

Galatians 1:1-10 – A Quick Start

The Book of Galatians has been powerfully used by God to change lives. The book delivers a message of freedom from sin, religious legalism and a works mentality through the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14) so the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of grace. Many have tried, and many still try, to distort and pervert the message of the Gospel. The truth of the Gospel must be defended. We should never compromise on the message of the Gospel. We should never try to make it more palatable to appease people. It does not change with the prevailing culture or morals of the time.

Read Galatians 1:1-10.

We are told, with the first word, that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians. What do we know about Paul? Paul was not one of the original “twelve” apostles. How did Paul become an apostle? (1:1)

Who were the churches of Galatia? (1:2)

In Paul’s letters to various churches he identified himself sometimes as an apostle, sometimes as a servant and sometimes with nothing but his name. The recipients of the letter were then identified followed by the common greeting of “grace and peace”. This greeting was usually followed by thanksgiving and prayer for the recipients. Paul deviated somewhat from this normal pattern in his letter to the Galatians. How did it differ? (1:1-6)

What essential elements of the Gospel are contained in Galatians 1-5?

What is the significance of verse 5, “to whom be the glory forever and ever”?

In place of the usual thanksgiving for the churches of Galatia, Paul basically said, “I can’t believe what is going on with you people!” Why did Paul feel an urgent need to write this letter? What was happening in the churches? How serious was the problem? (1:6-9)

What were the Galatians giving up? How were they first called? (1:6)

What was the “other” gospel which is not a gospel at all? Was the gospel preached by Paul and this other gospel compatible? (1:6-9)

What is the true Gospel message? How do people try to change the gospel message today? What do they add to the message? What do they take away from the message?

After Paul moved on from the churches of Galatia certain people came in who agitated the new converts and who perverted the gospel preached by Paul. Is perverting the gospel a misdemeanor or a major crime? What is true of those who pervert the gospel? (1:7-9)

Why is salvation based on works so appealing to people? What was one of the things that the serpent promised Eve if she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? (Genesis 3:5)

Verse 10 implies that one of the accusations leveled at Paul was that he only wanted to gain people’s approval at the expense of the truth. What in Paul’s message would leave him open to this kind of accusation? What was Paul’s evidence that he was not a people pleaser?

How should the church respond to people who are perverting the Gospel of Christ?

Galatians 1:11-2:10 – Defense of Apostleship

The Book of Galatians started out quickly with a brief greeting and then strong statements by Paul that there is one and only one true gospel. Anyone who is preaching something other than the one true gospel is preaching something that is not a gospel at all and is under God's wrath. Just as it was wrong for Israel to worship false God's, so it is wrong for someone to substitute the true gospel for a fake gospel of human invention.

Read Galatians 1:11-24.

What was the origin of Paul's gospel? When did Paul receive the gospel message that he preached? (1:11-12)

According to verses 13-14, what was Paul's background before he received the gospel? Did he previously support circumcision and following the law of Moses?

What happened to Paul which brought about a dramatic change in his life? When did God set Paul apart? Why did God choose Paul? What was God's mission for Paul? (1:15-16)

Where did Paul go after his conversion? Note that Arabia could have referred to an area south of Damascus which also included Damascus. Why did Paul specifically point out that he did not immediately go to Jerusalem? (1:16-17)

Why did Paul need to defend his apostleship? Why did Paul need to defend his gospel? How was Paul's apostleship and his gospel tied together? What do you think some people were saying about Paul to the Galatian churches?

When did Paul first visit Jerusalem after his conversion? Why did Paul go up to Jerusalem? How long was he there? Which leader did Paul see in Jerusalem besides Peter? Which Jerusalem visit does this correspond with in Acts? See Acts 9:26-30, 11:27-30, 12:25, 15:1-30. Where did Paul go after his visit to Jerusalem? See Acts 9:30. Tarsus was in Cilicia. See Acts 11:25-26. Antioch was in Syria. (Galatians 1:18-21)

While Paul was in Cilicia and Syria, what was said about Paul in the churches of Judea? How did the believers respond to the report about Paul's new life in Christ? (1:22-24)

Read Galatians 2:1-10.

When did Paul's second trip to Jerusalem occur? Who went with Paul? Why did Paul go to Jerusalem? Which Jerusalem visit does this correspond with in Acts? (2:1-2)

Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile. Did the leaders in Jerusalem require Titus to be circumcised? Who wanted Titus to be circumcised? Who were these people? What did these people want to do to Paul and his companions? Were these people true believers in Christ? (2:3-4)

How did Paul respond to those who wanted Titus to be circumcised? Why did he take a stand against these Judaizers? What harm would there have been in having Titus circumcised so that there would be peace and unity in the church? When should we take a strong stand in the church on an issue and when should we, above all, keep peace and unity in the church? (2:5)

Who were "those who seemed to be influential" ESV / "those who were of considerable repute" NASB? What did these Jerusalem leaders add to Paul? Why did Paul say "what they were makes no difference to me"? Did Paul show a lack of respect for the divinely appointed apostleship of Peter and John? Wouldn't that hurt his argument? (2:6)

What did James, Peter and John recognize about Paul and his mission? Did Paul ever preach the gospel to Jews? Did Peter ever preach the gospel to Gentiles? (2:7-8)

What sign of approval did James, Peter and John give to Paul and Barnabas? What conclusion did the leaders reach? What was the one instruction that was given to Paul? What was Paul's point in recounting this trip to Jerusalem to meet with the church leaders? (2:9-10)

Galatians 2:11-21 – I do not Nullify the Grace of God

So far in the letter to the Galatians, Paul argued that he was a true apostle who was sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father. The gospel which he preached was given to him directly by God. He did not receive it from any person and he did not learn it in some school or conference. In his second visit to Jerusalem, after his conversion, it was verified by James, Peter and John, that Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles just as Peter was an apostle to the Jews. It was also established that the gospel which Paul preached was the same as Peter preached. He didn't need to add anything to it, like circumcision. There was only one true gospel and Paul was preaching it. He received the gold seal of approval from the top church leaders. Peter and Paul were on the same page until Peter came to Antioch in Gentile territory.

