freedom

reconsidering Galatians

latechurch growth group studies | second quarter 2009

Galatians 1:1-2:20 - Whatever happened to the Gospel?

Study 1

Paul's mission to the Gentiles (non-Jews) in the regions of Galatia in Acts 13 to 15 was the start of a revolution. The Kingdom of God was no longer just for Jews! No matter who you were, no matter where you were from, you were invited to join the people of Israel's Messiah, Jesus. The shockwaves were felt all the way to Jerusalem. Some of the Jewish Christians were unconvinced that unwashed, unclean, uncircumcised gentiles should truly be welcomed - at least until they cleaned up their act. They wanted to add Jewish ritual and law to the message Paul had been preaching in Galatia...so new "missionaries" were sent to add the bits of the message that Paul had left out. The question is, how will the Galatians react? How will they respond to being told there was something lacking in the message that saved them? Let's find out.

Personal Preparation 1

Read Galatians 1:1-10

1. How does Paul describe himself?

2. Describe the key elements of Paul's Gospel in verses 1-4.

3. What does Paul have to say about any message that differs from this Gospel?

Personal Preparation 2

Read Galatians 1:11-24

In this section, Paul talks about a dramatic turn around in his life. You can read the details in Acts 9:1-19.

1. What does Paul say this turn around proves? (v.12)

2. Paul meets the leaders of the church he once tried to destroy - Peter (v.18) and James (v.19). What conclusion do they come to after meeting Paul?

3. In this section, how does Paul say he received his message?

Personal Preparation 3

Read Galatians 2:1-10

1. In your own words, describe the issue surrounding Titus.

2. In Paul's mind, how does the imposition of rules and regulations bring people into slavery?

3. How does Paul's commission from God differ from Peter's?

4. What do they have in common?

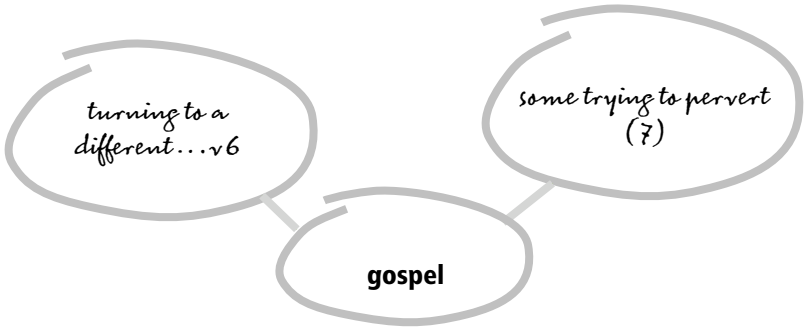
Discussion Questions - Galatians 1:1-2:10

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

READ Galatians 1:1-2:10

1. Compare the Gospel Paul mentions in 1:1-4, with the Gospel he describes the Galatians as having in the rest of this passage. What have the changed, added or detracted from the Gospel Paul talks about? How does Paul feel about the changes?

2. Work through the passage and make a mind map, attaching all the words and ideas that Paul associates with the word "gospel". Some are positive, some negative...but try to arrange them so that similar ideas are in the same general area.



DISCUSS: Imagine an angel appeared in the centre of the room while you're doing this study, and announces that there's a whole new way to get right with God. What are you going to say, and why? (Would you REALLY?)

3. Why is it that another Gospel would be no Gospel at all? What are the effects of this different gospel in Galatia?

4. Paul's message is so important BECAUSE of its origins. Where does Paul's message come from (1:10, 1:11-12, 1:16b-17), and what does this prove?

5. What important people does Paul mention he met with? Why does he mention it?

6. In 2:1-5, Paul describes a situation that arose when he went to Jerusalem. It seems as if some raised the issue of Titus (a Greek) being circumcised. Why do you think Paul reacted so strongly to these "false brothers"?

7. Why would giving in to the demand for Titus to be circumcised "make us slaves" and prevent the "truth of the gospel" from remaining with the Galatians?

For Paul, anything that was added to the "truth of the gospel" actually subtracted from the truth of the gospel. If the false brothers wanted to compel people to be circumcised, Paul was compelled to object.

