

Galatians

By Ross Callaghan

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Author: The apostle Paul. Paul's Roman name *Paulus* means "little". His Hebrew name *Saul* means "asked for". See Acts 13:9.

Type: General epistle (letter) written for distribution among the churches in Galatia.

Written to: *The churches in Galatia*.1:2. Galatia was a Roman province in Asia Minor (today's Turkey).



In the letter Paul doesn't name the churches he is writing to. He just calls them *the churches in Galatia*. There are two theories on which churches he was referring to:

1. The North Galatian theory. The traditional theory says that the letter was written to churches in the northern part of the province, traditionally called Galatia. The people there were mainly Gauls who had had settled in the north after invading the area in the third century BC. There is no mention in Acts of Paul visiting this area on his missionary journeys. According to this theory Galatians was written between AD 53 and 57 in Ephesus or Macedonia.

2. The South Galatian theory. This theory says Galatians was written to churches in the southern part of the province - Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, These cities were not geographically in Galatia but were still considered to be part of the province politically. Paul had founded these churches on his first missionary journey and visited them again on his second and third missionary journeys. See 2 Timothy 3:11, Acts 13:13-14-28, 15:36-16:10,18:23. Some followers of this theory think that Galatians was written in Syrian Antioch in AD 48-49, after Paul's first journey and before the Jerusalem council meeting. Others say that Galatians was written in Syrian Antioch or Corinth after the second missionary journey which would mean it was written between AD 51 and 53.

Purpose

Galatians addresses one of the most difficult issues that faced the early church: "Should Christians follow the Jewish law and submit to traditional Jewish practices like circumcision"?

Paul was a Jew, and most of the first Christian converts were Jews. As they travelled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the gospel they first went to the Jewish communities which were present in most towns. (Jews formed about 10% of the total population of the Roman Empire). As a result many Jews became Christians.

Many of the Jews who rejected the gospel became very antagonistic, so much so that they were called “enemies” of the gospel. *As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.* Romans 11:28. Acts Chapters 13-25 show how the early church preached the gospel successfully to many Jews but faced consistent and powerful persecution from Jewish mobs. Paul, in particular, was often in dangerous situations and this led him to focus his missionary endeavours on the Gentiles, rather than on the Jews. He became the *Apostle to the Gentiles*. Galatians 2:8.

Then a group developed amongst the Jewish Christians called the Judaizers. They taught that the practices of the Old Testament Jewish law (including circumcision) were still binding on the New Testament church. They argued that Paul was not an authentic apostle and that he had tried to make the gospel more appealing to Gentiles by removing the Jewish legal requirements.

Paul responded by stating that he was appointed as an apostle by God Himself, and that the gospel he preached was the only true gospel. Adding anything to it like works of the law, was a perversion of the gospel of grace and would bring people into the bondage of legalism. It is by grace through faith alone that people are saved, and it is by faith alone that they are to live out their new life in the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians is a powerful declaration of the essential New Testament truth that people are able to come into right relationship with God (justification) only by faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing less and nothing more! We can never be saved by carrying out legalistic or religious works. Salvation and relationship with God only come by putting our faith in Jesus Christ and by obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And all of this is by God’s grace and power!

The rediscovery of these basic truths brought about the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s. Galatians is often referred to as “Luther’s book,” because Martin Luther used it so much in challenging the theology and legalism of the Roman Catholic Church of his day.

Key verses

So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified. Galatians 2:16.

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28.

It is for freedom that Christ Jesus has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1.

Live by the Spirit.... If you are led by the Spirit you are not under law.... The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:16, 18, 22,23, 25.

Key message: freedom in Christ

Galatians has been called the “Charter of Christian freedom”. It shows how we can have freedom in Christ so that we are not in bondage to anything, and are free to fulfill all that God has for us.

It is for freedom that Christ Jesus has set us free. Galatians 5:1.

And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. John 8:32.

If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed. John 8:36.

But what does it mean to be *free indeed*? What is this freedom that we can have in Christ? The Greek word is *eleútheros* – free, liberated, not in slavery or bondage, not under obligation, delivered from restraint, unshackled: free to realize your destiny in Christ.

Unfortunately, persecution of the early Church by Jews fuelled prevailing anti-Semitic attitudes and, tragically, was used to justify atrocities against the Jews in later centuries. (Often based on 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

But, Jesus taught us to *love our neighbour as ourselves* (Matthew 19:19). We are to love Jews (and all peoples); pray for them, and seek to share the gospel with them so they can find salvation in Christ Jesus.



Freedom in Christ has two aspects:

- Freedom from bondage to sin, selfishness, satan, others, legalism, culture, circumstances, fears, The keys to coming into this kind of freedom are to **believe the truth of God's Word**, and **live in a Christ-like way**. Galatians shows us how to do each of these!
- Freedom to embrace all that God has for us. The key to coming into this kind of freedom is to **be obedient to the Holy Spirit**. Again, Galatians shows us how.

It is for freedom that Christ Jesus has set us free. Galatians 5:1.

Outline

Introduction 1:1-5

Paul opens Galatians in a more abrupt way than his other letters. He is going to say some harsh things to the Galatians so he begins by establishing his authority to speak into their lives. He says he is an apostle *sent not with a human commission nor by human authority, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead*.

