

No Other Gospel: *an 8-Week Study of Galatians*

The Story Houston's Fall 2020 Discipleship Season

Session One: The Gospel of Inertia

Introduction

Welcome to our Fall 2020 study of Paul's letter to the Galatians! Over the next eight weeks, we'll explore the words written by the Apostle Paul 1,950 years ago in the year 50 AD. This letter, called *Galatians*, may be the earliest of Paul's thirteen letters that are included in the Bible, and if so, that would make Galatians the oldest book in the New Testament.

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 1:1-24 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Personal

Context

Let's create a timeline to help us get our minds around the order of events among first-generation Christians (all dates are approximate):

4 BC	4-6(?)AD	26-30(?)	33-35(?)	33-38	46-47	49-51(?)
Jesus born	Paul born	Jesus' Ministry	Paul's Conversion	Paul in Arabia, Syria, Cilicia	Paul's 1st Missionary Journey	Galatians Written Jerusalem Council

What stands out to you as you observe this timeline of New Testament events?

Personal, but could include facts like (1) Paul's age in relation to Jesus, Paul's conversion soon after Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul's 10+ years spent in training before launching his ministry.

Who was Paul?

- Author of 13 New Testament books. List them in order here:

Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

- Read Acts 22, and list what you learn about Paul's life and background here:

- *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia..."*
 - *Cilicia was a Roman province, and Tarsus was its capital city. It was centrally located and vital for three different key trade routes. It's a beautiful place, with waterfalls and a mountain range, and about 300,000 people lived in Tarsus, making it a major city by first century standards.*
 - *Part of the reason for Tarsus' incredible growth was that, in 42 BC, the Roman government declared it a Free City. No income tax. Like Texas. But imagine if tomorrow, the federal government said, "Texas is so awesome, and we're so grateful for what Texas has done to make the United States stronger, richer, and smarter, from now on, no residents of Texas will pay federal income tax." That's pretty much what happened in Tarsus a few decades before Paul was born.*
 - *What followed the population boom was more entertainment and culture. Sports were huge in Tarsus, which might explain why Paul so often uses sports analogies like "run the good race" and "fight the good fight" in his letters. Tarsus was also known for being the "other Ivy League" of Roman scholarship. The most renowned universities in the Roman Empire were in places like Athens and Alexandria, but Tarsus boasted a university that rivaled those by every metric. The school in Tarsus was the Rice University of the first century Roman Empire. Paul studied there, and that's why his mastery of Greek philosophy and rhetoric are clear in his letters.*
- *"...brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel..."*
 - *In Paul's context, studying under a great teacher was an incredible privilege, a source of pride and honor. Gamaliel was a leader among the Jewish people in Jerusalem. He was a member of the Great Sanhedrin, which was essentially the Jewish Supreme Court in the first century. It's very likely that Gamaliel sat on the Sanhedrin when Jesus was arrested and tried before the court. The Sanhedrin then ordered Jesus to be beaten for claiming to be the Messiah, and sent him away to Pontius Pilate.*
 - *Relative to other members of the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel was even-tempered. In Acts 5, several Sanhedrin members were ready to murder Peter and the apostles, "But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. Then he said to them, 'Fellow Israelites, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if their movement is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will be found fighting against God!'" (Acts 5:33-39)*
- *"...I was circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, a Pharisee, zealous for God..." (Philippians 3:5, Acts 22:3)*

- We think of the word “zealous” as passionate or excitable, but for Jews like Paul, being zealous meant something more radical. The Zealots were political activists and revolutionaries. At least two of Jesus’ disciples were zealots (Simon and Judas). We’re not sure if Paul was a member of the Zealot Party, but we know he shared a lot in common with them.
- He was also a Pharisee, which is something he chose to become. You weren’t just born a Pharisee; you worked for it. The Pharisees were the cream of the crop. Only the smartest boys in school were considered by Pharisees. These were the honor roll students. The Eagle Scouts. To become a Pharisee you had to pass several tests. You had to memorize the Psalms. Not a psalm. The Psalms. All of them. You also memorized Leviticus and Deuteronomy, word for word. You wore the phylactery every day with a scroll inside of it. You were distinguished, and people respected you everywhere you went. That’s what Saul had been working toward all his life, and he had arrived. That’s why in Galatians 1:14, he shared a humble brag - “I advanced in Judaism beyond my peers.”

The Problem

What problem did Paul write to address among the Galatian churches?

