

Galatians: Freedom of a Christian – How to Get It, How To Lose It

Week 1

To Do or Not to Do: That is the Question

Beginning

Introductions: If the members of your small group do not know each other, do introductions. Have each member tell their name and give a picture of their life: significant people, where most of one's time is spent, and how long one has been connected to OSL.

Conversation Starter: Is freedom a word that you would normally associate with faith? Why or why not?

Opening Prayer:

Merciful God, as we gather, ease our fears, doubts, and worries. Send your Holy Spirit that our ears would be opened to the word you would have us hear. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Some Things to Know

Before we really dig into the book of Galatians, let's look at some general information about it. Galatians is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia. While their exact location is uncertain, the ancestry of the people of the Galatian churches is possibly a people of Celtic origin who migrated into central Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Acts 14:1-23 speaks of Paul and Barnabas founding churches in the southern regions around the Mediterranean. The letter was probably written during the mid-50's A.D., (Jesus was believed to have been crucified around 30-33 A.D.) so this is fairly soon after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Digging Into Scripture

Let's look at Galatians 1:1-5

1 Chapter 1 Paul, apostle, not from men nor through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. **2** And all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia. **3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, **4** who gave himself for our sins in order to deliver us [snatch us out] from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father. **5** To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1. What did you hear in the sermon or lecture that caught your attention and why?
2. What do you think of when you hear the word "righteous?" How would you define it?

3. It is not unusual for us to think of “self-righteousness” when we hear the word “righteous,” and this generally has a negative feeling about it. Is this what Paul means in Galatians? If not, how is Paul’s meaning different? (*note: this question makes most sense if you have heard the lecture*)
4. Is faith something you do, or control, or decide? How about belief, or trust – do you control or decide whom you believe or trust? Talk about your understanding of this question now, and we are going to re-visit it at the end of the Bible study. It might be interesting for you to see if your answer to these questions is different at the end!
5. Does a lack of control make you feel free? If not, how does it make you feel?
6. Look at verse 4. We frequently hear the question, “Why did Jesus have to die?” How does Paul answer this question? What role do you play in this answer?

Going Deeper:

Throughout Galatians, Paul makes the distinction between two kinds of righteousness: active and passive. Understanding this distinction will be an important element throughout this study. In addition to the below understanding, the glossary defines these terms as well.

Active and Passive Righteousness – What is the difference?

- Active Righteousness is the type everyone knows. It comes from laws, traditions and commandments of God. The three most common types of active righteousness are: 1) Political – kings and lawyers; 2) Ceremonial – comes from popes and parents; 3) Ten Commandments.
- Passive Righteousness is not intuitive for us. Synonyms for this type of righteousness are faith, grace, and forgiveness of sins. In this type of righteousness, God is the actor and you are the receiver – the purely passive recipient of God’s action. God acts to give you forgiveness and faith by imputing this righteousness through Christ alone – without works or effort of any kind on your part. This happens in Baptism, in the Lord’s Supper, and in preaching.

Week 2 Got Credentials?

Beginning

Introductions: With only one meeting under your belt, a reminder of names may be helpful.

Conversation Starter: Name one or two meaningful people in your life. Why are they meaningful to you? In other words, what are their credentials?

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, in Baptism you have made us your own. Give us faith to trust this promise and know that there is nothing more. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Digging into Scripture:

Let's look at Galatians 1:6-24.

1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly transferred from him who called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel. 7 Not that there is another gospel, but there are certain persons who are troubling you and they desire to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel alongside of [and so contrary to] the one We preached to you, let him be cursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if any certain one is preaching to you a gospel alongside that which you have received, let him be cursed. 10 So right now, am I persuading men--or [even] God? Or, that is, am I [still] seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not then be a slave of Christ. 11 For I am making known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not come down from a man. 12 For I did not receive it from a man, nor was I taught it, but by apocalypse/revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former religious conduct in Judaism, how violently I persecuted the church of God, even hoping to annihilate it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my equals (contemporaries) among my people, being such an extreme zealot for the traditions of my ancestors. 15 But when He, the God who had set me apart in my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to apocalypse/reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult with flesh and blood. 17 Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and then later I returned to Damascus. 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to question Peter, and persisted/stayed with him for fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the brother of the Lord. 20 In what I am writing to you before God, behold I do not lie. 21 Then, I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard it said, "Our previous persecutor is now preaching the faith which he formerly tried to destroy." 24 And they gave God the glory because of me.

