

# Source

THE BIBLE IN COMMUNITY

GALATIANS

## Welcome to Source

### Our Source

The Bible is unquestionably the most important book ever written. Not only does it speak to the issues we struggle with today (i.e., wealth, poverty, work, conflict, love, sex, forgiveness, guilt, sin, time, youth, death), but it also gives us a picture of a God who created the universe and who has been orchestrating an incredible story throughout history. While we recognize its importance, we often stay away from the Bible because it often seems unapproachable.

For these reasons, we have designed Source studies to help you engage with the Bible in a meaningful and helpful way. First, we've included an **Introduction** to each book so that from the beginning you have a clear picture of where the author is headed. Second, we've added **Notes**, which help make the ancient backgrounds of the text accessible and approachable. Third, and most important, we've created **Discussion** guides for each section of Scripture that allow you to explore and apply the passages in the context of community. These elements come together to form a very simple format for each week:

1. Before each session, read the selected passages in your Bible, look over the text notes, and answer the discussion questions.
2. Come to your small group prepared to share and discuss your responses.

## Galatians

This study covers the book of Galatians, a letter written by Paul encouraging the Christians in Galatia to return to the freedom that is found in a right relationship with Jesus. He was calling them back to a life of grace where they could chose to truly live out their faith through love. Hopefully, over the next six weeks, you'll discover if your faith is firmly rooted and lived out in the right way.

**Session 1** - Galatians 1:1-10

**Session 4** - Galatians 4

**Session 2** - Galatians 1:11-2:21

**Session 5** - Galatians 5

**Session 3** - Galatians 3

**Session 6** - Galatians 6

Our hope is that this study will allow you to engage with the Bible in a way that incorporates the dynamics of a small group with the transformational nature of God's Word.

## Galatians - Introduction

It is difficult to know exactly when the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the churches in Galatia. He does not say where he is writing from, as he does in his letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians. And while he writes this letter both in his own name and on behalf of “all the brothers and sisters with me,” he does not say who these brothers and sisters are. Many interpreters believe that Paul penned this letter before the pivotal Jerusalem Council, because they think Paul would have mentioned the Council’s decision if the letter were composed sometime afterward. *If this is the case, Galatians was written around AD 49 or 50, making it the earliest of Paul’s letters.*

Galatia was a Roman province in central Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The book of Acts reports that Paul traveled through this area on several journeys he made to spread the Christian message. On one of these occasions, when he needed to stop and recuperate from an illness, he met the people to whom he later sent this letter. (As he reminds them, “It was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.”) The Galatians received Paul warmly and cared for him. They also believed the message he brought.

But some people Paul calls “agitators” later came to Galatia and made some unsettling claims among these new believers. Paul consistently taught that Gentiles (non-Jews) did not have to convert to Judaism or keep any of the Jewish law in order to become Christians. But these “agitators” insisted that the apostles in Jerusalem taught just the opposite: that Gentiles who believed in Jesus Christ had to be circumcised, keep kosher, and observe the Sabbath and annual Jewish festivals. The agitators also claimed that Paul insisted on these things elsewhere, and that he had only relaxed these requirements for the Galatians in order to get on their good side. In light of these demands, the Gentiles in Galatia had begun observing Jewish customs, and they were actually considering being circumcised. *In his letter to them, therefore, Paul first answered the charges that were made against him and then corrected the belief that certain religious observances must be added to faith in Christ.*

When he begins his letter, Paul wastes no time answering questions about his teaching and authority. He insists that what he preaches comes directly from God, so that it does not really matter who disagrees with him. Paul explains that he really had very little contact with the apostles for the first part of his ministry. But when he finally did visit Jerusalem, they affirmed his teaching and welcomed him as their partner. Even after that, however, he was not dependent on their endorsement. Once he actually rebuked Cephas (Peter), one of the leading apostles, in public.

Having addressed the charges against him, Paul then proceeds to his main argument: Gentiles who have become Christians do not need to be circumcised. Paul first asks the Galatians about their own experiences. He points out that God sent them the Holy Spirit before they were even considering Jewish religious observances. This is evidence that God does not really expect these things of them.

Paul then makes an appeal to the Scriptures. He observes that Abraham, the source of spiritual blessings for both Jews and Gentiles, was actually declared righteous by God on the basis of his faith before he was circumcised. Abraham did not earn favor with God because of his heritage, religious practices, or because he was a good person. Rather, “God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.” Paul then repeats the biblical warning that those who try to become right with God by keeping the law actually bring a curse upon themselves if they do not observe everything in the law. *The only way for anyone to escape this curse and to have a right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ.*

Paul also draws several analogies to illustrate the law’s purpose of leading people to faith in Christ. At one point, however, he actually breaks off in the middle of these arguments and appeals to the Galatians on a personal level. He is writing to people who have taken care of him, and for whom he cares deeply. It grieves him that he must send them such a strong letter of correction.

Finally, having established that it is not necessary for Gentile Christians to be circumcised or keep any other part of the Jewish law in order to be saved, Paul must address one more concern. If people do not have the law to restrain them, what’s to keep them from running wild? He explains that the Holy Spirit lives inside each believer, granting the power and the

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desire to live as God wishes. Instead of external restraint, there is inner transformation. Paul brings his letter to a close by describing what this transformation should look like for the individual believer and for the Christian community as a whole.

