

## **GOOD WORD SCHEDULE**

### **"The Gospel in Galatians" July, August, September 2017**

| <u>Lesson #</u> | <u>Date</u>            | <u>Topic</u>                         |
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| <b>1</b>        | <b>June 24–30</b>      | <b>Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles</b> |
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#### **Introduction**

The host and study guide author for this set of lessons on Galatians is Carl P. Cosaert, associate Professor of Biblical Studies in the School of Theology at Walla Walla University. Guests for the taping of this series of Good Word broadcasts are also two members of the Walla Walla University School of Theology faculty: Paul Dybdahl, Professor of Religion, and David Thomas, Professor of Theology and Dean of the School of Theology.

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## **Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles**

Lesson 1: June 24–30

### **Leading Question:**

**"Who was Saul of Tarsus? And why did God choose him as His apostle to the Gentiles?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Acts 6:8-7:60 – Arrest and Stoning of Stephen

Acts 8:1-3 – Saul's Persecution of the Church

Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-22; 26:12-18 – Paul's Conversion

### **Key Points:**

**1. This Quarter's Lessons:** At the outset of this quarter's study on Galatians, I want to make a couple of confessions. First, I should note I am the principal writer behind each of the lessons in the Adult Bible Study Guide on Galatians. In addition, I have also authored the companion book that goes along with the lessons. That book is entitled *Galatians: A Fiery Response to a Struggling Church* (Review and Herald, 2011). Since I've already written extensively on Galatians, I will try not to simply repeat that material in this quarter's Good Word Study Guide. Instead, my plan is primarily to highlight a few key points and raise additional questions for discussion. To get the most out of our study, I would encourage you to obtain a copy of the companion book on Galatians. It is packed with more information than is not found in the quarterly and it also contains additional material that attempts to connect the issues in Galatians with issues we face today.

**2. Galatians and Adventists:** Several years ago when I was preparing this information on Galatians, I shared several messages on Galatians at a spiritual convocation in the Pacific Northwest. After the end of the first presentation, a lady told me she was glad to hear a series on Galatians because a friend had just told her that Seventh-day Adventists were afraid of Galatians. Her friend claimed Adventists were legalists and did not really understand the gospel. As proof of this, her friend said Seventh-day Adventists never study the book of Galatians. While I was glad to assure her that her friend was mistaken on both accounts, it is certainly true that some of Paul's comments in Galatians have been mistakenly used to teach that Christians who are saved by faith no longer need to observe the law of God. Although Paul says we are not saved by what we do, he also says that what we do is important. To many readers, this can certainly sound very confusing, and even contradictory. This quarter's lessons provides us an ideal opportunity to grapple with this issue, and in the process to grow in our own personal understanding of what God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**3. Paul's Background:** But before we look at Paul's letter in particular, we need to first look at the man Paul. Who was this man? What events shaped his life? Why was he so opposed to Jesus and His followers at first? What made this one-time persecutor decide to become a follower of

Jesus himself? And why did God choose Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles instead of using one of the other apostles?

Paul was born around A.D. 5 to a Jewish family living in Tarsus, a city located along the northeastern coast of the Mediterranean in what is modern day Turkey. Although he was raised outside of Palestine, he was still raised in a conservative Jewish home. In addition to being given the Hebrew name Saul at birth, he also was circumcised according to the law, learned to speak his native tongue, and was raised with a knowledge of the laws and traditions of the Jewish people (Phil. 3:4-6). At the same time, however, Paul was a man of two worlds. Although he was Jewish, he grew up in a Greco-Roman city. He was given a Greek name, Paul, learned the Greek language, and was even a Roman citizen. As a young man, he decided to become a member of a Jewish sect known as the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a group of conservative Jews who were focused on keeping the Jewish laws as well as a collection of oral laws that were passed down for generations. These oral laws were an additional set of rules given by various rabbis that were intended to keep people from even coming close to breaking one of the laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Paul was not always a follower of Jesus Christ. In fact, he was the foremost persecutor of Christians for a time. He was convinced that the followers of Jesus were being disloyal to the Torah, and thus hindering God's plan for Israel by their claims that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead and was the long awaited Messiah. In his mind, there could be no tolerance for such nonsense, or for anyone who refused to give up such ideas. Paul was determined to be God's agent to rid Israel from such heretical beliefs. It was not until he encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus that he realized he was fighting against God instead of working for Him.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Describe the reaction of Ananias to God's instructions for him to go see Paul (Acts 9:10-14)? What do you think shocked Ananias more: the news of Paul's conversion, or the fact that Paul was to be God's chosen apostle to take the gospel to the Gentile world (Acts 9:15-16, 26:16-18)?
2. In Paul's account of his conversion in Acts 26:14, he mentions how Jesus said it was hard for Paul to kick against the "goads." A goad was a sharp rod that acted like a modern day electric cattle prod. What, in your opinion, were some of the goads that Jesus had placed in Paul's life that Paul was "kicking" against?
3. Does every Christian have to have a spectacular conversion experience? What basic elements are necessary for genuine conversion? When did you first accept God's call to direct your life?
4. Who is the least likely person you know who would become a Christian? What is there about the story of Saul's conversion that brings you encouragement?