The term 'apostle' would have been familiar to Paul's readers. An apostle is someone who is specially commissioned and sent out. Paul says that He was commissioned and sent not by people, or by his own authority. He was commissioned and sent by the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. i.e. by God Himself. Because he has this authority the Galatians and all who read his letter (including us) had better note carefully what Paul is saying!

The letter comes from Paul *and all the brothers and sisters with me* and is addressed *to the churches in Galatia*. The issues Paul deals with in the letter, while especially for the Galatians, are relevant for Christians anywhere and at any time.

Paul completes his introduction with a blessing. He sends the Galatians *grace (charis) and peace (eirene – equivalent to the Hebrew shalom) which come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father*.

Paul was a Jew so it was natural for him to finish his blessing with a reverential "berakhah" for God: *to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen*.

Another gospel 1:6-10

Paul is astonished that the Galatians are *so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all*.

They had been *thrown into confusion* by some who were trying to *pervert the gospel of Christ* but Paul strongly affirms that the gospel he preached to them was the only true gospel. If anyone even an *angel from heaven* should preach a different gospel let them *be eternally condemned (or come under God's curse)*.

The way we conduct our Christianity today is very different to that of the early Christians. Our focus is often on Church services, buildings, meetings and organisations. Is it possible that we too have *another gospel*?

These are strong words! Paul is saying that the gospel he preached is the only true gospel and that any other so-called "gospel" is *no gospel at all*

Paul defines the gospel in Romans 1:16-17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

The gospel (Greek *euangelion* – good news) is *the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*.

How can a Jew be saved? How can a Gentile be saved? How can anyone be saved?

Through Jesus Christ! The only way someone can be saved is to truly put their faith in Jesus Christ. When they do this they are declared righteous in God's sight and are able to have fellowship with God. They become a child of God and inherit eternal life. What good news!

Nothing else is required! Not circumcision. Not adherence to the Jewish law (as the Judaizers were teaching). Not good works. Not religious observances. Jesus alone is the way to salvation!

Paul attacked the "gospel" of the Judaizers because the new believers were *deserting the One who called them by the grace of Christ*. They were losing the freedom they had found in Christ and were going back into a legalistic, religious system.

Paul had every reason to be concerned because exactly what he preached against came to pass over the following centuries. Christianity went from being a group of believers focused on relationship with God, and on bringing others into that relationship, to a worldwide religion built around a church organisation that had enormous power over peoples' lives, and over the course of history.

The concept of 'Church' as an organisation is quite different from the original meaning of the word *ekklesia*:

Ekklēsia – from *ek*, "out from and to" and *kalēō*, "to call") – properly, people *called out from* the world and to God, the *outcome* being the *Church* (the mystical *body of Christ*) – i.e. the universal (total) body of believers whom God calls *out* from the world and *into* His eternal kingdom. (Strongs).

Read through your New Testament and you simply won't find the kind of church-based religion we have today. In the New Testament Christianity was about:

- Sharing the gospel.
- Living in the Kingdom of God – i.e. living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This includes relationship aspects like
 - repentance from sin and living in righteousness
 - prayer without ceasing
 - hearing and obeying the Word of the Lord as revealed by the Holy Spirit
 - loving and worshipping God in all aspects of life
 - loving others, demonstrated by sacrificial giving and serving
- Being prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said *You will know the truth and the truth will set you free*. John 8:32. Living out these foundational truths are what will take you out of bondage and set you free.

Freedom is found in Jesus Christ, not in any religious system! *If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed!* John 8:36.

Paul's vindicates his apostleship 1:11–2:14

Paul now gives an extensive defence of his apostleship and of the gospel he had preached to them.

Paul's gospel was *not something that man made up*. He did not *receive it from any man*, nor was he *taught it*; rather he *received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*.

The process by which Paul received his gospel was:

- Saul (or Paul) was a Jew who was *advanced in Judaism beyond many Jews of his own age*. He was *extremely zealous for the traditions of the fathers*, so much so that he *intensely persecuted the church of God, and tried to destroy it*. See Acts 8:1-3.
- Saul was converted on the road to Damascus when *God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles*.

Saul was then *filled with the Holy Spirit* and spent several days with the disciples at Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. He grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. The great Jewish scholar and leader had become a Christian! Immediately radical Jews conspired to kill him – a situation that Paul had to endure for the rest of his life. Paul then moved to Jerusalem and began building relationships with the Church leaders there. Some of the Grecian Jews tried to kill him so Saul was sent to Caesarea, and then to his home town of Tarsus. See Acts 9:1-31.