FOR US:

8. Can you think of extra things that people want to add to the gospel today? How should we respond?

9. How is the "freedom we have in Christ Jesus" (2:4) expressed in **your** Christian life?

10. Is flaunting "rules and regulations" freedom?

Galatians 2:11-21 - Pass the Bacon!

Study 2 - Key Principles for Christian Fellowship

Personal Preparation 1

Read Acts 10:9-48

In the book of Acts, this occurs just after Saul's (Paul's) conversion. We saw last week that Peter was the apostle to the Jews, just as Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7). But what we see here is Peter learning that the old barriers are disappearing.

1. From what you know of the Old Testament, why doesn't Peter want to eat what's offered in this dream?

2. What is God's response to Peter's reaction?

3. From Peter's explanation at Cornelius' house, what is it that God was showing Peter in this dream?

When we get to Galatians, and we learn about Paul's confrontation with Peter and Peter's hypocrisy, we know that Peter should have known better. He hadn't just figured out for himself that times had changed - God had personally told him so. Peter wasn't acting in ignorance. Peter was acting directly against the revelation and command of God.

Personal Preparation 2

Read Galatians 2:11-21

1. Fill in the chart below...

2. What is it that Peter and "the men from James" have been forcing Gentiles to do?

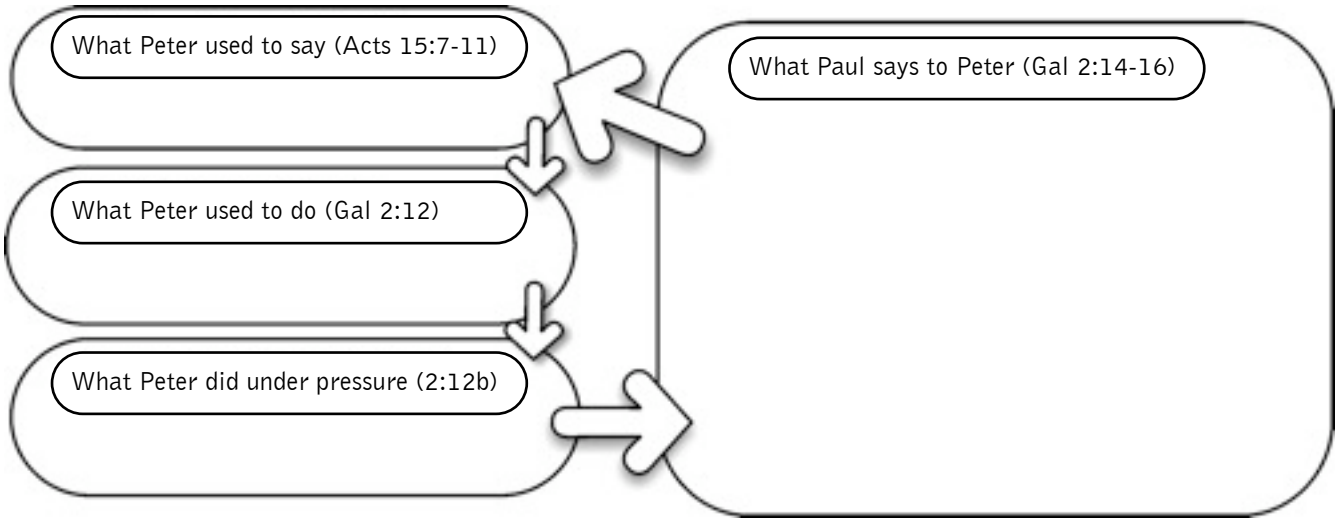
3. Because both Jews and "Gentile Sinners" are saved the same way, what can Paul - and Christ - be accused of?

4. From verses 20-21, what is it that rules Paul's life?

Think Again...

Sometimes we assume the main opposition to Paul (and Peter) came from Jews who did NOT believe in Jesus. But the evidence from Acts 15:5 and 21:20-21 gives a different picture. According to James, "Many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are **zealous for the law.**" Their zeal for the law is what puts them in conflict with Paul. Their zeal for the law - and their desire not to be contaminated by eating with "Gentile sinners" - is also what makes Peter fear them...and turn into a hypocrite!