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## Session 1 - Notes on Galatians 1:1-10

### 1:1

The author identifies himself as Paul, a Jew born in Tarsus (located in modern-day southeast Turkey) who became one of the most influential leaders of the early Christian movement. He received Jewish rabbinical training in his youth and, as a member of the Pharisee party, he persecuted Christians until his encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to the city of Damascus (Acts 9). This event transformed him and from that moment on he began preaching Christ to all who would hear. After some time Barnabas, another church leader, brought him to Antioch where he launched out on three missionary journeys, taking the gospel throughout Asia Minor and Greece (Acts 13-21). He was then imprisoned in Jerusalem and taken to Rome on a series of appeals (Acts 21-28), where the biblical narrative ends. After this, he likely revisited Greece and Asia Minor before traveling to Spain and eventually was rearrested and executed by Nero in A.D. 67.

Paul begins the letter by identifying himself as an apostle. In New Testament writings, this term generally referred to a messenger, but it is used almost exclusively of the twelve disciples of Jesus (including Matthis, Acts 1:26) and Paul (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 15:3-11), all men who saw Christ and were commissioned by him to be his messengers.

### 1:2

There is a debate among scholars as to whether Paul addressed this letter to the churches in Galatia proper (which is referred to as North Galatia and was not mentioned in Acts) or whether he used the term generally and in so doing addressed the churches of so-called South Galatia (which would have included the churches in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe that he visited in Acts).

### 1:6

Most of Paul's letters collected in the Bible start with an introduction followed by a thanksgiving prayer. But in Galatians, Paul compresses this opening section (w 1-5), and then he immediately comes out with an accusation against his audience. By doing so, he dismisses

the literary convention of his time in favor of directness. His language and tone in this first section reflect his astonishment at what's going on in Galatia.

At issue is the gospel (literally “good news”) of Christ. Paul taught that the good news regarding Christ was that through Christ’s death, he secured for us a right standing with God based on faith alone. After Paul left, other people began to gain influence and were teaching the Galatians that one could only have a right standing with God if one believed in Christ and that person was circumcised, a cultural symbol of Judaism that God had given to Abraham in Genesis 17:10-14. These people questioned Paul’s authority and authenticity as an apostle, believing he had watered down the gospel to make it more popular with those who did not have a Jewish background. Paul’s response was that it was they who were perverting Christ’s gospel by adding on nonessential rules as requirements for one to be justified before God. This was a big issue in early Christianity, especially as the gospel spread to Gentiles. The primarily Jewish church wrestled with this issue at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), where Paul vehemently argued for circumcision not to be a requirement for salvation, and the early church agreed.

## 1:8

Paul begins to mount his case by emphasizing the message over the messenger. Those who were leading the Galatians astray were likely claiming that they had been given authority by the mother church in Jerusalem. But Paul contends that the message be judged on its inherent truth, and not by who delivers it, whether this messenger be man or angel.

## 1:9

The word translated “curse,” anathema, used both in v. 8 and v. 9, carries the sense of turning something over to God for divine wrath. It is a very strong term and emphasizes Paul’s fury.



## Session 1 - Discussion

### Introduction

We are being influenced on a daily basis. Every day when we turn on the radio, the TV, log on to the Internet, read an email, or have a conversation with someone, we are opening ourselves up to someone else's influence. Facts and opinions come at us in a constant barrage, pushing us in different directions. With so many voices clamoring for our attention, how do we sort out who and what to listen to? In this session, we'll explore the power of influence and its potential to affect our lives, either positively or negatively.

### Discussion Questions

1. Who have been some of the most influential people in your life?
2. In the verses at the beginning of Galatians, we read about how the Galatian Christians had been influenced by the Judaizers (see note for v. 6). In your life, how has the influence of certain people pulled you away from God?
3. Initially, however, the Galatian Christians had been influenced by Paul. Who have been the people in your life that have pulled you toward God? In what way did their lives influence you?
4. What could have been some of the reasons the Galatians turned away from the influence of Paul and began to listen to the teaching of the Judaizers? When are we susceptible to turning away from the truth today?
5. How do you determine who and what influences you? Are we to trust everyone and everything? Are we to be skeptical of everyone and everything?
6. Paul recognized the effect of the influence the Judaizers were having on the Galatian Christians, so he wrote this letter to bring them back to the truth. Have you ever had someone in your life confront you when you went astray? How can we help one other stay on the right path?

## Think About It

Whether we choose to or not, all of us have some level of influence over the people in our lives. Equally as important, others have influence over us. Who and what are currently the biggest influences in your life? What effect are they having on you? Where is their influence taking you?

## What Will You Do?

How can we critically engage with the competing voices and opinions that constantly attempt to influence our worldview? Specifically, what voices do you need to listen to on a more regular basis? What voices do you need to tune out?