- Paul then went *into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. After three years he went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days.* At this stage Paul was not well known by the churches in Judea. *They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they praised God* because of him.
- Fourteen years later *Paul went up again to Jerusalem*, this time with Barnabas and Titus. He went *in response to a revelation* and set before the church the gospel that he was to preach among the Gentiles. He did this to make sure that his gospel was valid and that he was not *running or had run my race in vain.* The matter of circumcision arose because *some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.* Paul would *not give in to them for a moment*, and the church leaders added nothing to Paul’s message, and *recognised that Paul had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.* God was just as much at work *in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews* as He was at work in Paul’s *ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.* The church leaders (James, Peter and John) gave Paul *the right hand of fellowship* and agreed that Paul should *go the Gentiles and they to the Jews.* *All they asked is that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*

Paul opposes Peter’s hypocrisy 2:11-14

Paul has shown that his gospel came from God, not from men, and that his calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles also came from God, not men. Both were validated by the other leading apostles.

He now describes how he opposed Peter’s hypocrisy in not eating with Gentiles when a group of Jews arrived. This is used to strengthen Paul’s position as an apostle. *When Peter came to Antioch Paul opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.* Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles when certain men arrived because *he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.* Other Jews joined Peter in his hypocrisy and even Barnabas was led astray. Paul confronted Peter in front of them all by saying *“You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”*

This challenge to Peter sets the scene for the doctrinal part of the letter in which Paul describes the true gospel, and how it brings freedom.

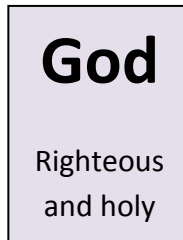
These days Christians have lots of different interpretations of the Bible and a wide range of different beliefs about the gospel. How can we know whether what we believe is the true gospel? Paul established the truth of his gospel by showing:

- It was God’s Word because it came by God’s revelation
- It was tested and validated by Church leaders
- It was not influenced by his own self interest
- It stood up to challenges from those who were self-seeking
- It brought honour to Jesus
- It resulted in freedom for those who embraced it.

Does everything we believe meet these standards?

Justification is by faith, not by law 2:15-21

Paul now introduces his central issue: how can someone have a relationship with God? God is holy and cannot have fellowship with sinful people, so how can people be justified i.e. become righteous and be able to relate to God? Is it by trying to keep the law; or is it by being declared righteous in God's sight because they have put their faith in Jesus?



Try to be righteous by keeping the Jewish Law. *By observing the law, no-one will be justified. 2:16*

Declared righteous in God's sight (justified). *We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. 2:15*

Jesus took the punishment that our sins deserved and died on the Cross in our place. (*The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23*). On that basis our sins are forgiven when we put our faith in Christ, and we are declared righteous in Christ. *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21*. This means that we can have full fellowship with God – because we are righteous (in Christ).

Paul recognised that the law could not bring about righteousness because *it is evident we ourselves are sinners*. Faith in Christ meant he *died to the law so that I might live for God*. On this basis he makes this wonderful statement:

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. 2:20

This demonstrates the *grace of God*. Christ died so we could have a relationship with God. *If relationship with God could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing*.

Next Paul gives an extensive (and sometimes complicated) explanation of how faith in Christ will lead to freedom for Christians, while any requirement to comply with the Jewish law, will take them back into bondage.

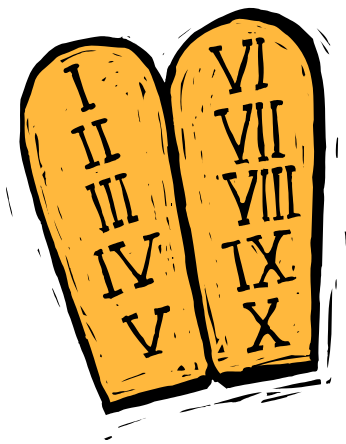
Faith in Christ contrasted with being under law 3:1-14

The Galatians had experienced a clear revelation of Jesus and received the Holy Spirit by faith, not by *observing the law*. They had even suffered for their faith. Paul wonders how the Galatians could be so *foolish* that they wanted to turn back to the works of the law. *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?* God gave them the Holy Spirit and worked miracles among them because they believed in Jesus, not because they observed the law. *Was this all for nothing?*

Here Paul is contrasting two quite different approaches to how we live out our Christianity. Do we put our faith in Jesus, and live our lives in fellowship with Him, led by the Holy Spirit? Or, in our own strength, do we try to please God by conforming to expectations, laws and supposed requirements. Have a look at your own Christian life. Why do you do what you do? How much of your life is spent trying to do things that are expected of you, and doing them in your own strength? How much is led by the Holy Spirit?

Paul now brings Abraham into the argument, probably because the Judaizers were teaching that only Abraham's descendants would receive God's inheritance, and that circumcision was the sign of this. Paul shows that even Abraham was justified by faith, not by the law. *He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.* Abraham became the father of those who have faith - of all those who believe in Christ - including Christian Jews, Gentiles, Arabs..... . In fact *all nations* will be blessed through Abraham.

In contrast to this, *all who rely on observing the law are under a curse, because it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law"*. (Deuteronomy 27:26). To try to keep the law just brings you under a curse because you will never be able to meet all of its requirements. In fact, *No-one can be justified before God by the law.*



The law that Paul is talking about here is based on 631 *mitzvot* (commandments) that God gave to the Jewish people in the Torah, the written law found in the first five books of the Bible. These include the 10 commandments.

In addition there was Rabbinical law which had been developed and passed on orally by the Rabbis, plus various customs and traditions.

