










## Galatians

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### Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Paul for Everyone Galatians and Thessalonians by Tom Wright, Galatians Tyndale commentary by Alan Cole, The Message of Galatians Bible Speaks Today commentary by John R. W. Stott, Bible Briefs on Galatians by David Martin from The Briefing #294 March 2003 and by Philip Percival #357 June 2008, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklets The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne and Free for All Galatians by Phillip D. Jensen and Kel Richards, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, "Resurrection trumps Religion" a talk and paper by Tony Golsby-Smith from Gospel Conversations 24/4/2015, "What good is the law?" a lecture by Iain Provan at Macquarie University 30/7/2011 for Gospel Conversations, an essay "On Jesus as attuned to life, not good and evil" by Mark Strom, May 2010, Lead with Wisdom by Mark Strom, Nooma videos #7 Luggage and #18 Name presented by Rob Bell and "One Family of Faith" essay by Phil Campbell.

## Study 1, Gal 1:1-10, Gospel

### Getting started

1. (Around the room.) Can you remember the last personal letter or email you wrote?  
Who did you write it to and what was it about?



Paul wrote at least 9 letters to churches and 4 letters to individuals. Galatians is one of those letters. It was probably written for the churches in southern Galatia which Paul evangelised on his first missionary journey i.e. Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (see Acts chs 13-14 and the map on page 1). Paul's letters have a similar structural pattern. He begins by introducing himself, addressing his readers and praising them for what they are good at. Later he teaches them some things they need to know and/or answers their questions. Often Paul warns them about false teaching and finishes the letter with prayer and some cheerios. All his letters are centred on Jesus and his life, death and resurrection.

### Bible

2. Read Gal 1:1-10.  
(a) How are these verses different from the way Paul usually begins his letters?

(b) Why do you think Galatians is different?

3. The gospel is the point of contention in Galatians. Paul's readers knew what it meant but rather than living gospel lives they were clinging to the old way of living under the Old Testament law. To understand Paul's issue with the Galatians we need to know what Paul meant by "gospel".

The word "gospel" = good news/tidings has its origins in Isaiah when God's people had been defeated, their cities destroyed and all but the poorest people were taken into exile into Babylon. To that situation Isaiah speaks the following good news:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Isaiah 40:1-2

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!' See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 40:9-10

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'  
Isaiah 52:7

(a) From the three passages above what is the good news?

For Israel, the good news is as much about God's kingly rule over the world (Is 40:9-10) as it is about his forgiveness (Is 40:1-2). The gospel proclaims both a Saviour who pardons wrong and a King who puts things right.

From the 2012 sermon series on Isaiah at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

God's people returned from exile to live again in the land God had promised them. But it was tough going and things didn't turn out as well as they had expected. "The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . . Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand." From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) p 11 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'  
Mark 1:14-15

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'  
Luke 4:16-21

(b) From the two passages above what is the good news?

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.  
1 Cor 15:1-4

(c) What is the gospel = good news in the passage above?

(d) How does it fit in with the previous passages on good news?

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.  
Rom 1:16

The idea of 'good news', for which an older English word is 'gospel', had two principal meanings for first-century Jews. First, with roots in Isaiah, it meant the news of YHWH's long-awaited victory over evil and rescue

of his people. Second, it was used in the Roman world for the accession, or birthday, of the Emperor. Since for Jesus and Paul the announcement of God's inbreaking kingdom was both the fulfilment of prophecy and a challenge to the world's present rulers, 'gospel' became an important shorthand for both the message of Jesus himself and the apostolic message about him. Paul saw this message as itself the vehicle of God's saving power (Romans 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The four canonical 'gospels' tell the story of Jesus in such a way as to bring out both these aspects (unlike some other so-called 'gospels' circulated in the second and subsequent centuries, which tended both to cut off the scriptural and Jewish roots of Jesus' achievement and to inculcate a private spirituality rather than confrontation with the world's rulers). Since in Isaiah this creative, life-giving good news was seen as God's own powerful word (40:8, 55:11), the early Christians could use 'word' or 'message' as another shorthand for the basic Christian proclamation.

From Paul for Everyone Galatians and Thessalonians by Tom Wright pp 167-168.

4. What understanding of the gospel is given in Gal 1:1-10?
  
5. (a) What is "grace" (vv 3 & 6)?
  
- (b) How does the idea of grace fit in with the gospel?
  
6. How is the gospel different from evangelism?
  
7. What is Paul's attitude when writing about preachers of a "different gospel"?
  
8. Why is this such a serious issue?

### To finish

9. Is it more common to criticise something or someone than to tell someone good news? Why?



## Study 2, Gal 1:11-2:10, Paul's story

### Getting started

1. Pick someone other than a family member.  
(a) What do you know about him/her?



- 
- (b) Would you trust her/him? Why?

Henry was a friend of mine when I was studying at Hawkesbury Agricultural College. He became an Agriculture teacher and years later I heard from another friend who said "Henry treats students like no other teacher ever would. He trusts them."

### Bible

2. Read Gal 1:1 and 1:11-2:10.  
Give reasons why the Galatians should trust Paul.
3. (a) What is the difference between the religion of man (Gal 1:11-12) and the gospel of Christ?  
  
(b) When are you tempted to "do religion" for the approval of others or for your own self-satisfaction?
4. What problem(s) does Paul hint at in Gal 2:1-5?
5. Why is not having to get people circumcised (2:3) evidence that Paul had got the gospel right (2:2)?
6. (a) What does Paul mean by "the freedom we have in Christ" (Gal 2:4)?

(b) Where do you think our freedom in Christ is in jeopardy today?

7. (a) What do you think the “right hand of fellowship” means (2:9)?

(b) Why was it relevant to Paul’s gospel?

[T]here was a full and glad recognition that there was only one gospel, shared alike by Jerusalem and Antioch. This sense of ‘belongingness’ was sealed by giving *the right hands of fellowship*. Clasped right hands were the sign of friendship and trust and this action on the part of the church leaders in Jerusalem must have been a bitter blow to the Judaizers. The heavier blow was to follow. For if Paul’s gospel was accepted, then his apostleship must be accepted too. Thus it was that the handclasp was also the seal on a bargain, they were ‘accepted . . . as partners’, as the NEB has it. By this action Paul’s apostolate to the Gentiles was recognized as freely as Peter’s to the Jews – the latter being an apostolate in which the other members of the College of Twelve shared apparently.

