

Study of Galatians

Core theme: The Gospel is enough!

Author – Paul in approx. AD 49 in Antioch.

Original audience- churches in Galatia founded on Paul's 1st missionary journey.



Key verse: *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. (5:1)*

Purpose: To refute Judaizers who were calling gentile believers to follow the rules and traditions of the Jewish Law alongside their faith in Jesus. And to call them to true faith in Jesus, who alone can save.

- First, we need to understand: **What is the Gospel?**

Jesus Christ came to liberate us from the power of sin and death. He came to rescue us from eternal punishment by taking our place. *'But he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was laid on him and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29)* became our once and for all sacrifice and no other sacrifice for sins is left (*Hebrews 10:10*). Jesus cried out: *It is finished* as he breathed his last breath on the Cross (*John 19:30*). His death completely atoned for our sin and so now through faith in him we can experience true and lasting forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. This offer of forgiveness and reconciliation to God through Jesus is open to all whatever one's race, language, gender, or creed. It is a free gift to be received by faith and through it all are made righteous in God's sight. (*Romans 3:21-25*)

It is as if Jesus came to you in your prison cell condemned to die and opened the door and allowed you to leave and he stayed to take your place. This is all the more amazing in that Jesus is the Son of God, our Creator and the Alpha and Omega, God Almighty who chose to become a sacrifice and pour out his blood, obtaining eternal redemption for all who would come through him (*Hebrews 9:11-14*).

This is the new covenant which, supersedes the old covenant of adherence to the Law and the sacrifice of animals as the way to being right with God (*Hebrews 8:6*). This new covenant came in Jesus, His life and death on the Cross and His resurrection offering forgiveness and resurrection life to all who would believe in Him. After which he would send the Holy Spirit to be with us forever, to come into our hearts to be our Guide, Comforter, Counsellor – God with us. Our guarantee and deposit of the kingdom life which we will inherit, and we will live forever with our God (*Hebrews 8:8-12/Romans 8:1-4/11*).

It is a new relationship that is not distant or impersonal or based on fear, but we are adopted into God's family and become 'sons,' rightful heirs with Christ of God's kingdom. God is our heavenly Father who loves us (*Romans 8:14-17*). As beloved children of God we are then moved by His love in our heart to persuade others to come and believe in Jesus and receive the free gift of grace and new life (*2 Corinthians 5:14-21*).

Galatians is a book which articulates the full meaning of the pure gospel. What it is and what it is not. It contrasts adherence to the Law and earning our salvation, with belief in the true gospel which brings salvation as a gift.

Legalism and enslavement versus faith and freedom.

- Meditate on what the gospel means for you and the world.

Chapter 1 Muddying the waters.

Read 1-10 – in order to recognise a diversion from the true gospel we need to understand it fully. Paul was '*astonished*' that they were moving away from it and introducing other things so that just the gospel was now not enough to be saved and sanctified. Now these false teachers who had infiltrated the church were adding things – gospel + (a) gospel +(b) = Christian faith.

But Paul was eager to rescue them from this heresy that was leading them back into slavery to the old covenant of obeying hundreds of rules and observance of special days and rituals to be made righteous.

The gospel as we have meditated on above is an amazing gift from God to the world and can only be received by faith. We cannot earn it and can do nothing to better it. We simply have to admit our utter powerlessness to save ourselves and receive it with deep thankfulness.

Paul challenges the believers to trust in God alone and not to bow to outside pressure to conform to certain behaviours. The believers had started to put pleasing people above pleasing God out of fear.

Application

- What does the true gospel require of us as believers?
(Drowning analogy)
- Have you any personal experience of pressure from your church to conform to certain rules and traditions being made to think if you don't obey you are sinning?
- Do you ever give in to fear/people-pleasing?

Read 1:11-24 – Amazing grace - It's always good to use our testimony and personal experience when in discussion with those who disagree with us (*Revelation 12:11*). Paul states first in verse 1:1 that he was sent as an apostle by God – he establishes his credentials clearly. As a former murderer of followers of the Way he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, and repented of his sins and was then sent to the gentiles to share the truth of the gospel (*Acts 9:1-9*).

Paul had been a rigorous and legalistic rule -keeper. A '*Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless*' (*Philippians 3:5-6*). But he had been liberated from empty human religion by Jesus, who came to save the world in love. After his encounter with Jesus his own hard heart was filled with the Spirit of God and mercy and compassion became his new motivation to see the gentile world rescued from sin and death.

