

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 1 – Galatians 1:1-10

Big Idea¹: There is only one true Gospel and therefore eternal condemnation for those who preach a different gospel. Paul reacts strongly to the Galatians' situation because of the dangers of accepting this different gospel they are being taught

Study Aim²: That group members will: be reminded of the one true Gospel, grasp the significance of the Gospel, and be struck by the dangers of accepting other gospels

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter³

What are some statements or beliefs that most people today would consider to be politically incorrect?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 1:1-10.

Passage Questions

In many of Paul's letters he follows his initial greetings by telling his readers that he is praying for them. What is different here?

Strikingly Paul doesn't mention that he is praying for the Galatians. He moves straight from his greeting to the issue at hand. Even his statement, "To the churches in Galatia" (v 2) is abrupt, with the reference to "saints" used in other letters being absent here.⁴

What does that communicate about the situation in these Galatian churches?

Serious. Important. Etc.

¹ Each week a 'big idea' and a 'study aim' for the allocated passage will be provided. These are not to be shared with the group (e.g. "The big idea for our passage this week is ...") but rather the hope is that the group will discover these for themselves. The big idea should help you as the leader to know what the passage is on about and the study aim should help you to keep discussions headed in the right direction.

² Further to the previous footnote, regardless of how closely or not you follow my suggested questions, the time with your group should at least achieve this study aim each week.

³ These headings ('Discussion Starter', 'Passage Questions' etc) are just for you as leaders – you don't need to communicate to your group that you are now moving to a different section in the study!

⁴ These 'answers' are just provided as a guide for you as the leader to know what the questions are aiming at. You don't need to 'check off' every aspect or provide the group with *the* answer at the end of each discussion.

What are some other ways that Paul communicates the importance of this issue?

The language and tone that he uses – e.g. “I am astonished” (v 6); “deserting” (v 6); “pervert” (v 7). Especially the repetition of “eternally condemned” (vv 8, 9).

How would you summarise what has actually happened in these Galatian churches?

Some false teachers have come in and taught the Galatian believers a different gospel – a perverted version of the Gospel of Christ. This has introduced confusion and caused the churches to turn to this different gospel. In effect, they are “deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ” (i.e. God himself)!

Activity⁵

Paul mentions the “Gospel” a number of times in verses 6-9 (5 times in 4 verses!). Hand out a small piece of paper (e.g. A5 size) to each person. Allow time for people to write down their own response to the following question(s) – What is the Gospel? How would you explain it to someone else?⁶

After around 5 minutes, give a few people the opportunity to share their responses. (It’s probably best not to make this compulsory – e.g. directing everybody to share – but certainly encourage people to do so⁷).

Passage Questions cont.

How does the passage itself help us to understand what the Gospel is?

If we take the time to notice what is there Paul does actually give us quite a lot of information in this regard. For example, verse 1 – “... raised him from the dead”; verse 3 – “Grace” and “Peace”. Especially verse 6 – “... grace of Christ” and verse 4 – Jesus Christ “... who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age”.

Application Questions

What is your immediate reaction to Paul’s manner and tone in this passage?

⁵ Each week I will try and include some kind of a break from the ‘Question and Answer’ style of Bible study by including an activity. I’m not at all against the question and answer format but its weakness is that it doesn’t cater for everybody’s learning style (e.g. visual and kinaesthetic learners). This week’s activity helps those who would benefit from some personal space in the study for individual reflection, and also allows for those who may need some assistance in the reflecting stage of the learning process.

⁶ Although this question may seem straight-forward, can there be a more important question for people to understand and live by? Studying the letter to the Galatians will suggest not in the strongest possible terms.

⁷ This sharing time may even help to give you a window into where people in your group are at spiritually. The question is a key one for us to be clear on as Christians and therefore the sharing of these individual responses could be quite enlightening. As leader, you need to strike a balance here between being overly dominating on the one hand (e.g. “everyone must share”) where people could feel threatened and uncomfortable, and being too passive on the other hand (e.g. “you can share if you really want to”) where no-one, or only a couple of the more talkative group members, will share.

What might be underlying that reaction for you personally?

It is worth trying to tease this out with people. If we think Paul is being a bit 'full on' or 'over the top' then perhaps we are not valuing truth (especially God's truth) as much as we ought. Maybe we don't take false teaching/thinking about Jesus as seriously as we should. Have we bought into the 'political correctness/relativism/pluralism' of today's climate more than we realise? If we are in that zone, or drifting in that direction, we are on precarious ground.

What does this passage teach us about the Gospel?

Try and tease out not just the content but what we have seen regarding the importance and seriousness of the Gospel. My guess is that many of our group members will know that the Gospel is important but this question should help the group to think through why it is important as well.

What might tempt us to turn to a different Gospel?

Prayer Points⁸

Praise God for the grace of Christ shown in the Gospel of Christ – the one who “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age”.

Pray for those in leadership positions at our church and denomination – as they encourage us in the Gospel and continue to teach the one true Gospel.

Pray for ourselves – that we would understand the Gospel, grasp its importance and be protected from different gospels.

⁸ These are just suggestions. You, and your group, will no doubt come up with others from the passage and have other group-specific prayer points.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 2 – Galatians 1:10-2:10

Big Idea¹: Paul insists that the Gospel that he preaches is the one true Gospel, having been received directly from Jesus Himself, and therefore it is not a message that has its origin in man, been tampered by man, nor requiring man's confirmation

Study Aim²: That group members will be reassured that the Gospel is ultimately a message from God not from man and therefore be encouraged to continue to place their trust in that Gospel and reject other false gospels

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter³

Think about a time when you were telling someone a message that was important or a message that they found hard to believe. How did you try and convince them that it was important or believable?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 1:10-2:10⁴.

¹ See the footnote from last week regarding the 'big idea' and 'study aim'.

² Again, refer to the relevant footnote from the first study.

³ Last week's study makes reference to these various headings ('Discussion starter', 'Passage questions' etc). Please refer to that again if you need to.

⁴ The reading for this week purposefully includes verse 10 from last week's study. The verse is what I like to call a 'hinge' verse because it 'swings' between the two sections. Note its repeated references to "men" which, when combined with 1:1, forms a bracket for the first section (1:1-10) but also links with the theme of today's section (see 'Big Idea') – 1:10-2:10. Hence its inclusion in the readings for both studies.

Passage Questions

Think back to our passage from last week (1:1-10). What was the situation in these Galatian churches that Paul was writing to?⁵

See particularly 1:6-7. Some false teachers have come in and taught the Galatian believers a different gospel – a perverted version of the Gospel of Christ. This has introduced confusion and caused the churches to turn to this different gospel. In effect, they are “deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ” (God) – verse 6! Paul, of course, is deeply concerned and distressed by this⁶.

What questions might this have raised for the Galatians regarding Paul and his Gospel?

Some possibilities: Did Paul really tell us the truth? Or was he mistaken? And if, as it seems from what these other teachers are telling us, he was mistaken – was that innocently or maliciously? Can we really trust him and what he said? Was Paul’s Gospel really the one true Gospel? Maybe it was false after all? And, if so, what does that mean for where we’ve placed our trust and for our Christian experience?

Look particularly at verses 10-12 in Chapter 1. How does Paul initially respond?

In terms of Paul’s defence of himself, he is not on about pleasing men or seeking their approval.