1. What did you hear in the sermon or lecture that caught your attention and why?
2. When someone comes with a certified authority such as a badge, diploma, license etc., how does that impact the reception of the person, and in this instance, the person's message?
3. Can you identify what Paul claims to be his credentials/certification?
4. Does Paul claim to have deserved Christ's call? If not, why did Christ call him?
5. What is the gospel? Please define it as you understand it. We are not talking about the "books" of the Bible here, but the content of those books that we call "gospel."
6. Recall the distinction between active and passive righteousness – active is what we do, what our neighbors see and judge, and passive is what God does to us in Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the proclamation of the Gospel. How does this distinction relate to the idea that the Gospel message of Christ's forgiveness is counter to the idea that religion's role is to improve people, to make them better? In other words, for the Apostle Paul what is the role of religion and are we active or passive?
7. In what sense was Paul free, and in what sense was he a slave? (see verse 1:10)

Going Deeper

- *Auctoritas*: The root word for authority is the Latin word *auctoritas* (creation or creative power). The preaching of the Gospel is authoritative, because it exercises creative power and establishes creation. This corresponds with the notion of God's Word being a living Word, a

verbum reale (We will discuss this concept more next week.) The Gospel is a living voice that does something, creating new out of the old, which makes it authoritative. The Gospel isn't waiting to be interpreted by a scholar or others in authority. The Gospel's authority comes about because it does what it says.

Week 3 Keeping Up With the Joneses

Beginning

Introductions: Remembering names? Hopefully, but if not – repeat and repeat!

Conversation Starter: Have you ever tried to be holy? How did that go for you?

Opening Prayer: Lord God, we give you thanks that you are righteous and holy and that because of Christ we need not even try. Set us free from our need to prove our faith to you or anyone else. Amen.

Digging into Scripture

Let's look at Galatians 2:1-18.

2:1 Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up according to an apocalypse/in response to a revelation; and I declared to them the gospel which I preach to the Gentiles, taking aside each one of those reputed to be something, lest somehow I should run, or had run in vain. 3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was Greek. 4 But [I went up] because of the crypto-false brothers/false believers who slipped in to spy on (lay in wait for or pounce on) our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, with the purpose that they might enslave us. 5 To them we do not yield in obedience even for an hour, in order that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 And from those who were reputed to be something (what sort of thing they were makes no difference to me; God does not play favorites) those, I say, who continue today to have repute contributed nothing to me. 7 To the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter was the circumcised, 8 for he who worked in Peter into the apostolate directed to the circumcised, worked in me directed to the Gentiles, 9 And when they came to know the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of *koinonia* (fellowship), so that we go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised [period]. 10 --Only that we should remember the poor, which very thing I was already eager to do. 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch I stood against/opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before "certain ones" came from James, he ate with the Gentiles. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself fearing those of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Judeans joined in the hypocrisy with him, so that even Barnabas was led away by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not walking in a straight line concerning the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "If you a Jew, are living as a Gentile and not as a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? 15 We [ourselves] are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners. 16 Yet we know that a man [human being] is not justified from works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ--even we have trusted in Jesus Christ, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not from works of the law, because by works of the law shall not any flesh be justified. 17 But if in our seeking [striving] to be justified in Christ we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ a deacon/servant of sin? Let it not be! 18 But if I build up again those very things which I tore down, then I stand with the transgressor.