## Changing Your Mind

*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)*

## Session 2 - Notes on Galatians 1:11-2:21

### 1:11

The formulaic “I want you to know,” introduces the central point of this next section—if the Galatians are confused about which version of the gospel is true, they have every reason to trust Paul over these new teachers. Thus, starting in 1:13 (“for you have heard”) and stretching to 2:14, Paul begins to substantiate his case by establishing his credibility. Though the message should be judged on its own merits (1:8), apparently the other teachers had been discrediting Paul and flaunting their own credentials. So Paul tells his side of the story in order to regain a hearing from the Galatians.

### 1:12

The Galatians should trust the message Paul preached to them first and foremost because Paul received it straight from the source. Acts 9:1-30 gives the account of Paul’s encounter with Christ and his resulting conversion from an enemy and persecutor of Christians to an advocate of the gospel of Christ.

### 1:13

Paul’s dramatic transformation testifies to his encounter with the resurrected Christ. Paul’s persecution of the church is documented in Acts 8:1-3 at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and in Acts 9:1-2.

### 1:14

Before Jesus, Paul was on track to become an influential adherent of Judaism (Acts 22:1-5, Philippians 3:5) diligently studying the “traditions” of his fathers. In Paul’s day, a detailed set of laws and regulations existed that had been passed down orally for hundreds of years by Jewish rabbis. These traditions were interpretations of the law of Moses and were intended to govern the day-to-day life of the Jewish people. These were eventually recorded in the Mishnah, Midrashim, and Targums.

## 1:15-16

In the line of Old Testament prophets (Jeremiah 1:5), Paul felt that God had been preparing him all of his life for his mission to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:1-6). The word translated Gentiles literally means “nations” or “people” and was used by Jews to refer to the rest of the (non-Jewish) world.

## 1:17

Why Paul went to Arabia after his conversion is unclear. “Arabia” likely refers to the Nabatean kingdom that stretched from southeast Damascus down to the Isthmus of Suez. He then returned to Damascus, the ancient capital of Syria, where he had been converted.

## 1:18-19

Jerusalem was the religious center of Judaism and the birthplace of Christianity. Paul’s visit likely coincides with Acts 9:26-30. When Paul was there, he visited Cephas, which is Aramaic for “rock,” and refers to Peter, one of Jesus’s disciples (Matthew 16:18) and a leader of the early church. Paul also visited with James, the brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55) and the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

## 1:21

Paul then traveled to Asia Minor, specifically his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

## 2:1

Fourteen years after his conversion to Christianity, Paul returns to Jerusalem, likely coinciding with Acts 11:30 and the delivery of a collection for famine relief. Accompanying Paul are Barnabas (Acts 4:36; 13:1-14:28) and Titus (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6-7; 8:6, 16; 12:18; Titus 1:5), two of his partners in ministry.

## 2:2

It is unclear what Paul means by “a revelation,” but it may refer to the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:28.

## 2:3-4

One of the issues Paul's critics had with the message he proclaimed was that Paul did not require circumcision to be a Christian. Paul was adamantly opposed to adding anything to the gospel. See the note on 1:6.

## 2:6-9

Paul's defense that his authority was from God supported his independence from Jerusalem's influence. Yet, his ministry was still in agreement with Jerusalem, as the Jerusalem leaders extended their blessing to him. John was another of Jesus's disciples and a leader of the early church.

## 2:10

Providing for the poor was heavily emphasized in the Old Testament, and Paul followed through with this request (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:3-4; 2 Corinthians 9).

## 2:11

Antioch was the third leading city of the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. It was at Antioch where followers of Jesus were first called Christians, meaning those "belonging to Christ" (Acts 11:26). Antioch was also the birthplace of the first predominantly Gentile church, making it a strategic player in the early growth and development of Christianity.

## 2:12

It was customary for Jews to separate themselves from Gentiles and refrain from eating anything "unclean" in accordance with Jewish dietary law. Peter's earlier vision from God, however, led him to realize that the barriers between Jews and Gentiles were being lifted (Acts 10:28, 34-35). Peter's failure here, however, is his willingness to give in to the pressure of the Judaizers (those who believed that Gentile Christians should also follow the law of Moses) and in separating himself from Gentiles once again.

## 2:15

After establishing his credibility in 1:11-2:20, Paul now sets forth his points of agreement and of disagreement with the other teachers. The points of agreement are given in verses 15-16, that no one is justified by the law, but by faith in Christ. The points of disagreement are listed in verses 17-20, where Paul argues that the Christian life is not lived by observing the law, but in Christ.

## 2:16

Three times in this verse, Paul asserts that we are not justified by observing the law, but by our faith in Christ. In doing so, he drives home the point that it is faith in Jesus Christ alone that justifies one before God. Peter's "hypocrisy" then was declaring this truth, yet living in a way that communicated to the Gentiles that God accepts only those who live according to Jewish law.

## 2:21

Grace and legalism (earning favor with God through good works) do not mix. If acceptance before God can be earned, then the need for Christ's sacrifice is nullified.

## Session 2 - Discussion

### Introduction

The way we live our lives says much about us. The decisions we make and the paths we choose, speak volumes about our motivations and beliefs. So as Paul defended himself and his message against the accusations of the new teachers in Galatia, he laid his life before his audience. Over and over again he was willing to risk his life, reputation, and even the approval of other Christian leaders to live out the message of grace and freedom he had been given. For us, and for the Galatians, he was an example of someone who lived his life in line with his calling and mission.