Additionally, in terms of Paul’s defence of his Gospel, it is not a message made up by men, received from men, or taught by men. Its origin is in a revelation offrom Jesus⁷.

As a side note (and one that you might like to point out to your group), this helps us to make more sense of why Paul introduces himself the way he does in the opening verse of the book – “Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (1:1).

⁵ Asking this question is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, comprehending the Galatian situation helps us to grasp why Paul says what he says in this week’s passage. Secondly, it helps people to understand that the book is a coherent whole (even though we are breaking it up into smaller parts each week to better understand it) – i.e. its various parts relate to what comes before and what comes after. Thirdly, and relatedly, it also keeps reinforcing (perhaps more subtly) to our people that good Bible reading (and in fact any good reading really) requires reading a text in its context.

⁶ Remember from the first study that these ‘answers’ are just provided as a guide for you as the leader to know what the questions are aiming at. You don’t need to ‘check off’ every aspect or provide the group with *the* answer at the end of each discussion.

⁷ Given time constraints you probably won’t have the opportunity to look into this “revelation” reference further, but if people have questions regarding what this is or how this came about you can refer them to the places where Paul recounts the details of his conversion (Acts 9, 22 and 26).

Activity⁸

Paul continues his defence of himself and his Gospel right through to the end of our passage. Split your group into two smaller groups⁹. Get one group to look at 1:13-24 and the other group to look at 2:1-10. Using the relevant passage, choose from one of the three options below:

- (i) ‘Mock’ interview. One person can pretend to be a news reporter and another can pretend to be Paul. Extra group members can help come up with questions and responses from the passage. Allow some time for the group to prepare their interview and then present it to the larger group.
- (ii) Drama. Have various group members act out the different characters, interactions and events mentioned in the passage. Allow some time for the group to prepare their script and then present their drama to the larger group.
- (iii) Investigation. Have the group read the passage and pretend that they are detectives compiling a dossier on Paul and his message. Allow some time for the group to prepare and then report their findings back to the larger group.

Passage Questions cont.

Paul mentions a lot of details about himself and various events in his life in this passage. What is his purpose in doing this?

Paul’s purpose revolves around ensuring that “the truth of the Gospel might remain with you” – his Galatian readers (2:5). He is concerned that, having shared the Gospel with them, now with the arrival of these false teachers, he might have run his race in vain (2:2). He wants to protect “the freedom we have in Christ Jesus” (2:4).

He recounts the details of his conversion in order to show that he wasn’t even part of the church of God previously – in fact he was a persecutor of God’s church and tried to destroy it! Upon being commissioned he didn’t seek anyone’s permission before being engaged in proclaiming the Gospel. It was only after three years that he even went to Jerusalem and saw the other apostles – and even then he was only there for a two week period and only saw Peter and James. When he went fourteen years later (!) nothing was added to his message, or corrected, but rather all that the apostles there could do was recognise God’s grace and his work in and through Paul.

⁸ Again, please refer to the first study for my comments about the inclusion of this ‘Activity’ section each week. This particular one helps those who are more kinaesthetic in their learning style and also appeals to those with a preference for the dramatic. You may initially feel like the options suggested – especially the first two – won’t work for your particular group (e.g. they will think it’s too immature, they will find it too embarrassing, we’ve never done something like this before). Try and resist that urge and get brave! You might just be surprised ☺. At any rate, I would suggest that it’s a far more interesting and fun way to work through such a long section of mainly autobiographical content than the question and answer style.

⁹ If your group is quite large you can split into four groups instead of two and give the same sections of the passage to two of the groups (i.e. double up). The activity works best if the groups only have 3-4 people in each one.

How do all these details strengthen the claims that Paul made in 1:10-12?

Paul is not sharing all this information about himself and these various events in his life just for the sake of it. He employs them deliberately in his argument to demonstrate that he is not on about pleasing men or seeking their approval and to prove that his message is not made up by men, received from men, or taught by men. They form a crucial part in Paul's defence of himself and his Gospel message.

The ESV helpfully makes the logic of this clearer than some other translations with its use of "for" at the beginning of verses 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Application Questions

In terms of receiving the Gospel, in what ways are we different from Paul?¹⁰

We cannot say, as Paul does, that we "received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (1:12). We are not apostles and do not stand in such a pivotal position in salvation history as Paul does (the one who was commissioned to initially bring the Gospel to the Gentiles). Unlike Paul, we are taught the Gospel and receive the Gospel from others. It's important that we understand the differences and not just apply from Paul's experience directly across to ourselves.

Given that this is the case, how does our passage equip us to discern the various messages we might be taught?

Some questions we might ask of the messages we hear and the messengers we hear them from may include: Is the one teaching us being a man-pleaser or a God-pleaser? To what extent is it a message from man or from God? Does the messenger appeal to God for their authority (as he is now revealed to us in Scripture) or to people – i.e. wise gurus/special anointed ones? Does the message emphasise and lead to freedom or slavery? Has anything been added to the truth of the Gospel?

How does this passage reassure you in terms of the truth of the Gospel?

Try and tease out the aspects related to the origin of the Gospel, the content of the Gospel and the transmission of the Gospel.

¹⁰ Often as Bible readers our tendency is to jump straight from what the text says and seek to apply it to ourselves and our situation. This can be particularly problematic when it comes to reading the Old Testament (e.g. we forget that we are Christians and not Israelites or we miss the ways in which Jesus fulfills the Old Testament) but it sometimes trips us up even when we're reading the New Testament. This is one such example. We need to be careful here not to put ourselves into Paul's position – we are not like him in some ways – in order to apply this passage appropriately.

Prayer Points¹¹

Praise God for the one true Gospel – a message that has its origin in God not man and therefore can be trusted.

Praise God for faithful people who have guarded the Gospel and faithfully taught it and passed it on through the generations – even down to us today.

Pray that God would help us to be discerning as we hear different messages and that he would help us to stick with the one true Gospel.

¹¹ See the point made in Study 1 referring to the fact that these are just suggestions for you and your group to use during your time of prayer.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 3 – Galatians 2:11-21

Big Idea: The Gospel message is that sinful people are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by observing the law. Peter's behaviour was not in line with this message and therefore it was necessary for Paul to rebuke him

Study Aim: That group members will grasp the heart of the Gospel message (justification by faith and not by works) and be encouraged to live lives that are in line with the truth of the Gospel

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

How would you define hypocrisy?

Why do we find hypocrisy so distasteful?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 2:11-21.

Passage Questions

What does Peter do when he comes to Antioch¹?

Initially he was happy to eat with the Gentile believers in Antioch but when men came from James he drew back and separated himself from these Gentile believers.

What effect does Peter's action have on others?

Other Jews, even including Barnabas, joined Peter in his hypocrisy and they were led astray.

¹ The city of Antioch played a significant role in the early church. Persecution after Stephen's martyrdom caused believers to spread out to such cities as Antioch, where they shared the Gospel with both Jews and Gentiles. When the church in Jerusalem heard news of such a great number of people coming to faith there they sent Barnabas who was in turn encouraged by what he saw. Barnabas and Paul spent a year with the believers there. Antioch was where believers were first called Christians and, during a famine, they sent aid to their fellow-believers in Judea. See Acts 11.

What is underlying Peter's behaviour here?

