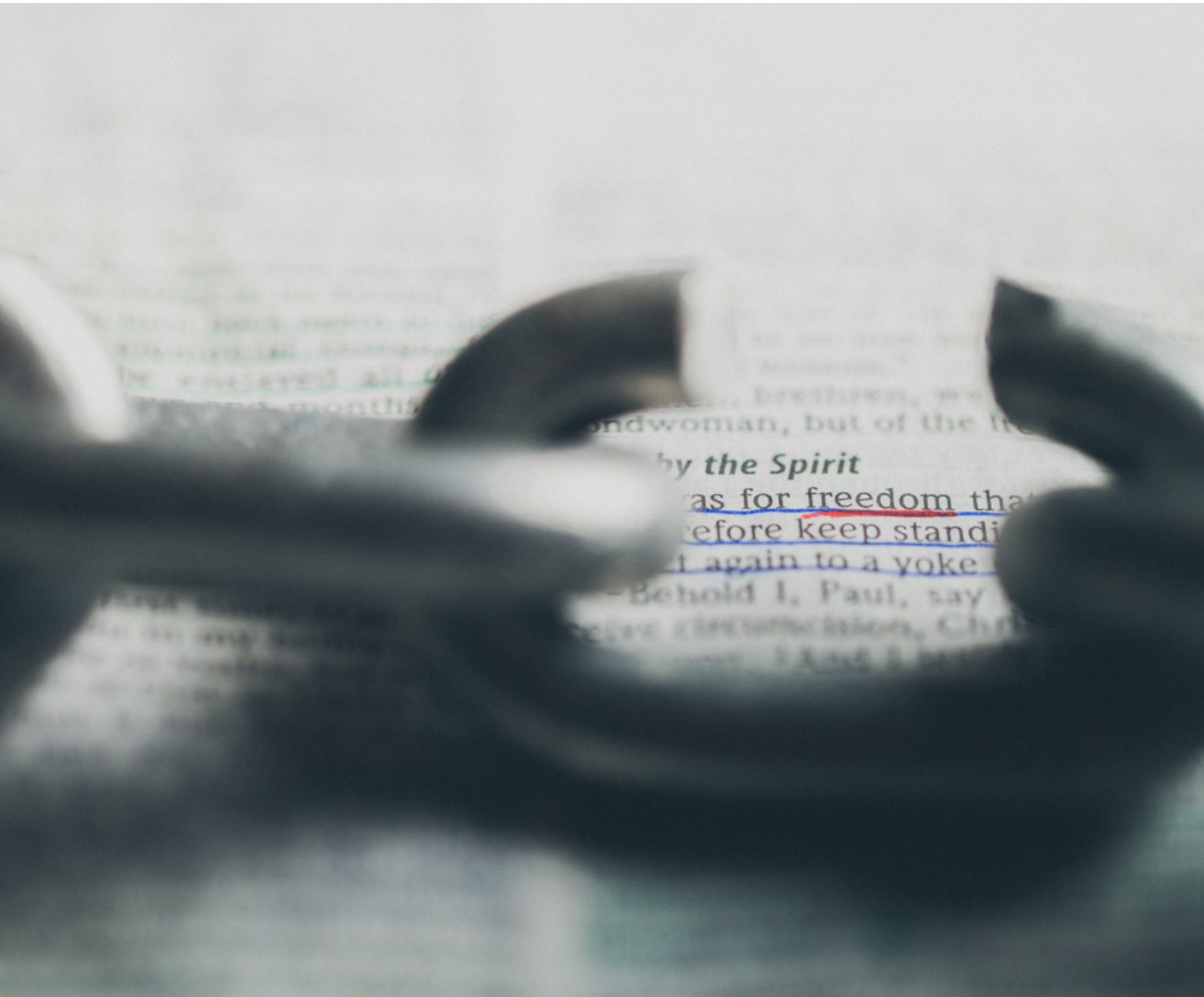


# Faith and Freedom

Six Growth Group Bible Studies in Galatians





# Galatians

Growth Group is more than just a Bible Study – we also pray and share our lives together. However, it is time spent studying the Bible that ought to shape everything we do in Growth Group. In our Bible Study time this term we will be looking at a New Testament letter - Galatians.