False teachers (Paul called them “Judaizers” or “The Circumcision Party”) stirring people away from the true Gospel arguing that circumcision is essential, vs 7, “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.” Their false teachings are creating deep divisions in the church.

Why did this problem matter so much to Paul? What was at stake?

For Paul the Gospel is simple and it only requires the acceptance of God’s gift through faith, vs 12, “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” What the false teachers are advocating for instead is religion and ritual, or inertia = “the way we’ve always done it”. In addition to creating division, it would have made a spectacle to have had the entire church of Galatia circumcised, for an entirely false argument.

The Gospel was at stake

N.T. Wright writes: “Paul believed that, through Jesus and his death, the One God had overcome the powers that had held the world in their grip. And that meant that all humans, not just Jews, could be set free to worship the One God. The Jesus-shaped message of liberation included forgiveness for all past misdeeds, and this message of forgiveness meant that there could be no barriers between Jewish Messiah people and non-Jewish Messiah people.”

Why did Paul feel the need to defend himself, his background, and his record as an apostle of Jesus Christ?

Paul felt it was important for people to understand that he was the recipient of God's grace through Christ. He experienced something powerful himself that was not of human origin, and that changed his life forever. He was never under the authority of other apostles, only Jesus.

How do Christians today still fall into the same trap that the Galatian Christians fell into in the first century?

The joy of their salvation is affected

Works righteousness can destroy the exuberance of our first love. When we first discover God's redemption we approach God as "Abba," but thinking that salvation occurs through works makes us concerned about God's judgment instead. We become concerned about our fate if we fail to follow "the law." This is what Paul feared the false teachers were causing people.

Correction

Read verses 9-10. What is the course correction Paul offered to the Galatians who had gone astray?

There is no Gospel other than salvation by faith. Every other gospel dissolves into works-righteousness, which is the path to self-righteousness, pride, and ultimately hell.

How would you define the Gospel of Inertia?

Inertia is a property of matter by which it continues in its existing state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line, unless that state is changed by an external force. It's also described as a tendency to do nothing, to remain unchanged, or to overvalue "the way you've always done it."

How do Paul's rebukes hit home for you? What is the "Gospel of Inertia" that you're most prone to follow, and what makes it inferior to the Gospel of Jesus?

Personal, but may include:

- *Old ways of celebrating holidays*
- *Old value systems and goals*
- *Old ways of eating, drinking, or expressing sexuality*
- *Old habits and addictions*
- *Religious dogmas*
- *Narrow-minded doctrines that exclude people because we put salvation in our hands, instead of God's.*

“If Christ is not all to you He is nothing to you. He will never go into partnership as a part Saviour of men. If He be something He must be everything, and if He be not everything He is nothing to you.”

— **Charles Spurgeon**

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Session Two: The Gospel of Favoritism

Introduction

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Review

What circumstances led Paul to write *Galatians*?

Eric inserts answer

This Week's Text

Read Galatians 2:1-21 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What was Paul's chief complaint about the circumcision group/Judaizers?

Paul was upset and "astonished" about the fact they were adding to the gospel. It wasn't WHAT they were adding that upset Paul enough to write his first letter, but THAT they were adding. They were adding onto the simple gospel of Jesus.

Discussion Question: Are you adding anything to the gospel of Jesus for your justification?

In verses 16 & 17, Paul says the word “justified” four times. What does he mean by being “justified”? (also see Romans 3:24-36)

Justification is a legal term, used in courts of law. It deals with the verdict a judge pronounces when a person is declared not guilty of the charges brought against him or her.

The words justified and righteous stem from the same Greek word. For a person to be justified means they are also counted as righteous. Paul is saying that justification is more than simply forgiveness; it's the positive declaration that someone is righteous even if they aren't. It's imputed righteousness. We are justified by grace through faith alone. Jesus is the Justifier.

How do we walk the balance of believing what Paul is saying and that faith without works is dead? (see also James 2:26)

Faith alone justifies, but justifying faith always produces good fruit. Loving like Jesus, sacrificially giving like Jesus, being compassionate like Jesus, serving like Jesus, producing the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Discussion Question: What kind of fruit is your faith producing?

Read Luke 18:9-14. What does Jesus say about justification and righteousness?

So, why is the tax collector justified and not the Pharisee? The tax collector recognized his need to be declared righteous and his inability to do it himself. He humbled himself before God and said only you can declare me as righteous.. The Pharisee wanted God AND his actions to make him righteous, the tax collector turned to God's mercy alone. The tax collector didn't add anything to the gospel- he had Faith in grace not faith in works. Pharisee thought God owed him the righteousness he earned, and that type of self-justification feeds pride and devalues grace. But the tax collector, surrendering to Jesus as Justifier alone... produces humility and treasures grace.