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



Discussion Questions - Galatians 2:11-21

TO START: What sort of behaviour do people usually identify with Christian hypocrisy? What motivates hypocrisy? Why are Christians so often guilty of it?

READ Galatians 2:11-21

1. From verses 11-13, what is it about Peter's actions that make him a hypocrite? What's he done that's so wrong, and what caused him to do it?

2. What does this show about the tension of Gentiles coming in to the Church?

3. Look through verses 14-18. What are the ways Paul says you can be justified? Which ways apply to which people?

4. Try and explain what verses 17-18 mean?

5. What do you think it means to "die to the law"? (verse 19)

6. Why don't (or why shouldn't) we take on the Old Testament law then as Christians? How do Christians know what they should do from day to day then? (verse 20)

DISCUSS: In what ways are Christians in danger of "rebuilding the law" today? How does this "set aside the grace of God"? (verse 21)

7. What is the end result if we embrace and attempt to enforce the Old Testament Law (verse 21)?

FOR US:

8. What attitude barriers can you see between:
   - Christian brothers and sisters in our church?

   - Christian brothers and sisters in other churches?

9. What steps can we take to make sure they are broken down?

10. What stops you taking the initiative to 're-connect' across barriers of age or style or dress-sense?

Avoiding the Hypocrisy of Religion...

Later in the letter, Paul says the most obvious kind of "christian hypocrisy" is to claim you follow Jesus while you continue in immorality and sin. That's to be avoided at all costs. But there's another sort of hypocrisy that's just as dangerous and a little more subtle...living by "religious laws", and relying on your own efforts at goodness in a way that makes Christ's death for you pointless. It usually means you'll be looking down at other people who don't meet your own high standards. When you do that, you can actually look very good - in fact, you might even seem very religious. But it's a sort of hypocrisy to avoid at all costs!

Galatians 3:1-14 - Bewitched?

Study 3

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

Personal Preparation 1

There were many important people in Israel's history - but none more important than Abraham. He's central to Paul's argument in this section of Galatians, so let's have a look at where it all started.

Read Genesis 12:1-9

1. What are God's promises to Abraham in this section?

2. How did Abraham respond to God's promises?

3. Which of these promises were directed at the Jews, and which were directed at the Gentiles?

These promises to Abraham are the cornerstone of the Old Testament. As we read the OT, we should have Abraham's promises in the back of our minds - are they becoming a great nation? Where's the land promised? Are they a blessing to other nations?

Ultimately Israel fail to bring about these promises. But that's why Jesus came, and that's what Paul is arguing for. It's now all about Jesus.

Personal Preparation 2

Read Galatians 3:1-14

1. In verses 1-5, Paul asks a number of questions. Answer them below by ticking the box...

   a) verse 2: [ ] Believe [ ] Law

   b) verse 5: [ ] Law [ ] Believe

2. What were these people trying to gain? Why were they doing it this way?

3. On the one hand, you've got Jews who are saying "You have to keep the law to be right with God", and on the other hand, you've got Gentile Christians saying "All I need to do is believe in Jesus"...which group is most like Abraham? (v.7)

4. The law was given to the Jews, but it turned out to be a curse. Why?

5. How does Jesus deal with, and do away with, this curse?

Discussion Questions - Galatians 3:1-14

TO START: Do you think that mankind has a love / hate relationship with rules and laws? Why or why not?

READ Galatians 2:11-21

1. What is it from the first 5 verses that the Galatians so badly wanted? How were they were trying to keep it, and how does Paul say the did gain it?

2. From verse 1, Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified "before their very eyes". How does this idea link with the fact they are trying to attain a place in God's family by their own efforts?

3. Combining the ideas in verses 1-5, what has the death of Jesus on the cross made possible, and how do we become part of it?

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

4. What was the one big thing that Abraham did right in the eyes of God? Is this closer to the "Gentile" way of thinking, or the "Jewish" way of thinking? Please explain.

5. What ancient promise is Paul referring to in verses 7-8?

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

6. According to verse 10, how much of the Law do you need to keep to be justified by it? Why do some still think they can be justified by the Law then?