### Discussion Questions

1. Paul was thoroughly changed by his encounter with Jesus (1:11-17). What do you think it was like for him to go from violently opposed to the message of Jesus to arguing with people to accept the message of Jesus? What did he lose? What did he gain?
2. How has Jesus changed your life?
3. God called Paul to take the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. Do you feel like God has something specific for you to do? What could that be?
4. How does it change your life when you get a clear sense of direction and focus? When has this happened for you?
5. When Paul was in Jerusalem (2:1-10) and when Cephus came to Antioch (2:11-14), Paul could have compromised his message to gain the approval of others. What are some of the pressures we face that can distract us from following through with what we believe God wants us to do?
6. Paul's life was so completely changed by grace that he could say, as in 2:20, that Christ lived in and through him. Do you feel like it is Christ living in you, influencing all of your actions and thoughts, or do you find yourself living life on your own?

## Think About It

What does your life say about you? Do your decisions and choices fall in line with God's direction for your life?

## What Will You Do?

What would be different about this week if you allowed Christ to live through you, to direct you and to guide you in your thoughts and actions?

## Changing Your Mind

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live, in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)*



## Session 3 - Notes on Galatians 3

### 3:1

Having established his credibility and concern for the Galatians, Paul now begins to gather his arguments. He is incredulous that the Galatians have so easily forgotten their own experience of coming to know Christ through faith. For the next two chapters, Paul draws upon his rhetorical skill to convince them that the Christian life does not consist of following rules and regulations, but in the freedom of Christ.

### 3:3

Upon becoming a Christian, believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Spirit would indwell individuals from time to time (Numbers 11:17; Deuteronomy 34:9; Judges 15:14; 1 Samuel 11:6; 16:13), but the prophets looked forward to a time when God's Spirit would be poured out on all his people (Ezekiel 36:22-28; Joel 2:25-32; Zechariah 12:10). This occurred on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Since that time, conversion has always been accompanied by the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38-39). So Paul argues that both the initial experience of salvation and the ongoing process of sanctification are works of the Spirit. Paul wonders why the Galatians would think that the Christian life would begin with the Spirit, but then be completed or perfected by human effort.

### 3:6

Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6 to emphasize that it was Abraham's faith that justified him before God, not his works. This is a key passage Paul uses (see also Romans 4:3, 22) to illustrate that salvation has always been through faith and not through works.

### 3:7

Abraham was the father of the Jewish people; therefore, all Jews considered themselves his children (John 8:33, 39, 53). Paul speaks here, however, of Abraham's spiritual descendants, as Abraham was also the father of the Jewish faith. God appeared to him in Genesis 12 and promised to use Abraham and his descendants to bless the world and called Abraham to

follow him. Here Paul identifies Jewish and Gentile Christians as Abraham’s descendants (see also Romans 4). Paul’s point is that all who believe in Christ, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, are participants in this blessing as they follow Abraham’s example of faith.

## 3:10

When Moses delivered the law to Israel, he also included the blessings associated with obeying the law and the curses associated with disobeying the law (Deuteronomy 27-28). Here Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, which succinctly states that all who disobey the law would suffer the consequences. He knows that even his most adamant opponents would agree that no one, no matter how zealous, could follow the law perfectly. Thus they would be forced to admit that everyone falls short.

## 3:11-13

Paul continues building his case by citing three more Old Testament references. In verse 11, he cites Habakkuk 2:4. In verse 12, he quotes Leviticus 18:5. And in verse 13, Deuteronomy 21:23. He then links the last verse to Christ’s death on the cross (the word “pole” was often associated with the poles upon which criminals were impaled) on our behalf.

## 3:15

The word Paul uses for “covenant” usually referred to a last will and testament, which appears to be the legal document he had in mind. Most wills were sealed so that they could not be tampered with, and Greek law prohibited them from being amended (BBC, 526).

## 3:16

Paul then quotes the promise that God gave to Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 13:5; 24:7) and states that Jesus is the ultimate seed of the promise.

## 3:17

Though the word “covenant” was usually used for a will, it was also used by Jews to refer to the covenant God made with his people. God would not retract the promise he made to Abraham

(Abrahamic Covenant) in light of the law (Mosaic Covenant), which came later (Exodus 19-24). Exodus 12:40 speaks of the time the Israelites spent in Egypt as being 430 years.

## 3:19

Paul, anticipating what he was certain his opponents were already thinking, raises a crucial question, “What then was the purpose of the law?” The law was given to point out sin (Romans 3:20). It was not intended to serve as a means for achieving righteousness. Rather, the law is required when trust is broken or absent to help preserve order, identify lawbreakers, and point out the need for redemption. The law was “added” and thus was supplementary and subordinate to the covenant. And the law was only in effect until the “Seed,” that is, Christ, had come.

## 3:20

According to Jewish tradition, the law had been given to Moses (the “mediator”) through angels. So Paul makes the argument to his Jewish opponents that the covenant was greater because it was given directly by God, unlike the law.