Conflict

The conflict in this week's passage is found in two actual, face-to-face conflicts. The first one is found in Galatians 2:1-10, and the second is found in verses 11-14.

Conflict #1 - Galatians 2:1-10

Who were Paul's adversaries in this conflict?

"Those esteemed as leaders," "false believers who infiltrated our ranks," James, Cephas, and John.

Who were "James, Cephas, and John"? Why is this confusing to some New Testament readers? (see also Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 17:1, Acts 12:1-2)

Cephas = Simon Peter

John = Son of Zebedee and "the disciple Jesus loved"

James = the brother of Jesus, who was not one of the 12, but who became the leader of the Jerusalem Church in the 30s AD until he died as a martyr c.62 AD.

It can be confusing because Zebedee's other son (John's brother) was also named James, and was also included with Peter and John in Jesus' inner circle of disciples. James, son of Zebedee, was martyred by Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12.

From Paul's perspective what were the points of disagreement between Paul and his adversaries?

Paul believed that Christian insiders - namely the apostles of Jesus, as well as Jesus' brother James - were holding onto the implicit favoritism found in their Jewish religion. Paul believed that Jesus destroyed all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, and that God does not play favorites.

Conflict #2 - Galatians 2:11-14

In this case, Paul's conflict is with Simon Peter (aka "Cephas"). Why was Paul upset with Peter? (see also Acts 10 and 11)

Paul was disappointed in Peter's glaring hypocrisy. Whenever he was outside of the presence of "Judaizers", Peter fraternized and ate with Gentiles, but whenever James or his friends came around, Peter pretended to be like them.

In both of these cases, Paul is concerned about *favoritism* infecting the Church. What is favoritism? Who did Paul suggest were "playing favorites"?

Favoritism is merit-based or biased preferential treatment extended to a select few. Paul cried foul about favoritism in two ways: first, as a response to James and the Judaizers' attempts to force Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism, and second, as a response to Peter, James, John, and others who appeared to be wielding influence in the Church based on their personal access to Jesus during his life on earth.

Usually, when the New Testament authors write about “works of the law,” we think of the Jewish Law (Torah) found in the Old Testament. But Paul writes plenty about the “works of the law” to his Gentile audience in Galatia. How could Gentiles have fallen prey to a devotion to the law? (see Romans 2:14-15)

Because the Gentiles had “the requirements of the Law written on their hearts,” they didn’t need to be Jews to strive for moral legalism. They could become the hypocritical morality police just as easily as Jews could. The point is that no one will ever be righteous by striving to be legally or morally good enough.

Why is favoritism so contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Because the reason Jesus died on the cross was to cover all our sins, and to extend an invitation to every soul, regardless of their religious or ethnic identities or their moral behavior. He is the great equalizer of all sinners. No one has the upper hand.

Can you think of a time when favoritism infected the Church? What was the result?

Personal

Why might the idea of no favoritism be dangerous to religious people?

Personal. But it’s worth noting that one of the functions of religion, historically, has been to create insiders and outsiders, winners and losers. That’s favoritism.

Correction

What was Paul’s solution to the conflict created by favoritism within the Church?

A return to the idea of justification by faith in Jesus Christ

What did Paul mean by verse 18? How have you been tempted to “rebuild what you destroyed” after coming to Jesus?

He meant that going back to his prior devotion to the law, after he was finally delivered from its grip, would be truly rebellious.

In verse 20, Paul says he was crucified with Christ. What does that mean? (see also Romans 6:1-4)

His old sinful self, including his sinful allegiance to the letter of the law, died with Jesus on the cross. Baptism was originally a reenactment of the believer’s death (descent into the earth) and resurrection (ascent from the grave) in Christ.

When you think about your life before Jesus compared to now, what parts of your “old self” died in your baptism? What parts of your “old self” still remain?

Personal

*I do not set aside the grace of God,
for if righteousness could be gained through the law,
Christ died for nothing.*

- Galatians 2:21

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Session Three: The "Gospel" of Works

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Question from Last Week:

Are there levels to God's judgment, and are Paul and James speaking to different tiers?

This Week's Text

Read Galatians 3:1-14 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

Why did Paul write this letter to the Galatians?

There are those who are preaching a different gospel than Paul taught to the Galatians. (1:1-6-9)

What were the specific “works” Paul mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 that had been added to faith in Christ as a means of justification?