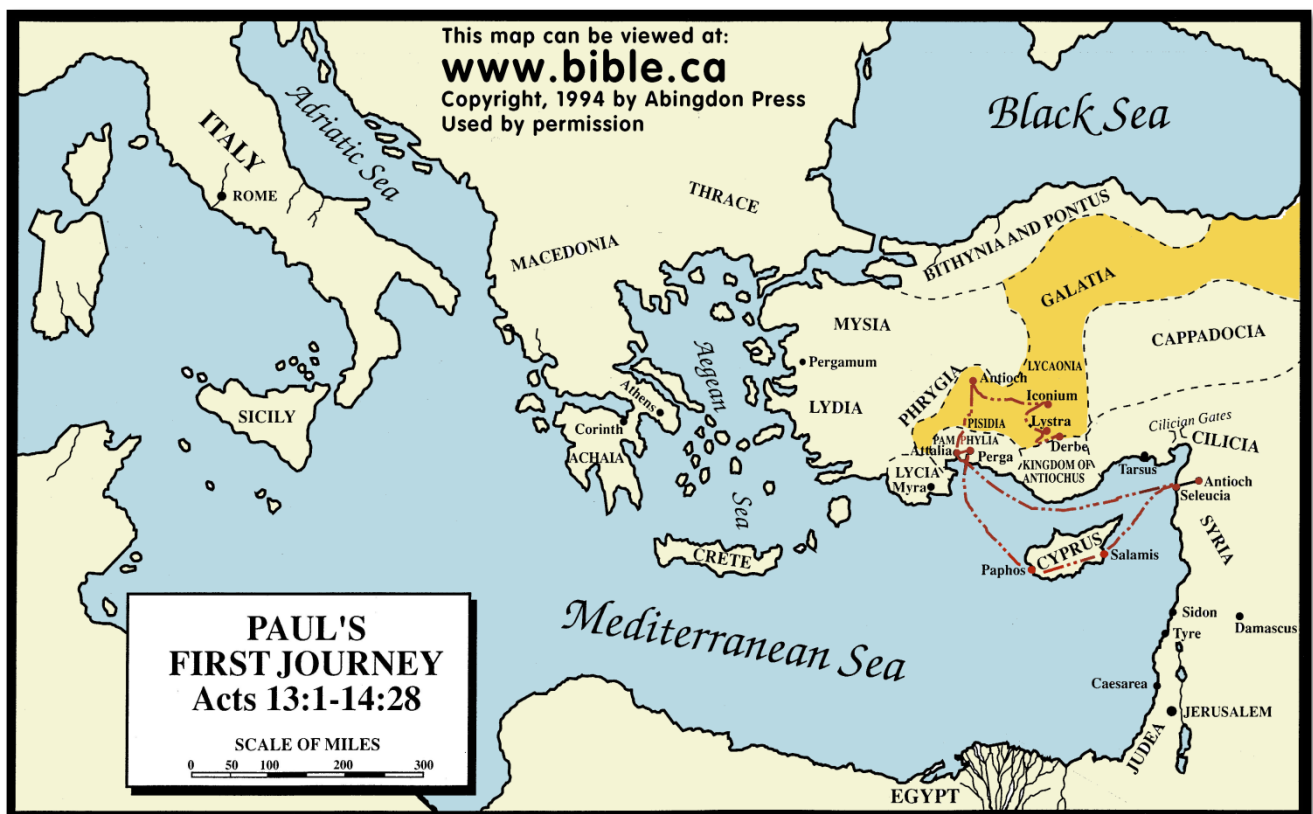
These Growth Group Bible studies were originally adapted from those used by Mitchelton Presbyterian Church in 2009 (thank you to Phil Campbell) with some help from the Bible Studies used by the KPC women's Growth Groups in 2011 (thank you to Rachel Kotterer).

Study 1	Galatians 1:1-2:10	<b>Adding to the Gospel?</b>
Study 2	Galatians 2:11-21	<b>Christian Hypocrisy!</b>
Study 3	Galatians 3:1-14	<b>Bewitched?</b>
Study 4	Galatians 3:15-25	<b>Unmaking a promise?</b>
Study 5	Galatians 3:26-5:1	<b>Children of Freedom</b>
Study 6	Galatians 5-6	<b>Free for What?</b>

During what is known as his first missionary journey the Apostle Paul visited the four cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (you can read about this in Acts 13-14). These cities are located in the southern part of the region of Galatia, an area now situated in Turkey.

After Paul had preached in these areas false teachers followed, preaching a distorted gospel and calling Paul's ministry into question. To make matters worse it seems that the Christians who had been converted on hearing Paul's preaching, were now tempted to believe the false teachers.

So Paul wrote this letter: that we now call the New Testament book of Galatians. We read of Paul's distress and disbelief at those in Galatia who were deserting the true gospel. As we read we find a clear summary of the true gospel, and the freedom that we ought to enjoy as followers of Jesus.



# Adding to the Gospel?

## Study 1 Galatians 1:1-2:10

Paul's mission to the Gentiles (non-Jews) in the region of Galatia (Acts 13 to 14) was the start of a revolution. The Kingdom of God was no longer just for Jews! No matter who you were, no matter where you were from, you were invited to join Israel's Messiah - Jesus.

