

Free to Be: A Study on Galatians

Welcome to the book of Galatians. This letter is considered one of the most authentic writings of Paul – there is no doubt as to the author and it reveals the true passions of Paul's heart. The book of Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of Christian Liberty for Paul is urgent in his desire that those who have found faith in Christ live in the freedom that Christ gives. This book was the cornerstone of the Protestant Revolution for Martin Luther. He loved it!

Central Message: *“Only through grace of God in Jesus Christ is a person able to escape the curse of sin and the law and to live a new life, not in bondage or license, but in a genuine freedom of mind and spirit through the power of God”*

Historical Setting:

Christianity had begun within the framework of Judaism with its laws and practices. As the Gospel was being extended to Gentiles, there was question as to whether the Jewish laws still needed to be followed as part of the salvation journey.

The authority and teaching of Paul was questioned over the other apostles because he never actually met Jesus before the crucifixion. His status was in doubt and Judaizers were trying to establish control of the church.

Galatians were descendants of the Celts and the Gauls of France. Through various wars and takeovers, they eventually settled in Roman territory. They were somewhat self governing and got along well with Rome, so their territory was expanded. Those Gauls with Grecian influence were called Gaul-ecians. They lived where Turkey is today and Paul's message was primarily to the southern Roman part of Galatia.

The letter was most likely written from Ephesus in 52 AD in the period covered by Acts 19.

Paul's background

1. Pharisee
2. Legalistic, narrow, tenacious , dogmatic
3. Underwent a dramatic conversion experience and vision of Christ
4. Paul's conversion led him to share the incredible Good News that he experienced and soon found a hungry audience in the gentile community.
5. Paul was set free from his Pharisaic past and so freedom in Christ became essential to his understandings of what salvation truly means. He was deeply offended at the disturbances in the Galatian churches, which likely included Lystra, Iconium, Derbe. (Acts 14)

Three Primary Issues

1. Chapters 1 – 2, Paul's authority as an Apostle
2. Chapters 3 – 4, Paul's teachings of the Gospel as true
3. Chapters 5 – 6 Fear of moral laxity without the law

Lesson 1: Paul's Introduction

Read Chapter 1: 1 – 5:

1. Share with one another the basic statements of theology in these first five lines. What are the foundations of Paul's faith outlined here?
2. How does Paul affirm his calling as an Apostle? (vs. 1) Would this statement influence your willingness to listen to this person's teachings? Why or why not?
3. Note vs. 4 and the line "rescued from the present evil age". Cross reference this verse with Eph. 2:2. In what ways has your personal salvation rescued you from the influences of our world? Think of how this concept of rescue offers us more freedom as Christians from the pressures of this world. Do you feel free?
4. Paul consistently uses the two words, "grace" and "peace" in his greetings to the churches. They must be important qualities that he believed should encompass the church. If we took these words and made them the primary focus of church ministry, what would the church be like? Do you know of any churches that have these two words in their mission statement? How would they help to shape the nature of a church?

Quoting from *Blue Like Jazz* by Donald Millar – pages 208-209

"So much of what I know about getting along with people I learned from hippies. They were magical in community. People were drawn to them. They asked me what I loved, what I hated, how I felt about this and that, what sort of music made me angry, what sort of music made me sad. They asked me what I daydreamed about, what I wrote about, where my favourite places in the world were. They asked me about high school and college and my travels around America. They loved me like a good novel, like an art film, and this is how I felt when I was with them, like a person John Irving would write. I did not feel like I did not know the Bible well enough, and I was never conscious what my hands were doing or whether or not I sounded immature when I talked. I had always been so conscious of those things, but living with the hippies I forgot about myself. And when I lost this self-consciousness I gained so much more.

Discuss this quote and what the church might learn from this hippie community. How might we create an atmosphere where there was total freedom and acceptance to be who God is calling us to be?

Now read Galatians 1: 6 – 9

5. This is the only letter that Paul doesn't give a statement of praise or encouragement. He launches right into admonishment! The Good News has been perverted to being no good news at all. Legalism always strips away the joy of salvation. What might be some legalisms that the church today attaches to the true Good News?
6. If you are willing, share any experiences that you have had where the Good News was not really good news at all because it left you with a load of guilt or confusion.
7. Who had initially called them by grace? Who has deserted that calling? What is the tragedy here?
8. *To tamper with the gospel is to trouble the church – our greatest struggles do not come from those outside the church, but rather from those within.* (Quote of John Stott). Comment on this statement.