The law (*Halakha*) is recorded in the *Talmud*. This includes the *Mishnah* which was compiled around 200AD to record the oral law, plus later interpretations and commentaries on how the law relates to everyday life.

The good news is that *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.* He did this in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The purpose of the law 3:15-25

At this point many of Paul's readers (and many of us) might be asking questions like:

- Why did God give the law when it was impossible to meet its requirements?
- If God was going to send Jesus as the way of salvation, why have the law at all?
- Does the Jewish law (including the 10 commandments) have any relevance at all for Christians?

These questions are more fully answered in Romans Chapters 1-11, but here in Galatians Paul gives a brief explanation of the purpose of the law.

He uses an *example from everyday life*, based on a *human covenant* (a document like a will). Once such a document has been established it can't be *set aside* or added to.

The original promise was given by God to Abraham and his seed (not seeds). See Genesis 12:2,3,7. The "seed" (or offspring) that would bring blessing to all nations is Jesus! The law was introduced 430 years after this promise was given so could not *set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.* Thus God's blessing does not come through the law; rather it comes through Jesus Christ. This is the promise that *God in His grace* gave to Abraham.



So what was the *purpose of the law*? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. People sinned in the period before Jesus came to make atonement for sins, so God used a mediator (Moses) to give the law and provide a way by which they could be righteous and have a relationship with Him. If people kept the law in every respect they could be righteous.

Does this mean that *the law is opposed to the promises of God*? Absolutely not! If people could have kept the law they could have been righteous and enjoyed fellowship with God. *But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin*, so no-one could keep the law. Romans 3:23, 6:23. This meant that the promise given to Abraham could only be experienced by *those who believe*, when they put their *faith in Christ Jesus*.

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

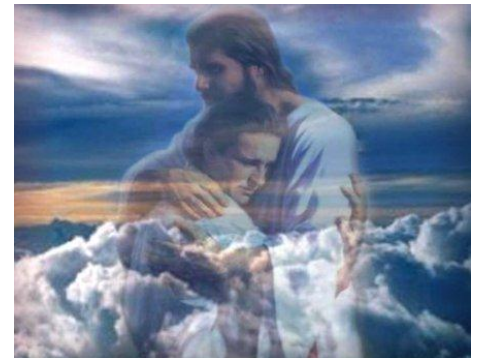
We are Sons of God in Christ Jesus 3:26-4:7

We are not under the law so what are we? We are *all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ*. When we accept Christ (by faith) we are baptised into Christ. We are immersed in and become part of His body and are clothed in Him. This applies to all Christians. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*.

And if we are Christians we are part of Abraham's seed, and are able to inherit the promise that God made to Abraham: to be blessed by God!

Before Jesus came people were in slavery to sin (because the law could not produce righteousness). *But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*.

Wow! What a privilege. We become God's children when we receive Christ. And not only *that because you are sons God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"*. So you are *no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir*. (Abba means "Father". It is a term of respect implying closeness, dependence and love, born out of a bond of trust).



So, to summarise the argument that Paul has made in this section:

- God is holy and can only have fellowship with righteous people.
- We can only become righteous by faith: by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Before Jesus came God provided a way by which people could be righteous: the law. Nobody could meet its requirements, though, because all are sinners. The law just showed us how much we need Jesus.
- When we believe in Jesus we become a child of God, and are able to enter into a wonderful relationship with Him. This is the way to experience the promise that God made to Abraham: that we would know His blessing on our lives.
- It doesn't matter whether we are Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free, males, females etc. If we are Christians we are God's children and are one in Christ.



One question that often arises at this point is "How were the Jewish people (before Christ) able to have a relationship with God, if they couldn't possibly be righteous through keeping the law". Paul answers this question in Romans Chapters 9,10 and 11. Here he says that Israel had every chance to obtain righteousness by faith. They missed out because they tried to obtain righteousness by following the law. (This doesn't mean God's word failed. God is sovereign and can do what He likes with His people). Everyone can be saved (including Israel) if, on hearing the Word, they believe and confess Jesus as Lord. But God has not rejected Israel. A remnant has been saved and the Gentiles have been grafted into the root stock begun with Israel. One day all Israel will be saved.

There are many other places where the New Testament teaches that Christians are not under any obligation to keep the Jewish law. Rather than living under the law we are to live in the Spirit and this will enable us to be really fruitful for God. Jesus has fulfilled the law so it no longer has any relevance for Christians (including the 10 commandments!!). Jesus' 'new commandment' is to love the Lord, our neighbours and ourselves, and obey what God says for us to do.



See Romans Chapters 1-11, Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34,35; John 14:15-27; Matthew 5:17-20, 22:37-39; Ephesians 2:14-18, Colossians 2:6-23; Hebrews 10:1-18; James 2:8-13; 1 John 3 etc. Also Acts 15 describes how the Church Council examined this issue and decreed that Christian believers had no obligation to follow the law.

Jesus death on the Cross also put an end to the Old Testament sacrificial system which was part of the law. The sacrifices were imperfect and have now been replaced by Jesus' one perfect sacrifice. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Colossians 1:15-23; 1 Peter 1:13-25; Hebrews 1:10-18; 7:23-10:18. These verses show that the new covenant makes the old obsolete.