## 3:23-25

Paul then employs a word picture to describe the role of the law. In verse 24, the phrase translated “put in charge” speaks of a guardian relationship. In ancient times, it was common for a servant to be put in charge of a child to oversee the child’s schoolwork. The idea is that the law was put in place for a time to teach us about sin until we came of age and put our faith in Christ, the only one who could overcome our sin and justify us by faith.

## 3:26-28

Upon conversion, Christians were baptized as a symbol of their identification with Christ. The Greek word *baptizo* was often used to describe the dying of garments. This is a great picture of our new identification with Christ. Through faith, Christians are so transformed that Paul speaks of us as being “clothed” with Christ. Thus, common dividing lines such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender, have been erased because we have been united in Christ. All who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, have been adopted into God’s family and have full and equal rights as heirs of the promise.

## Session 3 - Discussion

### Introduction

We've all heard the phrase, "If something seems too good to be true, it probably is." As a result, it's hard for us to accept that the most valuable gift of all, eternal life, is given to us free of charge. Although the Galatians initially accepted the gospel of grace, they were easily seduced into believing that such a valuable gift required additional efforts on their part. What about you? Do you live as though you have to earn God's favor, or do you live in the light of unconditional acceptance?

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the most valuable gift you've ever received? What were your thoughts and/or feelings in response to such a gift?
2. What is it that often makes it hard for us to accept gifts? Talk about someone you know (it could be you) who prefers to pay/work for everything they obtain. What might condition us to be this way?
3. In 3:1-5, Paul chastises the Galatians for changing course midstream. While they initially accepted God's grace as a free gift, they were now trying to earn God's favor through their actions. What has been your experience with Christianity? Did you initially understand it as something based on faith or on rules? How has your perspective changed over the years?
4. The Jews had come to believe that they obtained a right relationship with God through observing the law handed down by Moses. But in 3:6-18, Paul dismantles this belief and shows that Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith, had a relationship with God through faith, and that this relationship was secured by the death of Christ. Think about how this truth might have sounded to Jews. How would it make you feel to discover that everything you had ever worked for was now available for free?

5. In 3:21-25, Paul declares that the law was put in place until Christ came, and that it no longer has authority over us. Do you feel like you still have to obey the rules in order to be acceptable to God? What are the things you do (or don't do) in order to obtain God's favor?
6. If rules aren't a means of obtaining salvation, what is the purpose of the commands in the Bible (i.e., to tell the truth, not to steal, to share what you have with others—Ephesians 5:25-28)?

## Think About It

What difference does it make when you base your relationship with God on how well you keep a list of rules, rather than living in light of the truth that God accepts you through faith?

## What Will You Do?

Examine your motives this week. Why is it that you do (and don't do) certain things? Are you trying to earn God's approval, or are you living in light of the fact that you have been freely accepted?

## Changing Your Mind

*Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."*  
**(Galatians 3:11 NLT)**

## Session 4 - Notes on Galatians 4

### 4:1-5

Paul argues that while the law was in place (from the time of Moses until the time of Christ), we were like children and slaves who had limits placed upon their freedom and were governed by rules that minimized their rights. As well, like children, our understanding of spiritual things (“elemental spiritual forces of the world”) was uninformed. But upon coming to faith in Christ, we receive the freedom afforded to adults.

### 4:6

As Christians, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (see the note on 3:3) and, as a result, we have an intimate relationship with God. The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word (Aramaic was a common language, especially in the region of Palestine and among Jews). It means “father,” or more closely “dad,” and carries with it the connotation of intimacy and respect. It was rarely, if ever, used in Judaism to address God, but Jesus used the word and encouraged his followers to do likewise (see also Mark 14:36 and Romans 8:15). By doing so, Jesus emphasized the intimate, personal relationship we are invited to have with our heavenly Father.

### 4:8-19

Paul now turns from his arguments and reminds the Galatians of his deep personal concern for them. He reminds them of their relational history—how everything they did for one another was based on love and Christlike compassion.

### 4:9

Paul reminds the Galatians of their condition prior to a relationship with Christ. As Gentiles, they worshiped idols and false gods. Why would they now turn from one “weak and miserable” force to another, slavish observance to the law?

## 4:10

Apparently, in addition to conforming to Jewish circumcision rites, the Galatians began observing the Jewish calendar (i.e., Day of Atonement [Leviticus 16:29-34], New Moons [Numbers 28:11-15], Passover [Exodus 12:18], First Fruits [Leviticus 23:10], and the Sabbath year [Leviticus 25:4]) under the mistaken belief that observing these holidays was necessary to their Christian identity.

## 4:13

It is unknown what illness Paul is referring to.