This gospel involved Jesus plus certain Jewish rites, including:

- Circumcision (2:3-5)
- Dietary requirements and purification rituals (2:13)

Paul sees this as an adulteration of the gospel because:

- No one will be justified by living up to the law. (2:16)
- If works were the means by which we could be made right with God, Christ died for nothing. (2:21)

What was Paul’s personal manifesto as stated in Galatians 2:20. What did he mean?

To counter this other gospel—which Paul calls no gospel at all—he provides a personal manifesto. This manifesto does not just declare his personal beliefs, but what he thinks should be the manifesto of all Christians (2:20)

Conflict

What is Paul’s tone at the beginning of chapter 3? What does this say about the importance of the issue at hand?

The emotion of Paul’s words lets us know that the conflict about the gospel is not preferential in nature, it is fundamental.

What in Galatians 3:1-5 gives a sense that Paul did not think the Galatian error was lack of knowledge?

The Galatians’ error is not because of lack of knowledge. (3:1)

What rhetorical questions did Paul ask in 3:2-5? What answer was he looking for to each of the questions?

Paul uses four rhetorical questions used to “wake up” the Galatians:

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? (3:2)

After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (3:3)

Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? (3:4)

Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (3:5)

What was Paul's point in asking the questions he did? Why was he so angry with the Galatians?

In framing the argument as he does here, Paul makes clear that his conflict isn't with circumcision, or diet, or purification, it is with any self-effort that is added to the gospel.

In this conflict, remember Paul's chief audience: it is believers who have gotten off track.

Have you ever been in a season when your walk with Christ moved from faith to self-effort?

Personal

What do you think it means to live by faith instead of self-effort in the day to day?

Personal

Correction

Why would Paul turn to the life Abraham in defense of his position?

The appeal of a "Jesus+" gospel to those with a Jewish background is that it purportedly honored the God-given law, or the writings of Moses.

What does Genesis 15 tell us about the time when righteousness was credited to Abraham?

In order to show that the "Christ-alone gospel" does not dishonor the Mosaic law, but is consistent with it, Paul appeals to the life of Abraham, the father of the Jews. In particular, he quotes Genesis 15:6 which says this of Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

If then, we believe God, as Abraham did, we too can have righteousness credited to our account, and become members of the family of Abraham. (3:7)

How does Genesis 12:2-3 provide a peek at the gospel?

To strengthen his argument, Paul draws back further in the story of Genesis and ties the blessing promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 to the good news of Jesus Christ. (3:8-9)

Why is the law an insufficient means to make us right with God?

It's good that the gospel is not by works, because the law is a standard no one can live up to. (3:10)

Again, the righteous in God's eyes are not those who live up to the law, but those who live by faith. (3:11)

How did "the curse" placed on Christ provide an opportunity for both Jew and Gentile to receive the promise of the Spirit?

The law is not about faith, it is about doing. Life could come by the law if one could keep it perfectly, but no one, except Christ alone, has or can live up to the law. Therefore, our only hope is in a Savior who will take on the curse that should be ours because of our law-breaking nature. (3:12-13)

Jesus gave his life to redeem not only Jews, but Gentiles as well. This redemption would come through Christ by faith and result in the promise of the Spirit for all who believe.

Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

- Galatians 3:7

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Session Four: The "Gospel" of Entitlement

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 3:15-4:7 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What is the Law and where did it come from?

When we read "the Law" in the New Testament, we have to be aware that it could mean several different (but related) things. Most broadly, it refers to the Torah - the first five books of the Old Testament - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But "the Law" can also refer more specifically to the 613 statutes (or commandments) handed down by God in the Torah, which are summed up in the "Ten Commandments," and even more succinctly by Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40.

God gave the Law to the Israelites through Moses after God liberated them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12-14), as they wandered through the Judean wilderness for forty years (Exodus 12-Leviticus-Numbers-Deuteronomy)..

What did Jesus teach about the Law?

Jesus insisted that the Law still applied, at least insofar as its original intent was concerned, and insofar as he came to FULFILL it. To FULFILL = “make full, to fill up and to fill to the full” (Matthew 5)

Jesus didn't overrule the Law. He illuminated its original purpose and meaning.

When Jesus said the whole Law can be summed up in the two commandments to love God and neighbor, he wasn't replacing the Law with “love,” he was illuminating the fact that God's Law was given in love in the first place.