Paul's concern for the Galatians 4:8-20

You may be wondering how the Galatian Christians could want to comply with the requirements of the Jewish law, when they had experienced relationship with Jesus and being led by the Holy Spirit. Paul now shares his concern about this.

Previously when they *did not know God* they were *slaves to those who by nature are not gods*. Now they *know God - or rather are known by God* - how can they *turn back to those weak and miserable principles*? That would just enslave them all over again. e.g. by *observing special days and months and seasons and years*. (This could indicate that they wanted to go back to following one of the 10 commandments – to observe the Sabbath).

Paul pleads that they would become like him – free in Christ! When he first preached the gospel to them he was sick and they treated him well. *Though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself*. They would have even torn out their eyes and given them to him! (This could indicate that Paul's *thorn in the flesh* may have been his poor eyesight. 2 Corinthians 12:7). Now it seems he has become their enemy by telling them the truth.

The Judaizers are *zealous to win you over, but for no good*. They wanted to alienate the Galatians from Paul so they would be zealous for them. Being zealous is fine, but only if what you are zealous for is good, and lasting! Paul's cry to the Galatians is *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you*.

God's promise 4:21-31

Paul now continues his attack on those *who want to be under the law*. He takes them back to Abraham and the promise that all peoples would be blessed through his offspring. See Genesis 17 and 22:15-18.

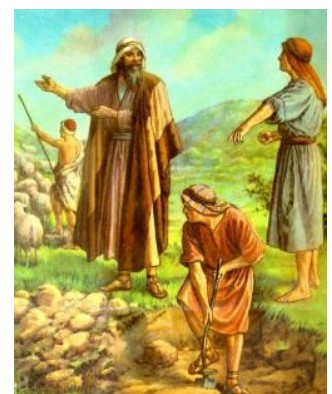
Abraham had two sons:

- Ishmael - born in the ordinary way through Hagar, his wife's servant; a slave woman. Genesis 16:15.
- Isaac – born through Sarah, his wife; a free woman. Isaac was born miraculously to Sarah when she was 90 years old, as a result of God's promise to Abraham. Genesis 17: 1-22; Genesis 21:2.

Paul says that *these things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants*.

No doubt the Judaizers (and many Christians) would expect that these two covenants represent the Arab nations (descendants of Ishmael), and the Jewish nation (descendants of Isaac and his son Jacob).

But, perhaps surprisingly, Paul interprets these covenants quite differently. He says that the covenant through Ishmael represents those who are under the Law, while the covenant through Isaac represents those who are free in Christ Jesus.



Comparing the two covenants		
Father	Abraham	Abraham
Mother	Hagar	Sarah
Child	Ishmael	Isaac
Given	Through the Law on Mount Sinai in Arabia	By God's promise to Abraham
Representing	The present city of Jerusalem. i.e. those who are under the Law	The Jerusalem that is above. i.e. those who are in Christ Jesus; the Bride of Christ; those who are part of the New Jerusalem. (Revelation 21:1,2).
Resulting in	Slavery through the law	Freedom in Christ

Paul quotes from Isaiah 54:1, rejoicing that *more are the children of the desolate woman than of her that has a husband*. This indicates that God wants lots of people to become Christians!

Paul then completes his comparison between those under the law, and those in Christ by saying to the Galatians (and to us) *Now you, brothers, like Isaac are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.* (Many Jews were persecuting Paul and the early Christians). *But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son".* Genesis 21:10.

Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Paul has made a pretty strong argument in this section, and it's not looking too good for those who are under the law! It is important to remember, though, that God loves everyone, regardless of the racial or national boundaries that they identify with. All who accept Jesus are saved regardless of whether they are Jews, Gentiles, Arabs, Americans, New Zealanders

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:24,25.

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9,10.

Freedom in Christ 5:1-15

Paul now returns to his main theme: *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.*

He tells the Galatians that if they let themselves be circumcised (showing they want to go back under the law) then *Christ will be of no value to them at all*. This would mean they should *obey the whole law*. They would be *alienated from Christ*, and will have *fallen away from grace*. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value*. If circumcision was of value the *offence of the cross* would have been abolished. Paul even wishes that the *agitators* who promote circumcision would *go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*

What really *counts* is *faith expressing itself through love*. The Galatians were *running a good race* but have now been kept *from obeying the truth*. The false teaching they received is like a *leaven of sin* that could *work through the whole batch of dough*. Paul is confident, though, *in the Lord*, that the Galatians *will not take this view*, and that the one who is throwing them *into confusion* will *pay the penalty*.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So Christians are not under law and have a wonderful *freedom in Christ Jesus*. But this does not mean that we are free to do whatever we like. No! We are not to use our freedom *to indulge our sinful nature*. Rather we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. This is the "Royal law"; the highest expression of our Christianity.

Fulfillment of the Law

Jesus said *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.* Matthew 5:17-18.

There would be no need for law if everybody genuinely loved others as themselves. Love sets a standard of behavior that is positive, pro-active and other-centred. It is based on attitudes of the heart that are concerned for others and which result in actions for the good of others. On the other hand, law sets a standard for what must or must not be done and is primarily focused on actions.