Paul mentions fear in verse 12. More deeply, and as we will see as the passage progresses, Peter's fear betrays an underlying misunderstanding of the Gospel message and its implications.

How does Paul respond?

Paul opposes Peter because he believes that Peter has been in the wrong and acted hypocritically.

What does Paul see is at stake here?

Peter, and the others led astray by his behaviour, were "not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel" (v 14). Peter, though a Jew, was happy to act as a Gentile (sharing a meal with them) and yet he, through his withdrawal and separation, showed that he actually believed that Gentiles had to first become Jews before they could become Christians. He was employing a double-standard and had to be rebuked. The very Gospel message, and all that it means and achieves, is what was at stake in this critical episode in early church history.

Activity²

In the verses that follow, Paul continues to explain exactly what was at stake in this incident with Peter at Antioch.

Split your group into pairs or triplets. Have each pair/triplet complete the following table from verses 15-21.

	At the start of the Christian life	Throughout the Christian life
The place of the law	<i>Observing the law doesn't justify³.</i>	<i>Through the law we have died to the law.</i>
The place of faith in Christ	<i>Faith in Jesus Christ justifies.</i>	<i>Having died, our (new) life is now lived by faith in the Son of God.</i>

² Sourced from 'Free for all – Galatians' – Matthias Media Study Guide – p 30.

³ This is the first time that this important concept of justification is used in Galatians. Therefore, it may be necessary to explain its meaning for some people in our groups (and to remind others). Put simply, it has to do with how we can have a right standing before God (i.e. be accepted, seen to be righteous, declared innocent before him). In Greek, the words for justify/justified/justification and righteous/righteousness all have the same root word. Thus, although it would be terrible English, you could say that someone is 'righteous-ified' in the same way as you could say someone is justified.

Bring your group back together. Share responses for each category entry in the table⁴. (Try and ensure that each of the pairs/triplets have the opportunity to make a contribution).

Passage Questions cont.

How do verses 15-21 relate to Paul's episode with Peter?⁵

Peter's behaviour (vv 11-14) was, in effect, a denial of the fundamental Gospel truths outlined in verses 15-21. Therefore, having referred to the incident with Peter, Paul provides further defence for his response.

In what ways do verses 20-21 sum up Paul's position?

There is an emphasis on Jesus' person and work – his love and his self-giving. Jesus' work on Paul's behalf is such that Paul can say that he no longer lives but it is all about Christ living in him. The life that he lives is a life of faith in Jesus. Alarming, if the false teachers are right, and righteousness is possible through observing the law, Christ died for nothing!

⁴ It is important to be aware that in engaging in this activity (i.e. thinking through the place of the law and the place of faith) people will naturally err towards answering 'from their head' rather than 'from the passage'. This is actually more true than we'd like to admit when it comes to reading the Bible, whether personally or in groups. Unfortunately, given its prevalence, it's a bad way of reading the Bible and ultimately one that's detrimental to our faith. Therefore, when the group comes back together after the activity it is a good opportunity to gently prompt people to demonstrate that their responses do actually come from the passage. As the leader, you don't have to come across as though you're the heresy police when you do this! It can be done in quite a non-threatening way through the use of follow-up prompting questions spoken in a kind and moderate tone – e.g. "Where did you see that in the passage?" or "Can you help us see what verse that's in?" It is also important if you use these prompting questions to follow up on a few different responses (i.e. including those that you would consider to be biblical and orthodox) rather than just singling out one particular individual that you have doubts about. In terms of the bigger picture of leading Bible studies more generally, it's a good idea as a leader to have these prompting questions up your sleeve to use at other times as well.

Incidentally, this is where you see the true beauty of using an inductive rather than deductive style of Bible study. I.e. Inductive – where facts are observed and then interpreted to reach a conclusion, as opposed to Deductive – where conclusions are made and then facts are searched for and commandeered to back up the conclusion.

⁵ This question is important to draw the passage as a whole back together.

How does our whole passage contribute to Paul's overall response to the situation in these Galatian churches?⁶

Remember the situation: false teachers have come in and taught the Galatian believers a different, perverted version of the Gospel of Christ. This has introduced confusion and caused the churches to turn to this different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Peter's outward actions in Antioch communicated something of this different gospel – that Gentile believers needed to take on Jewish practices in order to be Christian. Paul will have nothing of it (cf 1:8-9). In terms of justification, Gentile believers are justified in the same way that Jewish Christians are justified – solely by faith in Jesus. Furthermore, for both, this Christian life is one that is lived by faith in Jesus throughout its duration and not by law observance.

Application Questions

From our Activity we saw that faith alone is central both at the start and throughout the Christian life (It is faith in Jesus that justifies. Our new life is one that is lived by faith). What challenges pose a threat to this for us?

Think about your personal life. What additions to faith might others sense as being necessary in order to be right with God?

Think about our church life. What additions to faith might others sense as being necessary in order to be right with God?

Prayer Points

Praise God for Jesus, the Son of God – who loved us and gave himself for us.

Thank God for the Gospel message – that we are not justified by what we do but only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thank God that the way we start the Christian life is the same as the way we continue in the Christian life – by faith.

Ask God for his forgiveness for the hypocritical ways in which we have not acted in line with the truth of the Gospel.

Ask God to help us identify areas in our personal life, and in our church life, that others could misunderstand as being necessary to be right with God.

⁶ This question serves both a contextual and a summary purpose. It points people back to the context of the letter – the earlier passages in the book that we have looked at in previous weeks – and explores the contribution that this particular passage makes to the overall argument. As a summarising question it also helps people to crystallise in their own words what the big idea of the passage is. They are helpful to use at the end of studies to draw together the observations and reflections that have been made during the study.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 4 – Galatians 3:1-18

Big Idea: The Galatians have been bewitched and Paul responds to their foolishness by showing that they are to continue how they started – by believing the Gospel message they heard rather than by observing the law

Study Aim: That group members will realise and live out that the Christian life is all about faith in the Gospel and not about relying on what we do

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

What are some rules and regulations that people say we should follow in order to be a 'real' or a 'serious' Christian?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 3:1-18.

Passage Questions

What words does Paul use to describe what has happened to the Galatians?

“Foolish”; “Bewitched” (v 1)¹.

¹ Paul also says in this same verse that *“Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified”* before their eyes. If this happens to confuse some people it might be helpful to know that the Galatians had indeed not been in Jerusalem when Jesus died on the cross but rather that Paul makes use of this vivid language to describe his sharing of the Gospel with the Galatians. It was through his preaching that Jesus was presented before them as crucified.

Activity

Split your group into three smaller groups. Have each group complete one column (relating to one verse) from the table below².

	Verse 2	Verse 3b	Verse 5
What is the question?	<i>Did the Galatians receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what they heard?</i>	<i>After beginning with the Spirit are the Galatians now trying to attain their goal by human effort?³</i>	<i>Does God give his Spirit to the Galatians, and work miracles among them, because they observe the law or because they believe what they have heard?</i>
What is being contrasted?	<i>Observing the law vs believing the message/Gospel that they heard</i>	<i>Spirit vs human effort/flesh</i>	<i>Observing the law vs believing the message/Gospel that they heard</i>
What is the expected answer?	<i>The Galatians received the Spirit by believing what they heard (the Gospel)</i>	<i>Paul is concerned that they may have shifted from continuing as they began (by the Spirit) and have now begun to rely on human effort/flesh⁴</i>	<i>God gives his Spirit and works miracles because of belief in what they heard (the Gospel)</i>

Bring the groups back together and have each one share their responses from the table.