From Galatians Tyndale commentary by Alan Cole p 69.

### To finish

8. (a) What was the ‘gospel issue’ in Gal 2:1-5?

(b) What makes something a ‘gospel issue’?

(c) From the list below pick which ones are ‘gospel issues’ and explain why they are or are not ‘gospel issues’.

wearing thongs to church

salvation by works

swearing

what you watch on TV or the internet

baptism

taking the Lord’s Supper

dress code for people at youth group

prayer

morality

pre-millennialism

which political party you vote for

### Study 3, Gal 2:11-21, Paul sets Peter straight

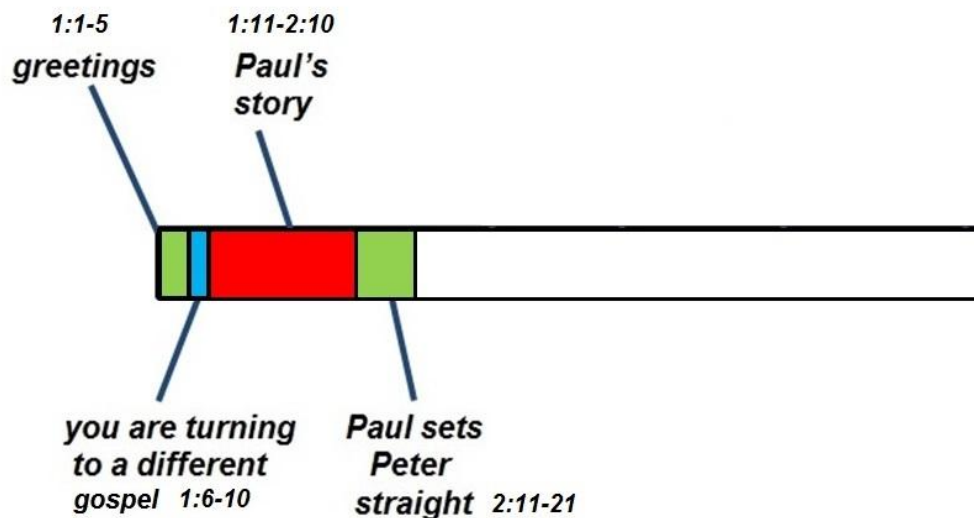
#### Getting started

1. (a) How do you know what is right or wrong?
- (b) Have you ever changed what you thought was right or wrong?
- (c) If so, name a moral issue on which you changed your mind e.g. conscription, participation in war, gay marriage, equal pay for women, capital punishment, divorce, legalising certain drugs like marijuana, republic debate, entry of asylum seekers.
- (d) Rather than debating any of these issues, what made you change your mind?



#### Bible

2. Read Gal 2:11-21.



- (a) Why did Peter stop eating with non-Jewish Christians (vv 12-13)?

Paul is not implying that James of necessity sent them (indeed, James denies this in Acts 15:24); but they were certainly men from James's circle, James's group, the Jerusalem church.  
From Galatians Tyndale commentary by Alan Cole p 75.

- (b) Why was this hypocritical (v 13)?

The real Peter is the Peter who knows in his bones that, in Jesus the Messiah, God has created one new family of Jews and Gentiles alike. It's hard to live like that after a lifetime of looking at Gentiles as almost a different species; but Peter has been doing it. Then, just as when Peter walked on the water [Matt 14:22-36] but looked down at the waves around his feet, something happened which caused him to sink. Certain persons

arrived from James. Paul doesn't say that James had sent them; but Peter knew they were hard-liners, who wouldn't approve of the Antioch practice. So he holds the mask of Jewish respectability in front of his real face, which means that for the moment he will separate himself from the Gentile Christians. So convincing is his mask that other Jewish Christians are taken in by it . . .

Paul's confrontation is direct and to the point. 'Peter, you've been living like a Gentile, making no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. How can you now insist, as your behaviour is insisting, on Gentiles becoming Jews in order to become part of the inner circle of God's people?'

From Paul for Everyone Galatians and Thessalonians by Tom Wright pp 22-23.

(c) Can you think of things you do because you are afraid you might upset someone, or anger someone or worse?

3. Why did Paul oppose Peter?

4. (a) What is the underlying issue (vv 15-16, 21)?

(b) Notice the issue is more than Peter not eating with Gentiles. Peter is forcing Gentiles to follow Jewish customs (v14). What has this got to do with the gospel (v14a)?

Paul and Peter had much conflict with Jewish Christians who wanted to keep some of their old Jewish customs and force new non-Jewish Christians to keep those customs as well. Read Acts 11:1-3, 15:1-2, 4-21.

The next section is the Peter section between [Acts chapters] 10 and 11 and Paul's early missionary journeys . Both of them describe movements into Gentile territory that is criticized by the Jewish Christians, and then discussed and arbitrated on by the council of elders in Jerusalem. Clearly Jerusalem is working as some kind of headquarters for the early believers and they are the ones who demand answers and set policy. The Council in chapter 15 is a major section that Luke gives a lot of attention to. James' endorsement of the Gentiles is fair but hardly a ringing endorsement; we can identify the traces of conservatism in his judgment, and we can feel the tension in the room and Jerusalem as he gives his verdict. He does not say "Let the Gentiles believe independently, and follow Christ only with no regard to Mosaic Law". He puts four stipulations on them, both moral and ceremonial. But his reasoning is strange to us: he says that they must abide by these four laws because "Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues every Sabbath". He is justifying the ruling by Moses and the widespread influence of Jewish customs, synagogues and Sabbath keeping. His reasoning does not emanate from the dying and rising of Jesus.

From "Resurrection trumps Religion" a talk and paper by Tony Golsby-Smith from [www.gospelconversations.com](http://www.gospelconversations.com) 24/4/2015.

Read Acts 21:10-12, 17-32.