5. After his conversion, Paul was clearly driven by the purpose God had for his life. What sense of purpose do we find when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Is your life purpose-driven? What purpose does God have for your life? And how would he let you know?

6. What characteristics and qualifications do you see in Paul that allowed him to be used by God as His apostle to the Gentiles?

### **Paul's Authority and Gospel**

Lesson 2: July 1 – 7

#### **Leading Question:**

**"How do we relate to Scripture? And what authority does it have in our lives?"**

#### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 1:1-24 – Paul defends his apostolic authority and the divine origin of his gospel.

2 Peter 3:15-16 – Paul's writings are classified as Scripture (and difficult to understand).

Galatians 5:12 – Paul desires that those who insist on circumcision would castrate themselves.

#### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Galatians and the Pauline Corpus:** Although Paul does not say when he wrote his letter to the Galatians, many scholars believe it is probably the earliest of all of his New Testament letters. If this is true, Paul's letter would have likely been written to the churches Barnabas and he found in Galatia during their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:28). Shortly after Paul and Barnabas left Galatia, the churches there became divided on the issue of whether Gentile believers needed to be circumcised. Before this issue was decided at the Council in Jerusalem in A.D. 49 (see Acts 15), Paul responded to this issue himself via his letter to the Galatians.

**A.** Does the fact that Paul's letters follow the pattern of all ancient letters say anything about how God reveals himself to us and how we should view Scripture? Or does the "humanness" of Paul's writing process undermine the divine "authority" of his writing?

**2. Paul's Authority:** Today Christians acknowledge that Paul was chosen by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. When Paul's ministry was first getting started, not everyone accepted Paul's status and authority as an apostle. One of the indications of the early date of Galatians is Paul's lengthy defensive of his apostolic authority in the opening verse. Paul's ministry was relatively new and his authority had not been as widely recognized, as it was later.

**A.** Paul's opponents in Galatia were challenging his apostolic authority. In what way is the authority of Scripture being challenged today? Is Scripture an authority in your personal life?

**3. Paul's Sharp Words:** On account of the rather strong words Paul uses with his opponents (see Gal. 1:6-9; 5:12), Galatians is often characterized as Paul's most fiery letter. Paul was so upset with what his opponents were teaching that he not only skips the traditional prayer of thanksgiving that occurs in all his other letters, but he wishes they would be "accursed."

**A.** If we believe that Paul was inspired, how do we deal with Paul's harsh words? Should they be dismissed as an ill-advised outburst inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus? Or were they spoken under the guidance of the Spirit?

**B.** Paul was insistent that there was only one way of salvation and that that was through Jesus alone. The popular view among most people in the world today is that there are many different ways to God. What would you say to someone who is of that opinion?

### **The Unity of the Gospel**

Lesson 3: July 8 – 14

#### **Leading Question:**

**"Is the debate over circumcision in the early church relevant for Christians today?"**

#### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 2:1-14 – Paul and the apostles agreed that circumcision was not necessary for Gentiles.

Galatians 5:2-6 – Circumcision is not a prerequisite for becoming a Christian.

Acts 16:1-7 – Paul is not opposed to circumcision in and of itself. Timothy is circumcised.

#### **Key Points and Questions:**

**The Issue of Circumcision:** Why were some Jewish believers so insistent that Gentiles be circumcised, while Paul and others strongly disagreed (cf. Acts 15:1-2, 5; Gal. 5:2-3, 12)? While this question may sound highly irrelevant to us today, understanding this issue is essential to appreciate fully Paul's message in Galatians.