7. What way does God say you can be right before him? (verse 11)

8. What has Jesus done for:
   a. The Jews:

   b. The Gentiles:

   c. And How?

FOR US:

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

10. Is it "easier" to be told that you are justified by faith, or to be given rules to follow? Why?

11. Do you think Paul is giving license here to do what we want? (We'll look at this more in coming weeks as well.)

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

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

Galatians 3:15-29 - Don't split the family of Faith

Study 4

Personal Preparation 1

What we read here, is the a meeting of Church leaders in Jerusalem. It was the very first meeting to decide how non-Jews were going to be incorporated into God's family. Let's see what happened.

Read Acts 15:1-21

1. What is the issue that has arisen in the Church? (verses 1-5)

2. How does Peter argue for the inclusion of Gentiles "as-is"?

3. What's the conclusion the council comes to? (verses 19-21)

4. Why do you think they came to this conclusion?

Personal Preparation 2

Read Galatians 3:15-29

This is a tricky passage, and one we probably won't understand at first glance. And maybe not at the second! But to try and get a glimpse of what Paul is saying, there's one little detail it's helpful to know.

The New International Version of the Bible is a pretty reliable guide to the original text of the Bible. But every now and then it's helpful to dig behind what's there to see what the original actually says. This passage is one of those times.

In an effort to make Galatians 3:16 clearer, the NIV has added some words that are not in the original. And by doing that, they've shifted the meaning a little. Here's the English translation, with the added words in bold print...

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

That loads in the idea that "seed" refers to 'persons.' The original greek simply says "The scripture does not say "And to seeds," as to many; but as to one, "and to your seed."

So many what? One what? You'll notice in the next few verses Paul goes on to say that we are 'all one family in Christ' (See v 28 below). It has recently been suggested that a better interpretation comes if you plug in the idea of "family" instead - a common understanding of 'seed' or 'offspring.' This gives a slightly different reading. Write in 'family' and see what happens:

The scripture does not say, "And to _____s," meaning many, but "And to your _____" meaning one, which is Christ."

In other words, God's plan to bring blessing to the whole world wasn't going to create a bunch of different families (Jews vs Gentiles), but ONE FAMILY... in Christ. Exactly the same point is made in verse 28. Fill the gaps...

There is neither _____ nor _____, _____ nor _____, _____ nor _____
for you are _____ _____ in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

SO...for this entire passage, try and follow the logic of what Paul is saying, and write it below.

Discussion Questions - Galatians 3:15-29

Read Galatians 4:15-29

1. Describe in your own words what you see in the timeline (above). Try do describe all the features in the diagram. Then read 4:15-25, and label each part of the diagram above with the verse number that describes it.

2. With the diagram above, and looking through the passage, fill in the table below to get a better understanding of Paul's argument:

	Covenant with Abraham	Covenant with Moses (the Law)
Recipient(s)	v.16,22 -	The Israelites
Purpose	v.18 - Inheritance	v.24-25 -
Fulfilment	v.25	v.24-25

3. From the above table, what can you say:
   a. About what the purpose of the Law was and is now.

   b. About who can have, and how they can have, God's inheritance promised to Abraham.

   c. What relationship we have to have to Christ, in order to gain an inheritance.

4. There's a key word that Paul uses in verse 23 - UNTIL. What is the role of faith now that we've reached this "UNTIL"? How is this a better arrangement?

DISCUSS: What response would you have to someone who was trying to encourage you to step back under the Law?

5. From verses 26-29, what does Paul see as the qualifier for being in God's family? What affect does this have on relationships and status within the family of God?

FOR US:

6. Do you think there's a temptation to view people in the church based on something other than Christ? Give some examples.

7. Why is there a tendency for people to slip back into following the Law instead of remaining in Grace?

8. If we aren't under Law any more, but under grace & faith, what does this mean for people who become Christians now? How do we know WHAT to ask them to change, and how do we know WHAT NOT to ask them to change?