Then Acts finishes with the longest section of all—beginning at Chapter 20 we see Paul's emotional journey back to Jerusalem. We can read between the lines and recognize this is a deep thing for him. It is not a mere tactical return, and it is not like a missionary returning for R and R. This is an affair of the heart; his heart remains in Jerusalem and he wants to give them every chance to come with him to the full journey in Christ. We know that he is filled with foreboding and does not really expect to succeed and in fact this journey back is marked by poignant scenes of farewell and indeed by criticism or disagreement from other Christians who clearly do not think it is a good thing to go back to Jerusalem. Paul expects conflict there.

When he arrives back we see a violent mix of two ingredients: on the one hand, Paul's strange attempt to compromise with Judaism, and on the other the fearsome extremism of the unbelieving Jews—whom we can only describe as ungovernable, fundamentalist jihadists. All of my sympathies lie with the poor Roman governor trying to make sense of it all and calm everyone down!

But the thing to note is that Paul's presence caused uproar within days of his arrival—but the continued presence of James and the elders and the believing Jews had NOT caused any such uproar. In fact, they were



living somewhat peaceably and they implored Paul to continue to keep the peace—by demonstrating that ‘you yourself are living in obedience to the law’. SO we can only assume that they were participating in Jewish customs, the temple traditions and keeping Moses law while also defining themselves as believers in Christ.

From “Resurrection trumps Religion” a talk and paper by Tony Golsby-Smith from [www.gospelconversations.com](http://www.gospelconversations.com) 24/4/2015.

5. Read Gal 2:15-16. What does it mean to be justified?



### Justification - legal language

I had broken God's laws.  
I was guilty.  
Jesus was innocent.  
He took my guilt.  
Now I've been declared innocent.  
Now I've been declared righteous.  
Now I've been justified.

6. Gal 2:16 is the first mention in this letter of salvation by works of the law although it is hinted at in chapter 1 when Paul talks about a “different gospel”. When Israel first got the law at Mt Sinai (Exodus ch 20) the people were meant to keep the law but not *in order* to be saved. So the concept of salvation by works of the law must have been invented somewhere between Sinai and Paul's day.

Cast your mind back to the events of the exodus – the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea and the journey to Mt Sinai:

(a) What were God's people saved from?

(b) What were God's people saved for?

(c) What was the purpose of the law?

[T]he purpose of law is to deal with the brokenness of things as they are found on the ground in a pragmatic way . . . to fix as much as was broken as can be fixed realistically . . . to prevent things getting worse than they need be. It's kind of bargain basement stuff through which society should not be allowed to fall into chaos and anarchy but it's not really about heading for the Kingdom of God . . .

In other words, I think all law accommodates itself to human sinfulness and to human culture. All law givers must take seriously the culture they're dealing with otherwise the legislation will do no good because people will simply not accept it. They will simply ignore it.

So there's always constraints around law. You have to work out what will people tolerate, most people. If you try to legislate something people won't accept you may as well not bother, in fact it will make matters worse because all respect for the law giver will then depart and then you will be in bigger trouble. . . .

So, as far as I read it, I think the law was really part of God's plan to organise things for Israel in such a way that they survive, that they stay relatively faithful, relatively civilised long enough for the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled and I think much of the book of Leviticus is precisely about that. It's really about teaching the people of the need for boundaries between things. I don't even think there is what we call a rational explanation, in fact, behind many of those rules. They're not there to be rationally deduced. They are simply there to teach Israel that boundaries are important and you shouldn't cross them.

So it seems to me we're dealing with something that is pragmatic, that it is temporary and indeed when we hit the New Testament we discover that indeed this is how the New Testament often views the law. They view it in this rather mixed and paradoxical way in some ways eternal because it still represents the character of God and I define that as principal. In many ways though, it is temporary and passing away. It's done its job, part of which was to educate Israel as a school teacher (remember that language Paul uses?) You see this in Jesus' response on the divorce question . . .

“What about divorce, Jesus?”

“For your hardness of heart Moses legislated for divorce but in the beginning it was not so.”

That's divine accommodation. God recognises he's dealing with very difficult people and legislates in order to take account for that but let's not get confused about what God wants people to do, though, at the level of moral vision, commitment and living. And Jesus says to those people basically, you're really getting two things confused here and what's more you're doing it deliberately because it's in your own interests. It makes life easier and you don't have to actually strive to imitate God, for example, any more. So that passage leaps to life in a new way.

From a lecture by Iain Provan on "What good is the law?" at Macquarie University 30/7/2011 for Gospel Conversations.

7. Why would Paul's opponents suggest that Christ promotes sin (v 17)?

8. What is Paul accused of rebuilding in v 18?

The Judaizers, with their reintroduction of law-keeping as an essential of salvation, are painfully rebuilding the very structure of human 'merit' that, for Paul, had come crashing in ruins on the Damascus road [Acts 9:1-19].

From Galatians Tyndale commentary by Alan Cole p 81.

9. (a) Is there anything wrong with Christians living in such a way that they observe the Old Testament law (see v 19)?

(b) Should *all* Christians live by observing the Old Testament law (see Gal 2:19)? If so, why?

If not, which laws should we not observe and how do you decide which laws to drop?

### To finish

10. What has living by faith in Jesus (Gal 2:19-20) got to do with living by law?

11. What role does the Old Testament law play in a Christian's life today?

## Study 4, Gal 3:1-25, Law or Faith

### Getting started

1. Think about the last argument you had with someone. What were you trying to do?



### Bible

2. Read Gal 3:1-14.  
What seems to be Paul's problem with the Galatians (vv 2-3)?
3. What is the goal (or "ending" Revised Standard Version) for the Galatians (v 3)?
4. What things does Gal 3:1-4 teach us about the Holy Spirit?
5. (a) In what three ways does Paul try to convince the Galatians (vv 1-5, 6-9, 10-14)?  
  
(b) What is Paul trying to do with his reasoning?
6. Why does Paul use Abraham as an example of living by faith (v 6 and read Gen 15:1-6)?
7. What is the "blessing of Abraham" (vv 8, 14 and Gen 12:1-3)?
8. Read Gal 3:15-18.  
(a) To whom were the promises spoken?  
  