Before his conversion Paul had been a very proud and hard religious man. He thought his rule-keeping and zeal for God made him right before God and better than others. But Jesus showed Paul the state of his heart. A heart filled with pride, hatred and hardness. Paul encountered the Son of God who had come down to save the world not through worldly power but by humbly dying on a cross.

Paul's response after his conversion was to go to Arabia for 3 years. Perhaps he went there to spend time with Jesus and relearn all he had learned as a Jew about God from a new perspective of GRACE. He was very knowledgeable in the scriptures, but meeting Jesus changed everything because God was not as he had believed. He had to get to know the true and living God. He had been a pharisee, who were condemned by Jesus as being *whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23)* hypocrites, who had no idea who God was, even though they professed to be representatives of God (*1John 2:23/John 8:19/42-47*).

After Arabia he went to Jerusalem to acquaint himself with the Apostles- Peter and James, who accepted him and his testimony that he had been sent by God to the gentiles.

Application

- Paul had been a very religious man. After he met Jesus, he became a lover of Jesus. Read and discuss the change Paul experienced and the impact upon his life and ministry - *Philippians 3:3-14*.
- Have you personally experienced a shift from rule-based religion to true faith? What's the difference? How did your life change?

Chapter 2 The transcultural gospel of freedom

After 14 years Paul went from Antioch to the Jerusalem Council/Conference (Acts 15). He took Barnabas with him and Titus a Greek gentile Christian. They went to sort out the growing problem between the Judaizers and the Gentile believers.

Read Acts 15:1-35 for the parallel story in more detail.

The issue: *the Judaizers/Pharisees group believed that it was not enough to believe in Jesus, but gentile Christians should also be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.*

Paul felt compelled to counter this false teaching that had infiltrated the church and present a clear apologetic of the all-sufficiency of the Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross and justification by faith alone.

For Paul there was at stake the authenticity of the true Gospel and the freedom it brings. He repudiated a return to enslavement to the Law and Jewish traditions, which could not save and realised it was a real threat to the unity of the church, which was vulnerable to divisions as new factions arose with different voices.

The Jews were looking down upon the gentile Christians as they had always done. They could not accept that now in Christ they were all equal and justified freely through Christ alone. This challenged their religious and national pride.

Read Acts chapter 10 - God had already spoken to Peter about the Gentiles' inclusion into the church and God's acceptance of them. *God clearly showed Peter he was not to regard Gentiles as unclean and outside God's purposes.* In fact, God's purpose and plan had always been to reach the surrounding nations, and the world. *Genesis 12:3/Acts 3:35* refer to the promise which pointed to the Messiah who would come from the Jews and bless the nations –ie bring salvation (*Acts 15:15-19*).

God loves the world- **Acts 13:46-48** – records Paul and Barnabas at the start of their Gentile mission quoting from Isaiah who prophesied that God's desire was that all nations would believe in Him as the One true God.

'I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

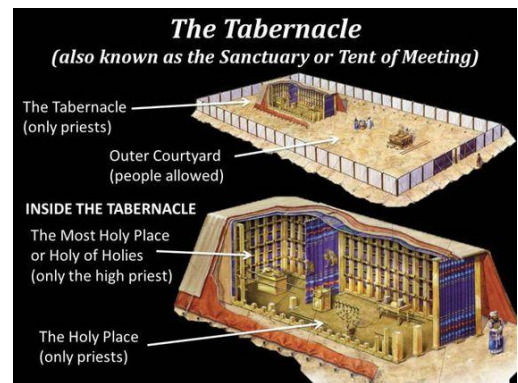
However, Peter had clearly forgotten what God had shown him because here he is in **2:11-14** being accused by Paul of refusing to eat with the gentile brothers out of fear of the Judaizers. Of reverting to old ways of behaving and treating gentiles as inferior. Paul boldly confronts him, and Peter graciously accepted his rebuke (Proverbs 27:6).

We all need a Paul in our lives, who will challenge us when we are at fault. Paul's motivation was not to humiliate Peter but to protect him and the church from deception.

Read Hebrews 9 1-15 which contrasts the first covenant with the new covenant.

1st covenant requirements:

- Adherence to the Mosaic Law including circumcision.
- Tabernacle – Presence of God there – in the Most Holy Place (golden ark of the covenant, golden altar of incense, gold jar of manna, Aarons staff, stone tablets of the covenant, Cherubim of the Glory,)
- Only The High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of an animal which he offered to take away the sins of the people.



New covenant blessings:

- Jesus (the new temple and embodiment of the presence of God) came to fulfil the former covenant and its regulations. His blood now brings atonement, and the holy place is now open to all (Hebrews 10:19-22). Forgiveness of sins is through the blood of Christ shed once for all at the cross and new life through the Holy Spirit.