Jesus said that the commandments to love God and to love others are the greatest commandments. (See Mark 12:28-34). He also said that *all the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments*. (See Matthew 22:37-40). As a result Jesus instituted a *new commandment* that fulfills all of the Jewish Law with its countless individual commandments.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34,35.

Paul says the *entire law can be summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."* Jesus has not abolished the Law. Rather, He has provided a way that all of its requirements can be fulfilled by a much higher standard: the way of agapê love.

The way of agapê love

Agapê means love, affection, good will, benevolence.

In the ancient Greek world the word *agapê* was used very rarely, yet in the New Testament it is the most commonly used word for love. That's because God's love is *agapê* love. It is selfless, giving, sacrificial love, totally focused on the good of the one who is loved; not seeking anything in return.

Agapê love is the highest of all expressions of love and was supremely demonstrated when God sent His Son Jesus to be our Saviour:

This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9,10.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 1 John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16.

- Agapê love involves action - *God so loved the world that He gave*
- Agapê love is sacrificial - *God gave His one and only Son*
- Agapê love knows and meets the needs of others – *that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

God cannot do anything else but love because He is love. Behind all of His actions (including creation, salvation, deliverance, judgment, empowerment, sending of the Holy Spirit etc.) is God's love. He wants the best for those He interacts with, and acts on their behalf.

And Jesus said we are to consistently demonstrate this kind of love!

Whoever has my commands and obeys them is the one who loves me. See John 14:15-24.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7-8

Agapê love is not concerned with self: rather it is concerned with others. It is an attitude, a choice, an exercise of the will that the highest good of another might be brought to pass. Agapê love involves all aspects of our lives and personalities: our wills, our decisions, our emotions; our thoughts; our choices; our desires; our reactions

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

It is not just an emotional thing which is why Jesus could command us to love others. It would be impossible to require us to love our enemies in the same way as someone we had "fallen in love" with, but it is realistic to say "You must be like God, never wishing anything but good for others". Always try to look at everyone in the same way that God looks at them: with the eyes of loving goodwill.

This is the key to victorious Christian living!

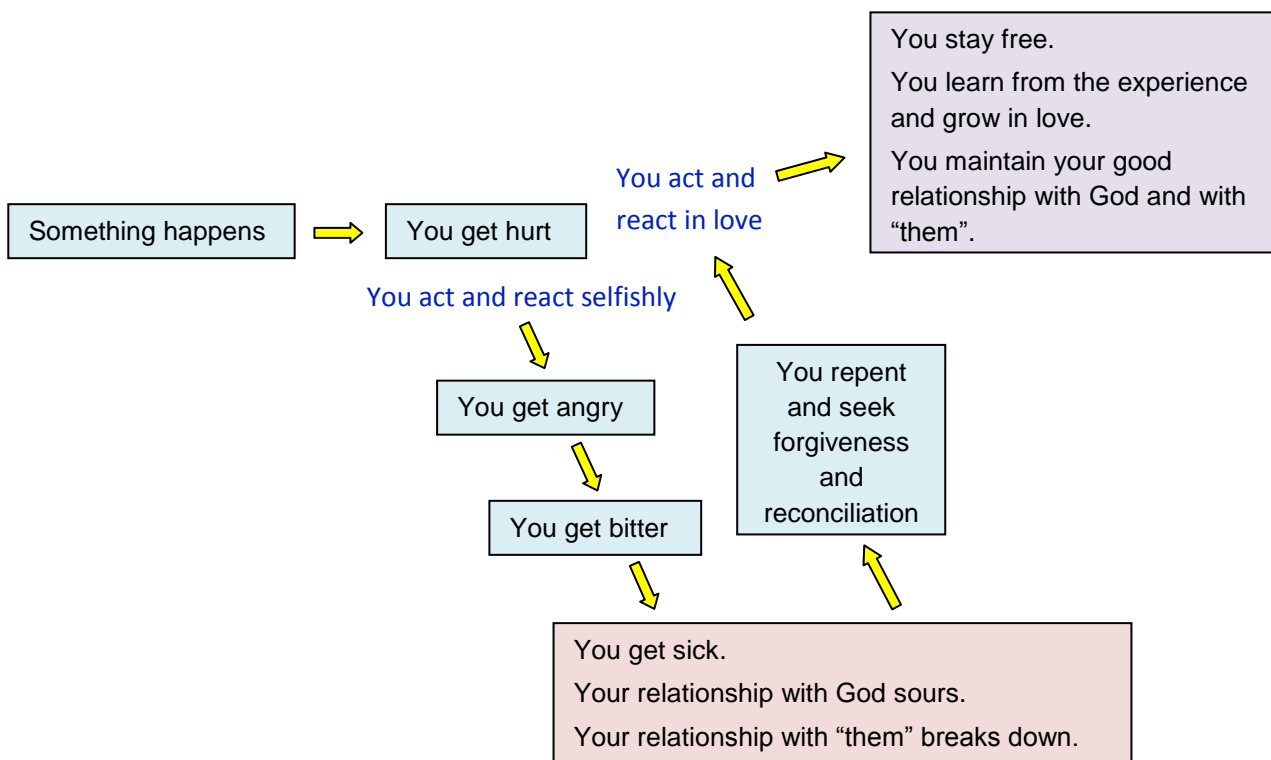
Paul has said *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.*

If you want to be "free in Christ Jesus" live your life in the same way that Jesus lived: the way of love!