(b) What are the promises (see Gal 3:8, 17, Gen 12:1-3, 7, 13:15, 24:7)?  
  
(c) How do the promises made to Abraham flow to the Gentiles?

### **Jewish law, Torah**

'Torah', narrowly conceived, consists of the first five books of the Old Testament, the 'five books of Moses' or 'Pentateuch'. (These contain much law, but also much narrative.) It can also be used for the whole Old Testament scriptures, though strictly these are the 'law, prophets and writings'. In a broader sense, it refers to the whole developing corpus of Jewish legal tradition, written and oral; the oral Torah was initially codified in the Mishnah around AD 200, with wider developments found in the two Talmuds, of Babylon and Jerusalem, codified around AD 400. Many Jews in the time of Jesus and Paul regarded the Torah as being so strongly God-given as to be almost itself, in some sense, divine; some (e.g. Ben Sirach 24) identified it with the figure of 'Wisdom'. Doing what Torah said was not seen as a means of earning God's favour, but rather of expressing gratitude, and as a key badge of Jewish identity.

From Paul for Everyone Galatians and Thessalonians by Tom Wright p 176-7.



9. What is the significance of the law being introduced 430 years later (v 17)?

10. Read Gal 3:19-25.

(a) Why was the law given in the first place (see also Rom 3:20)?

(b) What is the relationship between the law and God's promise?

(c) What couldn't the law do?

(d) Why not?

(e) What difference does Jesus ('the Seed') make to the role of the law?

(e) What role does the law have for Christians now (see Heb 7:18-22, 8:8-13)?

(f) Is Gal 3:25 about - not being saved by following the law  
 OR - not living your life by following the law?  
 Give reasons for your answer.

(g) We will look at the next verses (Gal 3:26-4:7) in the next study but before doing that what is the context for those verses i.e. what ideas come before Gal 3:26-4:7?

In some versions of the Bible the Greek word “sarx” in Gal 3:3 is translated as “**human effort**” probably because those versions have a commitment to conversational English. More literal translations use the word “**flesh**” for “sarx”. Various translations for Gal 3:3 are:

CEB Are you so irrational? After you started with the Spirit, are you now finishing up with your own human effort?

Old NIV Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

ESV and NASB Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

From Gal 2:11-21 Paul's argument is that people are saved by faith in Jesus, not by works of the law. In Gal ch 3 Paul extends his argument to say that they now live by the Spirit and not by the flesh/human effort. We can set out Paul's argument of opposites like this:

law	faith
flesh/human effort	Spirit

In Romans ch 5 Paul looks at opposing ways of life by using “in Adam” and “in Christ”. Paul links this with the opposites of sin and righteousness, law and grace, and death and life so we can set it out like this:

in Adam	in Christ
sin	righteousness
law	grace
death	life

In Romans ch 6 Paul adds to his argument by introducing the opposites of old self and new life, slavery and freedom. In Romans ch 7 Paul talks about the opposites of flesh/sinful nature and Spirit as ways of living so our lists become:

in Adam	in Christ
sin	righteousness
law	grace
death	life
old self	new life
slavery	freedom
flesh/sinful nature	Spirit

These lists suggest there are 2 ways of living: “in Adam” or “in Christ”. More than being a way to live, a person's *identity* is bound up in whether or not he or she is “in Adam” or “in Christ”. We will think more about identity in Study 8. When you are “in Christ” you can choose to sin but it doesn't change the fact that you are still “in Christ”. Sinning is out of step with your identity but it doesn't change your identity.

The confusion comes when some translations use “sinful nature” or “human effort” instead of flesh e.g. in Rom 8:9 the NIV has “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit”. The NIV makes it sound like you are split between a sinful nature and a spiritual nature, like you have two natures inside you which are constantly at war. Contrary to the NIV the original Greek does not have “controlled by”. The Greek translation is “You are not in the flesh but in the spirit” (see ESV). It is about identity not struggling natures.

The idea of two natures ('sinful nature' and 'spiritual nature'—recall my comments on the terrible NIV translation of Rom 8:9)—is unnecessary. We are *not* in the flesh, but in the Spirit (Rom 8:9). But we *can* think, act, and live *as though* we are in the flesh. In other words, we can still choose to follow our old head, Adam. It's about choice, not infection. We have had a lifetime of thinking and acting from Adam/flesh. That doesn't change overnight. Like any neural 'conversion' experience, some dramatic changes often occur when we come to Christ. Other stuff persists forever unless we encounter and indwell Father, Son, and Spirit in transformative ways *through one another*.

From an essay "On Jesus as attuned to life, not good and evil" by Mark Strom, May 2010.

Paul's argument in Galatians chs 2 and 3 is the same argument, but extended, in Romans. Paul is talking about identity in Christ.

### To finish

11. (a) Have you ever got the impression from other Christians that there are certain things you should do if you are to be a "real" or "serious" Christian?



- (b) What are these things?

- (c) Can you see anything wrong with the idea that you need to do certain things to be serious about your faith?

## Study 5, Gal 3:26-4:7, All sons of God

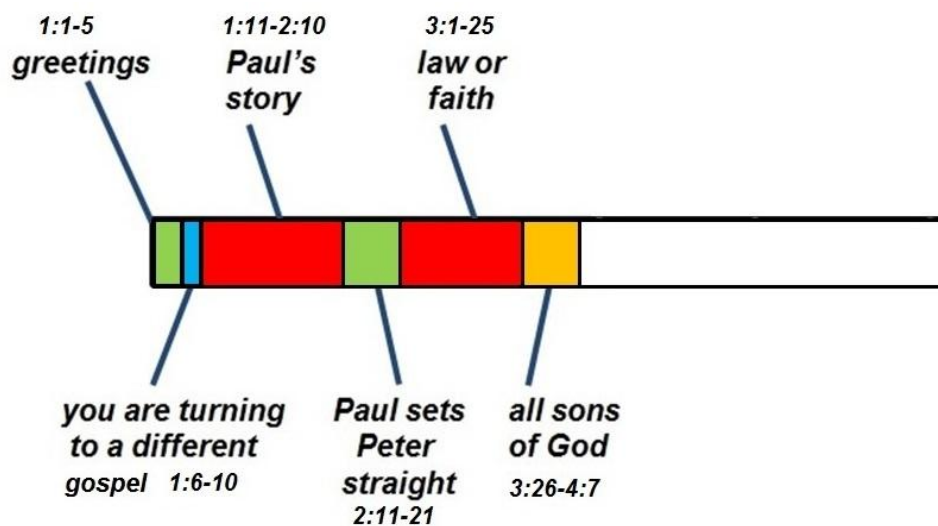
### Getting started

1. (a) After finishing school how did you decide what direction you would take?
- (b) What major changes in direction did you take after that, if any?
- (c) How did you decide to make those changes?
- (d) When you became a Christian what changes in direction did you make, if any?