Read Galatians 2:11-14.

When did Peter go to Antioch? Antioch was in Syria. It was populated mostly with Gentiles but there were also Jews living there. Why did Paul confront Peter? Who influenced Peter's inconsistent actions? Who else was influenced by Peter's inconsistency? What motivated Peter's hypocrisy? (2:11-13)

Paul was concerned with more than just table manners. What was at stake? Why did Paul confront Peter publicly instead of privately? (2:14)

How was Peter living like a Gentile? Was Paul living like a Gentile? How was Peter forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews? The word "forcing" is the same word that was used in 2:3 when Titus was not forced to be circumcised. (2:14)

What were the implications if Christian Jews and Gentiles could not eat together?

What would you say to someone who thought that Paul was making a big deal out of nothing? They might point out that Paul was inconsistent or a hypocrite when he had Timothy circumcised.

Read Galatians 2:15-21.

Paul used the word “justify” eight times in Galatians. Paul used the word to indicate how someone is declared righteous in the eyes of God. God is holy and he will not let unrighteous people into his kingdom. The question is how do sinners become justified, or righteous given God’s standard of holiness and perfection? Peter and Paul were both born Jews. How were Peter and Paul justified? While Paul was a pharisee, he sought justification through a different means? Where did Saul, the pharisee, think his justification would come from. Look at John 5:39-40. How are Gentiles justified? (Galatians 2:15-16)

When Paul talked about “works of the law”, what laws were included? Was it just the ceremonial laws like circumcision and dietary regulations? Did it also include moral laws like “do not kill, do not commit adultery”? What would you say to someone who said that following God’s moral law was essential for justification, entering into heaven? (2:16)

One objection to the gospel of “by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone” is that it promotes sin. Why live a good life if you didn’t do anything to earn salvation and you can’t do anything to lose it? The blasphemous charge is that this gospel makes Christ a servant or agent of sin. How does Paul respond to this charge? How would you respond if someone said to you that the gospel of grace promotes sin? (2:17)

Verse 18 talks about tearing down and building up. What had Peter and Paul torn down? In withdrawing from the Gentiles, what had Peter begun to build up again? What were the trouble makers in Galatia trying to get the Gentile believers to build up? What is the result of building up the things which were torn down?

In verse 19, what did Paul mean that he died to the law and that he was crucified with Christ? What in Paul’s former life was now dead to him? Look at Romans 6:3-11. How did Paul describe his new life? (2:19-20)

Verse 21 is a very important verse to understand. How were the trouble makers in Galatia nullifying the grace of God? How does justification by works make Jesus’ death on the cross purposeless and meaningless? I personally find the thought of nullifying the grace of God horrifying. I don’t want to be a party to it. I also don’t want any part of implying that Jesus’ death was meaningless or in vain.

How do people today nullify the grace of God? How do people today make Jesus’ death meaningless?

Galatians 3:1-9 – The True Sons of Abraham

Paul preached the essential and all sufficient cross of Christ. Justification, being declared righteous before God, is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. If anyone teaches “faith plus...” then they are teaching a false gospel and a message of justification by works. Any message involving a works based justification nullifies the grace of God and robs Christ’s death of its meaning, power and purpose. After Paul had told the Galatians about how Peter had muddied the gospel of grace, he turned to the Galatians and their departure from the one true gospel.

Read Galatians 3:1-5.

Paul called the Galatians “foolish”. This is a word which is used in contrast to someone who is wise. The Galatians weren’t thinking. They weren’t using the brains God gave them. How were the Galatians acting foolishly? (3:1)

What did Paul mean when he said that the Galatians were “bewitched”? Who bewitched them? (3:1)

What was the focus of Paul’s preaching? What was the focus of the trouble makers’ teaching? (3:1)

Paul asked the Galatians some questions to engage their minds. How had the Galatians received the Holy Spirit? How did Cornelius, a Gentile, receive the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:44-45? (3:2)

Philippians 1:6 says “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” This verse teaches that God begins the work of salvation and God completes the work. The words “began” and “bring to completion” are the same words, in the original language, that are found in Galatians 3:3. The Galatians began by the Spirit. How were the Galatians trying to complete the work God began in them? (3:3)

How had the Galatians experienced God’s Spirit and power among them? (3:4-5)

Read Galatians 3:6-9.

The Galatians seemed to want to hear about Jewish traditions and history so Paul expounded some Old Testament passages for them. Jews are identified as children of Abraham. As the Jews proudly proclaimed to Jesus in John 8:39, "Abraham is our father." Paul's Old Testament lesson began with Abraham. Paul quoted from Genesis 15:6. How was Abraham counted as righteous? What is the context of Genesis 15:6? What did God promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:4-5? Was God's promise given as a one-way covenant or as a two-way covenant. An example of a one-way covenant is a will. I don't need to perform any work to receive benefits from a will. An example of a two-way covenant is a contract job where I agree to do a specific task and in return I receive a specific amount of money.

The troublemakers were telling the Galatians that they needed to be circumcised before they could be righteous in the eyes of God. Was Abraham declared righteous before or after he received circumcision? See Genesis 17:9-14 and Romans 4:9-12. What is the obvious conclusion from this sequence of events?

According to verse 7, who are the true sons of Abraham? Were Ishmael and Esau physical descendants of Abraham? Were they heirs of the promise given to Abraham? In John 8:44, Jesus said to some Jews who claimed "Abraham is our father" that their father was the devil. He said that the devil was their father because they believed in lies and wanted to kill Jesus. Their behavior was consistent with the devil and not with Abraham.

In verse 8, Paul again quoted Genesis 12:3. What was the gospel which was preached to Abraham?

How can Abraham be our father even if we are not physical descendants of Abraham? (3:9) See Romans 4:16-17.