To love your neighbor as yourself is a realistic and practical lifestyle for Christians. (But, unfortunately our old selfish nature is very strong so we commonly default to it and *keep on biting and devouring each other*, and that is why there are so many relationship breakdowns where we end up *destroyed by each other*).

When Jesus says to love your neighbor as yourself He is speaking to YOU, and it applies in all situations and circumstances. The responsibility to love rests on you (regardless of what "they" have done, or of how badly you have been hurt).

Here's what typically happens when we have the opportunity to act or react in love:



Actions and reactions of love (based on Jesus' teachings in Matthew's gospel)		Actions and reactions of selfishness	
Be meek, merciful, pure in heart, humble, peace-making.	Deal with your own issues. (7:3-5).	Attack them/blame them.	Lose peace and joy.
Hunger and thirst for righteousness.	Do for them what you want them to do for you. (7:12).	Hate them.	Can't/won't forgive them.
Accept persecution for righteousness sake.	Lay down your life and your rights. (10:37-39).	Explode at them or others.	Make judgements or expectations about them.
Seek reconciliation.	Turn to Jesus and find your rest in Him.	Twist everything so it's their fault.	Lie/gossip about them.
Turn the other cheek.	Allow Him to carry your burdens. 11:28-30).	Gather evidence, lobby, build a case against them.	Fabricate stories about them.
Give to them. (5:38-42).	Watch your words. (12:33-37).	Portray yourself as innocent.	Demand things of them (e.g. an apology).
Love them.	Watch your heart. (15:10-20).	See a need in them for repentance and forgiveness, but not in you.	Try to manipulate them.
Pray for them. (5:43-48).	Go to them and try to sort it out. (18:15-20).	Refuse to acknowledge your part in the situation.	Withdraw from them and others.
Forgive them. (6:14,15; 18:21,22).		Justify why you are right and they are wrong.	Become self-absorbed.
Don't judge them. (7:1,2)		Can't stop thinking about them and what they have done to you.	Have a sense of loneliness and alienation from others and from God.
		Become miserable.	Reject them and everything to do with them
<p><i>The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.</i> Galatians 5:22-25.</p>		<p><i>The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.</i> Galatians 5:19-21.</p>	
Free in Christ		In bondage	

So, love fulfils the law and provides the way by which we can be free in Christ. In our actions we choose to love by seeking the good of those we interact with; in our reactions we choose the way of love and this prevents us from going into the bondage of selfishness.

We all know that it is easy to talk about loving all of the time, but hard to do! Fortunately God has provided a way of helping us act and react in the way of love: the Holy Spirit.

Being led by the Holy Spirit. 5:16-26

All Christians face a continual battle between living by the Spirit and gratifying the desires of the sinful nature. *For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

But if we *live by the Spirit* we will be *led by the Spirit* and we will not be *under law* (because the Holy Spirit will always lead us in the ways of righteousness).

Paul now contrasts the *acts of the sinful nature* and the *fruit of the Spirit*.

Acts of the sinful nature	Fruit of the Spirit
<i>sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like.</i>	<i>love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.</i>
<i>Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.</i>	<i>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.</i>

- All Christians have a battle between their old sinful nature and our new nature in Christ. We tend to go up and down in this: sometimes we are weak and fall back into our old sinful ways. Other times we are strong in the Lord, living in victory over sin, and responsive to the Holy Spirit. But *those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires*. This is a transaction that took place at the Cross and which is being worked out daily in our lives. Hopefully, as we surrender more of our lives over to the Lord and as we are more responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit we become more mature in Christ and more and more *sin will not reign over us*. See Romans 6:1-14.
- The Holy Spirit is continually at work helping us to live in righteousness. As He has greater and greater control we demonstrate the fruit of His presence in our lives: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are evidences that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and that He is in control. *Against such there is no law*. When we live by the Spirit there is no need for law. All of the righteous requirements of the law are fully met in Him!
- The list of the *acts of the sinful nature* is not complete as Paul includes *and the like*. The old selfish nature expresses itself in many different ways! Hopefully these kind of actions gradually disappear from our lives as the Lord is more and more in control, and as the power of the old sinful nature is broken through surrender to God.
- *Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God* is a verse that has caused consternation for many (because we all know that we do most of the things listed)! They think that if they do some act of sin they will not go to heaven. But the Kingdom of God is not a thing or a place. It is a condition of relationship in which God is King of everything. When you are under God's kingship it is evidenced by righteousness, peace and joy. *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*. Romans 14:17. So if you act in a sinful way you immediately lose the most important thing in life: your intimate fellowship with God. You lose your righteousness, peace and joy! When you repent and confess your sin (under the leading and conviction of the Holy Spirit) back comes your fellowship with God, and back comes righteousness, peace and joy. (If Galatians 5:21 meant that those who sin would not go to heaven there would be no one there – because we all sin at times).