1. What did you hear in the sermon or lecture that caught your attention and why?
2. What does Paul identify as the “problem” in these verses?
3. Did Paul consider himself “serving Christ” if he allowed a compromised message of the gospel to remain? Why or why not?
4. In relation to the problem you identified in question one, what was Peter doing with the Gentiles prior to the arrival of the “certain ones”? (Note: the “certain ones” were those people who regarded holiness as being based on one’s adherence to the Jewish law) What did Peter do after the arrival of the “certain ones” and why did this upset Paul?
5. When Paul compares and contrasts “works” with “believing/faith” does it mean that believing/faith is not a work? Think about this concept in relation to the subject vs. the object of a verb. In short, subjects of verbs do “work.” Objects of verbs are passive. If believing and faith is not a work, then is it passive? How does this answer impact how you have think about faith?

Another way of thinking about this question is to ask yourself if you control your belief. Do you control it, or does the one in whom you believe control it? Think about your relationships. Is your trust/belief in someone based on the actions of that other person? If it is, then are you controlling your trust/belief or is it actually the actions of that other person controlling your trust/belief?

6. Are you free if you are required to follow the law, or to obey someone?

Going Deeper

Verbum Reale: Ancient and contemporary understanding typically regards words functioning in one of two ways: as a label or as a sign. If a word is understood as a label, it is interchangeable with other labels; an example of this would be the word “dog” and the word “canine.” If a word is understood as a sign, it is pointing to something else but is not the thing itself; an example of this would be the sign “Look out for falling rock.”

God’s word functions differently than either of these two approaches. As Scripture tells us over and over, when God speaks, it happens – God does something. When God said “Let there be light” there was light. (Genesis 1:3) When Jesus said, “Lazarus, come out!” so he did. (John 11:43-44) When God speaks, then, He creates out of nothing.

The same thing happens with faith: God creates faith out of nothing when He speaks. Faith is created where there once was none; and it is created by speaking God’s promises to the hearer. How so? The Apostle Paul tells us faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard is the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17) God’s promises are spoken to us and that promise creates a new reality for us, not a label or a sign of what is to come (the typical way of understanding words) but actually faith itself. This is something we do not control, or decide to receive (in other words

in our active righteousness) but it is done to us and we are completely passive as we hear God's words of promise, and faith is created.

Week 4 Heard into Freedom

Beginning

Conversation Starter: Name a time when you were freed from something. How did it happen and how did it feel?

Opening Prayer: Good and Gracious God, we quickly forget Christ. Are we really justified in Christ? Free us from our doubts and raise us in faith. Amen.

Digging Into Scripture

Let's look at Galatians 2:19-3:13.

2:19 For I through the law died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. 20 So it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. **21** I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died in vain! **3.1** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was written [in big letters] as crucified? **2** The only thing I wish to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by works of the law, or by the preaching unto faith [hearing of faith]. **3** Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit are you now being perfected in the flesh? [finishing with the flesh] **4** Have you suffered so many things in vain? If indeed it is in vain--[which you are trying to make it]. **5** Does the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles now among you do so by your doing works of the law, or by the preaching for faith? **6** Just as Abraham "had faith (trusted) in God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness (justification)." **7** Therefore, know that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. **8** And the Scripture foreseeing [what is happening now]--namely that God is justifying the Gentiles by faith--preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham that "In you shall all the Gentiles be blessed." **9** So then, those who are of faith (trust) are being blessed with Abraham in the faith. **10** As many as are (exist, live by) of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not persevere in/observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law, to do them." **11** Since it is clear that no one is (being) justified before God in the law, since the just will live by faith. **12** Moreover, the Law is not of faith--indeed the man who does these things will live in them. **13** Christ redeemed (delivered) us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged upon a tree!"

1. What did you hear in the sermon or lecture that caught your attention and why?
2. What does Paul mean when he says that he has been crucified with Christ? How does this relate to verse 19 and dying to the law?
3. In verse 21, what is it that Paul identifies as making Christ's death irrelevant? What are some examples from your life that would result in making Christ's death in vain?
4. Define a "Christian." Does following the "law" make you a Christian? If the law doesn't make you a Christian, then what does? How does your answer to this question relate to the title of this study?

