

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Galatians 1

Background

1. Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia which is in central Turkey around 49-57 AD. Paul visited Galatia on his missionary journeys. Many Jews lived in these cities. The cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe are some of the places he visited (Acts 13:51; 14:8, 20).
2. Galatia had many Celtic people who were descended from European Gauls that migrated to this area in 278 BC. People of French, Scottish, Irish, Welsh or Breton ancestry also came from this Celtic ethnic group. The Greeks and Romans referred to barbarians as Celtic people.
3. Paul focuses on rebutting some Jews who claimed to be Christians and who were teaching that the observance of Mosaic Laws such as circumcision was necessary. Paul's message of salvation by faith alone in Galatians is credited as having a key role in changing the thinking of Martin Luther.
4. False teachers and teachings have plagued the church since its earliest days. A common tactic of false teachers is to attack the authority and reliability of the gospel as given by the apostles. Another tactic is to claim special revelation that expands, clarifies or changes the gospel. Can you name some false Churches today that are examples?

Introduction (1:1-5)

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1. Paul begins by establishing his credentials and authority by reminding the recipients that he is an apostle. He was called to this ministry directly by God and so his teachings do

not depend upon the ideas of other men. Why do you think Paul started this letter this way?

2. What are the credentials for apostles? (Mk 3:14-15; Lk 24:46-49; Heb 3:1; 1 Cor 15:3-7).
 - A. Apostles are appointed by God; they have seen the risen Christ. They are pioneers in making converts and planting churches.
 - B. The word apostle means “messenger.” Paul reinforces his authority by stating that he was sent to proclaim the gospel by Jesus and God the Father.
3. Paul also includes “all the bothers with me” perhaps to reinforce the idea that there is unity in belief among believers that are with him that align with the message of this letter.
4. Grace and peace describe the gospel in a nutshell. God gives grace or unmerited favor to those he chooses to save from the penalty of their sins (Eph 1:4-8). This was accomplished by the death of Jesus on the cross (1 Cor 15:2-4; 2 Cor 5:18-21). Jesus did this because it was the way that God the Father chose to pay the penalty for sins and make it possible for restoration through faith (Jn 3:16-18; Eph 2:8-9). Therefore, God gives the gift of faith in Jesus to those he chooses. The result is peace with God. Those who have this faith are forgiven and are adopted children of God (Jn 1: 12-13).
5. Paul says that Christians are “rescued from the present evil age.” Jesus will return one day to change this world and eliminate the devil, sin and death (Rev 20:10-21:4). This is a reminder that God is not interested in improving the present world or to make us comfortable. Our priority is to share the gospel so that those whom God chooses can be saved (Mt 28: 18-20; Rom 10: 14-15).

Departure from the Gospel (1:6-9)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

1. The gospel of faith alone in Jesus alone by the work and choice of God alone is very simple. Why is there a natural tendency to want to add or change this?

2. Paul was concerned about some leaders (who probably were Jewish converts) who said that observing the Old Testament laws was necessary for salvation. This was repudiated by James (the brother of Jesus) and other Jewish converts who affirmed that Paul was correct in preaching a gospel of salvation by faith alone (Acts 15:9-29).
3. The Old Testament laws are not to be ignored as they represent the will of God. They are meant to instruct man by defining behavior that is righteous. Failure to perfectly keep these laws is essential to bring about the realization that everyone sins and is subject to God's wrath without the forgiveness offered by Jesus (Rom 3:19-20).
4. Confusion is a sign of the perversion of the gospel. People are divided into different groups which leads to the formation of denominations and religions. The simple gospel of faith becomes buried within doctrines, rituals and various types of works. Can you name some examples within present Christian denominations? When the simple gospel of faith becomes complicated, the members become confused about what exactly is required for salvation...another evidence of perversion.
5. Paul seems to anticipate that not only will there be false human teachers but that supernatural beings will also attempt to pervert the gospel. There have been numerous false religions and movements within Christian churches that originated with the appearance of supernatural beings. Angels, saints, Old Testament patriarchs and even Jesus himself have been reported to have brought new revelations and messages about how to be saved. Can you think of some examples?
6. Paul condemns anyone or anything that preaches another gospel. Christians are not to be swayed by talented speakers or even supernatural appearances. Sophisticated scholarship, the pomp and popularity of leaders and even miraculous events do not validate a change in the simple gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus.