Summary

We will sense throughout the reading of this letter that Paul is greatly troubled by the practices erupting in the churches around Galatia. Paul takes real ownership of these churches because they were his church plants. He was the one who brought the Good News to these people and so it absolutely crushes him to see them being weighed down by a whole bunch of Jewish rules and customs that are not essential to salvation by grace through faith in Christ. We know later that Paul will write guidelines to churches in regards of how they must act with order and propriety. The freedom that he preaches is not a call for anarchy. But salvation itself is not based on order or propriety – they are not the essence of the good news – just the means by which we live and work together. As we work through this study together, we will be endeavoring to separate what is the essential message and means of salvation from the practices of the earthly church.

Freedom is a challenging thing. We want people to be free – but not free to hurt others. Sometimes we are threatened by the freedom others claim because as they bear the name “Christian”, it seems to reflect negatively on we who also bear the name “Christian”. One of the greatest challenges of society is to balance freedom with responsibility.

What a wonderful witness to the world the church of Jesus could be if we could model that balance with grace, peace and beauty. That is the challenge we will work toward in the coming lessons.

Lesson 2: Paul Justifies his Calling and his Authority

Read: Galatians 1: 10 – 24

1. As you read these verses, think of yourself as a church member. What would you need to hear from Paul that would convince you of his calling and his authority?
2. Read Acts 9: 1-19. What was the primary factor that led to the conversion of Paul? Was it the physical change – the blindness? How does he describe his change in Galatians 1: 16?

Quoting from *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* by Frederick Buechner, pg. 49.

During his Pharisee phase or “blue period” Paul was on his way to Damascus to mop up some Christians when suddenly he heard the voice of Jesus Christ, whose resurrection he had up till now considered only an ugly rumor. What he might have expected the voice to say was “Just you wait.” What in effect it did say was, “I want you on my side.” Paul never got over it . . . Paul also discovered that all the brownie points he had been trying to rack up as a super-Pharisee had been pointless. God did business with you not because of who you were but because of who he was.

3. In what ways do you feel that you have personally met Jesus? How has that personal encounter changed your life? What is the difference between an intellectual understanding and a personal encounter?
4. How did Paul experience grace? Define grace and specifically what you understand that from which Paul was released.
5. The Galatians accuse Paul of tailoring the gospel to please people. Discuss together some examples that you can think of where perhaps a church might say what they think people want to hear in order to attract them to the Gospel.
6. What is the balance between making the Gospel socially relevant and appealing, and being honest with the true cost of discipleship?
7. How do we evaluate what is a valid teaching or a valid concern and what is a perversion? Where does our authority lie – since we do not have Paul as the pastor of our churches?
8. Reflecting back on vs. 8-9, how do you feel about Paul’s condemnation to hell of these false teachers? Do we take seriously enough today the

- teachings or activities that cause disruption within the church? How do we recognize false prophets and teachers among us?
9. What was the reason that Paul didn't go directly to the apostles in Jerusalem but spent time in the desert? When you have had a personal encounter with God, is it your tendency to go and share that with community, or to take time alone to understand its impact on your life?
 10. What is Paul saying in vs. 18 -23? What criticism might he have been facing that he needed to assure them who he had spent time with?

Summary

It is always difficult to find the proper balance between freedom of thought and orthodox thinking. It is dangerous when we put all of our faith in a human authority such as a pastor or an author or a denomination or a school. All human thinking is fallible – no person has all the answers to truth. It is dangerous when orthodox thinking over rides grace. Yet it is also dangerous when anything goes – that any thought or opinion carries as much weight or is as valid as any other. Many churches swing the pendulum one way or the other. Some denominations expect all teaching to come from the “top” – giving much authority to certain leaders. Other denominations have no set plumb-lines to monitor what is truth and accept anything shared with sincerity.

The easiest thing would be to say that Scripture is our final authority and that would be true. Unfortunately, interpreting the Scripture is not an exact science – nor exact faith for that matter! Once again, it is easier for us to rely on one source than to wrestle with the Word ourselves.