² You will need to copy the table from the Word document that is able to be edited and then print out enough copies for each group to complete.

³ The ESV, being more literal than the NIV, is more helpful in its translation of this verse because it retains the Spirit vs flesh contrast of the original Greek. The NIV has captured the thought of the verse well but it misses this contrast between flesh and Spirit – a contrast which is so prominent in the rest of the book and in other writings of Paul (e.g. Romans). There are two dominant realms that we find ourselves in – either the realm of the Spirit or the realm of the flesh. Verse 3 (ESV) – “*Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*”

⁴ This is a direct result of the false Gospel that has been introduced to these Galatian churches. The message of the false teachers was that the way you continued in the Christian life was different to the way you began – you continue by human effort/observing the law/works.

Passage Questions cont.

In verses 6-9 Paul calls on his readers to consider Abraham. What does Paul say about Abraham?⁵

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6) – i.e. he was justified by faith. God, through his word (the Scriptures) announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham. Abraham was a man of faith.

Why do you think Paul refers to Abraham here?⁶

There are at least two aspects to this but if your group only gets one of them that is OK.

Firstly, Abraham's experience demonstrates that people are, and always have been, justified/made righteous by faith. This is against the alternative of being justified/made right by observing the law/works – the message proclaimed by the false teachers to the Galatians. Therefore, following the flow of Paul's argument, Abraham forms a key component in his opposition of the false teachers and their false gospel.

Secondly, and more related to the situational context of the letter, Abraham is particularly pertinent because these false teachers are saying that if the Galatians want to be real Christians they have to follow the Old Testament law. In response, Paul refers to one of the key figures of the very Old Testament they are appealing to and contends that he was actually a "man of faith", showing that it is "those who believe" who "are the children of Abraham". This in contrast to Abraham being a man of law-keeping and those who observe the law being his children.

Activity

In verses 10-14 Paul switches from talking about blessing to talking about curse (note the contrast between verse 9 and verse 10).

Split the group into the same three smaller groups from the first activity⁷. You can either assign one of the following activities to each group (i.e. each group does a different activity) or have all the groups do the same activity for the particular section they are given.

⁵ You may want to give people some time to read over the verses again for themselves before answering the question. The question is not necessarily complicated but in order to properly digest what Paul is saying your group members may benefit from some time to mull it over individually before feeling the pressure of being asked a question. (You could say, "Have a look over verses 6-9 on your own for a moment and then I'll ask a question to help us think about them together")

⁶ These "why" questions are useful because they move people beyond mere comprehension ("what") and help people gain the insights necessary to push them towards the purpose and main thrust of the passage. "Why does Paul refer to Abraham here?"

⁷ Sometimes retaining the same sub-groups for the duration of a study can make group members gradually feel more comfortable through familiarity. They get more used to being with those two or three other people (as compared to the ten or dozen others). It could become tedious doing it week after week, and counter-productive for the group as a whole to get to know each other, but on occasions it is useful to make use of this group dynamic technique.

Group 1 – Verse 10; Group 2 – Verses 11-12; Group 3 – Verse 13.

- (i) Paraphrase the verse(s) into your own words; or
- (ii) Create a drawing of the verse(s); or
- (iii) Produce a newspaper headline from the verse(s).

Allow the groups sufficient time to complete the activity and then have them come together and share with the other groups.

Passage Questions cont.

Why do you think Paul refers to the Old Testament so much here?⁸

Again, Paul is using the very Old Testament that the false teachers were using to show the Galatians the implications of accepting this false Gospel. It means that, verse 10, unless they can obey all of the Old Testament law they are under a curse (Deuteronomy 27:26). Additionally, verses 11-12, those who are justified/the righteous live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4), which is a different system to observing the law (Leviticus 18:5). Finally, Christ has actually redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (as promised in Deuteronomy 21:23).

How does verse 14 act as a good conclusion to this first section of Chapter 3?

Note the occurrences through verses 1-14 of “redeemed”; “blessing”; “Abraham”; “Gentiles”; “Christ Jesus”; “faith”; “Spirit”. All of these words are included in this verse.

Verses 15-18 sound quite complicated⁹ but how does this human example further strengthen Paul’s argument?

The law came many centuries after God’s covenant/promise to Abraham and does not cancel out that covenant/promise (like human covenants, it cannot be altered, and additionally it has precedence given that it was earlier). Therefore the inheritance still depends on the earlier promise and not the later law¹⁰.

⁸ Again, refer to the earlier footnote regarding the use of “why” questions in Bible studies.

⁹ You may find it helpful to re-read these verses. Try not to get too bogged down in the various details but rather focus on the way in which this section contributes to the overall argument.

¹⁰ Your group may want to explore matters regarding the law further but resist the temptation to do so in this week’s study. Paul himself anticipates such questions and it is to this that his attention turns next (see his question in verse 19 – “*What, then, was the purpose of the law?*”). Better to wait and see what he says in the following week’s study rather than spend time speculating in (relative) ignorance now.

Split your group again into the same three groups as earlier. Have them revisit the table that they filled out in the first activity and discuss the following¹¹:

Having now looked at the whole passage, how has Paul responded to the questions that he raised at the beginning?¹²

Application Questions

Bring the group back together.

What do we find attractive about relying on what we do for acceptance with God?

What do we find offensive about needing to trust the Gospel for acceptance with God?

How has this passage helped you to see that continuing to live by faith is the right move?

Prayer Points¹³

Praise God that the Christian life begins, and continues, by believing the Gospel message and not on the basis of the things that we do.

Praise God that we become children of Abraham, and receive the promise of the Spirit and the inheritance, simply by faith.

Ask God to help us to see the folly and danger of relying on what we do.

¹¹ Have each group focus only on the particular question they were looking at in that earlier activity. For example, the group looking at verse 2 – ‘Did they receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what they heard?’ – would restrict its discussion to how Paul responds to that particular question in the rest of the passage. On this occasion you don’t need to have all the groups share their responses when they come back together.

¹² This is another version of a summary question (mentioned in the footnotes of previous leader’s notes). They helpfully draw the passage and the study to a conclusion for group members.

¹³ You may like to split your group into the three sub-groups from earlier in the study for this prayer time. It’s good to pray as a large group but it’s also good to have some variety and have people pray in twos and threes as well. Sometimes this helps make those who are less comfortable with praying out loud more willing to do so. This would especially be the case on this occasion, given that they’ve spent such a large portion of the study with those same people. Their prayers can focus more specifically on what they have learnt together as a group from the passage.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 5 – Galatians 3:19-4:11

Big Idea: The Galatians have a new identity through the Gospel and Paul emphasises this to help them understand the purpose of the law and their mistake in turning away from the Gospel

Study Aim: That group members will (i) better grasp the place and purpose of the law in the Christian life, and (ii) understand how their new Gospel identity helps them to respond to alternate gospel messages

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

Divide your group into three smaller groups¹ and give each one a piece of paper with one of the following three scenarios:

- i) You are in prison – You are free
- ii) You are a slave – You are a son
- iii) You are a child – You are an adult

Get each group to discuss the following question:

What are some of the differences between the two people in your scenario?