James 2:21 says "and was not Abraham our father justified by works". James 2:22 says that Abraham's "faith was completed by his works". James 2:24 says "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." How do you reconcile these statements with Galatians? What issue was Paul dealing with? What issue was James dealing with? Luther said that while we are justified by faith alone it is not a faith that is alone. What he meant by that is that true faith produces fruit, or in the terms of James, "works".

Galatians 3:10-20 – Christ Redeemed Us

After appealing to the Galatians personal experience, Paul argued from the scriptures that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith. Abraham was justified by faith. The true children of Abraham are those who have faith just as Abraham had faith. The object of our faith is Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection as preached in the gospel. We believe by the grace of God. Jesus said in John 6:37, “All that the Father gives me will come to me.” God is working in the true believer’s life and God’s work will produce fruit in our lives. As John Calvin said “It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone”.

Read Galatians 3:10-14.

In verse 9, Paul said “So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham”. Verse 10 is a contrast to that statement. What is true of “all who rely on works of the law”? What scripture did Paul quote to support this claim? See Deuteronomy 27:26. What is the context of this quote?

Why is it evident that no one will be justified by the law? What scripture did Paul quote to backup this statement? See Habakkuk 2:4. What would you say to someone who thought that they were “good enough” to be accepted into God’s presence based on their works? (3:11)

How does verse 12 argue against someone who thinks that justification can be by both faith and works? What Old Testament verse did Paul quote in verse 12? See Leviticus 18:5.

We are all lawbreakers and therefore under a curse. How are we freed from the curse? What does the word “redeem” mean? It is also used in 4:5. What scripture is quoted in verse 13? See Deuteronomy 21:23. (Galatians 3:13)

Based on verse 14, what do we receive as a result of Christ’s work on the cross? Do those redeemed by Christ suffer the curse of the law?

Read Galatians 3:15-20.

In verse 15, what type of covenant do you think Paul has in mind? Look at verse 18. What is true of this human covenant once it has been ratified or confirmed?

The word “promise” appears eight times in chapter 3 and twice in chapter 4. Who were the recipients of God’s promises to Abraham? Can Gentiles be the recipients of God’s promises to Abraham? If so, how? (3:16)

When the law was given, hundreds of years later, it did not change or nullify the promises which God gave to Abraham. What is the significance of this statement to the Galatians? (3:17)

What inheritance is Paul talking about in verse 18? How was the inheritance given to Abraham? How does someone receive an inheritance? Someone can try to influence the person making their will by what they say and do but the decision is ultimately up to the person making their will. My siblings said that I was our father’s favorite but we all got an equal share in his inheritance. My “favorite” status did not earn me a larger share of the inheritance. We received our inheritance based on my father’s wishes documented in his last will and testament. See Genesis 22:16-18 for the surety of God’s promise to Abraham.

The obvious question is why did God give the law to the Israelites? Is the law a permanent law? Are parts permanent and other parts temporary? If so, which are permanent and which are temporary? What occurred which brought about the elimination of the temporary parts of the law? How was the delivery of the law different from the giving of the promises to Abraham? (3:19-20)

What is the meaning of verse 20? F. F. Bruce, in his commentary on Galatians, said that there are about 300 interpretations of this verse.

I grew up going to a United Presbyterian Church in Western Pennsylvania. When I went to college and someone asked me what is a Christian, I said that a Christian was someone who followed the teachings of Christ. When they asked me how someone becomes a Christian, I had a harder time answering that question. I thought that Christianity was based on works. Why do you think many people who grow up going to church think that we get to heaven based on what we do or don’t do?

Galatians 3:21-29 – Sons of God

By faith in Jesus Christ we are children of Abraham. Faith brings blessings, justification and the Holy Spirit. The law brings a curse to all who rely on it for justification. Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. The Galatian churches had enjoyed the blessings of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Judaizers wanted to bring the Galatians under the law and therefore bring them under a curse. As Paul said in verse 1, “Oh foolish Galatians”! The question that Paul continued to deal with in 3:21-25 is “why then the law?”

Read Galatians 3:21-25.

The law does not override the promises made to Abraham. The obvious question is “Is the law then against the promises of God?” Paul answers, “No way!” Why isn’t the law opposed to the promises which God gave to Abraham? Ephesians 2:1 says we “were dead through the trespasses and sins”. We are dead and need to be made alive. What did Paul say about the law’s ability to make us alive? (3:21)

In verse 22, what did the Scripture do to “everything”? What does this verse mean?

It was just getting worse for the Galatians. In verse 10, the law put them under a curse. In verse 22, the Scripture imprisoned them under sin. What does the law do in verse 23?

What is the role of the law in verse 24? The word used in this verse has a number of translations: guardian, custodian, schoolmaster, tutor, chaperon, disciplinarian and governess. The original word used is the word from which we get our English word “pedagogue”. We use the word differently. In Paul’s time, the “pedagogue” was usually a slave put in charge to lead a child to and from school. The “pedagogues” were also known to discipline the child assigned to them. Even though the child’s father was a free man, the child took orders and discipline from the “pedagogue”.

John Calvin talked about the three uses of law. First, it is used as a mirror which exposes our sinfulness. Second, it is used to restrain evil. This is the “civil” use of the law. The third use is to reveal the will of God for how we should live. Which of these uses did Paul talk about in chapter 3?

From verse 25, are we now still under the law? Explain.

Read Galatians 3:26-29.

In verse 26, Paul says that “you are all sons of God”. How does someone become a child of God? Does the law make someone a child of God? Does ancestry make someone a child of God? See also John 1:12-13. In John 8, Jesus said that “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (34). The Jews said “Abraham is our father” (39). When pushed they claimed “we have one Father even God” (41) This was the Jews’ identity. Now Paul proclaimed that by faith Gentiles were both children of Abraham and children of God. This happens through faith and not by works.

What does it mean to be baptized into Christ? What does it mean to put on Christ? (3:27)

What is the context of verse 28? What has Paul been focused on for the first three chapters of Galatians? We talk about people using a verse out of context. This verse is one of those verses which certain people love to take out of context. What does verse 28 mean in the context of Galatians? What is the relation between putting on Christ and verse 28?