### Bible

2. Paul was telling Jewish Christians that they had to make massive changes. Read Gal 3:26-4:7.



Considering Gal 3:26-4:7 and the context outlined in answer to question 4 (g) in the last study what does Gal 3:28 mean?

3. What do you think it might mean to (a) be sons (3:26, 4:5-7) and heirs (3:29, 4:7) of God?

(b) be baptised into Christ (3:27, see also Rom 6:1-10)?

(c) be clothed with Christ (3:27, see also Rom 13:8-14)?

(d) have the Spirit in our hearts (4:6, see also John 14:15-20)?

4. What does it mean to be “in slavery under the basic principles of the world” (4:3, see also Col 2:8, 20)?

Israel is in slavery – but now the slavemasters are not the Egyptians, but ‘the elements of the world’ [NIV has ‘the basic principles of the world’], an unusual phrase which probably refers to the guardian angels or deities which, in Jewish thought, looked after the different nations. In one of his most daring moves, Paul suggests that the Jewish law itself had become just another guardian angel, looking after Israel and keeping it separate from the other nations – in other words, preventing for the moment any fulfilment of God’s long-term intention of freedom and integration, of the creation of the single worldwide family.

From Paul for Everyone Galatians and Thessalonians by Tom Wright p 45.

The “basic principles of the world” could be referring to the principles of the Greco-Roman society at that time, as Mark Strom describes below:

Imagine a social network like a modern pyramid scheme. Think of a vast web of patron-client relationships carrying formal obligations and conventions. One worked to create obligations to oneself and called upon the conventions of enmity when slighted.

People in the top layers of the pyramid never worked a day in their lives. Work with one’s hands was unseemly, including what we would call administration or management.

Those above took a share of what was achieved below. Strange as it may seem to us, money also flowed down as well as up the pyramid. So what did patrons stand to gain? Support. Prestige. Influence. The harmony and well-being of the *polis* (the city or state) depended on public works, the availability of dole in times of famine, and on festivals and games. Relatively few of these works or events were financed by public monies. The money came from benefactors – the men at the top, and those keen to impress.

Friendship meant reciprocity. There were no free lunches in Athens or Rome. Layer upon layer of free-born men and not a few entrepreneurial freedmen, spent the bulk of their days in lobbying and intrigue, subterfuge and toadying. Litigation was rampant.

Ancient demarcations of rank defined social life. ‘Free’, ‘freed’ or ‘slave’ stamped a person for life. . . . Household slaves gave themselves ranks with special prominence for the literate. . . . As a freedman, you might rise to great prominence but there was always someone of inherited rank ready to rub your lowly origins in your face.

In the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome, leadership meant rank. Position, not role. Leadership was a right and responsibility attached to a man (overwhelmingly a man) by birth, marriage or adoption. Leadership did not depend on competence, gift, intellect or experience. The purpose of leadership was to maintain the order of a highly stratified society. Good order depended on people staying in the places allotted to them by birth, by Fate, by the gods or by personal accomplishment.

Status always complicated rank. One’s rank was largely fixed by birth with some possibility of change through marriage or adoption. (We read of great men with sons many years their senior.) The marks of status are familiar to us: education, wealth, fame, achievements, friendships, personal appearance, memberships, lifestyle and, in Paul’s day, oratory. A man might live many steps above or below his rank according to how well he fared in business and in securing the right friends.



Talent, piety, virtue and citizenship could each offer a platform for new status. Divorce, marriage and adoption might offer a rare opportunity to lift one's rank. It was in everyone's interest to keep the system going. The costly business of benefactions brought status to those of means. . . .

Four maxims are found far more frequently than any others. The original 3x5 motivational pack, the first fridge magnets were:

Know yourself = know your place.

Nothing to excess = stick to what is expected.

Cost to every commitment = assess the risk to your honour

Pick your time = seize the moment to improve your position.

Intellectuals, inscriptions and pithy sayings only projected what everybody knew. This was the bottom line: know and maintain your rank. Compassion and humility will only hinder ambition. Keep compassion for those who deserve it. And don't exceed what's socially expected, or there'll be a price to pay. So stay in your place while you await your chance to move up.

Enter Paul. What would an educated and urbane Greek man or woman make of a similarly educated and urbane Jewish man publicly declaiming or writing the following: 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one' [Gal 3:28]? Or 'do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves' [Phil 2:3]? Or 'think not of yourself more highly than you ought but with sober judgement' [Rom 12:3], 'associate with people of low position' [Rom 12:16], and 'give greater honour to those without honour' [1 Cor 12:23]? . . .

Paul set himself on a collision course with Greco-Roman social expectation and convention. And for good reason. The social implications of his story were profound.

First, the story was anchored in a man who, in Paul's words, 'emptied himself, made himself nothing, and subjected himself to death' [Phil 2:6-8], even execution by the Romans. If Paul wanted to cast the central figure of his message as eminently embarrassing and dismissible, he couldn't have done a better job of it.

Second, Paul claimed that on the basis of this inexplicable act of self-sacrifice, grace was now available impartially to all. It was inconceivable to Greeks or Romans that a deity would subvert the social system. Yet this was Paul's claim and he insisted on modelling it in his own life.

So did Paul set out to transform Greco-Roman society? I think we have to take an each-way bet on that one.