Now all men everywhere from all cultures had access to God through faith in Christ. Faith in Jesus was open to all cultures and relevant to all peoples without having to remain in any way Jewish.

9-10 The Jerusalem Council listened to Paul and Barnabas and compromised. The new gentile believers would not be required to be circumcised but they asked they might refrain from certain foods. And asked that Paul and the church remembered their responsibility to care for the poor. God will judge us on how well we care for the poor and needy, refugee, sick, widows, orphans etc.

(Isaiah 11:1-4, 61:1-2, Matthew 11:1-6/Luke 6:35-36/2 Corinthians 8:13-15/Deuteronomy 15:7-8/Leviticus 25/James 2:1-23/Acts 6:1-7/1 John 3:16-17, Isaiah 58, Jeremiah 22:16 etc!!)

Application

- Read and Discuss **Colossians 2:16-23**

Do you ever feel pressure to conform to outward rules in your churches? The bible is clear that these rules cannot save or sanctify us – only inward change through the Holy Spirit and applying God’s Word can do that! (**Hebrews 4:12-13/Jeremiah 23:29**)

- Why do you think the new covenant far surpasses the first one?
- Acts 2 shows the Holy Spirit was poured out on people of different languages - Jesus in Africa, Jesus in China, Jesus in the UK – how can our Christian faith be culturally relevant in different cultures without losing the truth of the Gospel? When might culture/customs badly influence the gospel? What about in your culture? Do you see any syncretism (mixing of faith and culture)?
- Discuss Paul’s great statement: 2:19-21 - *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!*

Paul’s new motive for obeying God was not for reward but LOVE. He was so grateful and amazed at what Jesus had done for him he laid down his life for him to live for him alone. GRACE – God’s promised gift – freedom and life through faith in Jesus.

Chapter 3 Faith-promise v works-reward

Paul continues to thrash out his argument repeating the same point from a different perspective. He points the Galatians to Abraham, their father of faith and shows them that Abraham did not please God by his works but by his belief in God’s promise.

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). His belief and faith in what God said revealed made him right before God. Therefore, Paul says, those who have faith are the true children of Abraham; our spiritual descent is from him.

Self-effort and good works cannot save us. Only faith in Jesus and acceptance of his promise of eternal life can save us.

Paul argues - Because it is impossible as sinful human beings to obey the whole law all the time we are under a curse – *Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ (Deuteronomy 27:26)*

But Christ set us free from the curse by becoming a curse for us – *‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:23).* He took our place and redeemed us from the curse of the law so that we might receive the promise of blessing given to Abraham – the promise of the Holy Spirit.

And so, the key is FAITH – *Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)* in JESUS as SAVIOUR and DELIVERER.

Realizing our absolute need of a Saviour is all that is required to please God and receive all He has for us: *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).*

Think about these 2 scenarios - *My uncle Jack wants to give me 10 million dollars, all I need to do is meet with him to receive it. My uncle Jack wants me to look after him in his old age and when he dies, I will receive 10 million dollars.* Can you see the difference?

*'A gift-promise needs only to be believed to be received, but a law-wage must be obeyed to be received.'*¹

The main purpose of the Law was to highlight our human problem – our inability to live righteously and to show that we are lawbreakers deserving of judgement and need a Saviour. Without a Saviour we are morally helpless, lost at sea with no hope unless someone rescues us, imprisoned in sin until someone sets us free.

As recipients of grace the children of God should never forget the awfulness of sin so that we will never stop thanking God for Jesus our Rescuer. As we fully realise and comprehend the utter darkness of a life of sin and its terrible consequences, then and only then do we fully appreciate the glorious light of the gospel which has translated us from darkness to the kingdom of light.

'But you a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, gods special possession that you may declare the praises of him, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'(1 Peter 2:9)

Application

- Have you ever had a personal revelation of your sinfulness and utter need of God to save you?
- How do you view God's grace to you personally?
- Obeying God's law is now internalized. What is your experience of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit changing you, cleansing you and moving you to be more like Jesus?

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) the old life has gone the new life through the Holy Spirit has come. We have died to our old life and by the Spirit we put to death the things of the earthly nature and embrace our heavenly nature in Christ – a new way of living. (Colossians 3:1-14).

3:23-25 – The Law was a forerunner to God's perfect solution to sin and faithlessness. Its purpose was a temporary guardianship until we could receive our inheritance as heirs of the promise (of blessing) through faith in Jesus. The Law's purpose highlighted mankind's need of a Saviour and utter moral helplessness. It showed the only way to perfect reconciliation to God was actual only possible through God himself. There was no way man could ever attain holiness.