Galatians 4:1-5:1 - Children of Freedom

Study 5

Personal Preparation 1

Before you read, here's some quick prep. This is a passage that starts of with Paul saying "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Clearly, he means all of you, Jewish or Gentile Christian. Distinctions no longer matter. There's a subtle line of argument that flows through 4:1-11 - look for it as you read. Paul will often use "we" to refer to himself and the Jewish Christians, and "you" in reference to the Gentile converts. When you notice this, it helps make sense of what he's saying...

for example -

> 4:3 "So also when we were children we were in slavery under...
> 4:8 "Formerly when you did not know God you were slaves to those...

Read Galatians 4:1-4:20

1. The Jewish Christians might be heirs of the one who owns the farm, but what have they been like so far? (v.1-3)

2. How does this compare with the prior situation of the Gentiles? (v.8)

3. What were the Jews & Gentiles enslaved to? (v.3 & v.9 - same word.)

4. And what is the common ground between Jews & Gentiles now? (v.6-7)

5. The Galatian Gentiles are at risk of becoming slaves all over again. What is Paul's warning in v.9-11?

6. From this passage, what makes you think Paul genuinely cares about the Galatians?

Personal Preparation 2

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

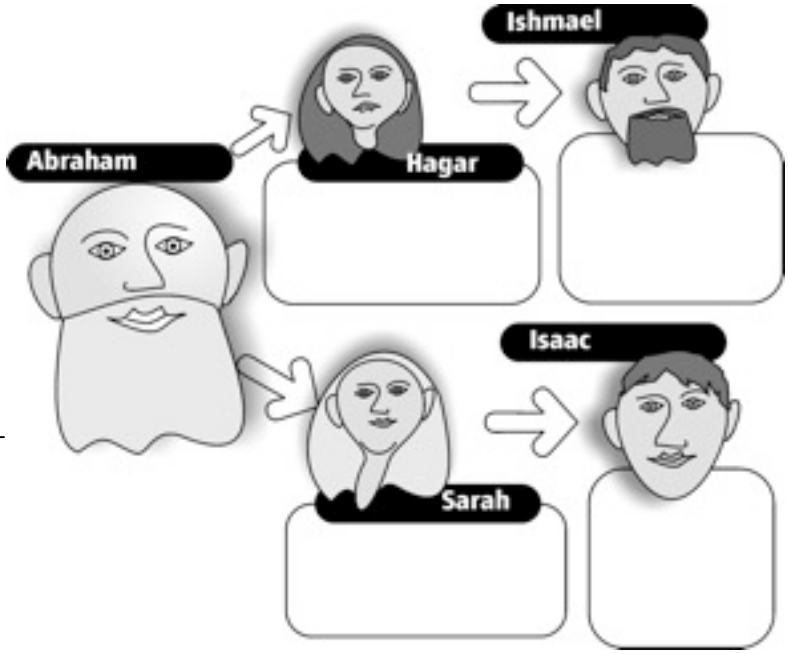
1. **Read Galatians 4:21-5:1,** and put the below descriptions in the diagram boxes below with the right characters in Paul's "figurative" retelling of the story...

> Slave woman, free woman, son born in the ordinary way, son born of promise, covenant from Sinai (law), slaves, Hagar, present Jerusalem, Jerusalem above, free, born of the power of the Spirit, us.

2. Which person represents us (Christians)?

3. Which person represents the Jews? (Or Judaizing Christians?)

4. What does the future hold for the "present Jerusalem"?



Discussion Questions - Galatians 4:1-5:1

If you were 'born with a silver spoon in your mouth', your experience of life is very different to someone who was 'born on the wrong side of the tracks.' They're both familiar (though dated) expressions that reflect on a person's 'station in life' - again a dated term. Maybe these days in Australia it just doesn't matter so much where a person came from in terms of their social standing. (Or maybe it does?) In any case, it mattered to the Jews. In this section, Paul calls for some radical re-thinking. Things are both worse than they thought ... and better than they thought. And that's true for us too - no matter which side of the tracks we were born on! Let's see how.

Read Galatians 4:1-5:1

1. From verses 1-7, in terms of the status of Jews and Gentiles:[1]
   a. What's changed:

   b. How has it changed:

   c. What privileges go along with that change?

DISCUSS: What types of people does our church bring together as a family that wouldn't usually be together? Are we working hard enough to make sure there's no "elitism" in our church?