The issue of circumcision in Paul's day has nothing to do with personal hygiene. It all goes back to God's instruction to Abraham to circumcise all his descendants (Genesis 17) as a sign of the covenant He had made with him. The problem was that in Paul's day circumcision had become such a highly prized symbol of national and religious identity that it had overshadowed the covenant it was supposed to have signified. Circumcision had become the end all. In the earliest days of the church, this issue was not essential since Christians were Jewish. But when Gentiles started joining the church, some Jewish believers insisted they submit to circumcision first. While the argument in the church was about circumcision, the real issue centered on what was the defining mark of a Christian? Was faith in Christ sufficient for salvation? Or did Christians have to do something else in addition?

**A.** While the question of circumcision is no longer the same issue it was for Christians in Paul's day, what modern forms of "circumcision" threaten the all-sufficiency of Jesus?

**B.** Paul claims that giving into the demands of the false brothers regarding circumcision would have resulted in slavery and bondage for Christians. How was this true, or was Paul just being overly dramatic?

**C.** Paul refers to his opponents as "false brethren" in Gal 2:4. How can "brothers" be false? Are there false brethren today? If so, how would Paul describe them?

**D.** Although Paul stresses the importance of unity in the first half of Galatians two, later in the chapter he tells how he publically rebuked Peter in Antioch. Is Paul's behavior inconsistent with his emphasis on unity? Or was Paul right to confront Peter publicly?

**E.** If Paul was so opposed to circumcision in Galatians that he refused to have Titus, a Gentile, circumcised (Gal. 2:3), why did he consent to circumcise Timothy later in Acts 16:3?

## **Justified by Faith Alone**

Lesson 4: July 15 – 21

### **Leading Question:**

**"On what basis can a God who is holy and just accept and forgive faulty humans?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 2:15-21 – Jesus' faithfulness is the means by which humans are made right with God.

Romans 3:10-20 – Paul explains that salvation is based on the work of Jesus for humans.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Justification:** In this week's lesson we are introduced to Paul's favorite term to describe what Jesus did for the human race in His life, death, and resurrection: justification. Justification is a legal term used in a court of law, where a judge justifies the innocent and condemns the wicked. This metaphor of salvation was especially relevant to Paul since he often had to stand before governors and magistrates on account of the charges his Jewish opponents brought against him. Paul would have seen in these experiences the need of a Savior who would vindicate him before the real enemy of the human race: Satan and the power of sin and death.

**A.** What positive insights does the metaphor of justification provide for understanding who God is and what salvation involves? Does the metaphor of justification have any shortcomings?

**B.** Paul says justification is not based on "works of the law." Is "law keeping" negative and opposed to the gospel? How should we understand the phrase "works of the law"?

**2. Not My Faith but His:** Before becoming a Christian, Paul was convinced that the problems facing the Jewish people were ultimately rooted in a lack of faith on the part of God's people. If Israel were only more faithful, then things would be different. Sometimes this same mentality can be seen in the church with the expression, "If we just had more faith..." While we certainly need to place our complete trust in Jesus, we often make the mistake of turning our faith into a work *we* have to do. Nothing could be more opposed to the gospel. Paul learned the foolishness of this when he realized that our hope is based in God's faithfulness to the promise He made to Abraham. God faithfully kept His word by sending Jesus, the one faithful Israelite, to overcome both Israel's unfaithfulness and to atone for the sins of the entire world. Paul highlights this in the phrase when he says in Galatians 2:16: We are not "not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith [or faithfulness] of Jesus Christ" (KJV).

**A.** What dangers are there to one's spiritual life if our acceptance with God is based on our behavior—or even on our faith?

**3. It Has To Be Personal:** Paul refers to Jesus in very personal terms as the one "who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*" (Gal. 2:20). While anyone can explain what the gospel is and how it works, no one can experience the gospel without making it personal. In the end, Christianity has to ultimately be about Jesus and me, otherwise it means nothing.

### **Old Testament Faith**

Lesson 5: July 22 – 28

### **Leading Question:**

**"To succeed in this world, we learn to rely on our strengths. Why is that so foolish, however, when it comes to our spiritual lives?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 3:1-14 – Personal experience and Scripture testify salvation is not by works.