Even Noah, a righteous man who was chosen by God to be saved from the flood later revealed his moral frailty when he got drunk and led his sons to sin (Genesis 9:20-23). And Moses the deliverer chosen by God to lead his rebellious people to the Promised Land could not enter because of his sin (Deut 32:50-52/Numbers 20:1-12). When the Israelites tried his patience in anger he struck the rock at Meribah disobeying God who told him **to speak** to the rock and he also took the credit himself – *'Listen you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock?'*

The only way was for God to send His Son Jesus..the Lamb of God -a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29).

¹ T Keller *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company 2022) p. 79

READ Isaiah 59:12-20

¹⁶ He saw that there was no one,
he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
so his own arm achieved salvation for him,
and his own righteousness sustained him.

²⁰ "The Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,"
declares the LORD.

3:26-4:7 Children of God united by Christ

The concept of divine adoption is powerful.

'If Jesus as 'the Seed' 3:19 gets all of Abraham's promised blessings, then anyone who belongs to Christ through faith automatically becomes an heir of the promises to Abraham. Through the Son we become God's children legally, receiving a new status; and through the Spirit, we become God's children experientially.'²

Heirs in this ancient culture were sons. Therefore, to include females here – '*you are all heirs*' is revolutionary and reveals a radical equality. God uses the genders equally. The Bride of Christ includes both genders, male and female.

Paul says we have been *clothed with Christ 3:26* – this sense that we are in the embrace of Christ and when God looks at us, he sees us as we are of course (Psalm 139:1-16) but held in the embrace of His Son and covered – we are '*hidden in Christ*' (Colossians 3:3). We are safe and secure in Christ's embrace. *We dwell in the shelter of His presence, in the shadow of his wing (Psalm 91:1).*

Wow!

The sense of being clothed also have these implications:

- Our clothing identifies us – we belong to CHRIST.
- Our clothes fit close to our bodies, so this implies a closeness to Christ like no other bond. A moment-by-moment dependency on him.
- We are to '*put on*' Christ in our daily lives and to imitate him – '*dress up like him*' look like, sound like, act like, think like JESUS.
- Clothing is worn as an adornment. In the garden of Eden God made clothes for Adam and Eve to cover their shame. Similarly, our status 'in Christ' is our acceptability before God and covers our shame. It is our grace covering and our true righteousness.³

All one in Christ

*'We are not all identical or interchangeable, but we are all one.'*⁴ We come from different backgrounds and cultures, different nations and economic status, different genders and generations but in Christ our differences are redeemed from being divisive and conflicting to being cohesive and complementary. We do not lose our distinctiveness eg. like the Greeks in this book did not have to become Jews, but a new unity exists for the body of Christ, whose members are filled with the one Holy Spirit of God and clothed with Christ, all barriers are gone. This is a level playing field where all

² T Keller *Galatians for You* p89

³ T Keller *Galatians For You* pp 90-91

⁴ T Keller *Galatians* p92

our human achievements fade and our true purpose in Christ propels us as the people of God out into our communities, our families, and our world with one voice to reconcile all people to God.

This unity is only possible in and through Christ and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts who fills us with a divine LOVE for God and our neighbour that is straight from the heart of God.

Verse 26 reaches upwards we are sons of the Creator. Verse 28 spans the globe – we are united with every other Christian regardless of difference, verse 29 looks back through history, we are Abraham’s seed and heirs of the promise, fulfilled in Christ. ⁵

Application

- How do you feel about being an adopted son of God? In ancient culture a slave could be adopted by their owner, and they would become an heir with full privileges of a son. This is in effect what happens to us.
- Do you practice daily the presence of God? Intentionally reflect upon being ‘in Christ’ clothed with Christ? What difference does it/would it make?
- What barriers divide people in your community, family, church, ministry? How can we help and improve this?

Chapter 4 - Slaves to Sons- Religion to Faith

Paul contrasts the path of slavery and death with the path of freedom and life. Before Christ came to die for sins, people were in bondage to the law. But the more they tried to be saved by it and failed the more enslaved they became. But when Christ came, he redeemed us from the law and granted us adoption to sonship. There was a foundational shift in our relationship with God from law and works based righteousness (which failed) to personal faith in Christ and his finished work on the cross which imputed righteousness and a new identity as children of God.