The abuses of verse 28 are many and varied. What doesn’t verse 28 mean?

How should verse 28 be applied to the church? How should verse 28 be applied to ourselves as individuals?

In verse 29, how are we the seed of Abraham? How do we become heirs? What is our inheritance in Jesus Christ?

Paul’s implied question to the churches of Galatia is, “If, by faith in Christ, you are already children of Abraham, children of God, recipients of the Spirit of God, and heirs of the promises of God what can you possibly gain by being circumcised? The Galatians already had what the Judaizers were trying to sell them without having to go through the obstacle course which the Judaizers had laid out for them.

Galatians 4:1-11 – Heirs not Slaves

Paul laid out a case that what the believer in Christ has is far better than what someone has under the law. Those under the law are under a curse, are imprisoned under sin, are captive under the law and are under a guardian. Those who are in Christ, who trust in Christ alone for justification are both children of Abraham and children of God. They have received the Holy Spirit and are heirs of the promises of God. The Gentiles didn't need circumcision, dietary constraints or attendance at feasts to receive all these blessings. The blessings come through the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. They don't come by works of the law.

Read Galatians 4:1-7.

Chapter 3 ended with “you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”. To begin chapter 4, Paul gave yet another illustration of what it was like to be under the law. How is being under the law like being an underage heir? (4:1-2)

When does the underage heir gain control of the inheritance? (4:2)

In verse 3, who does “we” refer to? Instead of being under guardians and managers, what were “we” enslaved to? The “elementary principles” is a phrase that has generated a lot of thoughts, discussions and interpretations. Some of the other translations for “elementary principles” are “elemental spirits”, “basic principles”, “elements”, “rudiments”, “elemental spiritual forces” and “useless rules”. Paul has been talking about the law. It makes sense that this term is another word tied to the law. How is the law “elementary principles”?

In what sense was Paul, at one time, enslaved to the law? (4:3) See Acts 15:10.

Just as the father of an underage heir appoints a time when the heir will gain full control of the inheritance, so God appointed a time for his children to receive the inheritance. What does verse 4 tell us about that time? God the Father sent his Son. What is the significance that Jesus was born of a woman and born under the law? (4:4)

According to verse 5, why did God send his Son into the world? What does the word redeem mean? See also 3:13.

In verse 4, God sent his Son and then in verse 6 he sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. What is the significance of the word “Abba”? The word is used in a similar way in Romans 8:15b. How is “Abba” different from “father”? When did Jesus use the word “Abba”? See Mark 14:36.

What is true of those whom Christ has redeemed? (4:7)

Read Galatians 4:8-11.

What was true of the Galatians before they knew the one true God? (4:8)

What is the difference between knowing God and being known by God? (4:9) In John 10:14 Jesus said that he was the Good Shepherd and that he knew his own and his own knew him.

What did the Galatians want to return to? (4:9) This is reminiscent of God redeeming the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God freed them from bondage and the oppression of the Egyptians. It didn't take long for some of the people to complain that they wanted to go back to Egypt.

The Judaizers told the Galatians that they needed to be circumcised. Peter came to Antioch and changed his practice of eating with Gentiles. It may be that the Judaizers also insisted on Jewish food customs. From verse 10, what other Jewish customs were the Judaizers getting the Galatians to follow? Why doesn't the church follow these customs today? We also don't relate to God through priests descended from Aaron. We don't offer sacrifices for sin. We don't worship at the temple in Jerusalem (if there was one). Is all the law obsolete? If not, what parts are shadows which have found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ and which are still commands we should follow?

The Judaizers had really shaken the Galatians. What was Paul wondering about the Galatians? Was this a real fear or was it simply hypothetical? (4:11)

Galatians 4:12-23 – Christ Formed in You

The Galatian churches were being persuaded to perform certain works of the law to make them justified in God's eyes. The Judaizers were pushing circumcision, observance of certain food restrictions and observance of special days. Paul pointed out that by doing this the Galatians were going back to being slaves of elementary principles. They were abandoning the Gospel of grace. Reliance on works, no matter what the religion, will never make someone righteous in the eyes of God. Only through faith alone, in Christ alone, by God's grace alone can someone be declared righteous before God. The Galatians were being knocked off course by the Judaizers. Paul was urging them to return to the path of faith in Christ and living for God through God's Spirit which dwells in all true believers.

Read Galatians 4:12-20.

In verse 11, Paul expressed a fear that he had labored over them in vain. In verse 12 Paul addressed them as "brothers". He still believed that he was writing to people who were fellow children of God through faith in Christ. How had Paul become like the Galatians? In what way did the Galatians need to become like Paul? (4:12)

What were the circumstances when Paul first preached the gospel to the Galatians? (4:12-14)

In verse 13, Paul talked about his "bodily ailment". Some other translations have "infirmity of the flesh", "weakness of the flesh", "illness" and "sick". What was Paul's "bodily ailment"? Was it the same as his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Can we definitely know what Paul's "bodily ailment" was when he preached to the Galatians? There have been many diagnoses.

How did the Galatians receive Paul when he first preached to them? Given Paul's physical condition, what would be the natural response to Paul? Describe the Galatians' level of commitment to Paul. (4:14-15)

What made the Galatians change their view of Paul? What was the real motive of the Judaizers in trying to persuade the Galatians to their legalistic ways? (4:16-17)

What does verse 18 mean?

What does Paul wish he could do to fix the problem in the Galatian churches? How were the Galatians like his children? What does Paul want to see happen in the lives of the Galatians? (4:19-20)

Read Galatians 4:21-26.