Genesis 12:1-3 – God's promise to Abraham was based on what God alone would do.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Remembering Our Story:** To help the Galatians see the foolishness of trying to do something to *earn* their salvation, Paul reminds them of their experience when they first came to faith in Christ. It all started when the gospel came to them. They had done nothing to earn it. God had sent Paul to share the good news of what Jesus had done for them and they had simply accepted it. What would make them think that now they had to *do* something?

**A.** Paul says Jesus was "publicly portrayed as crucified" before the Galatians? How did this happen? Were they in Jerusalem when Jesus died? What can we learn from this?

**B.** The Galatians had made a good start, but had lost their way. Why do humans fall so easily into the trap of relying on their own behavior for salvation? Can we do anything to avoid making this mistake?

**2. The Testimony of Scripture:** After trying to show the Galatians from their own experience that salvation can only be based on what God does for us and not our own behavior, Paul turns his attention to the testimony of "Scripture" on this issue. After briefly mentioning the story of Abraham, Paul quotes bits and pieces from four Old Testament passages to make his point.

**A.** Why are decisions by church councils and personal experience not sufficient for proving Paul's point? Why does he ultimately appeal to Scripture?

**B.** Many people equate salvation by faith with the New Testament and salvation by works with the Old Testament. Why is this a mistake? What do these passages teach us?

**3. Redemption in Christ:** Paul introduces two additional metaphors of salvation in Galatians 3:1-14. The first metaphor is drawn from the world of business and accounting. Paul says that Christ's "counts" or "reckons" his followers as "just" on the basis of what He did for them.

Secondly, Paul says that Christ redeemed us. The word redemption was primarily a secular term that referred to the release of a slave.

**A.** What is it that Christians have been redeemed from? See Heb. 2:14,15; 1Cor. 15: 56-57; Rom. 3:24; 6:22; and Gal. 3:13.

**B.** What metaphors would you use to explain the gospel to a person who did not have a Christian background?

## **The Priority of the Promise**

Lesson 6: July 29 – August 4

### **Leading Question:**

**"If God saves people by faith alone, why did he give the law in the first place?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 3:15-20: The law must be understood in light of God's promise to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6: God's original promise to Abraham did not include the law.

Matthew 5:17-20: Jesus did not come to abolish the law.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. The Priority of God's Promise:** When approaching the issue of the relation of God's law to the plan of salvation, it is important we remember the order in which God revealed the gospel. Abraham is the instrument God chose to work through to undo the evil sin had brought in the world. God promised to bless the entire world through Abraham's descendants. Paul compares God's covenant promise to Abraham to a person's final will and testament. It is something that cannot be changed. Since the law played no part in God's original promise, it would be foolish to conclude that obedience to the law was the basis of God's plan to save the world.

**A.** Why is a will an appropriate illustration for the point Paul is making? What other modern illustrations might he have used if he were writing today?

**B.** What difference does it make for your faith to know that God is not a promise-breaker?

**2. Why Was the Law Given?** Paul's answer to this question is ambiguous. It was "added" later than God's promise because of transgression. What law is Paul talking about? And why exactly was it added? The answer to these questions have led many to mistaken conclusions, including the idea that the law was only a temporary part of God's plan of salvation that ended with Jesus. In light of the overall context of the passage, Paul's answers are best summarized as follows:

- **What law?** – The law in general, including the moral and ceremonial laws.

- **Why was the law given?** – It was given to point out sin (thou shall not), and as a way to show how sin would be dealt with (the sacrificial system).

- **How long was the law added?** – It will continue to point out sin until Jesus returns again.

**A.** One of the jobs of the law is to point out sin. Is it possible to really appreciate the good news of the gospel, if we do not first come to grips with just how bad the bad news is?

**B.** God's promise to Abraham and Paul's letter to the Galatians occurred along time ago. How can we make these events meaningful and relevant in our world today?

## **The Road to Faith**

Lesson 7: August 5 – 11

### **Leading Question:**

**"What does the apostle Paul mean when he says that Christians are not under the law?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 3:21-25 – The coming of Christ changes our relationship with the law.

Romans 3:9-20 – Sin is pervasive and universal and brings condemnation to those under it.