How amazing that we can now call out to God as ‘abba’ with the passion and intimacy of a son/daughter and the sure expectation of love and welcome! God sent His Son and His Spirit who indwell the hearts of believers. The work of the Son was done externally, the work of the Spirit is done internally. The fullness of the Spirit is experienced as we meditate on the love of the Son. There is a new intimacy. Our emotions are involved. Faith is from the heart and is a love-relationship. It is not about performance or achievement but love.⁶ As a child assumes his/her Daddy is always there for them so we can be assured of our heavenly Father’s caring and loving presence. As sons we possess a new boldness as we come to our Father in heaven. When we pray, we do not simply utter meaningless liturgies, but we speak to God in our hearts with warmth, passion and freedom.

Application

- Some people who have had difficult relationships with their parent/s might struggle to truly understand the nature of God as ‘abba father’. Maybe parents who had high expectations and made them feel pressurised to perform and achieve their ‘love’ or approval. Or parents who neglected them, or even abused them in some way.

We need to study God’s Word and look to Jesus (who fully represents God in every way) to renew our minds and get to know the Father, who loves us so much he sent his own dear son to die in our place.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.’(1 John 3:16).

⁵ T Keller Galatians p 94

⁶ T Keller Galatians p99-100

And we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1 John 4:16)

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

- What about you? How was your upbringing with your parents? Did they help or hinder your understanding of God as a loving Father?

4:8-20 Gospel faith v worldly religion (Biblical moralism)

Many of the Galatian new Christians had been idol worshippers in the pagan temples and had lived immoral lifestyles. When Paul warns them not to return to being enslaved by 'weak and miserable forces' he is not talking about returning to pagan worship, but to equally demonic empty religion. His implication is that it is still idolatry if one is trying to earn one's salvation by following rituals, adhering to certain legalistic rules, and observing festivals. Evil spiritual forces are as much behind this as pagan worship, because the focus is not Christ and the Cross but SELF.

1 Cor 10:20 *'the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons'* not gods. Because there is only one true God. (1 Cor 8:4-6).

But now that we are known by God and know him (4:9) this new God/man relationship trumps all other forms of idolatry or worldly religion. We return to the intimacy of God walking in the garden of Eden seeking Adam in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8).

Paul's appeal to the Galatians is from the heart. He thanks them for their former care when he was ill and when they responded to his preaching the gospel with open hearts. He contrasts this with the present time when they seem to have turned their backs on him and his message. Paul sensed the Galatians had returned to a legalism which was squeezing their former joy out and leaving a grey, lifeless, burdensome religion that was far from the glorious freeing salvation he had preached formerly.

Of course, many did not like Paul's rebuke (4:16). They once viewed him with love but now he is the enemy. But Paul appeals to them out of genuine concern that they were losing their faith in truth and Jesus who alone can save and following empty religious rituals again. He strongly opposes the false teachers, who have led them astray and is bold in his confrontation. He was deeply concerned as their spiritual father (4:19-20). Here we see Paul's pastoral heart, he loves them and is sad. He knows the real enemy is Satan (Ephesians 6:12) behind these false teachers and is fighting with weapons of righteousness.

2 Cor 10:4-6³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

Application

- As leaders we need to confront false teachers and wrong teachings that infiltrate our churches or groups. Often however they remain unchecked and heresies grow up that lead many astray.

Can you think of churches that have lost their true focus and are now far from God? What about your church? How can we guard our own hearts and ministry from veering off course? Are we accountable to each other and our leaders?

4:21-31 - Slave woman Free woman

An allegory of the Gospel- the story of Hagar and Sarah representing - seeking salvation by works and relying on salvation by God's grace.

Just as Isaac came via a miracle of God to a barren woman and an old man so too salvation comes to us via a miracle of God's grace.

Abraham and Sarah were waiting for the promised son through whom the covenantal promises in **Genesis 12:1-3/15:1-6** would be realised. God had promised that they would bear a son. But Sarah got tired of waiting, she was barren and persuaded Abraham to take Hagar as his mistress. She bore a son, Ismael. But this was done without God's blessing. God had clearly told Abraham his heir would come from them naturally.

In Genesis 17:15-22/18:9-15 God tells Abraham again that Sarah would bear a son and after waiting a further 14 years she does! **Genesis 21:1-7**.

All in all, they had to wait 25 years for the promise to be fulfilled! Why did they have to wait so long? Perhaps so that the miracle was even greater. Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham 100. Humanly speaking it was an impossibility. This foreshadows the virgin birth of Jesus – an impossibility with man but this was a divine act through which God's salvation would come. Isaac was the son of a divine promise through whom the future 'seed' would bring blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3).