God places us within community for good reason. Our faith and our search for truth must rely on several factors in balance. In this passage, Paul emphasizes the importance of a personal encounter with Christ. God speaks to us and the Spirit abides within us. If we have encountered Jesus personally, we will be able to recognize his voice. If not, we are more easily led astray by false teachers. Secondly, we must test the voice we hear with the message that other believers are receiving. Truth is consistently true and so the body of believers should be able to affirm as a whole the message of Christ. Thirdly, truth is consistent for all people, in all times and in all cultures. Therefore tradition must be weighted into the equation.

Paul encounter Christ personally on the Damascus rode. He spends time alone being taught by the Spirit. Then he seeks out others who have known Jesus in Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, to confirm the truth as he has understood it. His knowledge of Scripture and understanding of God from his Jewish heritage also validates the true nature of God as seen in Jesus. That is a good model for each of us to know the kind of truth that sets us free.

Lesson 3: Rules verses Revelation

Read Galatians 2: 1 – 10

1. How do we find the balance between rules and freedom? In what ways is it just easier to be told what to do? How do rules keep us immature? Where are rules important and helpful?
2. Initially, God used circumcision as a sign of covenant between him and his people. The action was likely instituted by God as a matter of hygiene and protection from infection. It had a practical purpose. It became important to the Jewish people because of its visibility and permanence – like a badge of identification. Why did this practice become so controversial in the early church?
3. What are some examples of rules that have been kept, though the reasons behind them have been forgotten?
4. Consider 2: 4-5. Paul uses very strong language here. To what is Paul reacting? How was their freedom in Christ being compromised?
5. Read Acts 15. In verses 6 – 11 What does Peter say that supports Paul's ministry to the Gentiles?
6. In verses 19 – 21, what compromises were made at that council? What category did the compromises fall into? What might be some parallel compromises that could be made in the church today to those who are new to Christianity?

Quote from *Wishful Thinking* By Frederick Buechner, page 30

The old prayer speaks of God "in whose service is perfect freedom." The paradox is not as opaque as it sounds. It means that to obey Love himself, who above all else wishes us well, leaves us the freedom to be the best and gladdest that we have it in us to become. The only freedom Love denies us is the freedom to destroy ourselves."

7. In this quote, what does Buechner define as the balance to freedom? How does that balance work in your own life?
8. Paul makes three things clear in Galatians 2
 - a. He didn't go to Jerusalem to learn the Gospel, he already knew it.
 - b. Paul explained what he was teaching in order to maintain his unity with the heart of the Christian Faith – he was not off on any tangent but stayed true the to pure Gospel

- c. There are not two Gospels, one for Jews and one for Gentiles – there is only one truth.
9. Are there any ways that we have been guilty of creating two Gospels, one for the rich and one for the poor?
 10. Paul struggles with positions of importance. He acknowledges that Peter, James and John are “Pillars” of the Christian church, but on the other hand he doesn’t want to make too much about their authority. Paul stands alone in his authority, but he also stands with the backing of the pillars, even though he doesn’t need them.
 11. How do you balance your own Christian journey in trusting the Holy Spirit to guide you and teach you, interpreting the Scripture to you as an individual, and yet remain connected to the community of believers and their teachings?
 12. Do you feel able to trust that God works in different ways in different people, or are you uncomfortable with a certain lack of definition?

Summary:

Peter (Acts 15) relied on three things to resolve the conflict between Paul’s ministry and the Christian Pharisees: He trusted in:

- 1) The revelation he personally received from God to minister to the Gentiles
- 2) The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Gentiles and
- 3) The message of Scripture to affirm what they are seeing and experiencing.

We too can trust in these three signs as to what is of God. When we have confidence in our own encounter with Christ and his Spirit within us, along with a strong understanding of Scripture, we need less external rules to guide our actions and behaviors. The church does not need to be a place of control and rigidity but can open itself to the leading of God’s spirit in the people of God. This is why Baptists believe in the congregational governance. The job of the church isn’t to tell people what to do and how to live, but to enable them to encounter a living Christ and create the space in our lives for the Spirit to speak.