Bring the groups back together and have them share what they discussed with the other groups.

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 3:19-4:11.

¹ Do you find that people in your Growth Group tend to sit in the same spots week after week (it really is like a mini-church isn't it!)? If they do, this will mean that they probably tend to interact with the same people before, during and after Growth Group each week. Among other benefits, dividing your group into smaller groups is a good way of breaking this up and helping people to get to know more people in the group more deeply. So when you do this, don't be afraid of getting people to move around the room so that they interact with others. Or arranging the groups in such a way that the people aren't always with the person they're sitting next to (e.g. putting them in a different triplet to each other).

Passage Questions

Think back to our previous studies. Why do you think Paul starts this passage with a question about the purpose of the law?

Throughout Galatians Paul has been very strong in arguing that people are not justified by observing the law but rather through faith in Christ alone (e.g. 2:15-16). In 3:10-14 he stated that anyone who doesn't completely observe the law is under a curse and that Christ has actually redeemed us from the law's curse. At the end of last week's passage (vv 15-18), Paul demonstrated that the law came after the promise and therefore couldn't, and indeed didn't, set aside the earlier promise. Therefore, given all this, the obvious question to ask is one that relates to the law and its purpose.

How does Paul answer his own question about the purpose of the law?

In Paul's response he makes the subordinate nature of the law clear (it is secondary to the initial promise to Abraham). He does this in four ways in verses 19-20. (1) The law was "added" – i.e. it was not the original covenant but rather came later. (2) The law's purpose was "because of transgressions" – it was given to restrain sin (though some say perhaps to increase sin) and to bring sin to light – i.e. show sin to be sin. (3) The law had a purpose that was temporary and finite in nature – "until the Seed (Christ) ... had come". (4) The law was "put into effect through angels by a mediator" (cf Deuteronomy 33:2) – i.e. the law was unlike the direct word of promise to Abraham, and perhaps also unlike the direct revelation of the Gospel to Paul. In all of this it is clear that the law's purpose is certainly not to justify/save.

Activity

In verse 21 Paul is careful to not be misunderstood. The law is certainly *not* opposed to God's promises, he says. In the rest of the chapter he uses three images to help the Galatians further understand the relationship between law and promise and how this relates to them and their situation.

Split your group into three smaller groups² that will each focus on one of the following scenarios³:

- i) A prisoner and a free person (3:22-23)
- ii) A slave and a son (3:26; 4:3-7; 4:8)
- iii) A child and an adult⁴ (3:24-25; 4:1-3)

² On this occasion it would be good to change the mix of these groups from the ones at the beginning. This would allow group members to be impacted by more than one of the images/scenarios that Paul uses in this passage to make his point.

³ As you would probably have realised, these equate to the scenarios from the 'Discussion Starter' at the beginning of the Study.

⁴ The image of a child and an adult is somewhat obscured in the NIV's translation of 3:24-25 so you may need to point it out to the group members looking at this scenario. Literally these verses talk about being under a guardian/tutor (see ESV, NASB) where the NIV has the phrases, "put in charge" and "under the supervision".

Have each group read the relevant sections of the passage that refer to their particular scenario and, using these, work together on a creative way of communicating what the passage says. If they need prompting, here are some suggestions:

- i) A short drama
- ii) A drawing
- iii) A timeline
- iv) A flow chart/logic diagram

When the groups have had sufficient time, bring them back together to share their creativity with the larger group.

Activity

Hand out a small piece of paper (e.g. A5 size) to each person. Give group members around 5 minutes to personally reflect and write down some thoughts on the following question⁵:

What surprised you about what Paul said in your scenario?⁶

Invite members to share their personal reflections with the group.

⁵ We haven't had one of these personal reflection activities since Study 1. For some people, time on their own is particularly beneficial for their processing of information. It can also encourage some people to share more readily, given that they've been provided with this opportunity to reflect. This question could, of course, just be asked as a normal Bible study question but by buffering it with this activity of personal reflection before-hand the above benefits are reaped and the benefits inherent in the question (see below) are still retained.

⁶ This kind of question – 'What surprises you?' – is a really helpful one to have up your sleeve whenever you're leading Bible studies (and actually when you're doing your own personal Bible reading as well). The assumption in the question is that God's Word will bring us into contact with unexpected truths – e.g. about God, about us, about salvation, about living for Jesus. We ourselves, and our group members, can easily fall into the trap of assuming that we already know and understand what God is saying to us. This is especially the case if we have been attending church and reading the Bible for a long time. What we want to constantly be doing is having God's Word impose upon us and have its way with us rather than our thinking and beliefs imposing themselves on God's Word.

It is also a good question to ask at this point because (hopefully) it will help to uncover some wrong, or unclear, thinking that our group members may have regarding the law and its purpose and place in the Christian life. Given this, don't be afraid to allow some time at this point in the study for people to respond and for (relevant) discussion to ebb and flow.

Passage Questions cont.

Remember again the situation that Paul is addressing in Galatians⁷.

Why might Chapter 3 verse 28 be a precious truth to the Galatians?

The divisions in the society of the time that were so powerful and pervasive have been thoroughly broken down through the Gospel. The false teachers have made the Galatian believers feel that this is not the case and the gospel that they have brought, and that the Galatians have turned to, is actually a denial of this truth.

The Gospel has given the Galatians a new identity. This has been powerfully communicated through the images that Paul has used in this passage. How does this help us make sense of his astonishment and disappointment at the end of the passage?

The Galatians are no longer imprisoned by sin or by the law but are rather now free. They are no longer slaves under the law but have rather been made sons through the Son. The law is no longer a guardian or a tutor for them but rather has fulfilled its purpose in leading them to faith in Christ. So how can they turn back to principles that are weak and miserable? Having been made free do they really want to be enslaved again? They have forgotten who they are in Christ and are acting accordingly. Paul cannot contain his astonishment and disappointment.

Application Questions

In what ways are we in danger of going down the same path as the Galatians?

How does our new Gospel identity help us to respond in these situations?

Prayer Points

Praise God for sending his Son to redeem us and to transform us from being slaves to being his children.

Praise God for our new identity in Christ.

Ask for God's help to resist the temptation to turn back to weak and miserable principles and to that which only ends up enslaving us again.

⁷ If you need to, revisit Galatians 1:6-7 or read out the following summary from our earlier studies: "False teachers have come in and taught the Galatian believers a different, perverted version of the Gospel of Christ. This has introduced confusion and caused the churches to turn to this different gospel, which is really no gospel at all".

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 6 – Galatians 4:12-5:12

Big Idea: Recalling the relationship between the Galatians and himself, and expressing his heartfelt concern for them, Paul reminds his readers that they are free and not slaves and to therefore stand firm in their freedom

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) grasp the reality that through faith in Christ they are no longer slaves but free; and consequently (ii) be urged to stand firm in their freedom

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

The late Nelson Mandela, formerly President of the Republic of South Africa, spent 27 years in prison, most of which were on Robben Island. The title of his autobiography, now a movie, is *Long walk to freedom*. How do you think his experience of life was different after he was freed compared with before?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 4:12-5:12.