Romans 6:14 – Being under grace and not under the law should not lead to a sinful life.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. The Law as a Guardian:** Although the law does point out sin, its role is not entirely negative. The law also has a positive role in the life of the believer. Unfortunately many translations fail to note the positive aspects the law has in Galatians 3:23-25. The Greek word translated as "kept" (KJV) in verse 23 literally means "to keep" or "to guard." While this word can have a negative sense (2 Cor. 11:32), it usually has a more positive connotation in the New Testament as "protecting" (Phil. 4:7). Which aspect does Paul have in mind? It appears to be both since Paul likens the responsibilities of the law to the duties of the Roman slave, known as a *paidagogos*, whose job it was to supervise his master's son. This slave had the positive duties of acting as a chauffeur, a tutor, and a bodyguard, but also the more negative responsibility of disciplining the child if he got out of line.

**A.** Do you think of God's law in positive or negative terms? What danger is there in emphasizing one of its aspects to the exclusion of another?

**B.** What benefits do you have as a Christian that believers before Christ did not have?

**2. No Longer Under the Law:** If the law's responsibilities include both negative and positive elements, how then should we understand Paul's statement that Christians are no longer under the law since faith has come? The context and terminology of Galatians 3:23 indicates that the "coming of the faith" (Gal. 3:23) refers to the coming of Christ. Paul seems to be saying that the position of the law in relation to God's people changed when Christ came. This does not mean that the moral law is no longer applicable—that was never the issue. Christ, however, transcends the law. He is the epitome of all it requires and more (Gal. 6:2, 1 Cor. 9:21). We do not merely follow a set of rules; we follow Jesus. Jesus removes us from the law's condemnation, and does

what the law could never do, he writes his law on our hearts (Heb. 8:10), and makes it possible for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4).

**A.** What difference has the coming of faith made in your life. In what way has your faith in Christ changed your perspective of the world, and the perspective of others about you?

**B.** Paul contrasts being "under the law" and "under grace" in Romans 6:14. What does Paul say in the following verse that illustrates the law continues to have a role in a believer's life?

### **From Slaves to Heirs**

Lesson 8: August 12 – 18

#### **Leading Question:**

**"How do you relate to God? And how does He want you to relate to Him?"**

#### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 3:26-4:11 – In Christ we enjoy the privilege and rights of being God's children.  
Romans 6:1-11 – Christ's death has defeated the power of sin that seeks to control our lives.

#### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Children of God:** Although we often talk about being God's children, Biblically speaking that relationship and the rights and privileges associated with it is not something that belongs to the human race by nature. It is only a result of what God has done for us in Christ (see John 1:12). Christ has more than restored what the human race lost in Adam. We are now heirs of God.

**2. Coming of Age:** Paul compares a believer's relationship with the law to that of a minor who is not old enough to receive his or her inheritance, but still requires supervision. Paul's point is not to belittle the value of the law. The law has its time and place, just as little children need rules. But God's ultimate goal is for His children to mature so He can relate to them as adults. Paul likens the Galatians insistence on circumcision to an heir wanting to become a minor again.

**A.** How is being under the law similar to childhood, like the minor in Paul's analogy?

**B.** While a childlike faith can be positive, what dangers are there for your spiritual life if you fail to grow spiritually?

**3. Adopted into God's Family:** Galatians 4:4-7 is one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament. It highlights God's initiative in the plan of salvation, the purpose of Jesus' death, the means by which we become God's children, and the rights that are ours as children.

**A.** Why do you think Paul refers to the period of Christ's coming as the "fullness of time"?

**B.** What difference does it make in your life that God took the initiative in your salvation?

**C.** What is the sign and proof of our adoption as God's sons? Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15-16.

**D.** How do you relate to God? Do you see yourself as a privileged member of His royal family or as some sort of lowly servant?

**4. Avoiding Slavery:** The Galatians had lost sight of their position and privileges in Christ as God's children. By insisting on circumcision they had fallen back into a manner of life that sought to earn God's favor by their actions. Paul refers to this kind of experience as spiritual slavery.

**A.** What practical steps can you take in your spiritual life to avoid reverting back to the weak and worthless elementary principles of this world?

### **Paul's Pastoral Appeal**

Lesson 9: August 19 – 25

### **Leading Question:**

**"What is more important: Being right or being loving?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 4:12-20 – Paul pleads the Galatians heed his counsel and remember his love for them.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – Paul became all things to all people so he could win some for Christ.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Paul's Heart for the Galatians:** Paul's words in Galatians 4:12 reveal that while he certainly had a no-nonsense approach to dealing with doctrinal error, he also had a heart full of compassion for the wayward Galatians.