What did Jesus have to say about the sense of entitlement that was apparently prevalent among his people? (Matthew 20)

It's lost on many of us how easy it is to live with that frame of mind. When life has been pretty good to you. When you're born in America. When you've been relatively comfortable from Day 1. You got a good education. You've got a family that loves you. There's never been a rival tribe across the river threatening to cut your head off and take your wife and children as slaves.

When your life has been a little too easy for a little too long, you kinda start to think you're entitled to the comfortable life you have. And the only logical conclusion, then, is that those who don't enjoy the same levels of comfort don't deserve it like you do. And religion complicates the matter even further, because you start to think maybe the reason your life is so comfortable because God looks after good, church-going people like you.

Which seems to be precisely the kind of thinking that Jesus is warning against in this parable. Just because you're a Christian, you go to church, and you're a decent person compared to other people you know doesn't mean you deserve anything more from God than anybody else does. Being a Christian isn't about earning credits; it's about the privilege of knowing God. The reward of working for God isn't the payday; it's being with God. It's having purpose in the vineyard instead of feeling aimless at Home Depot.

Salvation is really not about getting what you deserve; salvation is realizing you never deserved anything in the first place, and everything you have in life is grace. All of it. Every good thing in your life is a free gift you did nothing to deserve.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like the vineyard, and entitled Christians are like the 6am workers.

Conflict

What was the major conflict that Paul wrote this letter to address?

Entitlement & exclusivity. Paul argues that the law was a later addition to a covenant that God had already made with Abraham, and that this covenant transcended the letter of the law in every way. The promise included everyone - jews and gentiles under the lordship of Jesus.

*The **fallability** of the letter of the law - "So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world." Paul also argues that the law is unable to provide the freedom and salvation that the gospel provides. And that in light of the promise in Jesus it is obsolete.*

Why were Jewish people susceptible to a sense of entitlement regarding their place with God compared to the Gentiles?

Their claim wasn't completely unfounded, but it failed to acknowledge the essential nature of Jesus' work on the cross as the fulfillment of the promise God originally made to Abraham.

Exodus 6:7 - *I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord."*

Genesis 17:11- *You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.*

What good is the Law now if Jesus made it obsolete? (Gal. 4:19) **"19** My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."

The law serves as a reminder of how much we really need Jesus. There isn't any other way to overcome the grip of sin and evil. Through Jesus we become partakers of the promise, we no longer need intermediaries to connect with God - we become "Children of God," redeemed by his blood.

The Law in its own right revealed the heart of God. The heart of the Law is Love.

“ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba,^[c] Father.” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.”

Optional question: Why should Christians care at all about the Old Testament, especially the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)?

It is our heritage.

Correction

How is the sin of entitlement a problem for many Christians today?

Ask the group.

What would Paul tell Christians today who have a sense of entitlement about their place with God compared to other people?

The same thing he told the Judaizers. Salvation is by faith alone, and faith is a gift of God.

What does Paul mean when he compares slaves to children in 4:1-7?

That children essentially have the same legal status as a slave. Just because you call yourself a “child of God” because of your religious status doesn’t make you an heir of God’s promises. Through Christ, God adopted the Gentile believers as sons and daughters. But through the Spirit, God grows us from “underage children” into heirs of his promises.

What does being baptized have to do with “clothing yourselves with Christ”?

In the Jewish baptism ritual, which was carried forward by the first Christians, the person being baptized entered the water totally naked and upon their baptism they were given new clothes as a symbol of their newfound purity or innocence. To clothe yourself with Christ meant that upon your baptism, Christ himself became the everlasting symbol of your innocence.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

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Session Five: The "Gospel" of Tradition

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 4:8-20 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What were the traditions first century Christians were still clinging to? Why were they so significant?

Traditions -

Days: Sabbath observances and other daily feasts;

Seasons: Passover, Pentecost, New Moon ritual, tabernacle season

Years: Year of Jubilee, the Sabbatical year, and New Year celebrations

They were incredibly significant because these traditions were means of sanctification.

What are the traditions that current Christians have created today?

Christmas and Easter traditions. The unhealthy nature comes from worshipping the observance not the purpose of the observance (God). It's not to say that traditions are bad, it's about why you do them. Jesus should be the center of your tradition, not a nice side piece to it.

**What's the relationship between following human tradition versus following Jesus?
(see also Mark 2:23-28)**

Jesus is saying that the lesser thing took the greater place. Man wasn't made for Sabbath, Sabbath was made for man to help him rest and worship God.

It's a really good thing for the right reason. Our traditions can be really good things in service of the gospel. Sometimes we make our church life or our traditions the foundation of our faith instead of the gospel.