Passage Questions

Chapter 4 verses 12-20 sound quite confusing in parts and seem to rely on particular interactions between the Galatians and Paul that we are now unaware of. However, using the following questions, discuss what we are able to learn from these verses.

In what ways does Paul describe the early relationship between the Galatians and himself?

The Galatians did not treat Paul with contempt or scorn, despite his illness being a trial for them. Rather, they welcomed him as though he were an angel or Christ himself (v 14). Such was their love and regard for him they would have torn out their own eyes and given them to him (v 15)!

For his part, Paul refers to them as “brothers (and sisters)” (v 12) and his “dear children” (v 19). The relationship is obviously close and intimate.

How does Paul express the change that has now occurred?

It is as though Paul has become their enemy by telling them the truth (v 16). Their joy has departed (v 15). The false teachers have introduced an 'us and them' dynamic, seeking to bring the Galatians over to their side and thus against Paul (vv 17-18). It is as though Paul needs to go through the agony of childbirth with them all over again, hopeful that this time Christ will be properly formed in them (v 19).

We have seen on a number of occasions that Paul is very abrupt and forceful with the Galatians in this letter. How do these verses help us to better understand why Paul has been like that?¹

Paul's abruptness and forcefulness with the Galatians stems from his pastoral love and concern for them. He is not being hot-headed, over-reactive or unnecessarily obstinate. We have cause to remember his balance elsewhere of "truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). As much as we may be seeing the 'truth' aspect emphasised in Galatians, it is coupled with, and flows from, the 'love' aspect.

Activity

From verse 21 we again see Paul responding to those who would rely on the law rather than on faith in God's promise for their justification. He directs his readers to consider what the law actually says. (If you have time, Genesis 16 and Genesis 21:1-21 form the background to Paul's argument here).

Using a whiteboard or a large piece of butcher's paper/cardboard, work together as a group to complete the following table by identifying the various contrasts in verses 22-31².

¹ Reflecting on the content and order of these first three questions helps us to identify a core methodology for faithful and careful Bible study. The first two questions – "In what ways does Paul describe the early relationship between the Galatians and himself?" and "How does Paul express the change that has now occurred?" are what is commonly called *Observation* questions. They focus us on the content of the text and help us to see what the text *says*. They should be able to be answered by simply looking at the text. The third question, "How do these verses help us to better understand why Paul has been like that?" is more of an *Interpretation* question. It focuses more on the meaning of the text – what the text *means*. The text doesn't directly give us the answer but by reflecting on the text and what we know from other passages in the book/the Bible we are able to respond. Observation questions are necessary because we cannot work out what a text *means* unless we have firstly identified what a text *says*. They can, however, sometimes be laborious for group members – which is why it's helpful to include an Activity section to alleviate this issue, instead of asking numerous Observation questions. A Bible study that contains too many Observation questions can become quite dull and does not sufficiently push people forward in their understanding of the text. Interpretation questions are where the wheels really start turning for people in terms of their understanding. However, they need to be sufficiently anchored in the text rather than giving permission for speculation. This can be difficult but it is a crucial component for moving people forward in their Christian growth. The third and final form of question is *Application* questions. This is where we give people the opportunity to think through how we are to *respond* to what the text means. Without these kinds of questions Bible study can become a merely academic and theoretical exercise. We fall into the danger of merely listening to the Word and not doing what it says (cf James 1:22-24). Effective Bible study should contain each of these elements – Observation, Interpretation and Application – and have an eye to allocating appropriate proportions of the study to each.

² It would be a good idea to at least have the shell/skeleton of the table prepared before your Bible study meets to help the study to flow smoothly and to not take up too much time unnecessarily.

Verse Reference	Compare and Contrast	
Verse 22	<i>Abraham's son by slave woman</i>	<i>Abraham's son by free woman</i>
Verse 23	<i>Son born in the ordinary way³</i>	<i>Son born as a result of a promise</i>
Verses 24-28	<i>Covenant from Mount Sinai. Bears children who are slaves. Hagar. Present city of Jerusalem. In slavery with her children</i>	<i>Jerusalem that is above. Free. She = our mother. Galatians (and us) are like Isaac – children of the promise</i>
Verse 29	<i>Son born in the ordinary way⁴ persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. Same occurring in Paul's time.</i>	<i>Son born by the power of the Spirit suffered persecution from the son born in the ordinary way. Same occurring in Paul's time.</i>
Verse 30	<i>Scripture (Genesis 21:10) says to get rid of the slave woman and her son because they will not share in the inheritance</i>	<i>The free woman's son is the heir to the inheritance</i>
Verse 31	<i>Paul, and his readers, are not children of the slave woman</i>	<i>Paul and his readers are children of the free woman</i>

³ As mentioned in previous studies, the NIV translation again captures the sense of this verse well but is slightly unfortunate in that it doesn't retain the literal contrast on view here. The contrast, as elsewhere, is flesh vs promise (see ESV translation). Being able to identify this helps to link different sections of the letter together.

⁴ See footnote above regarding the translation of this phrase.

Passage Questions cont.

From these verses (21-31), how would you sum up what Paul wants the Galatians to understand?⁵

Paul wants the Galatians to understand that they are free and not slaves. They are 'of the promise' and not 'of the flesh'. Their origins are in the Jerusalem that is above (the heavenly Jerusalem) and not the "present city of Jerusalem".

How do you think understanding this will help them in their current situation?⁶

The false teachers are proclaiming a gospel that insists that the Galatians fulfill certain requirements from the Jewish law in order to be saved. This amounts to a form of slavery and a denial of the freedom that the true Gospel brings. Being reminded of their freedom, a freedom that is apparent in the very law that the false teachers are appealing to, ought to help the Galatians realise what they are throwing away by moving away from the message Paul brought and the danger of accepting this other message.

In verses 2-12 of Chapter 5 Paul focuses on circumcision – perhaps *the* key way in which obedience to the law was to be expressed. What are some of the consequences of relying on circumcision that Paul mentions?

Christ becomes of no value (v 2). You are required to obey the whole law (v 3). You become alienated from Christ (v 4). You fall away from grace (v 4). The offence of the cross is abolished (v 11).

In verses 5 and 6 Paul puts forward an entirely different approach to life. What is this alternate way of life?

It is a life that waits in hopeful expectancy, with the Spirit's help, for the righteousness that will be ours by faith (v 5). It is seeing that circumcision has no value and, likewise, uncircumcision has no value. The one thing that does matter, and the way in which this different approach to life is succinctly encapsulated by Paul, is faith expressing itself through love (v 6).

⁵ These summary questions help people to see that although Paul's argument is quite detailed and in many ways complex, there is a central thrust to it that is clear and apparent. Having done the Activity together, hopefully this will be obvious to group members.

⁶ A question like this helps people to remember that we are reading this text in a context. Given that there is a gap of a week between each Study (rather than hearing the letter in one sitting, as would have happened originally) it is important that we repeatedly remind people of the particular situation that Paul was addressing. It also helps people to think through what the text says and means to the original audience and not be too hasty to make the leap straight to us without giving this due consideration.

Why is Chapter 5 verse 1 a good conclusion for this passage (and perhaps for the whole book)?⁷

It proclaims the central truth that Christ has set us free. The reality of our situation, despite what we may feel at different times in our life, is that we are free. It communicates that Christ has set us free in order to be free – that was his purpose and goal. It expresses the very real possibility that we could be tempted or persuaded to return to slavery – a slavery that amounts to being a burden. And, therefore, we are called to stand firm in the freedom that Christ has won for us in the face of these temptations and pressures.