Paul's Apostolic Credentials (1:10-24)

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judasim, how intensely I persecuted the church

of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they praised God because of me.

1. Paul assures the Galatians that his teachings are not meant to appeal to men. His gospel message of salvation by faith alone offends those who wish to exert power over others, build their own importance and make money through such things as books, TV, and appearances. Paul was not interested in this. He sees himself as a servant of Christ alone. Can you think of some popular preachers today who preach a prosperity gospel or some other gospel that is appealing?
2. Paul stresses that his gospel message came directly from Jesus. Therefore, he is not influenced by human thinking or interpretations and he did not make it up. Sometimes in the Old Testament false prophets claimed that God spoke directly to them. Even today there are those who say “The Lord told me...” or some other claim to a similar direct revelation from God. Can you think of examples?
3. Paul’s concern that others understand that he is a genuine apostle with a true gospel causes him to share his testimony and history. He was called by God to preach to the Gentiles which is completely out of character for a zealous Jew trained under the Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Therefore, the gospel of faith preached by Paul was counter to his background and religious training.
4. After Paul’s conversion, he did not immediately consult any Christian leaders. This further supports the idea that he learned the gospel of faith by revelation from God. Every born-again Christian understands this. Every born-again Christian has experienced the call of God bringing conviction of sin and the revelation of salvation through faith in Jesus.

5. Paul did not seek out mentors and did not even meet with any Christian leaders for three years following his conversion. This further demonstrates his independence and personal conviction of the authority of the gospel of faith. When he did go to Jerusalem, he only met with Peter and James who are described as pillars of the Church (Gal 2:9). He only stayed in Jerusalem briefly indicating that he was not seeking mentors or to gather a following. He appeared to be mainly interested in getting acquainted.
6. The independence of Paul's early missionary work is further supported by the fact that he went to Syria and Cilicia. He was unknown among the early Jewish Christians in Judea.

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Sunday School Lesson

Galatians 2

Council of Jerusalem (2:1-5)

Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

1. Paul continues his defense of the gospel of faith alone by describing his meeting with the early Church leaders in Jerusalem fourteen years later. Paul takes Barnabas and Titus with him.
2. He goes privately to see Peter, James and John. *Why do you think he wanted to meet privately?*
3. As previously discussed, Paul received the gospel of faith directly from Jesus so he was not doubting it. His fear was that the Church would be split and there would be discord resulting from those who wanted to add works to the gospel.

4. Paul says that there were “false brothers” who were saying that Gentile converts to Christianity had to be circumcised. This apparently was discussed regarding Titus who was Greek and was not circumcised. This was rejected by the Church leaders. Paul says that those who taught a gospel that included works (such as circumcision) for salvation were not born-again Christians (false brothers). There are Christian denominations today that teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. *What are some other examples of works that are thought to be signs of being saved or necessary for salvation in Christian Churches today? How do you think Paul would respond to this?*

Vindication of the Gospel of Faith(2:6-10)

As for those who seemed to be important—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance—those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

1. Paul sought out the Jerusalem Church leaders (James, Peter and John). These men were held in high esteem because they were with Jesus as his disciples and James was his brother. Paul says that the gospel of faith is to be held above the influence of men. Therefore, while he sought their approval, he would not be swayed by their reputation or influence.
2. The Jerusalem Church leaders recognized that God had called Paul and had revealed to him the same gospel that they taught. They saw the evidence of the Holy Spirit working in and through Paul in the same manner as within them. *What are some of the signs of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit that convinced them?*
3. This is a strong endorsement as Paul was acting largely independent of the Jerusalem Church. Also, Paul is recognized as having leadership equivalent to Peter. Paul was to go “among” the gentiles (*eis at ethane*) versus “to” them (*tois ethnesin*). *What is the significance of extending the right hand of fellowship?*