Conflict

What are the Galatians doing that makes Paul so angry?

- As pagans they were enslaved, working for your salvation
- Bondage to the law or bondage to pagan idols are both forms of idolatry. Idolatry is essentially a type of slavery.
- They are free people CHOOSING to return to slavery.

A "turn back" (verse 9) is an indication that the Galatians are going back to what they came from. What are they returning to? Is Paul saying that Judaism is Paganism?

They are going back to the regime of rules and traditions. The **Law was never designed to save** but to point forward to Christ. As believers, the work of Jesus on the cross has redeemed us from the bondage of idolatry. Paul is implying that it would be foolish to go back into slavery!

He's saying that adhering to the letter of the rules and traditions from paganism to Judaism are very similar, and even though they're "turning back" to Judaism, they might as well be turning back to paganism.

Why does Paul criticize the observance of holy days in verse 10?

Observing = performing and trying to gain salvation and acceptance.

"When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned a part of divine worship, the days are improperly observed." (John Calvin)

EVERYDAY IS HOLY! His point is they're falling back into the bondage of the law

If the Galatians came to know God through Christ, what were they turning against to become slaves once more? How is this a return to slavery?

They are free people CHOOSING to return to slavery. We find freedom in relationship with GOD through Christ, not in ritual

- See the following verses: Romans 1:21; 2 Corinthians 3:17

"For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the great gods Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self), and the other enslaving trio, Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run his life becomes his god". (*Your Father Loves You* by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, page for April 17)

How would you characterize true freedom in your walk with Christ? How are you tempted to return to the bondage of sin?

Personal.

Correction

What command does Paul give in verse 12?

Vs 12: **“become like me for I became like you.”** Paul as a Jew used to be bound by the law, but he abandoned the law to be free from the law. He urges the Galatians to not be bound to the law, to be free as he is.

What does it mean to know God, and how do we know God through Christ?

Knowing God is personal and relational. It is initiated by God and not something we can do ourselves. It's a response to his love, that “we love because he first loved us. It is not knowing ABOUT him, but knowing God on a heart basis is about fellowship and communion. Knowing God through Christ: We know God through RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

- See these verses: Galatians 5:1 (Next Week!); Colossians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17; John 10:22-30.

What was Jesus' solution to the conflict created by tradition? (see also Mark 7:5-9)

When we think we're honoring God by attending church every Sunday and not surrendering our lives to him, we're turning back to the enslavement that we once knew before Jesus. Jesus sets us free to respond to him with our hearts, not just our words.

Traditions aren't bad. Christmas and Easter celebrations are awesome. We are a festival people! But we have to be careful that we don't value our traditions so much that we forget the why. And that's the gospel of Jesus. We don't cling to religious traditions to get Jesus to love us, we do these things because he does love us and we want a greater intimacy with him. That's the motivation behind this Bible study, that's the motivation behind studying the Word of God, that's the motivation behind doing life in community with other Christians. The gospel is the only remedy.

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Galatians 4:8

No Other Gospel: *an 8-Week Study of Galatians*

The Story Houston's Fall 2020 Discipleship Season

Session Six: The "Gospel" of Secularism

Introduction

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This Week's Text

Read **Galatians 4:21-5:12** twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What is the backstory involving Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael?

In Genesis 12 and Genesis 15, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation and that his heir would be of his own flesh and blood, but Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were childless.

In Genesis 16, Sarah, still childless, suggested to Abraham that he should take her slave, Hagar, and sleep with her to produce an heir. Abraham agreed, and Hagar got pregnant by him. While she was pregnant, Hagar grew resentful toward Sarah, and Sarah blamed Abraham for messing everything up (even though it was Sarah's idea in the first place!). Sarah proceeded to "mistreat" Hagar, causing the pregnant woman to flee into the wilderness. God met Hagar in the

wilderness, cared for her, and sent her back to live with Abraham and Sarah. She later gave birth to a son, Ishmael.

In Genesis 21, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. When Isaac was around age two or three, Sarah noticed that Ishmael, who was at that time around 16 years old, was being a bully toward Isaac. Abraham gave Hagar some supplies and sent her away. Once again, God met her in the wilderness and cared for her and Ishmael.

Why did Paul equate Ishmael with slavery and Isaac with freedom?

4:24 - "figuratively" is the operative word here. This isn't a commentary on Arabs and Hebrews or Islam and Judaism. In fact, it's the opposite of that. Paul is equating the Jewish Christians with Ishmael because he was the son of a slave, and they were living as slaves to the Law, and Christians (Gentile and Jewish) who live by faith to Isaac because he was the son of the promise, and they were set free by faith.

