God’s children (v. 26; cf. 1 John 3:1; Romans 8:15-17). The evidence of that faith is expressed in immersion (v. 27). Paul described it in terms of being clothed. In Roman society when a child came of age, they gave that child a special toga to indicate maturity (John Valvoord, *Biblical Knowledge Commentary*). Baptism is that garment. God is very inclusive in terms of who can be an heir (v. 28). Ethnicity, social status, and gender do not matter. All heirs can share in being part of *Abraham’s seed*—another metaphor and the word from which we get the English word *sperm* (Genesis 17:7).

**Slaves and Adoption (Galatians 4:1-10)**

Paul extended this teaching on heirs in chapter 4. He repeated some of the ideas already established. While under the law, it was as if we were still “infants” (*underage*). But God knew when we would come of age. Everything changed when, at just the right *time*, God sent Jesus. The incarnation (Paul’s hint at the virgin birth?) signaled the ending of slavery and the beginning of sonship or adoption. Jesus was born of Mary while the law (the old way of being right with God) was still in force. But the goal was to *redeem* (to purchase, like buying something from the market) *those under the law*.

This redemption would open our liberating identity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, give us full access to the *Father* (allowing for an intimate relationship), and full rights as heirs. To go back to being a slave when God has made us sons would be ridiculous. But some in the churches of Galatia seemed bent on such.

**Forces (Galatians 4:3, 9)**

*Forces* may not qualify as a metaphor, but Paul referred to worldly forces (*elemental spiritual forces*) and spiritual forces (*weak and miserable forces*). The world can enslave us with its own ungodly principalities and powers, but religion can also enslave us with its rituals and requirements (*days and months and seasons and years*). We should choose an eternal and liberating inheritance in Christ as opposed to an earthly and legalistic inheritance.

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## APPLICATION

### DON'T CLOSE YOURSELF OFF

BY DAVID FAUST

Are there any bad apples on your family tree? If you are curious about your ancestry, you can take a DNA test. Comedian Jim Gaffigan jokes, “You do learn things from those genetic tests. I discovered I wasted a hundred bucks.”

My dad claimed that our family is distantly related to William Penn and John Chapman (better known as Johnny Appleseed). I can’t prove I’m related to these famous Americans, but I ponder the possibility while I stir applesauce into my oatmeal.

Even if we can identify our ancestors, we don’t get to choose them. I would have been a better basketball player if I were 6 foot 4 inches tall, but my DNA made me stop growing at 5 foot 11. Ancestors I never knew determined the color of my eyes and the shape of my face.

Prior generations have a spiritual impact, too. From Adam and Eve till today, sin has tainted humanity and tilted us toward disaster. Theologians argue about the nature and extent of the damage, but there’s no denying that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Thankfully, though, we can choose the spiritual family we call our own. When we receive the Lord Jesus, God gives us “the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13).

Here is a remarkable promise: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). We get to choose our spiritual ancestors! By God’s grace we “are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (v. 29).

#### The Difference It Makes

Why does it matter if we are “Abraham’s seed”? Here are four ways our spiritual heritage makes a difference.

**It affects how we think of God.** He is not only our Creator and Judge; he is the Father who adopted us, the Redeemer who saved us, the Teacher who instructs us.

**It affects how we view others.** The gospel transcends social barriers that devalue, distract, and divide. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

**It affects how we see ourselves.** We are members of God’s intergenerational family. Our worth isn’t determined by the titles we wear, the income we earn, the esteem others offer us, or where our name appears on an organizational chart. “You are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:7).

**It affects how we think about eternity.** By faith, Abraham followed the Lord to a place he had never seen. By faith, Moses led the Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land. The Lord has in store for us “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade . . . kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). By faith, we align with God’s covenant people throughout history who have looked forward to that eternal inheritance. We join a family of believers that includes Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, Mary, Peter, John, and Paul. When we all get to Heaven, what a family reunion that will be!

#### Personal Challenge:

On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, write “Because I belong to Jesus Christ, I am . . .” and then write what comes to mind about your identity in Christ. (For example: “I am . . . forgiven . . . adopted . . . part of God’s family . . . not alone . . .”).