4. The only suggestion the Jerusalem Church leaders had for Paul was to make sure that he remembered the poor (Christians). The believers in Jerusalem were very poor and needy and Paul took up a collection for them (Rom 15:26).
5. *How does the outcome of this meeting differ from the account of the meeting Paul had with the Jerusalem Council? Acts 15:29 says that the Council added the requirements to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. Were these requirements part of salvation? If not, why were these mentioned? (Gen 9:4; Rom 14:17-21)*

Paul Rebukes Peter (2:11-21)

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

1. God showed Peter that salvation was for the Gentiles based on faith alone. (Acts 10:45-11:3; 15-18) In a prior meeting with Paul in Jerusalem, it was agreed that following Jewish customs was not necessary for Gentile Christians. Peter initially eats with Gentile Christians but then separates under pressure from Jewish Christians. *Why was this an important incident to share with the Galatians? Who do you think the “certain men from James” were? Why do you think a public rather than private rebuke was in order? (Mt 18:15; 1 Tim 5:20)*

2. This incident shows that Christians are to live according to the leading of the Holy Spirit and not follow moral doctrines. The Holy Spirit will guide Christians to obey the Old Testament laws such as the Ten Commandments because this is the revealed will of God on moral living. However, this does not extend to customs and doctrines that were added by the Jews. (1 Cor 9: 19-23) *What does this say about Christian liberty and harmony?* (Rom 14:13-21).
3. Paul says that he is not promoting sin by preaching that keeping Jewish laws is not necessary for salvation. He says that this idea actually would make Christ a promoter of sin which is clearly an absurd idea. *What is being rebuilt (verse 18) and how does this put a person in a sinful and lawbreaking condition?* When works are added to faith as a condition of salvation, believers become focused on keeping rules which enslaves them. *How does the law result in death?* (Rom 3:20; 6:23)
4. In a legal and spiritual sense, we were crucified with Christ. Jesus took on our sins and our sinful identities on the cross. In exchange, Christians receive the Holy Spirit and we are given the identity of Jesus. When God the Father looks upon us, he sees the sin offering of Jesus and so we are justified in his sight by this covering. (Rom 4:7-8; 8:28-30; 1 Jn 3:2) *Is crucifixion a one-time event in the life of a believer or is it an on-going process?* (Lk 9:23) *What is the motivation to live the new life in Christ?*
5. Paul concludes by saying that salvation is totally a gift given by the grace of God. Therefore, it does not include or depend upon the actions of humans. (Eph 2:8-9)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Galatians 3

The Gift of the Holy Spirit (3:1-5)

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you

suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

1. Paul attempts to shake them by calling them foolish and bewitched by evil. Many times, shortly after being born-again through faith in Jesus, the devil puts doubts into the mind like “You are not really saved! It isn’t that easy!” This may unsettle new Christians and make them susceptible to teachers who say that they must prove that they are saved by doing good works or manifesting the presence of the Holy Spirit. The way to be certain is to go to the Bible. *Do you love to read the Bible like a new-born child craves milk? Has there been changes in your thinking that align with the Bible? Do you like to be with other born-again Christians? Most of all, do you sense the presence of the Holy Spirit within you?* (2 Cor 13:5)
2. Paul tells the Galatian Christians to recall that they received the Holy Spirit by faith when they heard the gospel. There was no human effort involved! The Holy Spirit convicts sinners and makes them see that they are totally lost and helpless. This produces a powerful desire to “get right with God.” The solution is then revealed through the gospel of faith in Jesus Christ. This is eagerly accepted and results in a spiritual birth (salvation).
3. New Christians many times experience persecution by their friends and family. This happens for a variety of reasons such as family traditions, religious differences, or changes in habits or thinking. The gospel causes divisions and brings persecution. (Mt 10:34-36; 24:9; 2 Tim 3:12)

The Covenant of Abraham by Faith (3:6-16)

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the law because, “The righteous shall live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Brothers, let me take an example from everyday

life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. 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.