If Galatians 4:21-31 was written today it might contain the legal disclaimer “don’t try this at home”. Paul once again challenged the Galatians to learn from the law which bears witness to Christ. It reminds me of when Jesus would say “have you never read”. This passage makes a lot of people nervous. Paul used the word “allegory” which was a bad word to the reformers. People like Origen believed that there was a deeper, “spiritual” meaning to passages. For example, in Numbers 33:5, “So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth.” (ESV), Origen would give meaning to the names “Rameses” and “Succoth” and draw a deep spiritual message which the modern day readers could apply to their lives. This allegorical method of interpretation was rejected by the reformers. They did recognize types of Christ in the Old Testament but only believed those types could be identified if they were mentioned in the New Testament. For instance, 1 Corinthians 5:7b says "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." (ESV) It is fine to talk about Christ, our Passover lamb, since that phrase is mentioned in the New Testament, but to see any of the details of the Passover as pointing to Christ would be allegorizing the text, according to the reformers. Not all reformed people are that strict with types. But, we must always be careful not to go too far.

When Paul said “do you not hear the law”, Paul used “law” not in the narrower sense of “the law of Moses” but in the broader sense of “scripture”. Who were the first two sons of Abraham? Who were their mothers? Describe the circumstances of these two sons’ births. (4:21-23) See Genesis 16:1-6 and Genesis 21:1-12. Genesis 21:1b-2a "and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age". (ESV)

Compare verses 22-23 to what Paul already said about how Abraham was justified and about who are the true children of Abraham.

Verses 22-23 are historical fact from the book of Genesis. In 4:24-31, Paul went from historical fact to an “allegory”. At the end of the chapter, Paul drew application from the “allegory”. We will discuss these verses next time.

What is the difference between application and interpretation? How many correct interpretations are there for a passage? How many applications can there be for a passage?

Galatians 4:24-5:6 – Christ Has Set You Free

Many people like the idea of justification by works because it puts them in control. What Paul would say to these people is that they are under constant pressure to keep all the law all the time. This overwhelming and impossible responsibility was described by Paul as a prison, enslavement and like being a child who needs constant supervision. God gives us eternal life, by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ frees us from the prison of law and sets us free to love God and love others as God has loved us. We seek to serve God, not out of fear or a superiority complex, but from a changed heart. We are now true children of God and his Spirit dwells in us. People's sinful natures are offended at hearing that freedom is freely given by God and does not depend on our feeble efforts to "be good". When we truly understand the grace of God, instead of being resentful, we are immensely and eternally thankful.

Read Galatians 4:21-31.

Last time, we covered the historical part of Paul's lesson from the Old Testament. (4:21-23) In verse 24, Paul used Hagar and Sarah as representatives of two covenants and the people who are under these covenants. What are the two covenants? Which covenant does Hagar represent? Why is Hagar associated with Mount Sinai? (4:24)

Why does Hagar correspond to the Jerusalem of Paul's time? (4:25)

Sarah is not mentioned by name but it is clear that she is the representative of the other covenant. Which covenant does Sarah represent? How does she correspond to the "Jerusalem above"? (4:26)

What scripture is quoted in verse 27? See Isaiah 54:1. What is the significance of this verse in the context of Isaiah?

In verse 28, according to Paul, were those in the Galatian churches Isaacs or Ishmaels? Were the Judaizers Isaacs or Ishmaels? What application did Paul draw from the account of Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael? (4:29-30) What scripture was quoted by Paul in verse 30? See Genesis 21:10. What was the application for the Galatians?

In verse 31, what is the conclusion of this allegory?

Ismael	Isaac
A son of Abraham	A son of Abraham
Circumcised	Circumcised
Born of an Egyptian slave – Hagar	Born of Abraham’s wife – Sarah
Abraham’s first-born	Abraham’s second-born
A normal birth – mother was younger and not barren	A birth by the power of God – mother was 90 and had been barren
Result of human effort to try to bring about God’s promise but it was not the birth promised by God	Result of the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham years earlier
Was kicked out of the family and did not receive an inheritance	Was Abraham’s heir
His descendants were Gentiles	His son, Jacob, became the namesake of the nation of Israel

Read Galatians 5:1-6.

In verse 1, Paul made a tremendous proclamation. Christ has set us free. What are we freed from? What exhortation did Paul give to the Galatians based on this proclamation of freedom? (5:1)

What harm would it do if the Gentile Christians received circumcision? What four consequences would there be for someone who received circumcision so that they could “be saved”? What does it mean that Christ would not be an advantage for them? What does it mean to be severed from Christ? Why would someone who received circumcision be obligated to keep the rest of the law? What does it mean to fall away from grace? (5:2-4)

Is Paul saying that a true Christian can lose their salvation? To draw this conclusion from verses 2-4 is to read into Paul’s words out of fear or guilt. Paul clearly is saying that there is only one way by which we can be justified. We are not justified before God by faith and works. Someone who is justified by faith alone in Christ alone is a true child of God. Anyone who seeks to be justified by works is under a curse and is subject to God’s wrath. What verses clearly speak to the eternal security of the true believer? See John 6:37-40, 10:27-29.

In verse 5, do we work for righteousness or wait for righteousness? What is the difference between our righteousness now and our righteousness after our bodily resurrection? How do we wait for this future righteousness? (4:5)

Were the Christians who were circumcised better than the Christians who were not circumcised? Why or why not? (4:6)

How did Paul characterize true saving faith in verse 6? What does a loving, working faith look like?

Galatians 5:2-12 – Circumcision or Christ?

It is interesting to note the similarities between John 8 and Galatians 3 and 4. Jesus proclaimed to a number of Pharisees that they would be free if they continued in his word. When they objected to the idea that they were not free, they sighted that they were descendants of Abraham and therefore already free. Jesus told them that they were slaves to sin. When pressed, these Pharisees claimed “we have one Father, even God”. Jesus instead told them that they were children of the devil. They were slaves, they were not true children of Abraham and they were not children of God. In Paul’s words, the Pharisees were Ishmaels and not Isaacs just like anyone who chose law over Christ.

Read Galatians 5:1-6.