**A.** How important is the manner in which we share the Gospel with someone? And what guidelines can we learn from Scripture about how we speak to others? Consider Eph. 4:15, 25, Col. 4:4, 1 Thess. 2:4, James 1:19, 2:12.

**B.** Although Paul reveals his softer side in Galatians 4:12-20, do you think Paul has been too overbearing and forthcoming in his remarks so far? How should we act when someone teaches doctrinal error or simply does not follow what the Bible teaches?

**2. The Challenge to "Become":** When Paul tells the Galatians to "become as I am," he is referring to the confidence, freedom, love, and faith that make up his spiritual life as a follower of Jesus.

A. In your opinion, should Christians today follow the apostle Paul's example in telling others to "become as I am"? And if so, how much of one's life should be "in order" before making such a declaration?

B. How far should we go in modeling our lives after others? How can we avoid looking to others, more than looking to God?

**3. I Have Because As You Are:** A comparison of Paul's gospel presentation to his fellow Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3) and with that of pagans in Athens (Acts 17:22-31) reveals that Paul was willing to vary his presentation based on the nature of his audience.

A. How far should one go in trying to contextualize the gospel? Are there limits?

B. What, if any, danger does the church face in failing to try to contextualize the gospel?

**4. Speaking the Truth:** Paul talks about telling the truth (Gal. 4:16). In a world where many do not believe in "absolutes," is truth telling even possible? What does Paul mean when he refers to "speaking the truth" in Galatians 4:16?

### **The Two Covenants**

Lesson 10: August 26 – September 1

### **Leading Question:**

**"How sure are God's promises? How do we know if He will really keep His word?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 4:21-31 – The birth of Ishmael and Isaac illustrate the false and true way of salvation.

Genesis 15:1-6 – God confirms His promise to Abraham by means of a formal covenant.

Exodus 19:3-6 – The reaction of the Israelites to God at Mt. Sinai reveals a mistaken self-confidence.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Covenant Basics:** The predominant metaphor of salvation in the Bible is the idea of a covenant. A covenant was a formal agreement that bound two or more parties together. We continue to make covenants today, though we usually refer to them as contracts or treaties. The fundamental difference is the means by which the agreement is guaranteed. Today the sign of a legally binding agreement is a person's signature and the stamp of a public notary. In the ancient Near East in Abraham's day, the legally binding nature of an agreement was symbolized by the slaughter of an animal. The slaughtered animal represented the penalty that would fall on the party who failed to honor the covenant.

**2. God's Covenant with Abraham:** God promised Abraham He would provide him with a son through whom the whole world would be blessed. Abraham, however, struggled to take God at His word. To help Abraham see the certainty of His promise, God did what no other earthly

monarch did with a vassal. He entered into a formal covenant with him by passing through the pieces of a slaughtered animal. By formally entering into a covenant with Abraham this way, God assured Abraham that He staked His life on the certainty of His word.

A. What hope is there in knowing that even Abraham had questions during his walk of faith?

B. God bound himself to the human race by a covenant. What practical difference can this make in the way we view God, and the way we live the Christian life?

**3. Hagar, Mt. Sinai, and Legalism:** Paul associates Abraham's experience with Hagar and the experience of the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai with legalism. Paul refers to this as the Old Covenant. In the same way that Abraham tried to fulfill God's promise himself by fathering a child with Hagar, the children of Israel mistakenly thought that by their own obedience to God's law that they could earn His favor. Just as Abraham and Sarah could not produce a child, so we are unable to save ourselves by our own behavior. We need to rely on God completely.

A. In Genesis 17:18, Abraham pleaded with God to accept Ishmael as his heir. Why did God refuse? What was so wrong with Ishmael?

B. Would Paul agree with the saying, "God helps those who help themselves"?

C. What are some of the "Ishmaels" in life that try to undermine our walk with God? How can we avoid succumbing to such influences?

### **Freedom in Christ**

Lesson 11: September 2 – 8

#### **Leading Question:**

**"Does the word 'freedom' describe your Christian life?"**

#### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 5:1-15 – Freedom in Christ is opposed to both legalism and licentiousness.

Romans 8:1-4 – Freedom in Christ includes freedom from condemnation and from the power of sin.