- Hagar represents the law, Mount Sinai (10 commandments) the earthly Jerusalem and the old covenant whose children are born slaves.
- Sarah represents the new covenant the heavenly Jerusalem, the new spiritual kingdom whose children are born of the Spirit and are free.
- Hagar's descendants figuratively represent those who rely on the law and works to attain righteousness and God's approval. They are enslaved.
- Sarah's descendants figuratively represent those who trust in Jesus for salvation and righteousness. They are free children of God.

To remind ourselves – the issue at Galatia was that the false teachers/Judaizers were insisting that faith in Christ alone was not enough for salvation. They were insisting believers also needed to be circumcised, and to keep the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

Isaiah 54: 1 'Sing barren woman, you who never bore a child. Burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.' This prophecy looks back to Genesis 16 to Hagar and Sarah, but also to the future Son, who would be born through a virgin and from him would come countless children of God – Christian believers.

Application

- Look at the story of the Prodigal and Elder Son in **Luke 15:11-27**. Compare and contrast the 2 sons and their response to grace. Which son represents the new covenant and which the old?

- 'Rule-keeping religion is for the noble, the strong, the moral, the able but the gospel is for all.'⁷ Discuss.
- Abraham and Sarah got impatient and tried to sort out their problem themselves, but in that they forgot God's promise to them. The problems that came through the birth of Ishmael were far-reaching. Our impatience can lead us away from faith and into actions that have devastating consequences. Are you waiting for a promise to be fulfilled? Have you ever lost patience and moved forward with negative consequences?

Chapter 5 Stand Firm in your Freedom in Christ

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it the full!' (John 10:10).

Jesus came to set us free. He was the great Liberator freeing us from the power of sin and death, from guilt and condemnation. No longer do we need to be under the fear of judgement or punishment because Jesus paid our penalty on the Cross. He died for the sins of the whole world and gave us the FREE gift of forgiveness and eternal life. He freed us for a life of freedom. A gift of GRACE that can only be received and lived by grace. Paul again reiterates how impossible it is to add anything to Christ's marvellous salvation. It is complete. A gift is a gift and can only be received. It cannot be earned – then it would cease being a gift rather a reward. This gift of eternal life is something we wait for with expectant hope by faith.

Hebrews 11:1. Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

The mark of circumcision (5:2) is no guarantee of anything just as our daily religious rituals, fasting, observance of certain religious festivals are equally of no relevance to our salvation.

Hedging your bets by trusting in Jesus + something else is not only useless it is also belittling Christ's great salvation. But God's Word is clear – only Christ's sacrifice can save the world.

(Revelation 5:4-9) ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."

Key verse: 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through LOVE.' 5:6

My good performance does not make me more acceptable to God nor bad performance does not make me any more lost. Only through Christ can we receive salvation. Related to this – as a Christian I can sometimes think God loves me more when I am doing more for Him but actually, he

⁷ T Keller Galatians p 127

cannot love me any more or less than he does right now. God is love. Of course, I can please him and displease him, but it does not affect His love for me. It is comparable to a parent's love for a child. When our children do something wrong, we are disappointed, but we do not stop loving them! God is interested in the heart and not outward show. If our actions come from a heart of love, they are acceptable to God and in fact prove our faith. Our faith is expressed through love. Our love can be a monitor of our faith.

Luke 7:36-50 - The sinful woman who anointed Jesus' head with oil did so out of love for the God-man who rescued her from her life of sin and transformed her life.

Jesus commended her to Simon the Pharisee, because unlike him, (a hypocrite) she was a true believer as her actions proved. She poured out her love on Jesus.

'Therefore, her many sins have been forgiven-as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little (Luke 7:47).

The way I treat people, my neighbours, my brothers, and sisters, the poor and needy is a monitor as to how real my faith in Jesus is! So even though the core message of Galatians is that we cannot earn our salvation, Paul does emphasise that our daily faith proves whether we truly have a relationship with Jesus or not.

James 2:18 'But someone will say. You have faith I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.'

1 John 4:23 – 'And this is my command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and to love one another as he commanded us.'

1 Thessalonians 1:3 - We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation cannot be earned. It is a free gift. **But my faith is expressed in how I live and that should all be about FAITH, HOPE and most importantly LOVE.**

But always we must check our hearts that we are not slipping into legalism or pride or routine. Whatever I do out of love for God and my neighbour should be done in humility; it does not make me better than others. A little yeast (wrong attitude) can gradually corrupt my whole faith (5:9). If we find our love running dry or cold, the root of our lack of love could be that we have stopped spending quality time with Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit to melt our hearts with His love. Or it could be that we are simply tired:

²⁸⁻³⁰ "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matthew 11:28-30)

5:11 - Paul says the fact that he is being persecuted proves his gospel is true.