More importantly, Paul was making the point that Ishmael was the product of natural, material circumstances, while Isaac was the product of supernatural, miraculous circumstances. In this way, Ishmael's story relates to the Law - which was based on the natural and material works of man - while Isaac's story relates to the Gospel - which was based on the supernatural and miraculous grace of God in Jesus Christ.

You've probably noticed that we refer to the slavery/freedom metaphor a lot when studying the Bible and applying it to our lives today. How have you experienced spiritual slavery in the past (or the present) and how have you experienced the freedom of the gospel?

Personal.

Conflict

What is the main concern Paul is voicing in today's passage?

Paul is concerned about people looking for answers to spiritual questions outside of Jesus. Whatever we find outside of Jesus' authority will inevitably lead us away from God. Paul equates slavery in this passage to the bondage of living according to human-made rituals and traditions that kill the spirit, and he equates freedom to the life that is found in Christ - 5:1 - It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Why is circumcision something that symbolizes the beginning of bondage according to Paul, and why is he so adamantly opposed to people taking this first step?

Even though circumcision might appear to be a simple initiation ritual, it is more than that according to Paul. It is the first step in the wrong direction, and a direction that misleads believers into thinking that there is another way to attain salvation outside of Jesus' authority.

5:2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. **3** Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.

It might appear harmless, but it isn't. Circumcision is only a ritual, but it is one that carries an entire different system of beliefs with it. It contains man-made rules but it has no power or authority to change people's hearts. Paul does not want Judaizers misleading the churches of Galatia into thinking that faith in Jesus can be substituted by man made traditions or rituals. Instead, he wants the Spirit of God to transform their hearts and lives.

Paul wants people to believe in Jesus and to allow the Spirit to guide their lives. Living in this way was radically different, and it was something the Judaizers couldn't control. It obviously put them at great odds with Paul because he adamantly rejects their religious systems and encourages the Galatian churches to accept them.

How do Paul's stern warnings apply to us today?

I like this quote from the book Strange Rites:

"A full 72 percent of Nones say they believe in, if not the God of the Bible, at least something...Forty-six percent of those Nones talk to God, or this higher power, regularly, and 13 percent say that God talks back...Forty-one percent say that it has rewarded them. Twenty-eight percent say it has punished them...Forty-seven percent believe in the presence of 'spiritual energy' in physical objects. Forty percent believe in psychics. Thirty-eight percent in reincarnation. Thirty-two percent in astrology. And 62 percent, it turns out, in at least one of those four."

Substituting the gospel for secular solutions still happens today. Like this quote says, people might believe in a higher power or even God, but that doesn't mean they accept Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God, or as their savior or Lord. In fact, believing in Jesus is more countercultural than ever before. The problems that Paul was having at the Galatian churches when Judaizers invaded them were nothing compared to what we face today. Even people in "Christian" churches are being stirred away from the gospel and encouraged to pursue secular solutions to meet their spiritual needs.

Beliefs in astrology, the search for existential answers through psychics are common in our day and age. But why are those things easier to accept instead of Jesus?

Believing in Jesus is harder because it requires surrender to the will of God. It requires us to pursue Him and to be in relationship with Him. It requires us to live by the power of the spirit of God, and that requires transformation. Following Him will inevitably put us at odds with people who would rather live according to their own rules and desires, and who are only in pursuit of the things of this world. That's why this verse is still relevant for us today:

4:29 At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.

Correction

In 5:4, Paul said that when we choose to prove our own righteousness by our works, we “fall away from grace.” Have you ever tried so hard to rely on your own works that you felt as though you were living apart from God’s grace?

Personal

If relying on your own works is “falling away from grace,” then how would you describe the choice to rely completely on God?

Falling into grace

Freedom

Peace

Etc.

In 5:2 and 5:6, Paul again makes it clear that circumcision holds no value to the ones who put their faith in Christ. This week’s passage culminates in the second half of 5:6, where he writes, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Why is this “the only thing that counts”?

True faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ will always elicit genuine love in the heart of the believer - both love for God, as well as love for our neighbor and our enemies.

Teachers/Leaders Note: “faith expressing itself through love” should not be interpreted as a soft, sentimental abandonment of our notion of sin and our pursuit of holiness. We are often led to believe that “love” means anything goes, no rules, love is love, so live your truth. This is absolutely not what Paul is suggesting here. Increased faith leads to increased love, which leads us to want to please God all the more with the ways we choose to live.