5. How is faith/believing related to hearing according to verses 3:2 and 3:5? Is it different from doing? When looking at faith/believing and doing, which is active and which is passive? In other words, when it comes to faith/believing versus doing, in which of these things are we active and in which are we passive?
6. Explain in your own words how it is Paul might come to an understanding that following the law brings with it a curse. That is to say, how is the law a “curse”?
7. Have you ever considered that Jesus became a curse? (see verse 3:13) How does this strike you now? Discuss.
8. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that Christ, who knew no sin, became sin. Discuss the reasonableness of Christ becoming sin.

Going Deeper

In a world dominated by the principles of scientific reason, and the ideals of post-enlightenment rationalism, the default mentality is to operate with a falsifiable understanding of how the world operates. In other words, truth is always elusive, and untruth is that which the intellect seeks to know. An example of this way of thinking, and how deeply embedded it is in our way of thinking, is to think of the latest diet news. For the moment, the claim will be made that it is healthier to avoid eggs altogether. A year later, a new study will come out, with new information that claims we should eat 1 egg per day for optimal health. Those of us who have lived long enough recognize this pattern: there will always be a paring away to attempt to reach the “truth” by proving prior assumptions are wrong – in whole or in part.

Such an approach is not new, but is actually rooted in Socrates’ quest for wisdom. It is also the foundation of classical Skepticism, in which doubt is the main engine of knowledge. Apply such a world-view to the Bible and inherently the Scriptures are rendered mute. How so? Due to the influence of philosophical assumptions and methods, the authority of the Scriptures comes to be questioned because the Bible stories seemingly have errors and discrepancies. People demonstrate the Bible as “not true” by following the laws of logical proof.

This approach, however, does not coincide with all notions of “truth”, especially that found in the scriptures. For Lutherans, the Word of God is “true” when it is spoken, simply because it is not a sign or label pointing to something else, but it is the thing itself. It is the *verbum reale*: when God speaks, it happens. To refresh your memory on this, look back at the previous weeks’ discussions on *verbum reale* and on authority.

Week 5 Rules: Made and Broken

Beginning

Conversation Starter: Are you a rule-keeper or a rule-breaker? How is one or the other expressed in your life?

Opening Prayer: Merciful God, we give you thanks for gathering us as your people. As we study and discuss, work faith in us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Digging Into Scripture

Let's look at Galatians 3:14-4:3.

14 He did this in order that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus; that is in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. 15 Brothers, I speak in a human way-- once a man's last will and testament has been ratified, no one annuls it or adds (a codicil) to it later. 16 Yet the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed. It does not say, "and to his seeds," as if referring to many, but referring to one, "and to your Seed," who is Christ. 17 What I am saying is this, a last will and testament previously ratified by God (or ratified in advance), is not annulled (revoked) by the Law that came four hundred and thirty years afterward so as to nullify the promise. 18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it is not by the promise, but God freely (graciously) gave it to Abraham by a promise. 19 Why, then the law? It was added to provoke transgressions, up to the time the Seed should come to whom the promise was made. It was ordained through the angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator is not One. But God is One. 21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if the law had been given that was strong enough to make people alive, well then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But actually the Scripture consigned (imprisoned) all things under sin, in order that the promise might be given via faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were imprisoned--confined under the law--until faith should arrive at the moment of being apocalypsed/revelation. 24 So then the law was our jailer until the advent of Christ, in order that we would be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come along, we are no longer under that jailer [confining custodian]. 26 For you are --all of you--sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus Christ. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. 28 There is neither a Jew nor a Greek, neither a slave nor a free, there is no "male and female" for you all are one (new) Man in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. 4.1 What I am saying is as long as the heir is a child he is no different from a slave, though he is (in prospect) Lord (owner) of everything (the whole estate). 2 Except that he is under the authority of guardians and trustees until the appointed day set by the father. 3 So with us, when we children were enslaved under the fundamental principles of the universe common to all.

1. What establishes someone as a descendant of Abraham? What verses in this passage bring you to this conclusion?
2. What is the significance of Paul's distinction between "seeds" and "Seed" in verse 3:16? Why do you think this understanding is important enough for Paul to include this sentence?
3. Think about an inheritance. If there is a conditional clause, an "if you do this then you will get the inheritance," that involves fulfilling a prescribed task so as to receive an inheritance, is the inheritance free? How does this relate to the distinction between active and passive righteousness?
4. Think about a "last will and testament." Do you possess an inheritance upon being named in the will? When does the will take effect?
5. In real time, when do promises stop being promises?