What harm would it do if the Gentile Christians received circumcision? What four consequences would there be for someone who received circumcision so that they could “be saved”? What does it mean that Christ would not be an advantage for them? Why would someone who received circumcision be obligated to keep the rest of the law? What does it mean to be severed from Christ? What does it mean to fall away from grace? (5:2-4)

Is Paul saying that a true Christian can loose their salvation? To draw this conclusion from verses 2-4 is to read into Paul’s words something that may come from personal fear or guilt and not from the text. Paul clearly is saying that there is only one way by which we can be justified. We are not justified before God by faith and works. Someone who is justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, is a true child of God. Anyone who seeks to be justified by works is under a curse and is subject to God’s wrath. What verses clearly speak to the eternal security of the true believer? See John 6:37-40, 10:27-29.

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How did Paul characterize true saving faith in verse 6? What does a loving, working faith look like?

Read Galatians 5:7-12.

In verse 7, how did Paul describe the Galatians' early life in Christ? Paul wanted to know who hindered them from obeying the truth. The word "hindered" is the same word that Paul used when he talked about Satan hindering him from seeing the Thessalonians. (1 Thessalonians 2:18)

The Gentile Christians in Galatia were being persuaded by the Judaizers to be circumcised. Who called the Galatians? Where did this evil influence come from? (5:8)

In verse 9, Paul didn't decide to all of a sudden give a cooking lesson. What is the point of "a little leaven leavens the whole lump"? See also 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

At times in this letter Paul expressed his concern about the Galatians. What is Paul confident of with regard to the Galatian believers? What is true of those who agitate the Galatians? (5:10)

It seems that the trouble makers were saying that Paul still preached circumcision. How would Paul's life had been different if he was still a pharisee preaching circumcision? Why is the cross an offense or stumbling block? (5:11)

Verse 12 answers the question, "Paul, tell us how you really feel about these Judaizers who were unsettling the Galatians." What did Paul want to happen to the Judaizers? Was he speaking figuratively or literally?

Sin is very deceitful. Why would someone think that receiving circumcision would impress God to the point where God would declare that person righteous? That person doesn't understand God. That person doesn't know God. More importantly, God doesn't know that person. God will say to them, "goat, go and join the other goats". God the Father sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die for his sheep, to shed his own blood, and become a curse for us. How is a sheep of God going to diminish all that Christ has done by saying "look at me, I got circumcised." God is not impressed. Paul felt confident in the Lord that the Galatians would reject the Judaizers' false teaching and continue to run well once again.

Galatians 5:13-21 – Walk by the Spirit

Paul made it clear that the Galatians needed to choose Christ or choose circumcision. They could not choose both. They could either be declared righteous in the eyes of God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone or they could attempt to be declared righteous based on their own pathetic “good works”. Adding any requirement to justification, apart from faith in Christ, has dire consequences. Christ will be of no benefit to you. You will need to follow all the law all the time. You will be cut off from Christ. You will not receive God’s grace. Paul was confident in God that God would turn the Galatians away from legalism and get them back to living a life of faith and love through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:13-15.

What is a common objection that people have to the idea that we are justified by God’s grace and not our own works? How do they react to the idea that we did nothing to earn our righteous standing before God?

Up to this point in the letter, Paul’s focus had mostly been on legalism. Christ set the Galatians free. They shouldn’t return to being slaves under the law. For the rest of chapter 5, Paul turned his attention to a different abuse of freedom. What was that abuse? Christ freed us from slavery to law and sin. But now we are a different type of slave or servant. What is our new focus as servants? (5:13)

In verses 13 and 14 Paul used words that he had previously used in a negative way and here he used them in a positive way. Slavery to sin and law is bad. Serving (slaving for) one another is good. Being under the yoke of the law is bad but fulfilling the law is good. In verse 14, what Old Testament passage did Paul quote? What is the meaning of this passage? Jesus mentioned this as the second (great) command. What was the first? See Matthew 22:35-40, Mark 12:28-31.

Based on verse 15, what was happening in the Galatian churches? What do you think might have been the cause of this?

What are some of the results of a legalistic or works mentality? What might we expect to see in a church where this exists?

Read Galatians 5:16-21.

In verse 16, what is the antidote for sinful living? What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? Only one major English translation, the RSV, translates the second part as a command “do not gratify the desires of the flesh”. All the other major English translations understand the second part of the verse as a promise. Why is “you will not gratify” properly understood as a promise and not a command “do not gratify”? (5:16-17)

What does Paul mean by “the flesh” in this context? Flesh and Spirit are opposed to each other. Why is that true? What is the result of this opposition? (5:17)

Based on verse 18, what is true of those who are led by the Spirit? Paul’s point will become clearer later in the chapter.

What are some examples of the works of the flesh? (5:19-21)

I don’t have chapter and verse on each vice, but I would guess that most or all of these vices are forbidden in the Old Testament. Did those under the law ever break these laws? Does the law ensure perfect obedience of those who are under the law?

What is true of those who practice these works of the flesh? Can a true believer sin? Have you ever know a Christian who says that they never sin? Does a true believer “lose their salvation” if they commit any of these works of the flesh? How is this statement not contradictory to Paul’s argument that justification is by faith in Christ and not by keeping the law? (5:21)

Have you ever heard the term “carnal Christian” used? Can a carnal / fleshly Christian truly exist? How can someone who is born from above and given the indwelling Holy Spirit continue to live the same old sinful life they did before “they were saved”? Was this person every truly born from above / born of the Spirit?

Galatians 5:22-6:5 – Fruit of the Spirit

For those who are in Christ, there is a constant battle between the flesh and the Spirit. This battle continues until the day we die. Our old nature and our new nature are in opposition to each other. When we walk by the Spirit, our old nature opposes us. When we give in to our old nature, the Spirit opposes us. Galatians 5:19-21 listed some works of the flesh. These works of the flesh flow out of the old nature. The works of the flesh do not characterize those who are children of God. Now, in contrast to the works of the flesh we will look at the fruit of the Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:22-26.