## 4:21-31

After expressing his deep personal connection with the Galatians, Paul continues to emphasize his main point in verses 21-31 that people are saved because of their faith in Christ, not because of what they do. To illustrate this point, he provides an allegory drawn from an Old Testament story. The story Paul chooses is that of Hagar and Sarah (Genesis 16:1-16 and 21:1-21). Paul earlier cited Genesis 15:6 as one of his main texts in arguing for salvation through faith alone. The faith that Abraham displayed, which was credited to him as righteousness, was that God would deliver on his promise to Abraham. Part of this promise rested in the fact that God would provide Abraham with a long line of descendants (Genesis 15:5). Yet Abraham found himself in his nineties with no son. So, at the urging of his wife, Sarah, he had a child, Ishmael, with her Egyptian servant Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16). This was not how God intended to bless Abraham and, through him, the nations (Genesis 12:2-3). Later, Sarah did conceive, despite her advanced age (Genesis 18:11), and gave birth to Isaac (Genesis 21:1-21).

Paul uses this story to contrast those who are enslaved to the law (represented by Hagar, the slave-wife) with those who are free from the law (represented by Sarah, the free woman). He compares Hagar to Mount Sinai, which was where Moses received the law (Exodus 19), and to the city of Jerusalem in his day. The city of Jerusalem was the center of Judaism and represented those who adhered to the law. Paul then contrasts the city of Jerusalem with the “Jerusalem that is above,” or the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the New Jerusalem that has yet to be revealed (Revelation 21:1-3), which will far surpass the earthly Jerusalem.

Paul then cites Isaiah 54:1. In its context, this passage was meant to remind the exiled Israelites that they would one day be restored to the Promised Land and be a fruitful nation once more (Isaiah 54:1-3). Paul connects this verse to the barren Sarah and her descendants, the children of Israel after the exile, and now to Christians, her spiritual descendants.

Ishmael's abuse of Isaac (suggested by Genesis 21:9) was like the persecution the Gentile Christians were getting from the Judaizers, who insisted on keeping the law in order to be saved. So Paul cites Genesis 21:10 and encourages the Galatians to rid themselves of the Judaizers, as Sarah suggested to Abraham. Paul then ends his discussion of the Hagar/Sarah story by emphasizing the freedom we have been given through Christ as children of the promise.



## Session 4 - Discussion

### Introduction

Christ secured for us a relationship with God through faith. And as we discussed last week, this isn't a relationship based on rules and regulations, like the relationship between a slave and a master.

Rather, this relationship is described as one between a father and a child. We are called sons and daughters and are encouraged to address God as our Father. So, how are we to live in light of this?

### Discussion Questions

1. What was/is your relationship with your parents (e.g., distant, close, antagonistic, loving, formal, personal, taxing, healing)? How does your relationship with your parents influence your view of your Heavenly Father?
2. How does it make you feel to know that you are a beloved son or daughter of God? How does this affect the way you view yourself? How does this impact the way you view God?
3. Paul uses an allegory drawn from Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31) to emphasize that we are children of God, heirs of the promise, and thus have all the rights and freedoms this affords us. How does your position as a child of God grant you freedom?
4. The Galatians were not living as though they were the recipients of the unconditional love that a father has for his children. They were returning to “observing special days and months and seasons and years,” as if they were slaves attempting to gain the favor of a hard master. What difference does it make in a relationship when you know that you are loved unconditionally?
5. What difference does it make in a relationship when love or approval is conditional? When have you been in a relationship where you felt as though you needed to gain the approval of someone else?
6. How should the unconditional love God has for you affect your life?

## Think About It

When you consider how you view your relationship with God, is it more as a slave or as a child?

## What Will You Do?

What can you do to remind yourself this week that you are a child of God, unconditionally loved by your Father?

## Changing Your Mind

*So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs. (Galatians 4:7)*

## Session 5 - Notes on Galatians 5

### 5:1-12

After arguing in Chapters 3 and 4 that salvation is obtained through faith and not through works, Paul exhorts the congregation to take hold of the freedom that has been given to them in Christ. Indeed, he begins this section with a rallying cry, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”

### 5:2-4

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross enabled us to have righteousness through faith. By turning to the law in an attempt to gain righteousness through works, the Galatians had “fallen away from grace”—they were turning their backs on what Christ had already secured for them. In doing so, they were attempting to obtain the unobtainable. If they truly wanted to earn God’s favor through following rules, they would have to follow them all. The Old Testament Law was a comprehensive unit; one part could not be enforced in isolation from the rest of the law. So if the Galatians really wanted to go down this path, they would have to follow not just the Ten Commandments, but the over 600 other laws that were handed down by Moses.

### 5:5

When it comes to righteousness through faith, Christians live in an already/not yet tension. Upon belief in Christ, righteousness is imparted through the Spirit as part of the ongoing process of sanctification, and yet “we eagerly await” the final declaration of righteousness by God at the last judgment.

### 5:7

Paul then compares the Christian life to an athlete running a race in a stadium. He asks the Galatians who “cut in” on them, hindering their progress. The picture is of a runner being knocked off-balance or tripped up.

## 5:8

Paul then cites a proverb that illustrates how seemingly small influences can quickly grow stronger and eventually take over the situation. He also uses this same proverb in 1 Corinthians 5:6. In that context, he refers to a man whose incestuous conduct threatened to contaminate the entire Corinthian church. In the context of Galatians 5:8, it refers to how false teaching can quickly spread, infecting those who listen to it. Jesus also used this analogy when he referred to the power of influence (Mark 8:15).