Romans 6:1-23 – True freedom is not independence from all authority, but freedom to live for God.

#### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Christ Has Set Us Free:** Since Paul makes use of the word freedom more than any other author in the New Testament, he is often called the "apostle of liberty." The problem is that many people misunderstand the way in which Paul understands freedom. Paul does not see freedom as the ability to do whatever one wants. It is freedom to live as God created us to live.

The way in which Paul understands freedom is summarized nicely in the following statement:

"From Paul's perspective, the notion that people should be free to do as they please is wildly out of touch with reality. Human beings are but a part of a larger whole whose meaning, purposeful order, and goodness are *not* their creation. . . . The moral laws that spell out *how* human beings may appropriately live in God's creation, and the institutions (marriage, the family, government) that foster and enforce such laws, provide the conditions within which humans flourish. To disregard them is to lose, not gain, one's freedom. Like birds with broken wings, human beings who refuse to accept their place in God's world are no longer *free* to enjoy life as it was meant to be lived. From their disastrous enslavement to the lie of their own independence, the self-absorbed need to be *set* free."— Stephen Westerholm, *Understanding Paul* (Baker Academic, 2004), p. 100.

**A.** What images and stories come to your mind when you think about the word "freedom"? Do they illustrate the kind of freedom Paul has in mind? Why or why not?

**B.** Since people value their freedom, why would Paul need to encourage the Galatians to not submit to slavery? What kinds of pressure would they have to resist?

**C.** How does legalism and licentiousness destroy true freedom in Christ?

**2. Fulfilling the Law:** To those who are considering circumcision, Paul says in a negative manner that they would also be "obligated to keep the whole law" (Gal. 5:3). Later on, however, Paul says that the whole law is "fulfilled" when we manifest love to one another.

**A.** How does love fulfill the law? What would that look like in real life? How could you tell the difference between a law-doer and a law-fulfiller?

**B.** Some Christians want to completely do away with the law. How does Paul's comments show that the law continues to play a role in the life of a believer?

### **Living by the Spirit**

Lesson 12: September 9 – 15

### **Leading Question:**

**"How does a person learn to walk by the Spirit?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 5:16-25 – The Christian life is a daily decision to live for God and not for self.

Romans 7:14-24 – A life lived without the power of the Spirit results in slavery to self.

Romans 5:5 – The love that defines the Christian life is a gift given to us by God.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Walking by the Spirit:** Although the Old Testament frequently calls believers to "walk in the law" (Lev. 18:4; Ex. 16:4), Paul instructs Christians to "walk in the Spirit." Why would Paul exchange the "law" for the "Spirit"? It was not that Paul was opposed to the law. Many Jews had mistakenly come to believe that by studying God's law alone, sin could be overcome. Paul disagrees. The problem is not in studying Scripture, but in concluding that individual rules and guidelines are a sufficient deterrent for sin. While laws can tell us where we don't measure up (Rom. 7:7-12); they cannot make us into what we should be (7:13-24). It is only through the abiding presence of God's Spirit that we can be empowered to follow God.

**2. The Christian's Conflict:** Contrary to what some people have claimed, the Christian life is never free from conflict and struggle. On the contrary, Paul describes the Christian life as an ongoing struggle between listening to our selfish desires and the prompting of God's Spirit. This does not mean, however, that we have to follow our sinful desires. It simply means we have to make a daily decision to follow God. As long as we have a sinful human body, we will have sinful desires.

A. Is the presence of conflict and struggle against sinful desire in our lives a positive or a negative sign?

B. What can we do on a daily basis to help our spiritual nature grow and flourish? Is there anything in your life that is serving to undermine your spiritual life?

C. What promise can we claim from Galatians 5:16 if we are willing to walk in the Spirit?

**3. Works or Fruits:** Paul associates our sinful desires with "works," indicating things "we" do, and the power of God's Spirit in our lives with "fruit," indicating what God produces in us.

A. The works of the flesh fall into four basic categories of sex, religion, society, and intemperance. Why are humans so susceptible to corruption in these areas?

B. Which fruit of the Spirit is most absent from your life? If it is love, how can that be remedied (Rom. 5:5)? If it is one of the other eight virtues, in what way can love make that virtue more of a reality in your life?"