Lesson 4: Egos and Attitudes – the Enemy of Community

Read Galatians 2: 11 – 21

1. Paul catches Peter in an act of hypocrisy. He was changing his behavior according to the crowd that he was with. Can you think of examples (if you dare to be personal) of times that you have compromised your beliefs in order to be accepted by the group you are with? (The Greek word from which hypocrisy comes from refers to the mask worn by actors in theatre production) Take comfort that even Peter, the rock on which Christ built his church failed to be always true and consistent to his beliefs, so we are not alone in our failure, and can seek forgiveness for those times of failure.
2. “You are *who* you eat with!” What did it say about the early Christian church that Jews and Gentiles dined together? What did it say about the Christian church when this failed to happen? (Remember the extreme dietary differences of the cultures) Are there any comparable activities today that would show unity of two diverse groups?
3. Often we expect certain behaviors and attitudes from Christians in order to show evidence that they are truly saved. How do we get in danger of creating behaviors that “make” us saved rather than actions being the evidence that we live by the Spirit of Christ within us? Can you think of examples of behaviors we look for among the saved? For example, are people who go to church more saved than people who do not go to church?
4. What are some attitudes that break down community?
5. Here are some dictionary definitions of the term “Justification”:
 - a. something (such as a fact or circumstance) that shows an action to be reasonable or necessary; "he considered misrule a justification for revolution"
 - b. In Catholic theology justification is a term that means the cleansing of sin in a person, and the communication by grace of "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ"
 - c. the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (John Calvin)
 - d. “In printer’s language, to justify is to put the lines of text in right relationship with the page, so that both sides line up equally. Being justified means being brought into right relation.
 - e. Paul (Romans 5:1) says it is being at peace with God.

6. What does justification mean to you? What does it mean to be justified by grace and not by the law?
7. When do you feel most at peace with God – that your relationship is right and good? Are there any times when you feel less at peace?
8. What do you understand Paul saying in verse 17 – 19?
9. What does it mean to you personally to be crucified in Christ? Are you consciously aware of any specific areas that have been crucified? Share only if you are comfortable doing so.
10. If you have experienced baptism, in what ways was your baptism joining in the crucifixion of Christ? (Romans 6: 3 – 8)

Quotations from Wishful Thinking by F. Buechner Pg. 84

A closer analogy is the experience of love. When you love somebody, it is no longer yourself who is the center of your own universe. It is the one you love who is. You forget yourself. You deny yourself. You give of yourself so that by all the rules of arithmetical logic there should be less of yourself than there was to start with. Only by a curious paradox there is more. You feel that at last you really are yourself.

The experience of salvation involves the same paradox. Jesus put it like this: “He who loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matt. 10:39)

You give up your old self-seeking self for somebody you love and thereby become yourself at last. You must die with Christ so that you can rise with him, Paul says. It is what baptism (q.v.) is all about.

You do not love God so that, tit or tat, he will then save you. To love God is to be saved . . . you do not love God so that you will go to heaven to love God is Heaven.

Summary

So much of our Christian experience is lived in our heads more than in our hearts. We know that we are saved by grace, but we still judge others by works. We know that we cannot earn salvation, and yet we continue to count up the brownie points we've earned by good works – how could God turn us down now. To be truly and purely motivated by loving Christ so fully and so deeply that we can't even remember our own name – well, that isn't work at all – it is pure joy.

Paul will continue to remind us throughout this letter that love overrides any laws. We wouldn't need a single law in the books if we lived out of love for Christ and lived his love for others. We know it. We preach it. Do we live it?

Lesson 5: An Inheritance of Faith

Read: Galatians 3: 1 – 14

1. “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (vs. 2) Take some time to share with one another what brought you to belief in Jesus Christ? What is the best thing about being a Christian?
2. “After beginning with the Spirit are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort?” (vs 3) What areas of your life are you most tempted to operate under your own steam, rather than depend on God?
3. A quote from Donald Millar, *Blue Like Jazz*, “*Our beliefs are not what we think but what we do*”. What do you truly believe and how do your actions support your belief systems?
4. Verse 5: It is a difficult question but one that must be asked: Is God doing miracles among us because of our belief in Him? Is God doing all that he could, or do his people hinder his actions?
5. Paul goes on to argue in verses 6 and 7 that the true children of Abraham are not those who are circumcised, but those who have a faith like Abraham. The blessing of Abraham is not a blood-line or a ritual act, but an inheritance of faith. What are some acts of Abraham that were acts of faith? What are some actions we could take that show our depth of faith?