John 15:18-19/1 Corinthians 1:23 - Jesus warned the disciples that the world would find it hard to accept his message and salvation through the Cross and so persecute them. It seems man likes to be in control of his own destiny and to accept our need of Jesus and the Cross means we have to humble ourselves and acknowledge our complete dependence upon God's mercy and grace and forgiveness.

5:13-26 Fulfilling the Law - Servant Love

Paul now gets very practical. He has spent the letter warning the Galatians that they cannot earn their way to heaven or work for righteousness or add anything to the free gospel of salvation, but now he describes clearly what true faith in Jesus will look like.

In case any of his readers might think *oh good I can now do what I want and live how I like* Paul paints a clear picture of what a Christians life should look like and what not.

He introduces the section by saying this new freedom in Christ is not an excuse to indulge our sinful, selfish natures. On the contrary Paul calls us to serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbour as yourself.' 5:13-14.

Paul is great at sound bites. This (like 5:6) is a summary key passage which he then unpacks.

What does a life following Jesus look like? What is the crux of the matter? Let's get practical. SERVE IN LOVE and TREAT OTHERS HOW YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED.

Of course, he is following Jesus, who frequently spoke about the key importance of loving God and neighbour – **John 13: 34-35**

34-35 "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

Love and not rules is Jesus' way. The new covenant is all about love in action. Love never fails. Love does no harm to its neighbour and pleases God. How we treat our neighbour is evidence of how much we love God.

Application

- Read the famous passages on sacrificial love again **1 Corinthians 13 and Philippians 2:1-11**
Look at the list in 1 Cor 13 - What attribute do you most struggle with?
Are you becoming more loving?
How can we increase our love for others?

Two walks

In Romans 7:15-23 Paul describes the struggle between the flesh and the spirit like a tug of war. This picture of an ongoing war between what we want to do in our spirits but fail because our flesh wants the opposite.

We are in the 'now and not yet' period. We have come to Christ, he has saved us and put his Spirit in us and has placed us on a new path that leads to everlasting life, but our characters are BEING transformed slowly. It is a process of change as we read and obey God's word, pray, worship, and spend time with other Christians.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says we need to be trained in righteousness and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be ambassadors of Christ in the world. A baby needs to grow into a child, learning to walk and talk and how to stay safe.

And so Paul gives us a checklist of do's and don'ts:

Firstly, he lists 12+ destructive sins of the sinful nature which result in death all of which grow out of disobedience and rebellion to God.

Then he lists the 9 life-giving fruits of the Spirit. These character traits grow out of the root of divine love which has been placed in new believers in the Spirit. (Romans 5:5)

The acts of the sinful nature fall into 4 categories: Those who live like this will NOT inherit the kingdom of God and is evidence that they are not true believers.

19- sexual sins – sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery

20-idolatry and witchcraft.

20-21 – 8 things that destroy relationships; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy.

21 – substance abuse - addiction to pleasure – drunkenness, orgies.

However, a true believer will change, and their attitudes, words, actions, relationships and lifestyles will reflect the change.

'By their fruit you will know them' – Read Luke 6:43-45/Matthew 7:16-20

The process of holistic Christian growth - holy fruit

It is gradual. Like botanical growth you cannot see the plant growing with the naked eye, but over time you can see growth.

It is inevitable – if the Spirit is in a believer the fruits of the Spirit will push through. Like a plant that pushes up through the soil or even stones.

It is internal – change starts deep in our hearts. Change from within brings outward change. I can make a new year's resolution with my mouth, but it won't happen unless I want it from my heart.

It is symmetrical – fruits of the Spirit grow together.⁸

24-26 Paul uses the life/death metaphor again. There has to be a putting to death of fleshly desires and passions. It has to be intentional. A turning away from bad behaviours and attitudes (repenting) and a turning towards Jesus. A dismantling of idols (including SELF) and figurative burning of rubbish that is from your old life a killing of the flesh. Its like a de-weeding of the garden before you can sow and plant good seed. If you do not weed out wrong, destructive sins they will eventually strangle and kill the good seed. And this is an ongoing process. But the more we spend reading and obeying God's word, the more time we spend in love-worship with Jesus and fellowshiping with our brothers and sisters, the more we do what Jesus did, the more we will grow in Christlikeness.