### **The Gospel and the Church**

Lesson 13: September 16 – 22

### **Leading Question:**

**"If you could describe the ideal Christian church, what would it look like?"**

### **Key Passages:**

Galatians 6:1-10 – Forgiveness, help, and support should be manifest among God's followers.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 – Cases of defiant sin must be dealt with in the church and not overlooked.

John 13:34-35 – Love manifest between believers is a sign of God's true followers.

### **Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Mistakes Happen:** Although God calls us to a life of holiness, the fact is that people make mistakes. It should be no surprise therefore that churches are messy places. What is suppose to make the church different from other institutions in the world is not that we are faultless, but that we extend forgiveness and restoration to those who make mistakes. In Galatians 6:1-2, Paul is not dealing with a case of defiant sin. He gives instructions on how to deal with that kind of situation elsewhere (see 1 Cor. 5:1-5). The situation Paul discusses here involves mistakes people make, acknowledge, and want to put behind them. We are not to condemn, punish, or disfellowship such people. We should treat them gently and seek their spiritual restoration.

**A.** Why do you think Paul had to instruct the believers in Galatia on how to deal with people who do not always live up to the standards God has for them?

**B.** What does restoration mean? Does it imply there are no consequences for a believer's wrong behavior even if he or she repents genuinely?

**2. Beware of Temptation:** Except for God's restraining grace, humans are capable of practically anything, given the right circumstances. The words, "I would never do that," betrays a lack of awareness to the depth of selfishness that dwells within the human heart. Paul's counsel to beware of temptation is no trivial piece of advice, nor is it limited to only a few kinds of people. We are all called to keep an eye on ourselves, lest we find ourselves wandering astray spiritually.

**A.** What steps are you taking in your spiritual life to avoid falling into temptation?

**B.** Paul says Christians should evaluate their own actions (1 Tim. 4:16). Is there a right and wrong way to do that? What criteria should be used? (Gal. 6:4; 2 Cor. 13:5).

**3. Burden Bearing:** Christians are not only called to feel sympathy for others, but we are also called to help others to bear their burdens.

**A.** What are some ways that we can help shoulder the burdens of others?

**B.** Paul's comments on doing good to others in Galatians 6:9 and 10 seem redundant. Why do you think Paul is so persistent in reminding believers of their responsibility to others?

### **Boasting in the Cross**

Lesson 14: September 23 – 29

### **Leading Question:**

**"How central is the cross of Christ to Christianity? And how does it relate to your life?"**

**Key Passages:**

Galatians 6:11-18 – More than outward conformity to a set of rules, God desires a heart open to Him.

2 Corinthians 4:10 – Accepting the call to follow Christ involves God making us a new person.

**Key Points and Questions:**

**1. Boasting in the Flesh:** Although Paul has hinted at it already, in the final verses of Galatians Paul specifically says that the problem in Galatia was that some within the church were insisting that Gentile believers submit to circumcision. Paul says their motivation was to avoid persecution and to make a "good showing" in the flesh. Here refers to this a little later has "boasting" in the flesh.

**A.** How would the circumcision of Gentiles enable the Jewish believers to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ? (Gal. 1:13, 5:11, 6:12).

**B.** How would getting the Galatians to submit to circumcision provide a "good showing" for Jewish believers who were insisting on their circumcision?

**C.** Since circumcision is certainly not an issue in the church today, what modern day analogies might we see in this situation?

**2. Boasting in the Cross:** In contrast to his opponents' insistence on circumcision, Paul places the cross of Christ at the center of the Christian faith.

**A.** We can assume from Paul's repeated references to the centrality of the cross of Christ that his opponents likely characterized him as being too fanatical about the cross. Sure it had its place, they said, but it was not everything. How central is the cross of Christ to Christianity?

**B.** Paul refuses to boast in anything but the cross? How does someone actually boast in the cross? What does that look like? Conversely, what does it mean to boast in the flesh?

**3. What Matters Most:** To keep the Galatians from concluding that being uncircumcised is in some way more pleasing to God than being circumcised, Paul says that what really matters is being born again—the divine act by which God makes a spiritually dead person alive.

**A.** How can a person know if they have been born again? And how does new birth occur?

**B.** What are some of the external forms of religion that people often mistake for Christianity?

**C.** It is easy to get so caught up with external forms of religion. What practical steps can a church or an individual take to help them remember that the heart is what really matters?