6. What might Paul mean by saying “the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin...” in verse 3:22?
7. When you have faith in Christ’s promise, how does that relate to your freedom and your standing before the law? (see verses 3:22-25)

Going Deeper

Lutherans maintain two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. There are two key distinguishing features that constitute a sacrament: 1) A material substance (water, bread, wine) and 2) God’s Word (a promise given by Christ added to the water, bread, wine). Recall the discussion from last week on scientific reason, skepticism, and doubt. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper come from the outside, as opposed to skepticism and doubt which work from the inside out. In both cases, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, God is giving you a promise – you are being chosen by God – and you are passive in receiving that promise. This is part of the passivity of faith: you do not decide whether or not you receive God’s promise, it is given to you and functions on you. We are not certain in scientific truths; we know these things have changed throughout the centuries and will continue to do so. We are certain, however, in the confession that God Himself is at stake in the promises we receive passively in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Thus, our certainty is in God, that God will do what He says He will do and our certainty is not in our own abilities.

Week 6 But . . . !

Beginning

Conversation Starter: Have you ever received something for free and argued against it being free? Or have you ever been given a gift and been uncomfortable with the inability to do something in return? Do tell.

Opening Prayer: Steadfast God, in Christ you give us everything. How often do we not understand this gift or think we must do something for it or fail to have faith in it! Forgive us and give us faith. Amen.

Digging Into Scripture

Let’s look at Galatians 4:4-5:26

4:4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law 5 in order to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father," 7 so that you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God's (act of adoption). 8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to those in nature that are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather have come to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and beggarly fundamental principles (ABC's) of the cosmos--whose slaves you will to be again? 10 You scrupulously observe days, months, and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid for you, that I have

labored among you in vain. 12 Brethren I beseech you, become as I am, for I have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. 13 You know that it was due to an illness of the flesh that I ended up preaching to you the gospel in the first place. 14 And though my [illness] in the flesh was a temptation to you, you did not spit at me or reject me as you would an evil spirit, instead you received me as an angel of God, indeed as Christ Jesus [himself]. 15 Where then is your blessing? For I testify to you as a martyr that you would have plucked out your eyeballs and given them to me. 16 So then have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They are zealous about you for no good end. They want to withdraw from fellowship with you, so that you end up being zealous for them. 18 It is always good to be zealous (courted) after for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, I am going through birth pangs all over again on your account, until the time Christ is formed in you. 20 I long to be present with you now and to change my tenor [voice] since I am perplexed about you. 21 Tell me, you who will to be under the law, do you not in fact hear the law? 22 For indeed it stands written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman, and one by a free woman. 23 But [the key] is that the son of the slave was begotten according to the flesh; the son of the free [was begotten] through the promise. 24 These things are spoken of allegorically, for these women are two testaments, on the one hand, the one woman/testament is from Mount Sinai begetting offspring into slavery, who is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She stands in the same contrasting column as the current (present--visible?) Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem from above is free, which woman is our mother. 27 For it stands written, "Rejoice, O barren one, who does not bear children, break out and shout, she who is not in birth pangs, for the children of the desolate woman are many more than the children of her that has the husband." 28 Now, we brethren are children of the promise just like Isaac. 29 Moreover, just as at that time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted (chased after the inheritance of) him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not inherit along with the son of the free woman." 31 So brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Let's look at Galatians 5.