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## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. With whom did you share the gospel using the plan you developed from our study last week?
2. What new opportunity or challenge came your way over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 3:23-4:10**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

3. What main point or points is Paul making in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What metaphors did Paul use to explain law (the old covenant) and grace (the new covenant)?
  - What contrasts did Paul make in the passage?
  - What do those contrasts demonstrate to you?
  - Look for any conditional statements (if-then statements, although those exact words may not be used) in this passage. What do they teach you about following Christ?
  - What does this passage teach you about unity (oneness) in Christ?
  - What kinds of things tend to spiritually enslave people?
  - Why would a full heir (adult child) of God, with all the freedom that brings, want to go back to living as if they were not an heir?
5. What do you learn about God (and how you view him) from this passage?
6. What do you learn about other people (and how you view them)?
7. How is obedience as a child different from obedience as a slave?
8. The gospel message is weaved into this passage (see especially verses such as 3:26-27 and 4:4-7). Consider a person you know out of the following groups: an unsaved person, a backslidden person, a legalistic church attendee, a prejudiced church attendee. What verses from this passage would you share with that person, and how would you initiate the conversation?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What dilemma or struggle do you anticipate this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Galatians 4:21-5:15**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

## WEEK FOUR

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

**STUDY:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 4:21-5:15

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Isaiah 54:13; 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 hap-

pening 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.

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## APPLICATION

### THOSE UNUSED GIFT CARDS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you have any gift cards lying around your house? According to news reports, 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?

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# DISCOVERY

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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 these verses.

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 the sentence: "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** and **6:7-10**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

## WEEK FIVE

**LESSON AIM:** **Choose to center your life on, and be guided by, the Spirit.**

**STUDY:** Galatians

**THEME:** Choose

**LESSON TEXT:** Galatians 5:16-26, 6:7-10

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Galatians 6:1-6; Romans 8:5-13, 13:11-14; Ephesians 2:1-5; 1 John 2:15-17

## WHICH DESIRES?

BY MARK SCOTT

Desires are primal. Brain research—a quite recent medical focus—finds that our “first brain” (sounds evolutionary, doesn’t it?) functions at a deeper level than cognition. Volition is at the real guts of the human experience. Maybe this is why when the serpent tempted Eve, he did so at the level of her desires (Genesis 3:6; cf. 1 John 2:16).

Paul wrote at the level of our desires when he shared the practical application of living by faith in Christ as opposed to living by works of the law. Desires shape much of our lives. But what shapes those desires?

**The Flesh (Galatians 5:16-21)**

When believers *walk* (live by or tread about) by the Spirit, they ensure that the flesh will not dictate their desires. Those walking by the Spirit will not *gratify the desires of the flesh*. *Desires* is a word that got dirtier in its etymology. It started out well (cf. Luke 22:15), but it became synonymous with evil. *Flesh* can simply mean “human.” But in this passage, it means “opposed to God.”

The flesh, which becomes the threshold for sin (Romans 7:14-20), is at war with the Holy Spirit. *Flesh* is mentioned seven times in our lesson text, while *Spirit* is mentioned nine times. So, which is stronger (Mark 14:36; 1 John 4:4)? People who do not have the internal help of the Holy Spirit need external laws to make them good.

Paul mentioned 15 acts (works) of the flesh. (The biblical vice lists are most often longer than the virtue lists. Could it be that living from the inside out by the Spirit needs only a few guidelines whereas living by rules requires greater specificity to know what God desires?) The acts of the flesh can be divided into four categories. The first three deal with sex. The next four deal with religion. The next six deal with various societal sins, and the final two deal with alcohol. We were born in the flesh, but we do not have to live by the earthy desires that drive that flesh.

**The Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26)**

The contrast between living externally and living internally could not be clearer. The Spirit produces *fruit* (singular) as opposed to the flesh which produces acts. John R.W. Stott recited these nine fruit every morning in his devotional time because he believed that these nine fruit summarize the life of Christ better than any other list. They could be viewed as three groups of three—love,

joy, peace; forbearance, kindness, goodness; faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In Jewish lists, things that head the list and end the list seem to get the accent. Love is our finest apologetic, and self-control helps us keep our head in a world gone nuts.

These nine fruit need no law. When they are produced in believers who live out the cruciform life, no law is necessary. Paul harkened back to Galatians 2:20 and spoke again about being *crucified* with Christ. When we live in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ, it is as if our desires and passions were crucified the day Jesus died. It was like a co-crucifixion. When believers abide in Christ, fruit is produced naturally—even if we need to be pruned occasionally (John 15:2).

When we *live* (the verb is indicative of the best life, i.e., life lived at the highest level) *by the Spirit*, we will *keep in step* (to go in rank or walk orderly) *with the Spirit*. Of course, this will keep us from becoming conceited, and provoking others, and envying still others.

**The Harvest (Galatians 6:7-10)**

The flesh can drive our desires, and the Spirit can drive our desires. But an additional aspect that can shape our desires is the law of harvest. The future is a powerful shaper of our desires. Knowing that there is such a thing as “payday someday” can keep us internally motivated.