How is the fruit of the Spirit different from the gifts of the Spirit? Should believers in Christ exhibit some or all of the fruit of the Spirit? Why is love first in the list? (5:22)

What is joy? Does it mean feeling happy and upbeat all the time? How are we able to rejoice always? See Philippians 4:4-7. What is the source of our peace? See Romans 5:1. Is this peace with God or peace with those around us or both? (Galatians 5:22)

How do patience, kindness and goodness affect a person's interactions with others? (5:22)

Why is faithfulness important? Is gentleness a sign of weakness? Self-control was a word used of controlling sexual desires. See 1 Corinthians 7:8-9. It can also refer to self-control in other areas of life. (5:22-23)

What does Paul mean by "against such things there is no law"? (5:23)

In verse 24, the reason why those who belong to Christ Jesus are not characterized by the works of the flesh is that they have "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires". In 2:20, Paul said "I have been crucified with Christ." What does it mean to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires?

Verse 25 reminds us of Paul's question in 3:3, "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" ESV. In 5:16, Paul exhorted the Galatians to "walk by the Spirit". In verse 25, Paul used a different word for "walk". The word here could be translated "follow" the Spirit or "walk by rule of" the Spirit. How do verses 22-25 argue against the charge that justification by faith alone, in Christ alone will lead to sinful and loose living?

In verse 26, Paul probably didn't pull these three prohibitions out of thin air? What was happening in the Galatian churches? Why do you think it was happening?

Read Galatians 6:1-5.

What is the situation described in verse 1? Who is to take action? What is the goal of the action? How is the action to be performed? What warning is given to those who restore a brother who has sinned? (6:1)

When someone is found to have sinned, does it need to go beyond the offender and offended parties? See Matthew 18:15-20.

In what ways can we bear one another's burdens? What is the "law of Christ"? (6:2)

What is the remedy for thinking we are something when we are nothing? See Titus 1:10 for another example of those who are deceivers. (6:3)

How should we test our own work? What happens when we compare our works to others? What should be the basis for our boasting? (6:4)

How is the "load" of verse 5 different from the "burden" of verse 2? What does it mean that each of us need to bear our own load? (6:5)

Galatians 6:2-10 – Sowing and Reaping

Those who are the true children of God are those who are born of God, born from above, born of the Spirit. These births are not three different births. They are three different ways to describe someone who becomes a child of God. The spiritual birth is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We are made spiritually alive by God. God gives us his Spirit to indwell all who are his adopted children. Paul said in 5:25, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” The word “walk” here is different from the word “walk” in 5:16 “But I say, walk by the Spirit.” The word “walk” in verse 25 is a less common word which could be translated “follow” or “be in harmony with”. Walking by the Spirit (5:16), being led by the Spirit (5:18) and following the Spirit (5:25) manifests itself by the fruit of the Spirit. It puts to death the desires of the flesh. It enables us to love one another as Christ loved us.

Read Galatians 6:1-5.

In what ways can we bear one another’s burdens? What is the “law of Christ”? (6:2)

Verse 3 talks about those who think they are something when they are nothing. How does this self deceit affect them? In other words, what does this false sense of importance prevent them from doing? See Titus 1:10 for another example of those who are deceivers.

How should we test our own work? What happens when we compare our works to others? What should be the basis for our boasting? (6:4)

How is the “load” of verse 5 different from the “burden” of verse 2? Both verses include the same word “bear”. What does it mean that each of us needs to bear our own load? (6:5)

Read Galatians 6:6-10.

What should those who are taught the word do for those who teach the word? (6:6) What other verses in the Bible speak to this principle? See 1 Corinthians 9:6-12 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

Verse 7 talks about the principle of sowing and reaping. Jesus used the words “sowing” and “reaping” to teach his disciples spiritual truths. Paul also used the words “sowing” and “reaping” to teach spiritual truths. What is the meaning of verse 7? How is this verse misused?

How does someone sow to their own flesh? What is their harvest? In the Galatian churches, who were especially guilty of sowing to their own flesh? How does someone sow to the Spirit? What is the harvest when someone sows to the Spirit? Is Paul talking about justification, sanctification or both? (6:8)

In verse 9, Paul encouraged the believers not to grow weary of doing good? What can make us weary of doing good? “Doing good” implies good deeds. Here again we see that although our good deeds don’t save us, we are to be engaged in good deeds as a result of our new life in Christ. What are some examples of good deeds that we can do for others?

What is the promise for those who do not grow weary of doing good? (6:9)

When should we do good deeds for others? Who are the recipients of our good deeds? (6:10)

If a non-Christian had a need and a member of our church had a need and there was only enough money to help one person, which person should we help? (6:10)

The book of Galatians lays out a defense of the one true Gospel. The one true Gospel is centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are declared righteous in the eyes of God when, by God’s grace alone, we, though faith alone, accept the righteousness of Christ alone as the basis for our justification. This leaves no room for our own works. Our works have no part in our justification. It also leaves no room for boasting about what we did. We didn’t do anything to earn our justification. Our justification is for God’s glory alone. Who do you think will do more good deeds? Will someone who is justified by faith in Christ do more good deeds or will someone who thinks they can work their way to heaven do more good deeds?

Galatians 6:11-18 – Boasting in the Cross

While Paul made it clear that we are not justified by works, those who are justified through faith alone in Christ alone are engaged in good works. The one who lives by the Spirit and follows the Spirit will love others. The love for others manifests itself in good works. The good work may be to restore a brother who is caught in a transgression. It may be to weep with someone who has lost a loved one. It may be to give money, food or shelter to someone in need. The good work may involve giving financially to support the work of Christ's church. The fruit of the spirit can manifest itself in many ways. No law should restrict or confine the good work of the Spirit.

Read Galatians 6:11-18.

Why was Paul writing in big letters? (6:11)

Why did the Judaizers want to force the Gentile Christians to be circumcised? What two motives were mentioned in verse 12?

Why would insisting on circumcision protect the Judaizers from being persecuted? What is the relationship between preaching circumcision and preaching Christ crucified? (6:12)

Verse 13 revealed a third motivation for the Judaizers to insist that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised. What was the motive? Why were the Judaizers hypocrites?

What was the object of Paul's boasting? Why was the cross so offensive in Paul's day? Is the message of the cross still offensive in our day? Why are people offended about the cross now? (6:14)

I have never been to a church where they boasted about how many people had been circumcised. What are some fleshly things that Christians boast about today as opposed to boasting in the cross of Christ?