Application Questions

Paul says, “*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*” (5:1).

What robs us of this reality of freedom that Paul says is ours?

What will help us to stand firm in this freedom?

We are now free to express our faith through love (5:6). What are some practical ways that we can be doing that?

Prayer Points

Praise God that we are free and not slaves because Christ has set us free.

Ask for God’s help to recognise the ways in which we can be burdened by slavery in our lives.

Ask for God’s help to live out this freedom by expressing our faith through love.

⁷ Extra idea: You may even like to make this a memory verse for your group. Practice it at the end of this week’s study and encourage your group to practice it during the week. You can have a ‘competition’ at the beginning of your next study to see if people have been able to remember it.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 7 – Galatians 5:13-26

Big Idea: Paul urges his readers to live out their freedom in Christ by keeping in step with the Spirit rather than indulging the sinful nature.

Study Aim: That group members will grasp and live out their freedom in Christ by keeping in step with the Spirit and not indulging their sinful nature.

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

After sharing the Gospel with a friend, he/she replies, "So you're telling me that it doesn't matter what I do?"

What is *good* about your friend's question?

How would you respond to your friend?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 5:13-26.

Activity¹

Place the title/heading cut outs ("Acts of the sinful nature" and "Fruit of the Spirit") face up at different ends of the room, preferably where all group members can still see them. Then mix up the acts/characteristics cut outs (e.g. "idolatry", "faithfulness") and place them face down together somewhere in the middle of the room. One by one, have group members turn over an act/characteristic and, as a group, decide together which title/heading to place it under².

¹ All the information (i.e. titles/headings and acts/characteristics) for this Activity is contained in a table for you at the end of the Study. Obviously you will need to print and cut them out before the Study commences.

² This activity may seem childish because it is quite simple and straightforward but it has at least three benefits. Firstly, activities like this one really help people who are kinaesthetic learners. That is, their preference is to learn by doing rather than hearing (auditory) and seeing (visual). Most Bible study material is geared towards visual or auditory learners, to the detriment of those who do not absorb information as readily in those two particular ways. Secondly, the repetition of the (what should be) straightforward placement of the acts/characteristics under the titles/headings reinforces the two main categories of the sinful nature/flesh and the Spirit. This repetition should bear fruit (pardon the pun) as the rest of the passage is investigated in the 'Passage Questions' section. These are the two main categories that Paul contrasts throughout the passage, and indeed elsewhere in the book. Thus the straightforward nature of the Activity is actually one of its main strengths. Thirdly, being able to 'sight' each of the acts/characteristics will help group members when they spend some time in personal reflection later in the Study.

Passage Questions

Paul tells his readers that they were “*called to be free*” (v 13). How has this freedom come about?³

In Galatians 5:1 we read, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free”. Each week throughout Galatians we have seen that this freedom comes to us through the Gospel/through faith in the promise/by the Spirit as opposed to freedom coming through following or observing the law.

What is this freedom to be used for?

Paul calls on his readers in verse 13 to use their freedom to serve one another in love rather than use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature.

Note that Paul is careful to base his call to Christian living on who we are in Christ. The order is: We are free in Christ – therefore live out that freedom in this way. In a passage that speaks so strongly about how we are to live as Christians we must be careful to retain this foundational balance. It is not a case of live this way and you will be this. Rather, the New Testament constantly says you are this, therefore live in this way.

Why do we find it so difficult to use our freedom in this way?⁴

Because we are still sinful we are tempted to continue to live in, and for, sin. We still desire to focus on, and live for, ourselves rather than looking outward to the needs of others.

³ Although it is not as explicit as similar questions in previous studies, this is actually a question that places the passage and the study in the context of the book as a whole. This particular verse does not tell us the answer to the question. Rather, what the passage does is tease out the implications of the answer. Group members will have cause to remember and reflect on what they have been seeing week after week in the letter. Again, it is crucially reinforcing that good Bible reading means reading the text in its context.

⁴ In a way, this is a bit of a ‘trick’ question. The way it is phrased makes it sound as though group members are to answer from their own personal knowledge and experience rather than from the passage. And if they do so, that is perfectly fine. However, as the following question indicates, the answer is actually contained in the passage if we keep reading. Hopefully by firstly reflecting on their personal knowledge and experience the perspective from the passage itself will have greater impact on group members.

You will notice that there is no separate ‘Application Questions’ section in this Study. The hope is that the Application component has been sufficiently weaved throughout the rest of the Study – e.g. this question, the later Activity and other questions. When preparing a Bible Study, don’t always feel as though you need to leave all the Application to the end. It can actually work just as well, if not even better on occasions, if the Observation, Interpretation and Application aspects (see Study 6 for definitions of these) are more organically and fluidly combined.

From verses 16-18, how does Paul explain why we find this difficult?

The Christian life is pictured as a conflict. The sinful nature is still present, with all of its desires at work. But the Spirit has also taken up residence within us, with all of his desires for our lives. They are like two great forces, working against each other and desiring what the other does not. Experiencing a conflict is by its very nature difficult.

How is this picture of the Christian life different from how some people see it?

Sometimes we will say to ourselves, 'How can I be a Christian if I still struggle with x, or if I am still like y'. We hear people talk about the Christian life in victorious terms, giving the impression that we are not true Christians if we still struggle with sin. Paul's perspective is very different. In fact, the very presence of this conflict is an indication that we are Christian. If we did not have God's Spirit there would be no such struggle – our sinful nature would always dominate.

Some people view the Christian life as one where it doesn't really matter how we live. To them, we can go on living much as we did before, where holiness and godliness is seen almost as an optional extra or not really that important. Paul will have none of this perspective either. The Christian life is one where we are called to live by the Spirit in order not to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (v 16).

I'm sure there are also other viewpoints that are corrected by these verses. Hopefully you or your group will come up with them and include them in your discussion here.

Activity

Re-read verses 19-23.

Give group members a few minutes to individually reflect on the list of the “acts of the sinful nature” and the “fruit of the Spirit” (these should still be visible from the earlier Activity). Have them choose one act and one fruit that they would like God to help them with in their Christian life. Allow time for group members to individually commit this to the Lord in prayer.

Passage Questions cont.

People are often quite troubled by what Paul says in verse 21. Given what we've seen in this passage, and in the rest of Galatians, what must this verse *not* mean? What then *does* it mean?⁵

Paul has repeatedly emphasised throughout Galatians that we are justified by faith and not by works. We are saved not because of what we do or don't do but only by Jesus Christ.

The issue here is not sins into which we fall but rather sin as a lifestyle. The life on view here is a life that is characterised by such things – where the sinful nature is unrestrained and in control. A life such as this is one where there is no evidence of the Spirit being present or at work – the Spirit that brings new birth and participation in the kingdom of God.

In this very passage he has indicated that the Christian life is one where we will face an ongoing battle with sin – because our sinful nature and the Spirit are in conflict with each other.

What does Paul mean when he says in verse 23 – “Against such things there is no law”?

Laws are specific and they restrict. Theoretically you can satisfy and live up to them. When it comes to the fruit of the Spirit there is both a freedom to express these characteristics with generous abandon and the lack of a standard by which we could ever say we have finished, completed or satisfied them.