Shockwaves were felt all the way to Jerusalem. Some of the Jewish Christians were unconvinced that unwashed, unclean, uncircumcised Gentiles should truly be welcomed – at least until they cleaned up their act! They wanted to add Jewish ritual, tradition and law to the message Paul had been preaching in Galatia. So new "missionaries" were sent to add the bits of the message that Paul had left out.

The question is - how will the Galatians react? How will they respond to being told there was something lacking in the message that saved them? Let's find out.

### But First...

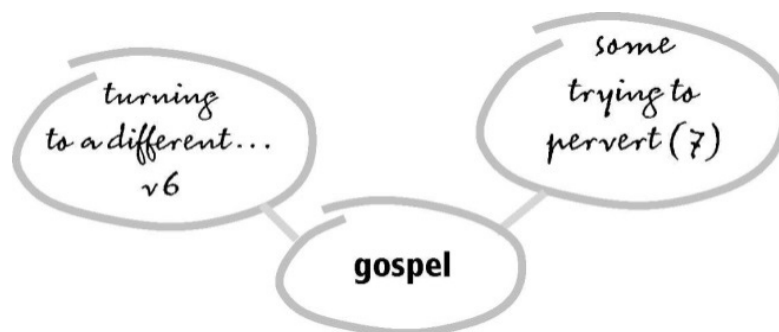
1. If you're already a Christian, how and when did you first come to understand the "gospel"?
2. As a Christian, how would you react to someone who told you that you had to 'do something extra' to truly be a Christian?

### Read Through Galatians 1:1-2:10

3. How does Paul introduce himself in the opening verses of his letter?
4. How does Paul introduce the gospel?
5. What do you think has happened in Galatia since Paul preached this gospel to them?

### Make a Mind Map...

Work through the passage again, and on the diagram below, attach all the words and ideas that Paul associates with the word "*gospel*." Some are positive, some are negative. Maybe you could arrange them so that similar ideas are in the same general area. Think freely. Associate as many ideas as you can.



6. How does Paul feel about what has happened to the gospel?
7. Why would "another gospel" be "no gospel at all"?
8. What are the effects of the different gospel that's being preached in Galatia?
9. Imagine an angel appeared in the centre of the room and announces that there is a new way to get right with God. What are you going to say, and why?

### **A Message Made in Heaven**

It is because of the origin of the message that it is so important that we don't mess around with it. This point is so important to Paul that he restates it over and over again (look at 1:10, 11-12, 16b-17). Not only that, it's the idea he started the letter with back in 1:1.

### **A Dramatic Turnaround...**

10. Paul tells the story of the dramatic change in his own life (Galatians 1:11-24). You can read more details in Acts 9:1-19. What does this prove? (1:12)
11. Paul, who used to persecute Christians, is suddenly one of them. He meets with Peter (1:18), James (1:19), and other church leaders "who appeared to be important." What was their verdict on Paul's message?
12. How did James, Peter and John confirm Paul's ministry and message?

### **Compelled to Object**

13. According to Galatians 2:3-4 what concern do the false brothers have?
14. Why did Paul object so strongly to their demands?
15. Why would giving in to the demands prevent the "truth of the gospel" from remaining with the Galatians?
16. For Paul, anything that was added to the truth of the gospel actually subtracted from the truth of the gospel. If the false brothers wanted to compel people to be circumcised, Paul was compelled to object. Can you think of extra things that people want to add to the gospel today?
  - a. What might tempt you to believe these 'additions'?
  - b. How *should* we respond?
17. Are there things that you have unconsciously added to the simple message of repentance and faith in Jesus?

### **Prayer**

- Thank God for those he has used to bring the true gospel to you, and pray that together we would not be distracted from the simple message of repentance and faith in Jesus.
- Pray for the other Growth Groups.
- Pray for concerns which you have shared together.

# Christian Hypocrisy!

## Study 2 Galatians 2:11-21

### The Problem with Peter

Jews and Gentiles have very different eating habits. Jews have strict rules around what they can and can't eat. It is in this mundane area of food that the complaint that "*Christians are hypocrites*" was first aired. In Galatians 2, Paul tells about a confrontation he had with his colleague Peter. Quite bluntly, Paul calls Peter a hypocrite - someone who says one thing, and does another.