Quote from Frederick Buechner: “Wishful Thinking” – pg 24

When God told Abraham, who was a hundred at time, that at the age of ninety his wife Sarah was finally going to have a baby, Abraham came close to knocking himself out – “fell on his face and laughed” as Genesis puts it (17:17). In another version of the story (18:8ff) Sarah is hiding behind the door eavesdropping, and here it’s Sarah herself who nearly splits a gut although when God asks her about it afterward she denies it. “No, but you did laugh”. God says, thus having the last word as well as the first. God doesn’t seem to hold their outburst against them, however. On the contrary, he tells them the baby’s going to be a boy and that he wants them to name him Isaac. Isaac in Hebrew means “Laughter”.

Why did the two old crocks laugh? They laughed because they knew only a fool would believe that a woman with one foot in the grave was soon going to have her other foot in the maternity ward. They laughed because God expected them to believe it anyway. They laughed because they half-believed it themselves. They laughed because laughing felt better than crying. They laughed because if

by some crazy chance it just happened to come true they would really have something to laugh about, and in the meanwhile it helped keep them going.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” says the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:1) Faith is the laughter at the promise of a child called laughter.

If someone had come up to Jesus when he was on the cross and asked him if it hurt, he might have answered, like the old man in the joke, “Only when I laugh”. But he wouldn’t have been joking. Faith dies, at it lives, laughing.

6. Since it is difficult to prove faith, is there anything anyone could say, do or discover that would lead you to abandon your faith?
7. Verse 10: If a person believes that God will save them because they do good works, what is the “curse” that they live under?
8. How did the crucifixion of Christ remove that curse from us all?

Summary

We talk of faith very easily in our Christian communities, but it is not an easy concept to grasp. Faith is not a positive word in many circumstances. It seems foolish to put our faith in things that have not been verified or scientifically proven. We are encouraged to have faith in one another, when as human beings we continually hurt one another and let each other down. But we are not encouraged to have faith in a God that we cannot see.

Paul doesn’t talk about faith as something intangible, uncertain or unreliable. He talks about faith as the only true certainty. And his faith is built upon a personal, face to face encounter with the Christ. I believe in all of our testimonies, there is some moment where we have known beyond a doubt that God is real to us – we have experienced something that no one can take away from us. Our faith is built on a life-changing experience that cannot be denied. This is the basis of a lasting faith that Paul speaks of in this chapter.

Lesson 6: The Promise Precedes the Law

Galatians 3:15 – 29

Read this passage out loud in several available translations.
Also read Genesis 12: 1 – 9 and Genesis 15: 3 - 6

Some definitions of words in today's text.

Seed = Family

Angels = God's will communicated from Heaven

Mediator = Moses

I found this passage of Scripture very difficult to understand and relate to through the use of questions. Paul is using a rabbinical style of argument to make a point that the law was simply a temporary measure given by God to reveal how short we fall from the glory of God. It was never meant as the means of salvation. Paul argues that the promise given to Abraham and sealed by the covenant sign of circumcision was given long before the law was given through Moses. A covenant cannot be superseded by later laws – a covenant stands for all time.

The promise was meant also for Abraham's seed – singular – which Paul sees as being the promised Messiah – Jesus the Christ. So the promise would be fulfilled in Christ – he becomes the means of our salvation, not the law.

The law was a temporary provision to reveal the depth of our need for salvation and to baby-sit us by giving guidelines for proper living. There is another reason for the law that John Calvin believed. He saw the law as a means of gratitude for the believer. Because we have received salvation through grace, we obey the law now in gratitude for what God has done for us. The law therefore is not the means of salvation, but rather the result of gratitude for salvation.

Because the law was given by a mediator and not directly from God, as we the covenant, it is also inferior to the Promise.

Discussion

Perhaps your own Bibles have study notes that can help to interpret this passage of Scripture to you. Read Ephesians 2: 8 – 9 and then James 2: 14 – 26. This is often considered the Catholic verses the Protestant debate. Spend your time together discussing how you balance the paradox of salvation by faith, and the evidence of faith by works. In your own personal lives, how do you live out this balance?

Spend extra time in prayer with one another as this is a shorter lesson.

Lesson 7: Re-Born Free!