So, what is Paul's conclusion? *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other*. Doesn't his reflect the battle between the old sinful nature (which is conceited, provoking and envious) and the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit (who is always helping us to become more like Jesus, in our actions and reactions)?

Paul describes the battle between the old sinful nature and being led by the Spirit more fully in Romans 6, 7 and 8. In Chapter 6 he shows how we can have victory over the old sinful nature. At the cross we died, were buried and rose with Christ. Believe this (know it, count it to your credit and yield yourself to God) and sin will not reign over you. You'll be free from sin and have eternal life.

In Chapter 7 he describes how we are dead to the law and how, if we try to be righteous by keeping the law, we will have a great struggle, and we won't win! Paul's description of his personal struggle with the old sinful nature is something many Christians can identify with!

Chapter 8 is a wonderful chapter! Paul shows that in Christ we are free from the law of sin and death. We can live in freedom from sin: controlled by the Holy Spirit; alive to God; righteous!

Doing good to all 6:1-10

Paul now gives some ways we can put into practice what he has been describing: being led by the Spirit, rather than being led by the sinful nature.

- *If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*
- *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. (in other words the law of love).*
- *Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.*
- *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*
- *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

They are interspersed with a number of warnings:

Watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.... If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.... Each of you should test your own actions. Then you can take pride in yourself, without comparing yourself to somebody else, for each one of you should carry your own load... Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. People reap what they sow.

Those who sow to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; those who sow to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

These warnings are very relevant because we are always tempted to go back to the old ways.

So if we know the truth, walk in love and are led by the Holy Spirit it will show in all of our actions. We will fulfil all of the requirements of the law and live by Jesus' new commandment to love your neighbour as yourself. And it also means we will not be in bondage to anything. We will be free. *It is for freedom that Christ Jesus has set us free. Galatians 5:1.*

A new creation 6:11-18

Paul finishes his letter to the Galatians by writing in *large letters* with his *own hand*. (In most of his letters he used someone else to actually write down his thoughts). He returns to his main theme by glorifying the cross of Christ, and showing that the Judaizers were only glorying in the flesh. They were only trying to *make a good impression outwardly* in requiring the Galatians to be circumcised and they did this to *avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ*. They themselves don't even obey the law! They just want to *boast in the flesh*, but Paul never wants to boast *except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*.

Paul summarises his argument in verse 15: *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

In most of his letters Paul finishes with a greeting or a blessing. The closest he gets this time is: *Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.* (Most commentators understand *the Israel of God* refers to all true Christians, which are called the Israel of God to distinguish them from Israel according to the flesh).

Paul then requests that no one should bother him further. *Finally, let no-one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.*

***It is for freedom that Christ Jesus has set us free.
Galatians 5:1.***

In Galatians Paul has recorded many very important theological truths. He has given us a very strong warning against any form of legalism; he has shown how salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law; he has demonstrated that love fulfils the requirements of the law and sets a higher standard for Christians; and he has shown the absolute dependence that we have on the Holy Spirit.

Galatians is all about freedom in Christ. Christians can live in freedom from bondage to sin, selfishness, satan, others, legalism, culture, circumstances, fears, The keys to coming into this kind of freedom are to:

- believe the truth of God's Word
- act and react the way that Jesus did: the way of love
- be obedient to the Holy Spirit.

This whole letter is about God's grace. He has given us amazing freedom in Christ Jesus but this grace does not mean we have licence to do whatever we want and indulge our old sinful natures. Rather we are to walk in truth, live in love and be led by the Holy Spirit.

This wonderful book is the charter for Christian freedom, but it is also the charter for Christian living.

Discussion questions

- Why was Galatians written? Are the issues Paul addressed in Galatians relevant for Christians today? How?
- Paul strongly declared that his gospel was the true gospel, and that the "gospel" of the Judaizers was "no gospel at all". How can we know that what we believe is the true gospel? (Especially as Christians have so many widely different beliefs)!
- Galatians is all about the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus. What is "freedom in Christ Jesus"?
- Why are so many Christians in bondage to sin, selfishness, satan, others, legalism, culture, circumstances, fears, etc? What can we do if we know we are in bondage to some of these things? How can we come into the freedom that Jesus offers us?
- God is righteous and wants us to fellowship with Him in righteousness. What are some ways that Christians try to become righteous? What does Galatians teach us about this?
- What are some ways that Christians can become legalistic? What are the effects of this legalism? How can we find freedom in Christ in these areas?
- What relevance do the 10 commandments and the Jewish law have for Christians?
- The Jews are "God's chosen people". Exodus 6:7. Yet Jews became the greatest enemies of the early Church and now in Christ there is *neither Jew nor Greek*, and we are all *one in Christ Jesus*. Galatians 3:28. What is God's agenda for the Jewish people especially in the light of 1 Peter 2:9,10?
- How does "not being under law" relate to the law of the land? Are we free to break these laws? How does the "law of love" affect this?
- Contrast the fruits of the Holy Spirit with the works of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:19-25. How can we demonstrate more of the fruits of the Spirit and less of the works of our sinful nature?
- What have you learned from your study of the letter to the Galatians? How will you apply this in your life in future?