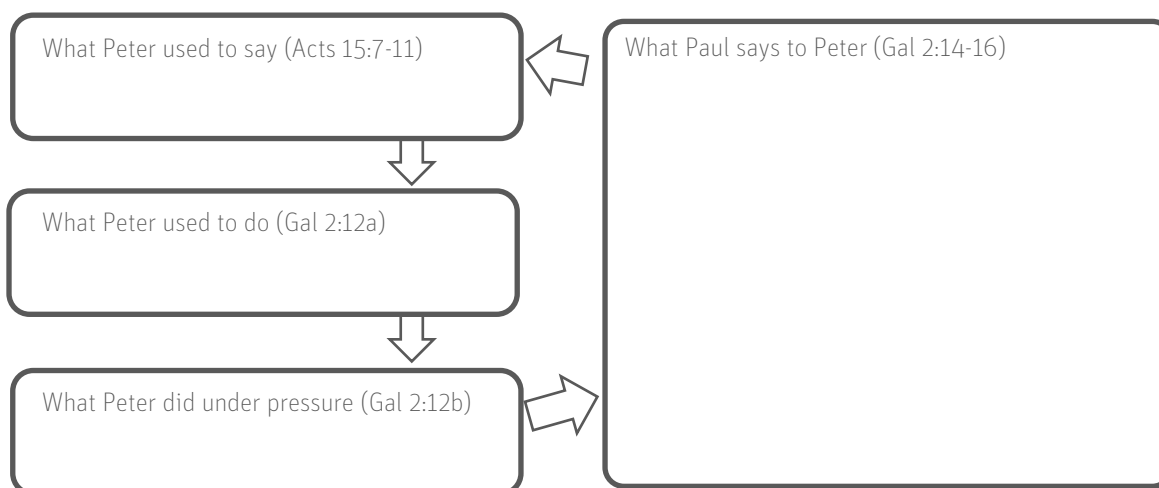
### These Days...

1. What sort of behaviour do people usually identify with Christian hypocrisy?
2. What motivates hypocrisy? Why are Christians so often guilty of it?

### Read About Paul's Showdown with Peter in Galatians 2:11-21

3. What is it about Peter's actions that make him a hypocrite?
4. What is Peter afraid of?
5. What does this show about the sort of tensions surrounding Gentiles coming into the church?

### Fill in This Chart...



### An Apostle - Afraid?

6. Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem apostles, has buckled under pressure. According to Paul's words to Peter, there are two ideas about how to get right with God. What are they?
7. Carefully follow Paul's logic in verses 14 to 18 and answer these questions...
  - a. How have **Jews** like Peter and Paul been saved?
  - b. Who will **not** be justified by observing the law?
  - c. How have those they called '**gentile sinners**' in the church been saved?
8. Cast your eyes back to verses 11-14. What have Peter and the "men from James" been putting pressure on Gentiles to do?
9. What might these Jewish Christians accuse Paul of?

## The Law that Showed Their Sin

Israel always *failed* to live under God's law. That's the sad story you read in the Old Testament over and over again. Rebuilding the law can only highlight their guilt all over again.

Paul knew this issue had to be sorted out once and for all. The Gentile Christians were saved by faith in Christ, just like Peter and Paul were – not by keeping the law, or being more Jewish. So, says Paul, we must not act in a way that says or even hints that the Gentiles need to now take on the law to be acceptable. Peter needs to rethink his position.

### Re-read verses 19 and 20

10. What do you think it means to "die to the law"? (v19)
11. Will "living for God" involve taking on the Old Testament law? Why, or why not?
12. According to the second half of verse 20, what will the daily life of a Christian look like? What is our reference point if it is not the law?

### Back in Chains?

13. In what ways are Christians today in danger of "rebuilding the law"?
14. Most people think "being a Christian" means "keeping the Ten Commandments and being good."
  - a. How does this idea "set aside the grace of God?" (v21)
  - b. How do you think this idea became so widespread?
  - c. What does Paul say to people who think this way? (v21)

### Avoiding the Hypocrisy of Religion...

Later in the letter, Paul says the most obvious kind of "Christian hypocrisy" is to claim you follow Jesus while you continue in immorality and sin. But there's another hypocrisy that's just as dangerous and more subtle... living by "religious laws," and relying on your own efforts. It usually means you look down at other people who don't meet your high standards. When you do that, you can actually look very good - in fact, you might even seem religious – when what you are really doing is ignoring Christ's death for you. That too is hypocrisy to avoid at all costs!

### Re-connect!

15. To Peter, refusing to eat with the Gentiles seemed the right thing to do. But he was ultimately denying God's grace. What self-righteous, grace-denying barriers are there between you and other Christians? What do you think Paul would say to you?
16. What attitude-barriers can you see between Christian brothers and sisters in our church? What steps can we take to make sure they are broken down?
17. What stops you taking the initiative to re-connect across barriers of age or style or dress-sense?

### Prayer

- Ask God to forgive you for ways you have built barriers / been judgemental / been hypocritical.
- Pray for Youth Group.
- Pray for concerns which you have shared together.

## Think Again

Sometimes we assume the main opposition to Paul (and Peter) came from Jews who did not believe in Jesus. But the evidence from Acts 15:5 and Acts 21:20-21 gives a different picture.