Read Galatians 4: 1 – 20

1. In verses 1 – 7, Paul is making a similar point regarding the law that he did in the previous chapter. The law was the babysitter that looked after us until the time was right for God to send Christ as our redemption. So in this chapter, Paul now uses the image of the Guardian. A child may be entitled to a great inheritance, but until the child is ready, there is a guardian placed in charge. The child is still the heir, but the guardian watches over the inheritance until the coming of age. Are there laws or rules in Christianity today that help “babysit” us until we are more mature in our faith? What might those be?
2. Think about the history of Israel from the time they were slaves in Egypt through their reign of judges and kings to the exile. What lessons did the Israelites need to learn in order for them to be open to receiving Christ? In other words, why did God wait for so long to send Jesus and release them from the law? What conditions were necessary to meet the “fullness of time”? (There are no ‘right answers’ to this question – so just consider what might be possible factors)
3. What might be some issues in an unbeliever’s lives that need to be dealt with or accepted before they might be ready to receive Christ?
4. Paul goes on to say that the inheritance is not meant only for the Jews. As long as the heir is a child, he is no better off than the slave. The Jews were like a child – promised heirs, but not ready to receive. The Gentiles were more in the position of slaves, also not ready for an inheritance. Now however, there is no such thing as Jew or Greek, Slave or Free – Christ is the Son that grants all children the place of honored sons and heirs, whether Jew or Gentile.
5. Read verse 6 and discuss what it might mean to you. How does the Spirit live in you and what does the Spirit do for you?
6. Are there ways that we as followers of Christ still live as though we are slaves and not heirs of the Kingdom of God? Describe some ways we live more like slaves than as children of the King.
7. When the Israelites left the slavery of Egypt, there were aspects of freedom that scared them and often they cried that they’d rather be back in Egypt. The Galatians seem to be going back to their old ways with pagan feasts and festivals, rather than living in the freedom Christ brings. Why is freedom in Christ scary or uncomfortable?

8. Verse 15: “What happened to your joy?” Overall, are Christians joyful people? If not, what has happened to our joy? What distracts us from the joy of living abundantly?
9. Paul now interrupts his theological argument and talks to the Galatians personally from his heart. It is a “remember when . . .” kind of moment. *“Remember when I came and I was so sick and you took me in and cared for me? When I shared the gospel, in spite of being ill, you receive me and my message like I was an angel or the messiah himself! So why now are you treating me like an enemy? What has changed? Why do you no longer trust me? Who has influenced your thinking?”*
10. Read verses 17 – 20 and describe Paul’s anguish. What is he feeling as he says these words? What kind of relationship did he have with this church and how has it changed? If you were a Galatian, what part of his argument would touch your heart?

Summary

Paul is very clear that there can be no dual system within Christianity. There can not be one means of salvation for some races and another tier for the rest. We are all equal in our opportunity for salvation, the means of salvation and how we live out our salvation. If you are born a Jew you do not have an advantage over those born Gentile. Today, if we are born into a Christian family or a Christian culture, we have no advantage for salvation over those born in a Muslim culture, or atheistic culture. However, we do know that it is easier to accept the culture of your ancestors than to be converted into a new faith. Environment does affect our ability to hear truth, but in spite of that, the rules are the same.

What is truly sad is those who have access to the Christian message and receive a part of the Good news, but not the whole. They continue to live in bondage to rules and regulations and miss the freedom granted in walking with the spirit of Christ. Paul continues to bring this truth home to believers – Those whom the Son sets free are free indeed! Let us live in the JOY OF OUR SALVATION!

Lesson 8: Adopted into the Family of God

Read Galatians 4: 21 – 31

This is quite a complicated argument of Paul to distinguish again what it means to be a true child of God. He uses the example of Hagar and Sarah to define two kinds of heirs: Hagar's child was born, not of promise but of flesh as a slave. Sarah's child was rather born of the promise and as a son. What therefore defines a child or heir of God is not flesh (Jewish heritage or circumcision of the flesh) but those who receive the promise as given in Christ. Paul now uses a similar illustration comparing the Jerusalem of the present which the opponents of Paul claim their authority comes and the New Jerusalem of the future which Paul claims is the new authority.

There is a story about a man who was sentenced to death before a firing squad. Before the sentence was carried out, the commander offered the condemned man a choice – he could either accept his fate before the firing squad or choose whatever lay behind “The Black Door”. The man considered his choices and since he had no idea what horrors could like behind the black door, he chose the firing squad. The execution was carried out. Afterward, the commander said to his squad, “I have met few men who will choose the unknown over the known.” The men asked their commander what lay behind the door, and the commander answered, “Freedom”.