No, in that he was pragmatic about living in society. Patrons, he said, should not stop benefactions, but do so with generosity freed from the need for personal honour or reciprocity. Clients should busy themselves with meaningful activity rather than endless lobbying for patrons (what else do you do all day if you don't have to work?)

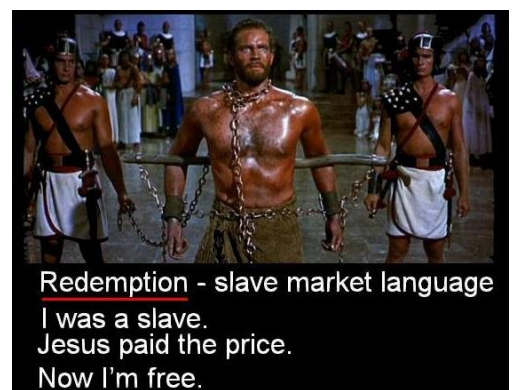
But yes, in that he sponsored a quiet revolution from within. His groups formed communities around the simple convention of gathering for dinner. Inside this gathering, Paul expected the group to maintain a high standard of propriety, but to disregard social distinctions, even to honour the less honourable.

We should not intellectualise what Paul was advising. It involved inverting the normal conventions of honour. Paul expected his associates to break with the convention of allocating food and seating according to rank. He expected wives, children, even slaves, to be allowed, no, invited to recline at meal with those of rank and to participate fully in the conversation. This was entirely scandalous. . . .

Paul was building something entirely new and had set himself an ambitious program of nurturing co-workers for the task. He had to neutralise the grip of every social convention that tied their hearts and minds to the old world. His strategy included undermining virtually every assured premise and outcome of the social system.

From Lead with Wisdom by Mark Strom pp 246-248.

5. (a) What does it mean to "redeem those under law" (4:5)?



(b) Does this only apply to Jews? Why/why not?

6. What is meant by (NIV) “that we might receive the full rights of sons”  
or (ESV) “so that we might receive adoption as sons” (4:5)?

### To finish

7. Often, when you decide to change direction, you do so because you know who you are, what you are capable of, and what you want to do. What did this study tell you about who you are?



## Study 6, Gal 4:8-31, Slavery, relationships & covenants

### Getting started

1. You've been busy preparing a Sunday school lesson for 8 year olds on Jacob. You've read Genesis chapters 25 to 35. You've printed out memory verses and activity sheets. You've got maps and a video to show. When you get to church the superintendent says it's not on Jacob, it's on Joseph – we did Jacob last week. How would you feel?



### Bible

2. Read Gal 4:8-11.  
Is Paul talking about salvation by works of the law or living by works of the law?  
Give reasons for your answer.
  
3. Read Gal 4:12-20.  
(a) What was the relationship like, between Paul and the Galatians (vv 12-16)?  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
(b) Why is the relationship now strained?  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
(c) What does Paul want for the Galatians?
  
4. What does Paul mean when he says "Brothers, become like me, for I became like you" (v 12)?
  
5. Read Gal 4:21-31.  
To understand the background behind Paul's argument in Gal 4:21-31 read and summarise the following passages:  
(a) Gen 11:29-30.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
(b) Gen 12:7.

(c) Gen 16:1-16.

(d) Gen 21:1-13.

6. Read again Gal 4:21-31.

(a) How does the story of Sarah and Hagar explain the difference between the old and new covenants?

(b) Why was this useful for Paul's case in explaining it to the Galatians?

It's conventional for evangelical Christians to speak nicely about the Sinai Covenant, and to look for points of continuity between the old covenant and the new. Paul is not quite so polite. To his mind, the Judaisers behind his persecution are direct descendants of the Sinai covenant. They are not "legalists" – they are simply those who won't give up the Sinai covenant, and now want to impose it on others. Paul's bluntness can remain obscure in the Hagar and Sarah allegory (Gal 4:24-31), but add this up... "24 ... (Hagar and Sarah) represent two covenants.

One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar ... 30 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.'" Or to be a bit more blunt ... "Get rid of the covenant from Mount Sinai and those in slavery to the law, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."

Galatians is a great reminder to Gentiles like us that being included in the family of God isn't a matter of taking on Old Testament laws expressed at Sinai, whether for our justification or our sanctification. Rather, we've been included in the family of those who are given new, God-serving hearts, by faith, through the work of the Spirit . . . .

Many Christians would argue that we are saved by grace alone, but are sanctified by keeping God's Holy Law. Once saved, our response to God is measured in our obedience in keeping God's moral law – the ten commandments – but also in seeking to discern and apply God's will from the rest of the law. So, for instance, a command about building walls around the roof of your flat-roofed house in Jerusalem is taken to broadly apply to issues of workplace health and safety and swimming pool fences. The principle is indeed the same; the wisdom is unquestionable. The application of these principles is seen as an appropriate response to God's grace in Christ Jesus. But the question remains, where do you draw the line? If our justification is by faith, and our sanctification is by keeping the law, exactly which laws do you keep? And is that really Paul's view of sanctification in Galatians? The simple answer is no – Paul says that sanctification comes not from the law, but from the fruit-bearing Spirit.

From "One Family of Faith" essay by Phil Campbell.

7. In what ways are Christians tempted to go back to slavery?



**To finish**

8. (a) What is meant by “religion”?



- (b) Why are the trappings of religion so attractive? What is it about law keeping that is so appealing?

9. “The proclamation of the gospel is the death-knell for all religion.” Do you agree? Why/why not?

## Study 7, Gal 5:1-15, Freedom

### Getting started

1. (a) What is your definition of freedom?