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast and be not subjected again to a crossbeam (a balancing scale) of slavery 2 Look here, I Paul say to you that if you are circumcised, Christ will not benefit you. 3 I testify as a martyr again to every man who is circumcised-- that he is bound to do the whole law. 4 You are estranged from Christ, whosoever of you would be justified by the law--you have fallen from the realm of grace. 5 But by faith, we eagerly await what we hope for, the righteousness through the Spirit. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is valid (accomplishes anything), but faith active through love. 7 You were running well; who hindered you from being persuaded by the truth? 8 Such seductive persuasion is not from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I persuade you in the Lord, so that you have no other understanding (mind), and He who is troubling you will bear the judgment, whosoever he may be. 11 But I, brethren, if I preach circumcision still, why am I still persecuted? If that is the case, the scandal of the cross has been removed. 12 O, would that they would just cut off the [whole thing] which is stirring you up. 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but to the contrary, through love be a slave to one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled and ended in one word: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you snip, snap and devour one another take heed that you are not eaten alive by each other. 16 But [unlike the "certain ones"] I say, walk by the Spirit, and not to fulfill the willful passions of the flesh. 17 Indeed the willful passions of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these stand in opposition to one another--(at war). The result being that you do not do (may not do) the things you want. 18 But if you are brought along by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are visible: which are these: fornication, sexual immorality smelling like dead flesh or fish, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, witchcraft, enmity, strife, jealousy, wrath, selfishness, seditions, heresies, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I prophecy to you as I prophesied before, that those who practice law-- collecting up such interest, taxes and tolls-- shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, 23 humility, self-control, against such things there is no law. 24 For those [who are] of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its sufferings and its willful desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us

then be drawn up in ranks behind the Spirit. 26 [Then] let not boasting, provoking of one another and jealousy among each other be produced.

1. Paul talks about “fullness of time.” If you connect this to his “apocalyptic” message, do you have any ideas about what Paul might be inferring?
2. Paul makes a distinction between “knowing God” and “being known by God.” What might be at the heart of that distinction? (See verses 4:8-9)
3. Look carefully at verse 4:17. What does Paul identify as the motivating factor for those who are imploring the Galatians to follow the Jewish law? Can you relate this to a contemporary understanding of Christianity?
4. How would life be different if we were “children of Hagar” as opposed to being “children of Sarah”? (See verses 4:22-31)
5. Can you force someone to be free?
6. How is it possible that “being justified by the law” cuts someone off from Christ? (See verses 5:3-6) Does that mean that when it is stipulated that a Christian must vote or behave a certain way in order to be Christian, that one is actually cutting himself/herself off from Christ?

Going Deeper

Throughout the course of this study, we have seen Paul making it clear the law has no role in making you a Christian. Our experience reminds us, however, that the law does play a role in the lives of Christians. Paul is very clear that the law does not disappear in the lives of Christians. In fact, the law is given by God for two purposes. The first is to preserve our lives on earth and the lives of our neighbors. The second is to name and expose sin. Both functions of the law provide room and opportunity for the preaching of Christ and his Gospel. Paul understands that the law must do its work, and it is a good work. His difficulty with “the certain ones” is that they believed the law makes one a Christian. There is no freedom in this belief, but only slavery as Paul states in Gal. 5:1. Instead, “For freedom Christ has set us free.” Just what it is we are now freed to do, we will explore in next week’s study.

Week 7 Free: Now what?

Beginning

Conversation Starter: Share a “now what?” moment in your life. What was it and what happened? (example: Taking your first baby home from the hospital, graduating from college, etc.)

Opening Prayer: Lord God, you forgive our sin and set us free. Free! Let us now live for our neighbors. Amen.

Digging Into Scripture

Let’s look at Galatians 6.

6.1 Brethren, if a man is caught (ambushed) by some trespass, let the spiritual (ones in the company aligned behind the Spirit) among you restore him in a spirit of humility. Look at yourself, lest even you be tempted (enticed by the tempter). 2 Bear one another's burdens, and again you will fulfill and end the law of Christ. 3 For if Anyone thinks he is Someone, when he is No one, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one prove his own work, and then his boasting will be [made] to himself alone, and not to his neighbor. 5 For each man will bear his own burden. 6 So let him who is taught the word (catechism) share all material possession with the one who is teaching (catechism). 7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked, whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his own flesh will reap eternal death from the flesh. But he who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 But let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due season we shall reap--unless we [our hearts] be loosed [from our mooring]. 10 Therefore, as we have an appointed time, let us be active trading good with everyone especially with the household of faith. 11 Behold, now I have written in such large letters to you with my own hand. 12 As many of those who want to put on a good show in the flesh compel you to be circumcised for one reason only-- that they may not have to suffer persecution for the preaching of the cross of Christ. 13 Indeed even those who are circumcised do not keep the law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But far be it from me to boast if not in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom (or which) the cosmos has been crucified to me, and I to the cosmos. 15 For neither is circumcision something; nor is uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 But as many as will walk in line according to this way of measuring, peace and mercy be upon them, that is to say, upon the Israel of God. 17 For all the rest, let no one make trouble for me, for I bear the stigmata of Jesus in my body. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren, Amen.