How does this story illustrate our tendency to rely on the law rather than embracing salvation through grace alone?

Read Galatians 5: 1 – 15

1. Paul is declaring quite strongly that now the way of the Law is no longer available as a means of salvation. That road is closed. You cannot follow some of the law and abide by salvation through works, and still claim salvation by grace. It is one way or the other. Read Matthew 5: 17 – 20. How do you understand the word of Jesus in light of these words of Paul?
2. What is now the primary motivation force in the life of a follower of Jesus if not the law?
3. “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” What are ways that we as Christians need to express our faith through love in a way that is recognizable to those outside of the faith?
4. Compare Paul's use of the picture of Yeast or Leaven with Jesus in Matthew 13:13. Also with Matthew 16: 5 – 12. What are ways that we as followers of Christ can be the yeast that brings in the Kingdom of God?

In what ways can we as Christians bring in the kind of yeast that spoils the work of the Kingdom?

5. Paul's "colorful side" comes out in verses 11 and 12 of Chapter 5. What are the kinds of things that happen within the church community that bring out your anger and frustration?
6. Verse 13 is a pivotal verse in Galatians. Yes, we are free in Christ – free from the Law - from rules and regulations but not free from responsibilities. Those who tend toward legalistic attitudes are usually afraid that freedom will create chaos. People will act irresponsibly with their freedom. They need rules to know the boundaries. Discuss this problem. How do we as a church encourage true freedom in Christ and yet offer guidance to the community of believers.
7. If you can think of an illustration, in what ways has your relationship with Jesus set you free? What are some areas that you have matured away from rules and moved more into living life by the Spirit?

Summary

Churches often fall into the trap of trying to control the actions and behaviours of their members because they do not trust people to own the responsibilities of what I mean to be Christian. They are afraid that what one person does will reflect badly on the whole. We do not trust "freedom". We would do better to teach people how to listen to the Spirit than simply tell them what they should do. This takes a lot of trust in the Spirit and a lot of forgiveness when believers fall short of perfection.

Lesson 9: Living by the Flesh or Living by the Spirit

Read: Galatians 5: 13 – 26

1. Paul's answer to the fear that people without the stick of the law will fall into licentious behavior is that we do not live by flesh, we live by the Spirit. In truth, the Spirit often requires much steeper expectations of us than the law ever could. However the Spirit empowers the believer to fulfill God's calling in our lives, where the law only shows us our failures. Give examples of where the Spirit pushes us farther to action than the law does.
2. Is there evidence in your own life that you have attended to the Spirit rather than written expectations? Do you have an example you would be willing to share?
3. Paul talks about "works" of the flesh and "fruit" of the Spirit. What is Paul implying by the use of these two different words?
4. Verses 19 – 20 list areas that the flesh controls. Are there any items on that list that the flesh still has a hold in your own life? (You can think about this privately!) Are there items that should be on the list that are not there? If not too personal, lists the traps of the flesh today that can hamper living by the Spirit.
5. Read various versions for the Fruit of the Spirit and compare words and their meanings. Define each of the nine qualities listed of a Spirit-filled person. What evidence do you look for in your own life to know that the Spirit is in control? It is important to understand that we cannot "work" on the fruit of the spirit. A healthy tree bears fruit, but it doesn't "work" at making an apple. Our work is to align our lives with the Spirit – then we will bear fruit.

Quote: "When I am connected most closely with the Spirit of God, I sense the wealth of true love. I experience pure joy without evaluating it against anyone/anything else; I know absolute peace without the fear of vulnerability; I am infinitely patient without the constraints of time; kindness and goodness flow through me without counting the cost; I know who I am and what I stand for and therefore, I am faithful to the path I'm on. My spirit is gentled by knowing I am okay and so is the rest of the world. I don't have to have anything in excess to prove my worth. I take what I need and desire not the rest. I am in control because things/others do not control me." (This was said by a friend of mine and I choose not to disclose her identity).