According to James, "Many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law." Their zeal for the law is what puts them in conflict with Paul. Their zeal for the law - and their desire not be contaminated by eating with "Gentile sinners" - is also what makes Peter fear them... and turn into a hypocrite!

Many Christians today likewise have a 'zeal for the law' which ultimately brings them into conflict with other Christians, and the gospel that saved them!



# Bewitched?

## Study 3 Galatians 3:1-14

Bewitched! Fools! Hypocrites! Paul uses strong words to describe what is happening to the Galatians. He is passionate about the gospel he preached to them, and he is in despair that they are in danger of getting things so badly wrong. They are being led astray by Jewish Christians telling them they have to keep Old Testament laws to be part of God's family. Maybe it seems like a small issue - but Paul is beside himself! Let's find out why.

### Read Galatians 3:1-5

1. What are the questions Paul asks in verses 2-5, and how do they link with his strong statements in verse 1?
2. Reflecting back on verse 1. Why is it important for Paul to remind the Galatians that Jesus was crucified?
3. Paul begins verse 6 with "Consider Abraham". Why do you think he uses the example of Abraham?

### Consider Abraham...

The Jews were exceedingly proud of their heritage. After all, they were the descendants of Abraham, and heirs of God's great promises. But it seems like they might have missed the point!

### Read Galatians 3:6-8

4. What does Paul explain about Abraham?
5. How is it possible to become right with God?
6. On the one hand, you've got Jews who are saying "You have to keep the law to be right with God", and on the other hand, you've got Gentile Christians saying "All I need to do is believe in Jesus"... which group is the most like Abraham? (v7)
7. What ancient promise is fulfilled by the fact that the Gentiles are 'justified by faith'? (v8 quoting Genesis 12:3)

### Trusting and Doing

*Faith* is simply resting your confidence on what *someone else* has promised or has done. Keeping the *law* though, is all about *doing*.

### Read Galatians 3:10-14

As you read you may notice Paul seems to refer to himself and Jewish Christians as 'us' in verses 13-14.

8. According to the Old Testament (v10 quotes Deuteronomy 27:26), how much of the law do you *actually have to do* to avoid being cursed by it?
9. Where does that leave people who want to add a '*bit of law*' to their Christianity?
10. The Old Testament also said there *was* a way to be right with God. What was it? (v11)



11. In short, the Israelites have gotten themselves into a terrible situation. God gave them the law - but they were cursed because they could not keep it. According to verse 13, what has Christ done for the Israelites now? How?

12. What benefit flows on to the Gentiles from this? (v14)

The *blessing given to Abraham* in Genesis 12 was that *all nations* would be blessed through his family line. Now - through faith in Jesus - it's finally happened! Jews and Gentiles alike can be filled with God's Spirit, so they want to do God's will *from the heart*. It's exactly what the prophets had always promised.

### Recommit

Do you see from this passage how it is possible to be right with God? It's not about what you do! It is about putting your faith in Jesus Christ, who was crucified to take God's curse on himself. When you put your faith in Jesus, you become part of God's family of faith, and His Spirit begins to re-work your attitudes and inner-being. Have you taken that step of faith?

### Check Questions

13. How much does a person have to DO to be a Christian?

14. How much of the Old Testament law does a person have to keep, to qualify as a Christian?

15. Do you find this surprising or offensive? (Some do!) If you miss out on understanding this simple truth, Paul says you really have been bewitched!

### Prayer

- Thank God for making it possible for us to be right with him – through Jesus death in our place.
- Pray for KPC Kids this term and for those who are teaching the Bible to them.
- Pray for concerns which you have shared together.



# Unmaking a Promise!

## Study 4 Galatians 3:15-25

Paul has already spoken about the way he had to rebuke Peter for splitting the great 'family of faith' that God has called together. He's talking about the same thing here.

The first time you read Galatians 3:15-25, it might seem a bit complex. The main point is clear – the promise came before the law. But the details are not as simple. Behind it all, there's the story of the history of Israel, and two key figures - Abraham and Moses.

Let's put some background in place before we read the passage.

### Read Genesis 12:1-9

1. What did God promise Abram (before his name was changed to Abraham)?
2. What impact might these promises to Abram have on the rest of the world?

### Abraham's Seed

Did you notice the footnote in Genesis 12:7? "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "to your offspring (*or in the footnote, "to your **seed**"*) I will give this land."

### Read Galatians 3:15-25

3. Attempt to 'label' as much of this diagram as you can with the verse number that best describes it.



### Now Consider Paul's Argument in Galatians 3:15-18

4. What can't you do to a covenant?<sup>1</sup>
5. When was the covenant/promises made?
6. When was the law introduced?
7. Does 'the inheritance' depend on the law or the covenant/promise?