1. What do you think Paul is getting at in verse 6:10 when he writes "let us be active trading good with everyone..."? Relate this to the distinction between active and passive righteousness.
2. What does it mean to have a calling or vocation?
3. What is your vocation?
4. In what ways did you come to have this vocation?
5. Does your vocation benefit your flesh? Your spirit? Is there a distinction?
6. What do you see in these verses and in the rest of Paul's letter to the Galatians that shapes your sense of your "calling" in life?
7. For Paul, what is the true freedom in life? Is this how you would have defined freedom at the beginning of this Study, or is this the way you think most people would define freedom now?

Going Deeper:

"Be all that you can be" is a slogan used by the U.S. Army when recruiting Americans for military service. This is a great marketing tool because it appeals to our sense that life is a process of progressing from less to more, worse to better, or as the ancient Greek philosophers understood, from vice to virtue. In all of these cases, one is bound to focus on the self and your individual wellbeing. This concept is contrary to what Paul understood to be the message of the Gospel. Why? Forgiveness does not improve a person, in fact it confirms the problem: it names our sin. Thus, Paul understood life not as a process of moving one from vice to virtue, but instead as a movement from virtue to Christ – from thinking about one's self and wellbeing to thinking about the neighbor, from sin to faith, from unbelief to belief, from worrying about "being all I can be" to having faith in Christ alone. For Paul, this is the true freedom of a Christian.

Glossary

Apocalypse (Apocalypsed) Apocalypse is commonly equated with complete destruction. In the biblical language, apocalypse is defined also as revelation, especially a divine revelation.

Eschatological Commonly understood as “end times” or the “second coming of Christ,” it also means the end of the old creation and the beginning of a new creation. For Paul, this happens when we hear preaching that declares us sinner (Law) and forgiven (Gospel), i.e. old and then new creation.

Faith Synonymous with the words trust and belief. It is something given to you, passively, and is not something which you can generate on your own. You do not control it. It is not a choice but rather is an imposition on you, controlled and given to you by God.

Gospel The good news of Christ who is reconciling the world to God through the forgiveness of your sin.

Grace God’s disposition toward you, His attitude toward you. Grace is not a substance.

Heresy All false teaching and preaching that makes additions to Christ himself.

Law This includes but is not limited to the Ten Commandments, statutes, ordinances, etc... set forth by God. The law does two things. First, it preserves us in our day-to-day lives on this earth. Second, the Law includes anything that functions on one’s conscience to convict us of our sin, and thus to drive us to Christ’s forgiveness. Put another way, the law always accuses us as sinners who can never do enough, exposing and actually increasing our sin so that we have only Christ’s righteousness to which to cling.

Righteousness Having a right or holy standing before another – either God or your neighbor.

Active Righteousness Also understood as proper righteousness. Righteousness based on the record you have worked at and obtained through your efforts and behavior. You are in control of this type of righteousness. This is what your neighbors see and is the basis for their assessment of you.

Passive Righteousness Also understood as alien righteousness. This is a declared righteousness based on words spoken to you and about you. It is nothing you have done, but is something imposed on you. This type of righteousness is at the heart of the concept of “justified by faith.” You are not in control of this type of righteousness – Christ is.

Vocation A call for service to your neighbor. This call is not an internal feeling, sense, or experience but rather it comes from the outside – from your neighbor. The call identifies gifts and talents God has given you for service to your neighbor.