In 5:9, Paul wrote: “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” What did he mean by this?

Allowing or endorsing any false gospel - even a little bit - can slowly ruin your entire worldview, and it can even affect the entire community of believers. So we have to guard our hearts by honestly questioning some of the assumptions and beliefs that we hold. We're also called to gently challenge one another to weed out our false gospel narratives.

And finally, in 5:7, Paul said, “You were running a good race. Who [cut you off]...?” And, in a hilarious turn of phrase, he wrote about his adversaries who were misleading the Galatians by insisting on circumcising Gentile believers: “I wish they would go the whole way and [cut themselves off].” How was this tongue-in-cheek insult also a meaningful critique of their reliance on the Law?

Castration of men was widely practiced among several well-known pagan cults in Paul's context. Paul was essentially making the point that the practice of circumcision (cutting off only a part) accomplished nothing more than the pagan practice of castration (ie, going “the whole way”). It was a humorous critique of secularism - the reliance on natural works instead of supernatural grace.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again with the yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

No Other Gospel: *an 8-Week Study of Galatians*

The Story Houston's Fall 2020 Discipleship Season

Session Seven: The "Gospel" of Indulgence

Introduction

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This Week's Text

Read **Galatians 5:13-25** twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

Throughout this passage, Paul contrasts *flesh* and *spirit*. What are the key differences between the two concepts?

Paul is writing in a Greco-Roman context where the platonic ideas that the body/flesh is bad and spirit is good is prevalent. Paul isn't talking exactly about that though. He usually thinks of flesh in terms of the law and Spirit, in terms of a new way of living that is in step with the Holy Spirit.

The Bible writers often draw clear lines between two groups: the righteous and the unrighteous, the wise and the foolish, those who live by the spirit and those who live

by the flesh, etc. Did they really assume that righteous people never do unrighteous things, and vice versa?

For Paul it was not that black and white. Christians aren't 100% sinless saints, and non-Christians aren't 100% hedonistic sinners. Paul's point was to draw a distinction between relying on God's grace in Jesus Christ versus relying on our own works and self-sufficiency.

Conflict

In Galatians 5:16-18 what does Paul say is the conflict within every believer? (You can also flip to Romans 7:15-23)

The conflict is the battle between our sinful flesh, and the Spirit. They oppose each other, they constantly want opposite things. We all have the desire to serve ourselves and devour others for our own gain, but the Spirit of God promotes self giving and denying one's sinful urges.

How would you define the "Gospel" of indulgence?

Indulgence is excessive or unrestrained gratification of one's own appetites, desires, or whims. As Christians we can mistakenly find ourselves serving our own desires rather than the spirits. We over rely and end up being governed by our desires.

What are the fruits of the flesh and what do they lead to?

The fruits of the flesh Paul lists are sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies. This is not an exhaustive list, surely there are others we can think of, but all of these lead to destruction and Paul even says disqualifying one from the Kingdom of God! This does not mean if we commit one of these sins we are doomed to hell, rather if we perpetually find ourselves stuck in these sins we better check and see how we are using or abusing our freedom.

What are some of the acts of the Flesh you struggle with?

Ask your group to be vulnerable here, as the leader you might need to lead with vulnerability

What does Jesus ask his followers to do in Matthew 16:24-26?

Jesus himself tells us that the Christian life is not indulging in every desire, rather it's picking up our cross and following him. This means we are called to deny ourselves and our sinful passion in order to save our own life. The only way we can save ourselves is through denying our passion, and giving our lives to Jesus.

Correction

What are the fruits of the Spirit, how do they provide a correction to the fruits of the Flesh?

They are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul doesn't believe that we are free we can be apathetic or uninvolved, the fruits of a relationship with Jesus lead to these fruits which oppose the self-serving nature of the flesh. These are not works we do to please God, but the outcome of "walking with the Spirit".

How is indulgence an issue among modern day Christians?

We let many things take over our lives and give them free reign. This can play out with materialism, sexual desires, rage/anger, selfish desire to protect oneself, ambition of climbing the corporate ladder, drunkenness, food, etc. We have been told to trust our heart, and do whatever you feel is right, but can we always trust that?

How can Gospel freedom be the antidote to indulgence?

Paul says we are free, but in this freedom, we should not "bite and devour each other" or indulge our sinful nature, rather we should as he says in verse 14 love our neighbor as ourselves. (Lev 19:18). The point Paul is making is that we should use our freedom not to be self serving. liberty can never degenerate into a license to sin.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:24-25