6. Discuss this quote and how this person defines a Spirit-filled life. Do you agree or find any areas of disagreement?

Summary:

I truly believe that there is no passage of Scripture that better defines the true heart and attitudes of a believer than this list of virtues. Although none of us are perfect, I think we must see this passage in conjunction with the other text which states that 'You will know a tree by its fruit'. (Matt. 7: 16) Unfortunately, the Christian community has relied upon its *verbal confession of faith* that "Jesus is Lord", without truly living the lordship of Christ as evident in our actions. If we live by the Spirit – allowing the Spirit control over our lives, then we will bear these fruit.

It is also important to consider how we see the salvation of those who bear this kind of fruit but do not confess faith in Christ. This is a difficult thing for us to understand. Can we truly live the life of Christ and all that he stood for and not embrace the Christian faith? I believe it is possible, but you don't have to accept my opinion!!!!

Close by praying this prayer together:

"Lord of each new day

May I seek to live this day quietly and serenely
Leaning on your mighty strength trustfully, restfully
Meeting others on the path peacefully, joyously
Waiting for your will to unfold patiently, obediently
Facing what tomorrow brings confidently, courageously"

Lesson 10: Created to do Good works (Eph. 2: 10)

Read: Chapter 6 of Galatians:

1. Verse 2 tells us that we should carry one another's burdens but verse 5 says that each one should carry his own load. What is the difference between a burden and a load? What are we responsible for in community and what are we to be responsible for ourselves?
2. Using the illustration of a sports team, what happens when the star players work for their own glory rather than the good of the team? How might this happen in a church?
3. In one word, what is the "law of Christ"?
4. What are some ways that we can gently restore a friend who has struggled with a sin?
5. What is the warning from Paul regarding temptation when we work with another who has sinned? What is the connection with pride?
6. How would you explain verse 6? (Hint: It has to do with money!)
7. Give examples of what it means to "do good" in your community.
8. It is important to remember that Paul is talking to a Christian community when he warns against sowing works of the flesh. What are some ways that we as Christians put more emphasis on "flesh" or worldly matters than we do matters of the Spirit?
9. Paul has been dictating this letter to a scribe, but now at the end of the letter, he grabs the pen (or quill!) and finishes in his own hand writing. What does that gesture suggest to you?
10. Paul closes by focusing on the cross of Christ:

The cross marks the great division, not only between the church and the world, but between those in the church who are prepared to face persecution for the Messiah and those who aren't. The 'agitators' have been keen to mark the bodies of the Galatians with the sign that says they belong to the ethnic family of Abraham. Paul declares that the only marks that matter on his body are the wounds he has suffered as a result of his allegiance to Jesus. If it is bodily marks you want, it is the signs of the cross, not of the circumciser's knife, that matter; and the signs of the cross are the marks of persecution, the 'wounds of Jesus'. (Tom Wright: "Paul for Everyone, Galatians and Thessalonians" – page 81)

11. What are some shallow or superficial “marks” that some Christians might flaunt as signs that they are true believers? What are the signs that you admire in a true believer and follower of Jesus?
12. What does it mean to truly be a new creation in Christ?

Conclusion

I hope that you have enjoyed this study of the book of Galatians. As I said at the beginning, it is considered to be one of the most authenticated letters of Paul. I once read a book by Walter Wangerine Jr. on the life of Paul and it was in reading this book that I was struck by the incredible conversion that Paul experienced. It wasn't just a conversion from Judaism to Christianity, but it was a whole new understanding of the God to whom he had already dedicated his whole life. Paul lived his life for God – he truly believed that he knew God and knew what God wanted for his people, the people of Israel.

And suddenly, his whole belief system was shattered when he personally encountered a living Christ. He had lived under a system of legalism. If he only could obey the law perfectly, then the reign of God would come and his people would be freed from oppression for ever. He did everything in his power to live that kind of life. But it was defeating him – he could never be sure he was doing it well enough.

Can you imagine what it felt like for him to suddenly receive the whole gift of grace – to know that God's salvation wasn't dependent on human's actions, but solely rested upon the love and grace of God. In Jesus, he saw what true freedom was all about. No wonder it crushed him when those who had received Christ went back to depending on laws and legalisms for some kind of salvation!

We have to continually evaluate our own Christian experience to see if we truly know the God that we serve or are we making assumptions about what God will or won't do according to our personal belief systems. It is a challenge!

The key is being open to the Spirit's leading and to continually seek personal encounters with Jesus. It is spending time with Jesus that will reveal Truth to our hearts.

Blessing on your continued walk with Jesus,

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