1. Those Jewish Christians who were teaching that works and faith were needed for salvation may have used the circumcision of Abraham to support their view. This may be why Paul clarifies that it was by faith alone **before Abraham was circumcised** that Abraham was declared to be righteous with God. (Gen 17: 6-12) Those who also have this faith are called children of Abraham.
2. It is impossible for anyone (except for Jesus because he is God) to follow God’s laws perfectly. Therefore, everyone is cursed because all have sinned and have broken the commands of God. (Rom 3:20-23; 1 Pet 2:24) Jews guilty of capital offenses were killed and hung on a tree as a sign that they were cursed by God (Dt 21:22-23).
3. Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by taking the punishment due to us on the cross. To redeem means to pay a price to buy something. Because of sins, we were objects of wrath, spiritually dead and separated from God. (Eph 2:1-3) Jesus bought us and brought us to God through his death on the cross. (Eph 2:4-9)
4. The Holy Spirit indwells believers as a result of the finished sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (Jn 16:7; 1 Co 6:19). Jesus saves those who put their faith in him from the penalty of sin but not from sinning. Christians continue to sin because of the nature of the payment. Payment has been made but we have a human nature and a body still subject to evil and death. *When will we be completely free of sin and death?*
5. God made a covenant with Abraham which is a legally binding promise. (Gen 17:6-8) This promise also included Abraham’s seed (not seeds). The Hebrew word used for seed is *zera* which means posterity, seed, descendants, fruit, child. Paul says that the promise God made to Abraham was to the descendants of Jesus Christ (seed singular rather than seeds). *Who are the descendants of Jesus? How are these descendants born?*

The Limitations and Purpose of the Mosaic Laws (3:17-24)

What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to

Abraham through a promise. What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party, but God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

1. The Covenant of Law was given to Moses after the Covenant of faith was given to Abraham. Paul says that the Covenant of faith was a promise that is not affected by the Covenant of the Law. The sin offerings and sacrifices given under the Covenant of the Law did not remove sin. This was accomplished under the fulfillment of the Covenant of faith in Jesus Christ. (Heb 9: 8-15)
2. *If the law did not set aside the promise of God or even add to it, then why was it given?* (Rom 4:13-15; 5:20-12).
3. The law was put into effect through the mediation of Moses and angels but there is only one mediator for the promise of grace through faith (Acts 7:53; 4:12). *What is the significance of two mediators for the law versus one for faith?*
4. The laws of God are good and do not conflict with the Covenant of faith. They are meant to show the sinfulness of mankind and our utter hopeless condition. The recognition of this condition is the first step to being humbled and to seeking God's solution which is by faith in Jesus. This explains the purpose of impossible commands by God such as to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (Dt 6:5) and to be holy as God is holy (1 Pt 1:15-16).
5. The law was a type of teacher or tutor. In Peter's day, tutors were typically custodial and disciplinary as well as educational in their responsibilities. The Jews did not attain eternal life through the law but were rather taught by it. Therefore, the law did not give life but regulated it. The gospel of faith revealed through Jesus frees believers from keeping the law in order to be justified before the judgment seat of God.

The Faith Family of God (3:25-29)

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and

heirs according to the promise.

1. Paul says that the Jews (we) were under the Covenant of the Law until the Covenant of grace through faith in Jesus was revealed. Jewish Christians are not to be exclusive and distinctive as the chosen people of God. This is because Christians are made sons of God through faith in Jesus. (Jn 1: 12-13) Christians have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and so have taken on his righteousness and identity. (Titus 3:4-7; 1 Jn 3:1-3)
2. Human distinctives such as ethnicity, social status, race and even sex are no longer to be considered as important among Christians. This is because every Christian is part of a new race of humans who collectively are the bride and body of Christ. (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-13) This does not mean that we will lose our individuality after death. What we will become is glorious beyond our understanding. I believe that our individual stories and identity will be present. However, they will be secondary to our Christ likeness. We will be covered or clothed perhaps something like wearing a Christian burka.
3. Christ is Abraham's seed. God promised that this seed would become more numerous than the stars or sand on the shore. (Gen 22:17) The stars are all distinct but appear the same. They all shine with the same light. In the same way, we will reflect the glory of Jesus and be clothed in his holiness. We will worship and praise him forever!