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the covenant may be considered a will, because an inheritance is in view 18?

The question Paul has been tackling is – do Gentile Christians need to become Jewish? Do they need to keep the Old Testament Law in order to be part of God's family?

There is an active group of Jewish Christians who would argue that because Gentiles are joining a family with very long held rules and regulations this means the Gentiles should take on the law as well!

8. How would you summarise Paul's answer to this question?

### All in the family

In an effort to make Galatians 3:16 clear, the NIV has added words that are not in the original. Here's the English translation, with the added words in bold print:

'The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The scripture does not say, "And to seeds," meaning many *people*, but "And to your seed" meaning one *person*, who is Christ.'

*Christ* is the seed. And he is one. However you'll notice in the next few verses Paul goes on to say that we are '*all one* in Christ' (See v 28-29).

In other words, the promise to Abram is fulfilled in Christ. And if we are in Christ then we are part of the offspring of Abraham. *We are the one family, in Christ.*

### So What Was the Purpose of the Law?

The burning question becomes... what is the purpose of the law then? If the promise trumps it, why was the law given?

#### Re-read Galatians 3:19-25

9. Considering verse 19a and verse 23-25: for how long does the law have effect?
10. Is the law intended to undermine the promise?
11. What role did/does the law serve?

### Angels and a Mediator?

Don't be put-off or confused by mention of angels and a mediator (Gal 3:19-20). The point seems to be that the promise is superior because it was given 'directly' from God to Abraham. In contrast the law was through angels/messengers (e.g. Dt. 33:2, Ps. 68:17, Acts 7:53, Heb. 2:2) and Moses – the mediator.

God's grand plan for the world was to bring together one great family of blessing made up of people from every nation. Israel was just the start of the project, and their Law was a temporary 'prison' to hold them in check *until* something happened to change our 'being' rather than just our 'doing.' What could have the power to do that? Why not read ahead to find out...

12. Why do you think Christians have a tendency to fall into 'rule keeping' or 'legalism'?

### Prayer

- Ask God to help us enjoy both the freedom that Christ has won and the family that we are part of in Christ.
- Pray for friends, family, and others we know who are yet to respond to the truth about Jesus.
- Pray for concerns which you have shared together.

# Children of Freedom

## Study 5 Galatians 3:26-5:1

### Born into Slavery

If you are 'born with a silver spoon in your mouth' your experience of life is very different to someone 'born on the wrong side of the tracks'. They're both familiar (though dated) expressions that reflect on a person's 'station in life' - again a dated term. Maybe these days in Australia it doesn't matter *where a person came from* in terms of their social standing (or maybe it does?). In any case, it mattered to the Jews. In this part of his letter, Paul calls for some radical re-thinking on this.

### Read Galatians 3:26-29

1. What distinctions have been broken down in Christ?
2. What types of people does our church bring together as a family that wouldn't usually be together?

### 'We' and 'You'...

You may recall that in Galatians 3:13-14 Paul included himself with the Jewish Christians - 'us' in distinction to the 'Gentiles'. It would seem that Paul does a similar thing through 4:1-11 - using "*we*" to refer to himself and the Jewish Christians, and "*you*" to refer to Gentile converts. See if you agree as you read.

### Read Galatians 4:1-20

3. Jewish Christians might be heirs of the estate, but what have they been like? (4:1-3)
4. How does this compare with the situation of the Gentiles? (4:8)
5. What were the Jews enslaved to? (4:3) What were the Gentiles enslaved to? (4:9)
6. What has God done for those under the law? How? (4:4-5)
7. What has God done for 'you Gentiles'? How? (4:6)

For both the Jew *and* the Gentile Christian, God has turned them from slaves into sons. They were both slaves. Now, they're both sons! The old distinctions have disappeared. There is no privileged class. Paul says there's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus!

8. Are we working hard enough to make sure there's no 'elitism' in our church?

### From Slavery to Freedom ... to Slavery Again

Tragically, the Galatians are at risk of becoming slaves all over again.

9. What is Paul's warning in Galatians 4:9-11? What's the issue?

What a tragedy it would be if the Galatians became slaves again! All they had to do was keep listening to the Jewish Christians who were trying to impose rules and regulations and holy day observances. If they are led astray like this, Paul is afraid his ministry to them will have been in vain!

### A Personal Note

Paul is deeply disturbed by what's happening in Galatia. Whereas once they cared for him in his illness and welcomed him like an angel, now things are different. Note the personal, emotional language Paul uses in...

v 11

v12

v16

v19

v20

10. Paul really cares! If they turn back to the law, they are losing their freedom in Christ. How much do

you care about this issue?