2. Tragically, the Galatian gentiles are at risk of becoming slaves all over again. What's Paul's warning in verses 9-11? What's the issue?

It'd be tragic if the Galatians became slaves again...but they were heading that way if they kept listening to the Jewish Christians who were trying to impose all kinds of rules and regulations and holy day observances. But the Gospel, and Paul's teaching would be in vain if they went back to that!

DISCUSS this statement. "Christians would demonstrate the reality of the gospel better if we stopped celebrating Christmas and Easter."

3. Have a look from verses 4:11 onwards. What sense do you get that Paul is personally hurting by the road the Galatians are heading down?

THINK:

4. Are you as passionate as Paul about this issue?

5. What do you think Paul would say to you? Does your life as a Christian reflect the fact that you're not God's slave, but God's child?

6. Run through the story of Hagar and Sarah in 4:21-31, and discuss what and who each part of the story represents. What's Paul's point from this story?

FOR US:

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

8. Is there a danger of going to the other extreme? How do we avoid both extremes?

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[1] (See note about "We" and "You" in Personal Prep 1)

Galatians 5-6 - Free for What?

Study 6

Personal Preparation 1

Read Galatians 5:1-15

1. Why is circumcision & law-keeping "all or nothing"?

2. What's the result of turning back to law-keeping?

3. In verses 5, as opposed to law, what are the true keys to righteousness?

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

4. According to verse 6, what is the only thing that counts?

5. Rather than using our freedom for self-indulgence, what should we be doing? (verse 13)

6. How does the one statement in verse 14 sum up the Old Testament laws? (i.e. the Ten Commandments)

Personal Preparation 2

Read Galatians 5:16-26

1. What does it mean to walk with the Spirit? (v. 16)

2. What battle occurs within Christians? (v.17)

3. From verses 19-21, what are the identifiers that someone is not being led by the Spirit? What does their future hold?

4. From verses 21-23, what are the characteristics of those led by the Spirit? How does the Spirit do away with the law?

5. From verses 15 and 26, what seem to be the biggest struggles for the Galatians?

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

Personal Preparation 3

Read Galatians 6:1-18

1. In what way does Paul tell the Corinthians they should care for each other? (verses 1-2)

2. And in what way does he say how they should value their own worth? (verses 3-5)

3. What is the motivation for doing what we do, according to Paul? (verses 6-10)

4. How do the final verses (verses 11-18) summarise the issues we've seen running all the way through the letter?

5. Why would taking on the Jewish Law help them avoid being persecuted?

Discussion Questions - Galatians 5-6

With all Paul's talk of "freedom from the law," we've already asked the question, "if we're not under law, how do we know how to live." It's in the closing chapters of Galatians that Paul gives the answers. We must not move from freedom back to slavery - but on the other hand, our freedom must not be used as an excuse for sin. As Paul puts it, the Christian life is all about living by the Spirit... free at last... free to serve God.

Read Galatians 5

1. From verses 1-6, discuss why Paul is so opposed to the law?

2. What does Paul mean in verse 6, where he says that "the only thing that counts if faith expressing itself through love"? Does this reflect your attitude?

3. Paul says we are free from the law (v.13), but what does he tell us we should use our freedom for? Do you?

4. Lots of Christians talk about dramatic evidences of the Holy Spirit at work in their churches or their lives. According to verse 16, what will the MOST dramatic evidences of the Holy Spirit be?

5. Describe the differences between the two lists of in verses 19-21 and 22-23. Which list better describes you?

Read Galatians 6

6. Look at Paul's warning in the first 5 verses. What is he afraid of? How can we avoid them at LateChurch?

7. In verses 8-10, Paul describes something that looks a little bit like "karma". What is he trying to say?

8. Do you think it's obvious what you are sowing? (i.e. where you are investing time, energy and resources.)

9. Have a look through verses 11-18. How do these verses summarise many of the issues we've seen running all the way through the letter.

FOR US:

10. You may not think you are under law, but can you see instances in your life where it is obvious you are led by the Spirit?

11. What have you learnt from Galatians that has changed your perspective on "what counts"?

Spend some time praying with each other about the things you've learnt, been challenged by and want to change as a result of working through Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Notes & Prayer Points