There are Bible teachings directed to slaves and owners, male and female, young and old (Col 3:18-25) Therefore, these human and cultural differences remain part of life. However, they are not to divide us as Christians. We are to love each other and treat each other with respect as members of the body of Christ. We are called to submit to Christ and crucify our pride and passions. (Mt 16:24-25) This will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit and a unity that will draw others to Christ. (Gal 5: 22-24)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Galatians 4

Sons of God (4:1-7)

What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his

father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

1. Paul uses a slave/son analogy to say that those under the Mosaic Laws were like slaves or children. They needed to be taught the elementary principles of what is right and wrong by the law. *Who are the guardians and trustees that instructed the Jews?*
2. Jesus came from the Father. He was born to a Jewish woman and he was subject to the Covenant of the Law. Note that Jesus was not created but he was born at the time chosen by the Father. This refutes the idea that Jesus was created. (Jn 16: 28)
3. We have received the “full rights of sons” through faith in Jesus. We have received the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We have the right to have a relationship with God whereby we can call him Papa. We have a glorious life awaiting us in heaven which is our inheritance. While we have full legal rights when we are born into the kingdom of God, we begin the process of spiritual growth in knowledge and obedience to the will of God. This process is called sanctification.
4. In ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures, a child was considered an adult sometime between twelve and eighteen years old. However, this did not mean that no further development was needed. This recognition meant that enough had been learned to make responsible decisions. *How does this idea relate to Christian spiritual growth and service?*

The Bondage of Religious Works (4:8-14)

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.

1. Who are the false gods to whom the Galatian believers were formerly in bondage?
Worshipping false gods required making sacrifices, observing certain rules and holy

days. Paul calls this a form of slavery. *How is observing the commands of Christ such as making disciples, the sacraments and Sunday worship different?*

2. Paul says Christians not only know God but are known by him. *What does this mean? Doesn't God know everyone?* This difference has to do with the calling or choice of God (predestination). (Rom 11:5-6; 2 Th 2:13)
3. Paul shifts from an intellectual to an emotional appeal. He goes from rebuking to embracing them as brothers assuring them that he holds no grudges against them. *What does Paul mean when he says that he wants them to become like him because he became like them?* (Hint: This has to do with living in grace versus living as a Jew). (1 Cor 9:19-23)
4. Paul reminds them that the illness that afflicted him during his first preaching to them did not hinder them from accepting his message. On the contrary, they accepted him as though he was an angel or Jesus himself. *Why do you think Paul added this?*

The Law and Grace Conflict (4:15-31)

What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for not good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you! Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." Now you brothers, like Isaac, are children of the promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will

never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.

1. A loss of joy and a determination to perform required religious works is a danger sign of those who teach a works-based salvation. Other danger signs include: Separation from former friends, the formation of new and closed social circles, narrow minded views that conform to the false teachings, and fanatical zeal that does not allow openness or dialogue with other views.
2. Christians who are not well grounded in the Bible are susceptible to false teachers. The Galatians apparently were immature since they were zealous for the gospel preached by Paul when he was present. When Paul was absent, they followed the teachings of others. This grieved Paul such that he felt like he was starting over with them. He compared this to the labor and pain of giving birth.
3. Paul considers the Galatians his children and, like a mother, he is striving to see them grow properly in their faith. (Eph 4:12-13)
4. Like a mother, he scolds them to get their attention and then he instructs them. The Jewish Christians who were teaching that circumcision is necessary for salvation were basing this on the covenant God made with Abraham. Therefore, Paul reviews the story of Abraham and his two wives. God promised that Abraham would have many descendants when he was old. His wife Sarah was barren. They tried to achieve the promise of God by using the slave woman Hagar as wife to Abraham. Hagar had a son who represented man's will and ways. Later, Sarah had a son who represented the fulfillment of God's promise.
5. Paul says that the two women represent the covenants of the law (bondage) and faith (grace). The descendants of Hagar are the Jews who are slaves under the covenant of laws. They are citizens of Jerusalem who are bound to keep religious rules and obligations. However, Christians are children justified by faith. They are citizens of heaven and are born by the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. (Phil 3:20-21)
6. Those who hold to a works-based salvation are attempting to exalt themselves by their efforts. *Why does this lead to persecution of those who hold to faith alone for salvation?*
7. Paul concludes by saying that those who follow religious laws will never achieve heaven. Being declared righteous before God and becoming his children are achieved by faith alone. (Gal 3:6)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