11. What would Paul say about you? Does your life as a Christian reflect the fact that you're not God's slave, but God's child? How?

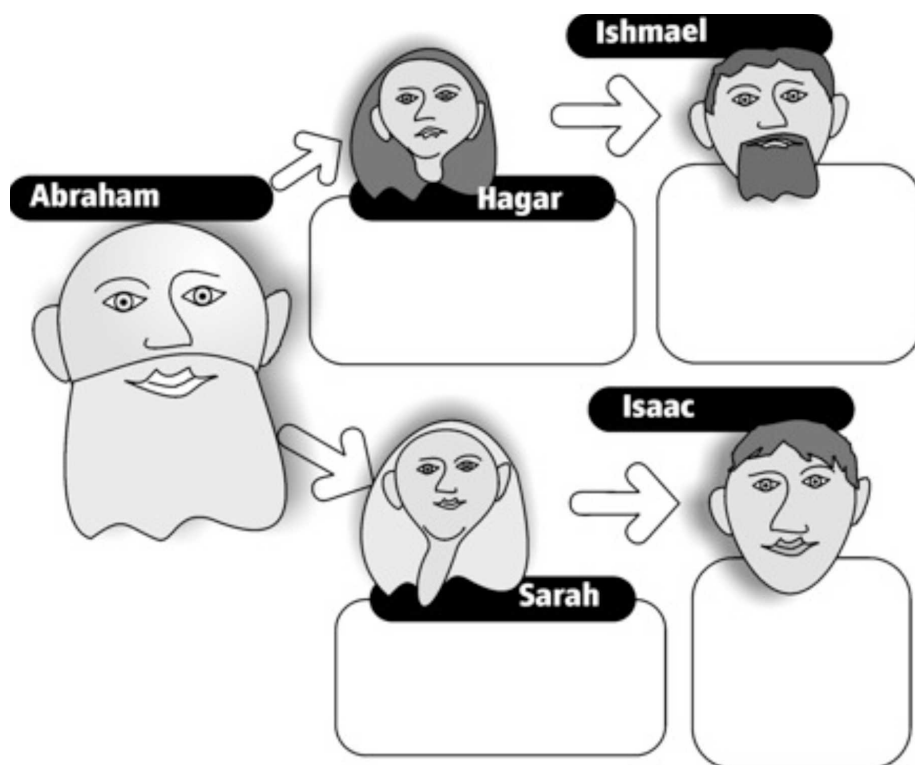
### A New Angle on an Old Story...

Paul sees parallels between the Old Testament story of Abraham and the present situation of the Galatians. You can read the details in Genesis 16. To cut a long story short, Abraham and his wife Sarah were unable to conceive, so Sarah gave her husband a slave girl, Hagar, to start a family. Hagar the slave gave birth to Ishmael. But God's promise to give Abraham a family wasn't intended to be fulfilled that way. Finally, Sarah, though infertile, gave birth to Isaac - the child of the promise. And through the line of Isaac came the whole nation of Israel. But Paul gives the story an interesting twist.

### Read Galatians 4:21-31

Now put these descriptions in the boxes with the right characters in Paul's "figurative" retelling of the story...

- Slave woman
- free woman
- son born in the ordinary way
- son born of promise
- covenant from Sinai (law)
- slaves
- Mt Sinai
- present Jerusalem
- Jerusalem above
- free
- born of the power of the Spirit



12. Which person represents Christians?
13. Which person represents the Jews/Judaizing Christians?
14. How does the way Ishmael treated Isaac illustrate the way Christians can expect to be treated by those who are slaves to law? (Why do you think this is?)
15. What does the future hold for the "present Jerusalem"?

**Read 5:1.** This is the practical application Paul has been heading for in telling the story of Hagar and Sarah. If we're FREE, we need to LIVE LIKE IT. We need to appreciate our freedom enough to not let ourselves be dragged back into a form of legalistic, religious, holy-day observing slavery.

16. What examples of "slavery" should we watch out for today?

### Prayer

- Thank God for the way he has brought us together in Christ and pray that we would serve him without becoming slaves again.
- Pray for plans for Christmas – for Carols etc.
- Pray for concerns which you have shared together

# Free For What?

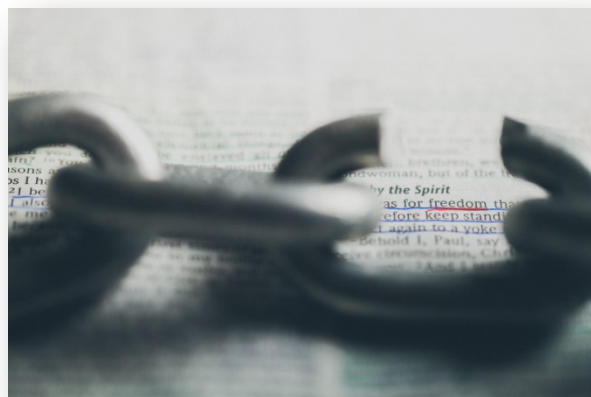
## Study 6 Galatians 5-6

With all Paul's talk of being free from the law we need to ask the question: "if we're not under law, how do we know how to live?" In the closing section of Paul's letter to the Galatians we find answers. We must not move from freedom back to slavery - but on the other hand, our freedom must not be used as an excuse for sin. As Paul puts it, the Christian life is all about living by the Spirit - free at last. Free to serve God.