Before discussing the law of harvest, Paul called believers to help fellow Christians who are overtaken with sin, to bear burdens, to be willing to be tested in their faith, and to share financially with spiritual directors. God cannot be *mocked* (to snort or clear away mucus). The law of harvest has been in place since creation (Genesis 1:11-13).

People reap what they sow. If they sow to fleshly desires, they will reap *destruction* (spoiling). If they sow to *please the Spirit*, they will reap eternal life. If believers do not *become weary* (lose their courage) *in doing good*, they will reap a harvest of goodness. Finally, Paul called believers to *do good* to everyone, especially to the church. Desires are shaped by the flesh, the Spirit, and the future.

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## APPLICATION

### SHE THOUGHT HE WAS A GARDENER

BY DAVID FAUST

How much sorrow must a person endure? How could she withstand another crashing wave of disappointment?

Mary Magdalene had been down the road of despair before, confused and tormented by the devil. Then she met Jesus, who freed her from Satan's power and gave her hope. But then came that dark afternoon when soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross. For Mary and all the other disciples who loved him so dearly, hope drained to the ground along with his blood.

Overwhelmed by grief, Mary wanted to see his body one more time and anoint it with spices in a final gesture of appreciation. When she and two other women arrived at the tomb early in the morning, their broken hearts endured yet another blow. The stone had been removed from the front of the tomb. Jesus' body was gone.

Bitterly disappointed because she couldn't anoint the body of her beloved Lord, Mary burst into tears near the empty tomb, barely noticing the man standing behind her. He asked, "'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him'" (John 20:15).

It was Jesus, who had risen from the dead! Mary was standing in the presence of the living Lord, but she didn't realize it. Actually, her mistake is understandable. Her eyes were filled with tears, and early morning fog may have lingered in the still-dark garden. Mary's whiplashed emotions made it difficult for her mind to grasp history's greatest miracle. In your own life, have there been times when the Lord was right there with you, but you didn't recognize his presence?

#### A Place Where Things Grow

The Bible says, "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid" (John 19:41). It's interesting that Jesus was buried in a place where things grow. On the farm where I grew up, our garden was an integral part of our family's food supply. We canned and froze tomatoes, corn, green beans, and other fruit and vegetables. In my travels I have seen artfully landscaped gardens in England, Austria, New Zealand, and Japan filled with beautiful flowers, shrubs, and trees. Solomon built palatial gardens and parks where fruit trees were watered by reservoirs (Ecclesiastes 2:5-6). God seems to have a special place in his heart for gardens. At the beginning of human history, he walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Jesus poured out heartfelt prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The book of Revelation pictures a crystal-clear river and a tree that continually bears fruit in the paradise God is preparing for the faithful.

When Jesus called Mary's name, she recognized him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). At first, she mistook him for a gardener, and in a way, she wasn't wrong.

Jesus skillfully trims and prunes his followers so they will bear more fruit (John 15:1-8). He is a wise teacher who wants his students to produce a harvest of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

#### Personal Challenge:

When you read the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23, which fruit seems most abundant in your life right now? Which fruit do you lack?

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## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did it go when you shared a verse from last week's study with someone who is living according to a law-keeping system to try to find favor with God?
2. What circumstances did you face as you went through the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 5:16-26** and **6:7-10**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions (one of which could be a paraphrase such as *The Message*). Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

3. What contrasts do you see in these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What warnings does Paul give in these passages?
  - What promises do you see?
  - Look specifically at the contrasts between the "acts of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit." Before even considering the acts and fruit themselves, what do those headings demonstrate to you about living as a follower of Christ?
  - What does Paul's choice of the word *fruit* teach you about how love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are produced in our lives?
  - How should Christ followers deal with sinful desires and passions?
  - How does Galatians 5:16-25 help someone carry out the instructions of 5:26 and 6:7?
  - What do you learn about God's timing versus human timing from these passages?
5. What do you learn about God's Spirit from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Choose a command from these passages to obey and then share specifically how you will seek to obey it this week:
  - Keep on walking by the Spirit.
  - Be willingly led by the Spirit.
  - Crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.
  - Keep in step with the Spirit.
  - Sow to please the Spirit.
  - Do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.
8. When we care for fellow believers in our community of faith, we become stronger and then together we can share God's love with a needy world. What good thing will you do for another Christ follower this week so that they may not become weary in doing good and so that we as a community of Christ can reap a harvest?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What opportunities to do good to others do you anticipate this week?

**For Next Week:** This week's lesson bring this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "**1717: Your Word Is Truth**" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at *ChristianStandard.com*.