15

Galatians 5

Christian Freedom (5:1-15)

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. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

1. Freedom is something that most people want because it is viewed as the ability to choose your life. God gave mankind free-will but sin corrupted our ability to choose well. Therefore, freedom has become our doom. Paul says that Jesus has set us free. *What is the freedom that Christ has given to believers?* (Rom 8:1-4; 1 Cor 15:56)
2. The laws of God make demands that we are not able to keep. The grace provided by the death of Jesus provides what the law demands. This new life of grace guided by the Holy Spirit transforms the mind and actions. This produces a life of growing dependence and conformity to the will of God. (Rom 12:1-3) *What is required of believers? How does faith express itself through love?*
3. Paul says that those who introduce laws as necessary for salvation nullify the adequacy of grace. Such people are going down a path which depends upon human effort and not reliance upon the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that born again Christians will lose their salvation but they will not grow by grace which grieves the Holy Spirit. Those that are not born again will be less likely to become so under such teaching.

4. The Galatians were being hindered in their relationship with Christ through legalism. Discuss how legalistic beliefs harm Christians. *How does legalism grow among Christians like yeast in dough?* The judgment of God is upon false teachers. (Mt 18:3-6).
5. Some were arguing that Paul had practiced circumcision at least in the case of Timothy (Acts 16:3) following the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15: 6-11). *Why do you think Paul circumcised Timothy?* (1 Cor 9:19-23)
6. *What is the offense of the cross? Why does the gospel incite the lost to persecute Christians?*
7. Paul uses a figure of speech to show his strong desire for false teachers to stop spreading their corrupt seed. He says he wishes that they would be emasculated.
8. *What does Paul mean when he says Christians have been set free to serve in love? How does this freedom require greater self-discipline and responsibility?* (Hint: Your new life in Christ is not about you but about God. Matthew 6:9-13)
9. *How does the introduction of religious laws cause divisions and strife?*

The Spiritual and Human Natures (Gal 5:16-26)

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

1. Living by the guidance of the Holy Spirit does not mean that everything that is pleasurable and pleasant to the flesh must be denied. For example, sexual pleasure between husband and wife is good. Likewise, the pleasure of eating is good. However, these things can be perverted through immoral or excessive behavior. Paul says that Christians are to live by the Spirit. This means that we are to live in prayer. We must seek to live according to God's will. We are to make decisions that follow the Bible, advance the kingdom of God and express love. We are called to be salt and light as we walk with God in the light of his presence and will. (Mt 5:13-16; 1 Jn 1:7)
2. There is conflict within Christians between the new and old natures. (Rom 8:12-13) *Is*

there comfort and encouragement in knowing that we will not always do what we want to do? We are perfected in Christ but we have not yet realized this perfection. Our souls have been redeemed but our bodies will not be perfected until the resurrection. The mind is in the process of being transformed and so it is a battle ground between the spirit and the flesh. (Rom 12:1-3)

3. Works of the sinful nature: **Sensual sins** (sexual immorality, impurity & debauchery); **Religious sins** (idolatry, witchcraft); **Social sins** (hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy); **Lack of Self Control** (drunkenness & orgies). Paul says that those who live comfortably in these sins will not be saved. In other words, those who habitually do these things without remorse show that they do not have the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that, if a person were to commit these sins, they could not be saved. If this were the correct meaning, then Paul would be effectively destroying his argument that salvation is by faith alone. Indeed, those who teach that salvation depends upon following rules would say that these sins must be avoided or a person can lose their salvation. This is a sign of false teaching that destroys the gospel of salvation by grace and faith alone.
4. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul lists love first because it is the foundation of our relationship with God and others. Joy and peace with God are experienced when we are born again. Patience, kindness and goodness develop as we grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit teaches us how to treat others as we realize how sinful we are and how merciful God is towards us. Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control develop as we discover spiritual gifts and use them to express love and to advance the kingdom of God.
5. Paul says that Christians have crucified their sinful passions and desires. (Gal 2:20) This has been accomplished through the death of Jesus. We have been set free from the penalty of sins. However, we are still subject to sinful desires (the presence of sin) and its power (death and evil outcomes). One day, we will be resurrected and perfected which will complete the destruction of the presence and power of sin and death. Therefore, Paul says we need to live according to the directives of the Holy Spirit which means listening, learning and obeying.
6. Christians who are living in tune with the Holy Spirit are humble and peace-keepers. False teachers use works and laws to control others. They typically are full of pride and