## 5:11

The cross was offensive. It was an instrument of death reserved for the worst offenders. Jews and Gentiles alike found it contemptuous that an all-powerful God would submit himself to such a base execution. And yet it illustrated the great lengths to which God would go in order to redeem his people. By turning to the law, the Galatians were in effect saying that the cross and Jesus's extraordinary sacrifice had not been necessary.

## 5:12

Paul's point in this verse regarding going the "whole way" is similar to that in 5:3. The suggestion he makes regarding emasculation or castration is a sarcastic reference to the Judaizers and their emphasis on circumcision.

## 5:13-26

Paul has thus far argued extensively that Christians should take hold of their freedom and should not go back to trying to earn God's favor through following rules and regulations. Now he turns his focus to how Christians should use their liberty. While we are free, we should not use our freedom to indulge our own selfish desires and wants. Our freedom should always be guided by love. The reason Christ sets us free from sin and the law is so we can love and serve others. Using our freedom as a license to sin or indulge our fleshly nature separates us from the very Spirit that set us free. It practically makes us slaves to sin again.

## 5:14

The spirit or intent of all the Old Testament Law is summed up in the simple command to treat others as you would have them treat you. See Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 7:12 and 22:36-40.

## 5:15

Seeking to obtain status with God and with others through how “good” you are only leads to self-righteousness, jealousy, and strife.

## 5:16

Walking was a common metaphor in Judaism for following God. “Jewish teachers described their moral laws derived from the Old Testament law as “halakah”, which literally means “walking” (BBC, 534). Paul takes this metaphor and applies it to living the Christian life through the Spirit. This “walking” consists of continually listening and following the promptings of the Spirit. It is a constant dependence on God and his power to work through you.

## 5:17

In this entire section (vv. 13-26), the Spirit is continually contrasted with the sinful nature. The Greek word translated “sinful nature” here is *sarx*, which could also be translated as “flesh” (NASB). The flesh, when contrasted with the spirit, refers to the part of us that is finite, limited, weak, and mortal. Paul uses it throughout this section to refer to our futile and self-serving attempts to live for ourselves, chasing after temporal pleasures.

## 5:19-23

Paul now sets forth lists of vices and virtues. These are not meant to be all-encompassing lists, but rather a representative sample of each way of life and what it produces. Note how Paul contrasts the “acts” or works of the sinful nature with the “fruit” of the Spirit. The vices are a result of human effort, while the virtues are a natural product of living life by the Spirit. Godly character is produced by the Holy Spirit and grows in the lives of those who submit to his leading. It is not the result of human effort or attempts to earn God’s favor through observance of the law.

## 5:24

Unlike his earlier statement in 2:20, where the action is passive (“I have been crucified”), Paul here notes the active role that those who belong to Christ have taken in putting to death the sinful nature.

## 5:25

The verb translated as “keep in step” is a military term referring to soldiers who line up in rows behind their commanders. While those who belong to Christ already have been given a new identity and new life through faith in him (“Since we live”), they are also called to conform daily to Christ’s image through the leadership of the Holy Spirit (“let us keep in step”). Thus, believers are called to follow the Spirit in faith because of who they already are in Christ, not in order to become Christ’s followers (being leads to doing, but not vice versa).

## Session 5 - Discussion

### Introduction

In this letter that Paul wrote to the Galatians, he pleads with them to return to the freedom found in the grace of God and to throw off the slavery of adherence to the law. But once they regain this freedom, Paul encourages them to use their freedom in the right way, because freedom is a very, very powerful force.

### Discussion Questions

1. How do you define freedom? When in your life have you felt the most free?
2. What is the freedom that is found in the grace of God? How is it similar or different from other types of freedom?
3. What limits your freedom? The Galatians allowed themselves to be enslaved to legalism. What enslaves you?
4. Most people want to be free so that they can do whatever they want. And this usually means serving themselves. Where does this lead?
5. Paul turns this idea of freedom on its head. He instructs us to use our freedom to serve others. What would motivate Paul to instruct us to use our precious freedom in that way?
6. How have you experienced the fruit of the Spirit (5:22) when you used your freedom to serve someone else?

## Think About It

Would you say that you are led by the Spirit (5:18)? Do you follow your own course, or do you lean on God to guide you? How can you become more dependent on the Spirit to direct you?

## What Will You Do?

How can you love your neighbor this week? What is a specific way you can use your freedom to serve someone else this week?

## Changing Your Mind

*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. (Galatians 5:1)*



## Session 6 - Notes on Galatians 6

### 6:1-10

Paul has encouraged the Galatians to take hold of the freedom that has been given to them through their faith in Christ and has taught them that this freedom is to be guided by love. Now he gets very practical on what this freedom guided by love is to look like. If he was at all unclear about what he meant by “walk by the Spirit,” he now lays out practical illustrations for them to learn from.

### 6:1

Paul starts by telling the Galatians to be humble about how they encourage one another to get rid of the sin in their lives. We should recognize that we are all vulnerable to the same temptations, and we should not become too self-righteous as we seek to hold one another accountable.