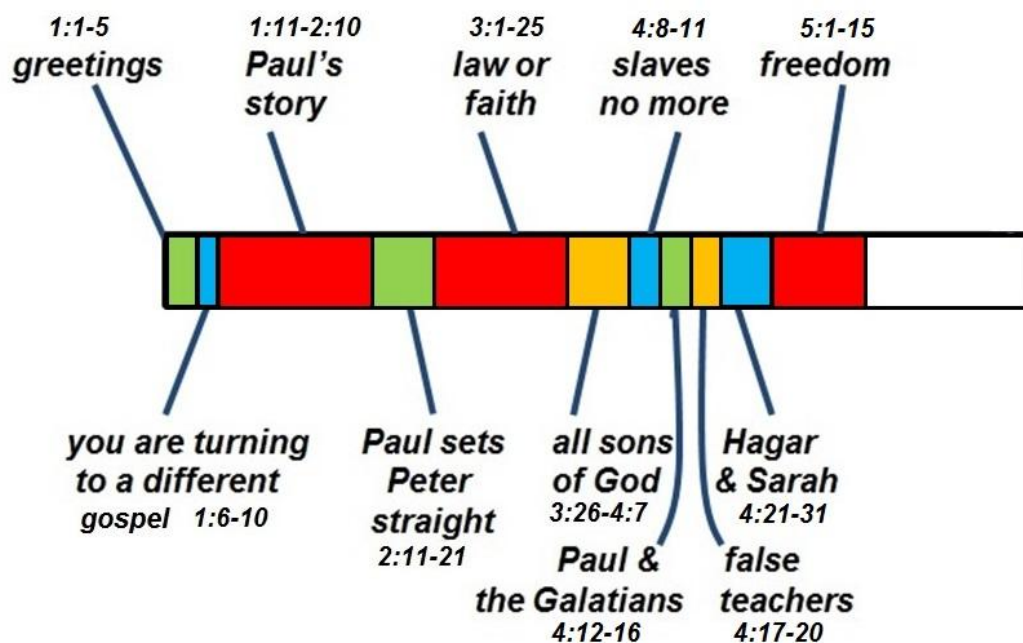
(b) In what ways are we free?

(c) In what ways are we not free?



### Bible

2. Read Gal 5:1-6.



(a) Why is it that a person who accepts circumcision must obey the whole law (v3)?

(b) How were the Galatians trying to be justified by law (v4)?

(c) What does Paul mean by freedom in this passage?

(d) What has justification got to do with freedom?

(e) What righteousness is Paul talking about in v5?

3. Read Gal 5:7-15.
  - (a) What does v9 mean?
  - (b) Who is persecuting Paul (v11)?
  - (c) What is the “offence of the cross” (v11)?
4. Explain how the entire law can be summed up by “love your neighbour as yourself” (see vv 6 and 14, Matt 7:12, 22:34-40, Rom 13:9-10).

### Video

This Nooma video, #7, Luggage, by Rob Bell is about a number of subjects but I want to focus particularly on what it says about freedom. We will talk about the video after it has finished and if you have any questions we will deal with them too.

5. Why was this video called “Luggage”?
6. What does it say about freedom?
7. Does this video make you think of other ways we are free or not free?
8. How did you feel about the ending?
9. Would anyone like to make any other comments on the video?



**“May you** forgive as you’ve been forgiven.  
 May you give to others what’s been given to you.  
 May you set someone free and find out it was you.  
 May you do it today because you might not have the chance tomorrow.”

### To finish

10. Are Christians more free than non-Christians? Why/why not?

## Study 8, Gal 5:13-26, Flesh and Spirit

### Getting started

1. Someone asks you, "Who you are?" What do you say?
2. You are watching an American TV drama and a policeman comes up to an ordinary person and asks to see some identification. What does he mean?
3. In "The Bourne Identity" Jason Bourne can't remember anything but he knows he's good at fighting and driving fast cars. He has a number of passports with his photo but under different names. He wants to find out his real identity. What does he mean?
4. In the context of computers and the internet what is meant by "identity theft"?
5. In the 70s Cat Stevens was on the road to finding himself. What did he mean?
6. Someone asks you "What is he like?" What does that person want to know?



All these questions are about identity. We are going to look at Galatians 5:13-26 by focusing on the theme of identity but first we will look at a video by Rob Bell on identity.

### Video

This Nooma video, #18, called Name. It goes for about 14 minutes. We will talk about the video after it has finished and if you have any questions we will deal with them too.





7. What follows is a sample of the words on the back of the T-shirts.  
 (a) What does each word mean to you? designer suits

pick-up trucks

immigrant

weak

ashamed

bankrupt

(b) What have these names got to do with "identity"?

(c) What does the bare skin signify?

8. Rob Bell tells the story of Jacob. After wrestling with the angel, the angel asks "What is your name?" Jacob answers "Jacob" (not Esau). (a) Why is this significant?

(b) How does Rob Bell relate this story about Jacob to us?

9. Rob Bell tells the story about how Jesus tells Peter that he is going to be a leader in his church (John ch 21) and Peter looks to John and says "What about him?" Jesus says don't worry about John, you follow me. How does Rob Bell relate this story to us?

10. What do you think is the take home message from the video?

**May you** do the hard work to discover your true self.  
 May you find your unique path, the one God has for you.  
 And in the process, may you find yourself comfortable in your own skin.

## Bible

We are going to look at Gal 5:13-26. One of the key words in this passage is “flesh” but the New International Version doesn’t use that word. The NIV uses the words “sinful nature” instead of flesh. The Greek word in the text, “sarx”, means “flesh” but the editors of the NIV have decided to interpret the word as “sinful nature”.

In past versions of the Bible you will find that the King James Version used the word “flesh”, the Revised Version (RV) used the word “flesh”, the Revised Standard Version used the word “flesh”, then came the NIV and it used the words “sinful nature”. Next came the English Standard Version (ESV) which was supposed to replace the NIV but it didn’t. The ESV went back to using the word “flesh”. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) also uses the word “flesh”.

Why is this such a big deal? Because it radically changes the meaning of the passage. In this study we will think in terms of “flesh” by reading from and working with the ESV for Gal 5:13-26. (I suggest you have printed copies of this passage for everyone in the group.)

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

So far in Galatians we’ve seen the problem of some Jewish Christians (the circumcision group) saying that faith in Jesus is not enough. You’ve got to keep the Jewish law as well. Paul strongly argues against this and says that the law was to *lead us* to Jesus (Gal 3:24) and now we are no longer under the supervision of the law (Gal 3:25). In fact, Paul says, if you go back to the law you are going back to slavery to all its rules and regulations (Gal ch 4), none of which will get you saved. Instead of being burdened by the law we have freedom in Christ (Gal ch 5).