are conceited. This leads to strife and envy as false teachers exerted power over others and set themselves up as examples.

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Galatians 6

Christian Service (6:1-10)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

1. Christians should help each other in a loving way to overcome sinful ways. Those who are told to help are those who are more spiritual. These people would be elders or those who are well grounded in the Bible and their commitment to follow God's will. *Why does Paul warn that those who are helping should be careful not to fall into the same sins as the person they are helping? If someone is compassionate and loving, how might this draw the counselling person to condone the sin?*
2. The law of Christ is based on love. (Jn 13:34; 15:12) A legalistic counsellor would tend to condemn the sinner because the focus is on blaming and shaming for breaking the law. Christians following the law of love see themselves as fellow sinners. (Rom 3:20-24) Therefore, we are not to think highly of ourselves which leads to feeling superior to others.
3. Christians are not to measure themselves by the failures or accomplishments of others. Each person is called to take up his own cross and follow Jesus. (Mt 16:24) Everyone will be judged by their deeds and so each person should focus on themselves and not

competing with or envying others. (Jer 32:19; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-13)

4. Christians have a responsibility to support their teachers in prayer, by giving them respect and in material goods and money.
5. Sowing seeds is an investment with the expectation of receiving future benefits. For the farmer this is harvesting crops. For the Christian, it means giving time, talents and money for the advancement of the kingdom of God. (Paul) says that those who spend their resources on temporary pleasures of the flesh, reap destruction. They have wasted their time, talents and money. In contrast, those who sow according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit will have eternal rewards. (Mt 6:19-21)
6. Paul instructs us to do good to everyone but especially to other Christians. By doing good to unbelievers, we are being salt and light that might lead others to Christ. By doing good to other Christians, we are building up the bonds of love and relationships as the Bride and Body of Christ. (Mt 5:13-16; 1 Thes 5:11; Eph 4:12)

Conclusion (Gal 6:11-18)

See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers, Amen.

1. Paul may have used large letters to emphasize his message or because he had poor eyesight.
2. Paul says that the Jewish Christians that were teaching that circumcision is necessary were doing so to please others and (to) avoid being persecuted for breaking with Jewish tradition. They wanted some outward sign as a means of showing their faith. *Can you think of any Christian religions that require that something be done to provide evidence of salvation?* Rituals and other evidence of salvation typically become part of the requirement to be saved and so works and not faith alone becomes part of the teachings. This error can lead to the belief that a person is saved simply by doing something. Such a

person may not have the gift of faith and so is deceived. Such ceremonies or traditions make it easy to increase church membership and make people feel good about themselves but it is false deception.

3. Paul says that being born-again spiritually is the only thing that counts as assurance of salvation. (Jn 3:3) This spiritual birth is by faith in Jesus and results in a person becoming a new creation as an adopted child of God. (Eph 2:8-9; 2 Cor 5:17)
4. Those who have been born spiritually into the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus experience peace and the forgiveness of their sins (mercy). This applies even to the Jews. There is only one way to become the chosen nation of God called Israel. (Jn 14:6)
5. Paul concludes by saying that he has suffered persecution and has the scars as evidence of his suffering for the gospel of faith. (2 Cor 11:22-27)
6. Paul concludes by praying for the grace provided by faith in Jesus to minister to believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Our salvation and transformation to holiness are totally the work of God. Man's role is to humbly accept this grace by faith which is also provided by God. (Phil 1:2-6)