**Read Galatians 5:1-15.**

1. What is Paul's concern for the Galatians in verse 1?
2. Why is circumcision an "all or nothing proposition" for those who give-in to the demand that Gentile believers must go through this ritual?
3. What is the result of turning back to law-keeping?
4. According to verse 5, what are the true keys to righteousness? Fill in the gaps:

But by \_\_\_\_\_ we eagerly await through the  
\_\_\_\_\_ the righteousness for which we hope.



Rather than struggling to keep laws we should struggle to keep trusting Jesus, while the Holy Spirit produces the righteousness we long for! Compare this with 2:20-21, and Paul's prayer for the Galatians in 4:19. Trusting and following Jesus is the source and motivation for our righteousness - not keeping rules and laws.

5. According to verse 6, what is the only thing that counts?  
How much does this recipe "count" in your daily life?
6. Rather than using our freedom for self-indulgence, what should we be doing? (v13)  
In what ways have you "served others" lately? Or been served? Did you realise this was the outworking of faith?
7. How does the one statement in verse 14 sum up all the Old Testament laws? (Think through the Ten Commandments as an example.)

**Natural Conflicts: Read Galatians 5:16-26**

8. Many Christians today speak about dramatic evidences of the Spirit at work in their churches or their lives. According to verse 16, what will the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work be?
9. Should you be surprised as a Christian if you find yourself losing your temper or being jealous? What perspective does verse 17 give on this? What is the way forward?
10. Verses 19 to 21 give a list of the natural acts of our sinful nature. Verses 22 and 23 give a contrasting list, showing what living by the Spirit will look like.
  - a. Look carefully at the list of the "sins of the flesh". They're not all "R-rated"! What does the future hold for people who want to continue down this path?
  - b. Write down the list of the fruits of the Spirit. How does living by the Spirit do away with the need for law? (v18, 23b)

11. From verse 15 and verse 26, what seem to be the greatest struggles for the Galatians? What are the greatest struggles for you?

The work of the Spirit is God's work IN US. But that doesn't mean we are passive. **Read verses 16 to 26 again**, and find out what we as Christians are TO DO as people who have been given the Spirit.

### **So What About Sin?**

What will living by the Spirit actually look like? It looks different, perhaps, to what many Christians expect. For starters, it won't necessarily have all the exotic and exciting features you'll supposedly find in some churches. It's much more down to earth. Living by the Spirit is really a war zone, as the desires of the flesh battle it out with the desires of the Spirit. We should be realistic about sin – but hopeful about the work of the Spirit!

### **Read Galatians 6:1-10.**

12. Because our own sinful nature is always ready to oppose God's Spirit, we should be humble in our dealings with the sins of another. "Watch yourself," says Paul, "or you may also be tempted." What other key problem areas does Paul foresee in verses 3 and 4?

### **Look back at 3:15 and 26.**

13. Have you seen first-hand the effects these things can have on a church? How can we work to avoid them? Are there things the Spirit is moving you to confess and repent of in these areas?
14. How important does Paul consider the teaching of God's Word? How does he say those being taught should respond? How does the teaching of the Word work alongside the work of the Spirit?
15. Some people sow (that is, invest their time, energy and resources) to please the sinful nature. What will they reap?
16. What will be involved in sowing to please the Spirit?
  - a. Why is this tiring?
  - b. How can we encourage each other "not to give up?" (Hebrews 10:24-25 may give some ideas)
17. How does Galatians 6:10 help us prioritise our efforts to "do good?"

### **Read Galatians 6:11-18.**

18. How do these verses summarise the issues we've seen running all the way through the letter?
19. Remember, those opposed to Paul's gospel are "Christians" who want to take on the Jewish law as well. Why does their position "avoid persecution"?
20. What matters to the false teachers, and what matters to Paul?
21. How has studying Galatians changed your perspective on "what counts"?

### **Prayer**

- Thank God for all that we have learned and been reminded of in Galatians. Pray that we would be using our freedom to serve God.
- Continue to pray for friends, family, and others we know who are yet to respond to the truth about Jesus. Pray for opportunities to share your faith with them.
- Pray for concerns which you have shared together.