11. Read Gal 5:13-26 from the ESV.  
What are the 2 main ideas in the passage (v 17 especially)?
12. Paul associates certain things with each of these ideas. Read vv 19-21.  
What things are associated with the flesh?
13. Read vv 22-25. What things are associated with the Spirit?
14. Read v 26. Where would you put the things in v 26, under flesh or Spirit?
15. Read vv 13-15. (a) Where would you put these things - under flesh or Spirit?

(b) What has freedom got to do with flesh and Spirit?

16. Read vv 16-17. How does freedom relate to these verses?
17. Read v18. What goes under flesh or Spirit?
18. Read v 24. Where would we put ourselves with regards to flesh or Spirit?
19. What does this say about our identity?

Summarising our 2 columns of flesh and Spirit we have:

#### **Flesh**

sins like sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry etc.  
(vv 15, 19-21, 26)  
not inheriting the kingdom of God (v 21)  
under the law (v 18)

#### **Spirit**

love, joy, peace etc. (vv 22-23)  
not about law (v 23)  
belonging to Jesus (v 24)  
living and walking by the Spirit (v 25)  
love (vv 13-14)  
service (v 13)  
fulfilment of the law (v 14)  
us (v 24)

#### **To finish**

20. What does it mean to be associated with the flesh?

What does it mean to be associated with the Spirit?

21. What has this got to do with our freedom (v 13)?
22. Summarise the different aspects of identity that were discussed in this study.

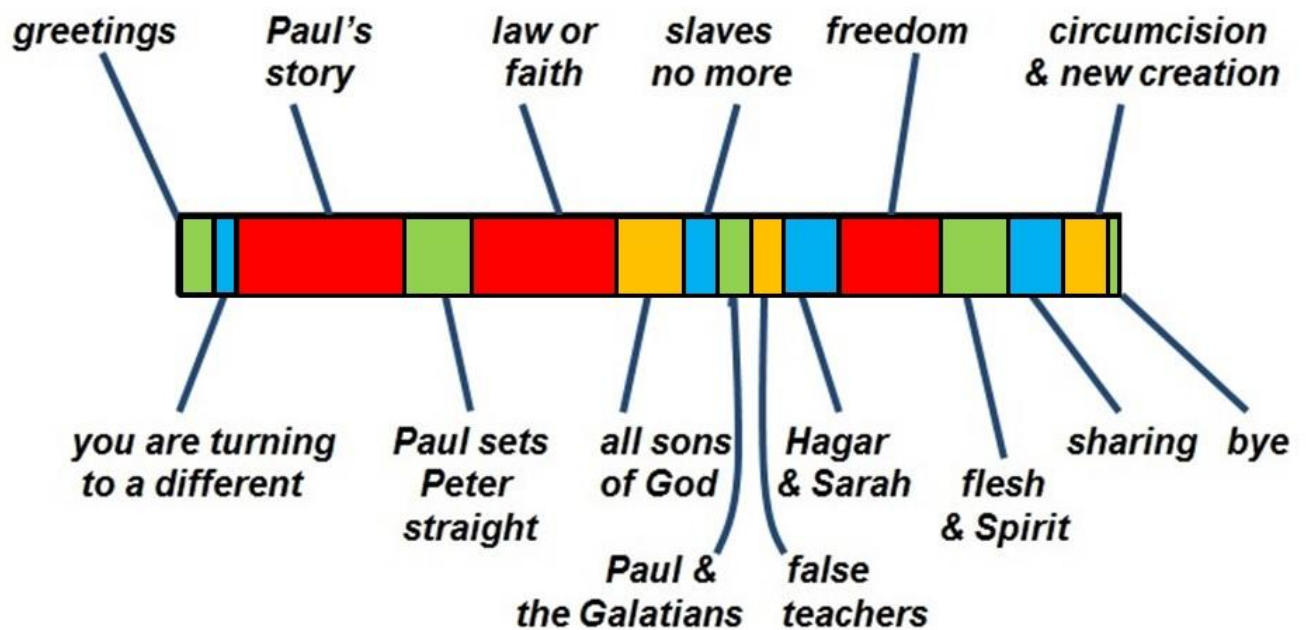
## Study 9, Gal 6:1-18, Sharing

### Getting started

1. What is the best thing about your church?



## Galatians



### Bible

2. Read Gal 6:1-5.  
How should we deal with sin?
3. Are we something or nothing? What does Paul mean in v 3?
4. (a) What's wrong with comparing yourself to someone else v 4?

(b) What if you don't measure up?

(c) What if you reckon you are better than someone / everybody else?

(d) What has this got to do with carrying a load (v 5)?

The implication seems to be that if we do not or will not bear one another's burdens, it is because we think we are above it. We would not demean ourselves to such a thing; it would be beneath our dignity. Again it is apparent, as in Galatians 5:26, that our conduct to *others* is governed by our opinion of *ourselves*.

From The Message of Galatians by John R.W. Stott p 159.

5. Read Gal 6:6-10.

(a) Who do you think Paul means by "your instructor"?

(b) What do you share with "your instructor"?

6. Considering the social context what was the "family of believers"?

7. (a) Why is it so important to do good for the "family of believers" (cf. Gal 4:4-7)?

(b) How does this work in your church?

8. Read Gal 6:11-18.

How do these verses summarise the concerns in the whole letter?

9. What does Paul mean when he says through cross of Jesus "the world has been crucified to me" (v14)?

'The world' is the society of unbelievers. Previously we were desperately anxious to be in favour with the world. But now that we see ourselves as sinners and Christ crucified as our sin-bearer, we do not care what the world thinks or says of us or does to us. 'The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.'

From The Message of Galatians by John R.W. Stott p 180.

10. (a) What does Paul mean by “a new creation” (v 15)?

(b) Why is this the only thing that counts?

### To finish

11. If Paul can make such a clear statement about the sign of circumcision could the same be said about the sign of baptism? Why/why not?