What does it mean to have the world crucified to us and us crucified to the world? (6:14)

Paul's letter to the Galatian churches warned them over and over again that the Gentile Christians should not be circumcised. Who had the advantage in the church, the circumcised or the uncircumcised? What was far more important than circumcision? (6:15)

In verse 15, what does it mean to be a new creation? Where else did Paul use this term "new creation"? See 2 Corinthians 5:16-18, 21.

What "rule" was Paul referring to in verse 16? What did Paul pronounce on all who walked by this rule? The "walk" of verse 16 is the same word as the "walk" in 5:25 (If we live by the Spirit let us also walk by the Spirit). It means to "follow" the rule, to "be in harmony with" the rule.

"The Israel of God" has produced a lot of debate. What group of people do you think Paul was referring to when he said "Israel of God"? Notice that this exact phrase does not appear anywhere else in the Bible. "God of Israel" is used about 200 times in the Old Testament but the phrase "Israel of God" is not used anywhere but here. ESV and many others have "and upon the Israel of God". The older RSV did not include the word "and". The NIV has a dash in place of "and". "And" can connect two different groups or it can be used in an explanatory sense "upon all who walk by this rule, **that is** upon the Israel of God". The old RSV, the NIV, along with some other translations understand the word "and" in this verse to be used in an explanatory way. (6:16)

What marks did Paul bear on his body? How were these marks the marks of Christ? (6:17)

What significance do you find in Paul's final words to end the letter? What words did he use which were emphasized in the letter? (6:18)

Galatians Review

In chapters 1 and 2, Paul defended his apostleship and his gospel as both given to him directly by God. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul laid out the doctrine of justification through faith alone in Christ alone. He used scripture, everyday illustrations, and the Galatians' own personal experiences to make his case. In chapters 5 and 6 Paul expounded on the application of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. When God justifies us by His grace, through faith in Christ, we are made alive spiritually and God gives us his Spirit to dwell in us. We have a new spiritual birth. We live by the Spirit and we are to follow the Spirit and be in harmony with the Spirit. By doing this we will manifest the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit results in loving others and doing good to all whether that means restoring a brother caught in sin, bearing another's burden, giving to support the work of the church or tirelessly sowing good deeds with the hope of reaping eternal rewards. We need to be about the business of boasting in the cross of Christ and glorifying God alone.

Grace Alone

1:6 God called the Galatian believers "in the grace of Christ".

1:15 Paul was set apart before he was born and he was called by God's grace

2:21 Anyone who claims that they are justified by their own works nullifies the grace of God and makes Christ's death on the cross a vain / purposeless / ineffective act. Justification by works and justification by grace are mutually exclusive. Only one leads to eternal life and that is justification by God's grace alone. I don't know how Paul could have stated this principle any more clearly. This verse colors how I understand other Bible passages. I am not afraid of going before God's judgment seat and having God say, "you didn't give yourself enough credit for your own justification and you gave me too much credit. Give yourself a pat on the back." I just don't see that happening! On the other hand, I would be terrified to hear God say to me "why did you take credit for your own justification when you had nothing to do with it? Why did you rob me of the glory that was due to me?"

5:4 Those who seek to be justified by the law have "fallen away from grace".

6:18 Paul closed his letter with "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

Faith Alone

2:16 We are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

3:2, 5 Paul asked the Galatians how they received the Spirit and how the Spirit worked miracles among them. It was a multiple choice question. A) By works of the law. B) by hearing with faith. Hopefully it was a rhetorical question. The Galatians should have all got the answer right, "B) by hearing with faith".

3:6 Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

3:7, 9 Those of faith are the sons of Abraham and they are blessed with Abraham, the man of faith.

3:8 God's plan to justify the Gentiles by faith was revealed to Abraham by the words, "in you shall all the nations be blessed."

3:11 "The just shall live by faith" quoted from Habakkuk 2:4.

3:12 The law is not of faith.

3:14 We receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

3:26 All who are in Christ Jesus are sons of God through faith.

5:5 Through the Spirit by faith we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. We don't work for righteousness. We wait for righteousness.

5:6 In Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count for anything. What matters is faith working through love. True faith is a faith that works.

Christ Alone

1:3,4 Jesus gave himself for our sins to deliver us.

2:16 Peter, Paul and other Jews believed in Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

3:13,14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us by "hanging on a tree". As a result of Christ's work on the cross, the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles and we receive the promised Spirit.

3:22 The promise, given to Abraham and his Seed, is given to those who believe by faith in Jesus Christ.

3:26 Being in Christ, we are sons of God.

3:29 If we are Christ's then we are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise.

5:1 For freedom Christ set us free.

6:14 Paul boasted in the cross of Christ alone.

6:18 The grace we have is from our Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:16, "and from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace".

According to the Scripture Alone

3:6 quoted Genesis 15:6, Abraham "believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness".

3:8 quoted Genesis 12:3, "In you shall all the nations be blessed".

3:10 quoted Deuteronomy 27:26, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them".

3:11 quoted Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by faith".

3:12 quoted Leviticus 18:5, "He who does them [works of law] shall live by them".

3:13 quoted Deuteronomy 21:23, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree".

3:16 quoted Genesis 12:7, 13:15, 17:7, 24:7, "and to your offspring [seed]".

4:21-31 drew from Genesis 16:1-6 and Genesis 21:1-12 to show who are the true children of promise and who are children of slavery.

4:27 quoted Isaiah 54:1, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;..."

To God's Glory Alone

1:4, 5 To God be the glory for our deliverance from the present evil age.

6:13, 14 The Judaizers gloried in the flesh. Paul gloried in the cross of Christ.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone leaves no room for me to boast about what I did to "get saved". All glory is to God alone. If justification was by works then there might be room for boasting in what we have done. Justification through faith alone is based on Christ's work on the cross and God's grace toward us. Grace leaves no room for boasting. Grace means that we didn't earn it. We are only left to say, "To God be the glory."