Application

- What sins has Jesus delivered you from?
- What sins do you struggle with? How are you intentionally putting them to death?
- Can you see the fruits of the Spirit growing in your life?
- Are there any idols that need dismantling and need replacing with Christ?
- How is your self-image? Are you secure in your identity in Christ and who he has called you to be? Or are you always seeking the approval of others? This can be because of feelings of either inferiority or superiority.

⁸ T Keller Galatians pp 151-152

Chapter 6:1-5 Gospel interconnected relationships

Paul now spends a few verses focussing on gospel interrelationships that are rooted in grace and mutual love and understanding. When a brother or sister sins, we should never have a superior attitude because we also are human, and pride comes before a fall! Humility accepts our own weaknesses and is able to reach out to others who are struggling with temptation. Just as we all come to Christ through grace and stand before him on level ground so too, we remain in a posture of dependent grace every day of our lives. We are being saved and on a journey to wholeness and we are not alone because God deliberately put us together in a body-the Church. All the members of the body need each other. When one part suffers, all suffer (1 Corinthians 12:26). The aim is that we will help, encourage, challenge, and spur one another on. We all need each other.

John 15:12-13 – loving one another might involve sacrificing something for them. This is Christ's way who laid down his life for us, took our place, that we might live.

Paul distinguishes between *carrying our own load and carrying each other's burdens*. We have a responsibility to watch our own life, putting to death those sins and habits that are destructive and following God's specific call using our talents well, (Matthew 25:14-25) but sometimes life piles a heavy burden upon us, and that is when our brothers and sisters are called to help and shoulder the load, just as Christ does (Matthew 11:28-30).

A load can be compared to a backpack whereas a burden means a heavy weight. Loving our neighbour as ourselves, means being able to put ourselves in their shoes and feeling their pain which will lead us to help them.

Application

- Have you ever received help from a brother/sister during a particularly difficult time of your life that enabled you to get through the hard time?
- Is there anyone at the moment who needs your help to carry their burden?

6:6-10 The law of sowing and reaping

Paul talks about sharing all good things with their teacher (of God's word), which is talking about caring for their material needs. **Read 1 Corinthians 9:7-12 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18.**

Paul then talks about a fundamental moral and biblical principle which basically summarises the whole of Proverbs! *This principle that if we sow poor seed, we will reap a poor crop; if we eat too much sugar we will get bad teeth and diabetes; if we sow dishonesty we will reap broken relationships; if we sow envy and jealousy we will reap bitterness; if we sow gossip and slander we will reap gossip and slander against ourselves; if we sow frugally into God's kingdom and not generously we will reap little.*

In short sowing to please the flesh and your own selfish desires will end in death, sowing to please the spirit and what pleases God will lead to fullness of life here and eternal life.

Key verse 6:9: Let us not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Perseverance is a must-have ingredient if our spiritual lives are to bear good fruit. Read **Hebrews 12:1-3**

The costs of following Christ are many. Being unselfish is often uncomfortable and helping others takes time, money, and energy. Our flesh would prefer to indulge itself, but living a sacrificial life of love will eventually bring amazing rewards for us. **Read Matthew 16:24-27 + Matthew 25: 34**

This doing good is to everyone but Paul highlights the importance of doing good to the family of believers first. Perhaps to fulfil Christ's command **John 13:34-35** – loving each other will cause non-believers to know we are Jesus followers-it is our mark, what identifies us in the world. A loving community of believers who help and care for each other.

Application

- Think about the law of sowing and reaping with regard to finances. Read 2 Corinthians 9: 6-11. How should this affect our personal giving?
- Have you ever sown to please the sinful nature and reaped the results?
- What are you doing to please the Spirit in your life?

6:11-18 Final exhortation

Paul concludes the letter by revisiting one last time the core message of the letter – that of salvation by grace versus salvation by works.

He once more reiterates the absolute pointlessness of being circumcised as regards one's salvation. The only way to salvation is through the Cross of Jesus Christ in which Paul boasts and declares that the law, the world, all self-help, all works righteousness is now useless. He has died to the world and all its temptations, and he has died to the law. His Saviour is Jesus and Jesus alone.

Paul issues a final appeal – stop all this heresy and controversy! He had the real marks of apostolic authority unlike these false teachers who suffered nothing– the marks on his body came from all his persecutions- Acts 13-14/Philippians 3:10/Colossians 1:24 which he went through in order to bring the gospel to the gentiles such as the Galatians.

Final Application

- Summarise – what's the key point/focus of Galatians?
- How has the Holy Spirit spoken to you personally through the study of Galatians? What has he highlighted to you about your walk of faith, your life, Himself?