### 6:2

He then instructs them to carry one another’s burdens. The word translated as “burdens” is often used to describe a heavy load or oppressive weight. In light of the previous verse, Paul is likely referring to someone caught in the grip of a strong temptation or struggling under the weight of sin. When we find ourselves so weighted down, it requires us to be humble and transparent in admitting our lack of self-sufficiency and our dependence upon Christ and one another. Then it is the responsibility of the community to rally around us and help us through this difficult time. In doing so, the community fulfills the “law of Christ,” in that the use of freedom is directed by love for others.

### 6:3

Paul knows that one of the biggest barriers to carrying one another’s burdens is an inflated opinion of one’s self. He encourages the Galatians not to think of themselves as better than others, but to gladly put themselves at the service of those who need help.

## 6:4-5

One of the major sources of pride is comparison. If we consider ourselves “better” than others and allow ourselves to become self-righteous, then we are not able to truly serve one another and carry one another’s burdens. So Paul encourages each believer to take personal responsibility for their relationship with God. He instructs the Galatians to “test your own actions,” since outward actions can be misleading. If we are the model of charity, and yet do it only out of a need for recognition, we are hardly better than the miser. We are the only ones who know our motives, so Paul encourages us to search our hearts. Then Paul likely uses a common Greco-Roman maxim, “Each of you should carry your own load,” which the Greeks and Romans would have used to stress self-sufficiency; but Paul turns this idea on its head. “In the context of stressing humility in dealing with others (6:1, 3-4), bearing one’s own load (6:5) means answering to God himself for what one has done (6:7-8)” (BBC, 536). We alone are responsible for our spiritual lives and thus we shouldn’t judge our progress by comparing ourselves to others. We should only judge our spiritual progress by how responsive we are to the leading of the Spirit. This will keep us humble and ready to serve others.

## 6:6

In serving one another, Paul encourages the Galatians to also remember those who took on the responsibility of teaching in the church. These people, who sacrificed their time to instruct others, should be the recipients of the generosity of those who were under their instruction.

## 6:7-8

Paul now stops to issue another warning to the Galatians. He wants to remind them once more that people who choose to live life serving only themselves, and thus “sow to please their sinful nature,” will “reap what they sow.” They will reap destruction, with their lives characterized by the vice list in 5:19-21. However, if the Galatians choose to walk by the Spirit, serving God and others, they will “reap eternal life.” This is the way it is and there are no exceptions. God will not be fooled. “God cannot be mocked.” This agricultural metaphor of reaping and sowing was common in the Old Testament (Job 4:8; Proverbs 22:8; Hosea 8:7; 10:12).

## 6:9

If often doesn't seem like we reap what we sow. People around us cut corners and live lives apart from God, and yet they appear to be successful. We make sacrifices and stick to our ethics, only to find ourselves struggling. So Paul encourages us to persevere. We will be rewarded ("reap a harvest"), both in this life, and incomparably more so in the life to come.

## 6:10

As believers, we are to be generous in good deeds to everyone, but especially to fellow Christians (1 Titus 5:8).

## 6:11

Paul now brings this letter to a close. Typically, letters of this length were dictated to a scribe, who wrote with a careful, practiced script. Paul now takes up the pen and writes with "large letters," likely because his handwriting is unpolished compared to the scribe and because he wants to draw the attention of the Galatians to what follows.

## 6:12-13

Paul exposes the motives of the Judaizers. They are not truly concerned about the Galatians; rather their concern is impressing those who believe that Christians should still follow the law.

## 6:14

By way of contrast to the Judaizers' boasts about their accomplishments, Paul's only boast is in the cross of Jesus Christ. The irony here is that this symbol of death, suffering, weakness, and humiliation is the true key to eternal life.

## 6:15

What matters to Paul is the new creation. The original portrait of creation involved God breathing life into Adam (Genesis 2:7). Likewise, new creation involves the Holy Spirit indwelling or breathing new life into believers who have identified with Christ and died to the world. In light of God's plan for inner transformation, concerns over outward symbols of righteousness such as circumcision prove to be meaningless.

## 6:16

Paul bears the scars of his suffering for Christ on his body (for an example see Acts 14:19).

## Session 6 - Discussion

### Introduction

At the end of his letter, Paul gets very specific about how the Galatians should interact with one another and how they should live out the freedom found in the grace of God. As we read through this list of commands, it will not be hard to apply these to our lives.

### Discussion Questions

1. Read Galatians 6:1. Have you ever had someone confront you about something you shouldn't be doing? How did they respond to it? How did you respond to it? Have you ever confronted someone else? How did it go?
2. Why should we confront one another? When should we do it? How should we do it?
3. Read Galatians 6:2. How can we carry each other's burdens? What might that look like?
4. Read Galatians 6:3-5. When do you notice pride creeping into your life? When are you tempted to compare yourself to others? How can testing your actions combat this?
5. Read Galatians 6:7-9. What could cause us to become weary of doing good? How can we stay the course?
6. Read Galatians 6:10. Where do you have an opportunity to do good this week?

## Think About It

How has your thinking been changed as you've gone through the book of Galatians?

## What Will You Do?

What will you do differently as a result of reading through this book of the Bible?

## Changing Your Mind

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10)*

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