Paul says on a couple of occasions that we are to “live by the Spirit” or “keep in step with the Spirit”. Why is this a great way to sum up how we are to live as Christians?⁶

It is the positive alternative to indulging in the sinful nature. In fact, verse 16 would indicate that if we are living by the Spirit we won't be gratifying our sinful nature's desires. We can't do both at the same time! Thus, the acts of the sinful nature will be avoided and the characteristics listed under the fruit of the Spirit will flow out and become evident.

⁵ Verses like these can be problematic for Bible Study leaders. On the one hand, they can prove to be fodder for those who love red herrings and taking discussions on tangents. On the other hand, it is a verse that can provide legitimate confusion and distress for some people. Ignoring it altogether is probably not the best approach as it can turn the verse into an elephant in the room – everyone knows it is there but no one wants to acknowledge or talk about it. However, allowing it to consume an inordinate amount of time within your Study is also counter-productive as it is not the big idea of the passage. What is the way forward? Including it in your Study demonstrates a willingness to engage with what is a difficult verse. However, including it also means that you can have more control over when and where the discussion of the verse occurs. Like so many other such verses, placing it within the context of the passage at large resolves a number of dilemmas that are initially apparent.

⁶ Given that this is the last question of the Study – and there are no Application questions to follow (see earlier footnote) – it is important that this discussion both satisfactorily summarises the overall discussion and also contains an element of application (how we are to live in light of what we have looked at).

Prayer Points

Praise God for the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Thank God for the gift of his Spirit to live his way.

Ask God for his help to live by the Spirit and not use our freedom to live for our sinful nature.

Sexual immorality	Envy
Impurity	Drunkenness
Debauchery	Orgies
Idolatry	Love
Witchcraft	Joy
Hatred	Peace
Discord	Patience
Jealousy	Kindness
Fits of rage	Goodness
Selfish ambition	Faithfulness
Dissensions	Gentleness
Factions	Self-control
Acts of the sinful nature	Fruit of the Spirit

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 8 – Galatians 6:1-18

Big Idea: Paul continues to fill out what the life of freedom looks like, this time expressing it in terms of the Galatians' relationships with others

Study Aim: That group members will see, grasp and live out their new life of freedom as they engage in the relationships that they have with others

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

What do you love about being part of a church?

What do you find difficult about being part of a church?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 6:1-18.

Activity

Paul has made the following two significant statements in the second half of his letter: *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love”* (5:6). *“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love”* (5:13).

Concentrating on 6:1-10, and using a whiteboard/butcher's paper, list the different ways in which this love is to be expressed¹.

Restore the one caught in sin (v 1). Carry each other's burdens (v 2). Share all good things with our instructors in the Word (v 6). Sow to please the Spirit (v 8). Do good to others (vv 9-10).

¹ The key here is to avoid the tendency of some members of our groups to go into detail on each of these aspects. There will be opportunity in the study to do this. The aim of this particular Activity is merely to orient people to the details of the text – observing what is there. You may need to be quite directive to ensure that your group stays on task here.

Passage Questions

What warnings does Paul give as we seek to live this life of love?

The restoring of those caught in sin should be done gently (v 1). As we engage in this restorative process we need to also watch ourselves (v 1). We should beware of deceiving ourselves by thinking that we are something when we are nothing (v 3). We must remember that God cannot be mocked (v 7). There is the warning that destruction comes from sowing to please the sinful nature (v 8). And the temptation to give up when doing good (v 9).

Paul says, “Carry each other’s burdens ...” (v 2) and “... each one should carry his own load” (v 5). These statements sound contradictory. How do you think they fit together?

We are to reach out in love and share the burdens of fellow-Christians but ultimately each is responsible and accountable for their own life under God.

Some of us need to be pushed in the first area to be less self-centred and look more to the needs of others. Others of us are overly and unduly burdened by the needs and concerns of others and need to remember that there is a limit to our responsibility towards others – we cannot live their life for them. God is the only one who is ultimately able to change hearts and minds.

Look at the list compiled during the earlier Activity. What are some practical ways that we can be living this out in our own church context?²

(This is a key question to help people think through the practical implications of the passage. You could explore any number of issues here – e.g. responding to sin in the life of fellow believers; supporting brothers and sisters in Christ through the struggles of life; supporting those in Gospel service in our midst; how we can sow to please the Spirit rather than the sinful nature; the interplay between doing good to believers and non-believers).

Interestingly Paul returns to the topic of circumcision yet again at the end of his letter. What does this suggest to us?

This is the topic of concern for Paul regarding the situation in the Galatian churches. Evidence for this can be seen in the number of times that he has referred to this issue. Circumcision (as people rely on it for their standing before God) is a short-hand way of referring to the false gospel of works. Even as he finishes his correspondence he wants to leave his readers in no doubt as to “what counts” (v 15).

² As with the previous study, the nature of the passage lends itself to placing Application questions like this throughout the Study rather than leaving them for the end.

It would be fruitful to allow a significant amount of time for your group to think through this question together. Make sure you keep prompting members to be specific rather than the more comfortable general responses that come to us more easily but end up ‘letting us off the hook’ when it comes to putting God’s Word into practice.

What does Paul tell us about the underlying motives of these other people?

They are seeking to make a good impression outwardly (v 12). They are trying to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ (v 12). They want to “boast about your flesh” (v 13).

What are some modern day varieties?³

Any group/religion/sect that seeks to (blatantly or covertly) establish relationship with God on the basis of what we do. (Try and help your group think through specific examples).

How do you think Paul would advise us to respond as we relate to such groups?

Paul helpfully ‘blows their cover’ (see the discussion under the question-before-last), pointing out what they’re really on about – i.e. their motives. He reminds his readers that his only boast (and ours) is in the cross of Jesus (v 14). As he has done previously (5:6), he maintains that circumcision or uncircumcision is not the key issue – what counts is a new creation (v 15). Although outside this passage we ought to also remember his key statement in 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”.

How does verse 15 provide a helpful summary for this Chapter?⁴

In terms of the discussion regarding circumcision in the second half of the Chapter, it demonstrates that the life that God calls us to is about this new creation rather than circumcision and uncircumcision. In terms of the first half of the Chapter, it outlined various ways in which this new creation is to be lived out relationally.

Prayer Points

Praise God for the freedom that is now ours through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise God that this means that we can serve one another in love in a variety of different ways.

Ask for God’s help as we seek to love those we are in relationship with.

Ask that God would help us to boast in nothing except the cross of Christ.

³ Again, keep prompting your group to think through this specifically rather than generally. Otherwise the question can easily descend into an abstract and theoretical discussion rather than the more useful specifics that we actually encounter from day-to-day.

⁴ Because the Study has been broken up into two halves, and the Application questions spread throughout, there is a need for a question at the end to tie the discussions together. If you can come up with one that you feel works better, please feel free to use that instead.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 9 – Review

Bible Reading

Read Galatians Chapters 1-6¹.

Activity²

Give group members around 10 minutes to complete one of the following activities:

Come up with a 3 or 4 word title for the book of Galatians.

or

Come up with a 1 or 2 sentence summary of the book of Galatians.

Bring your group back together and have them share their titles/summaries.

Questions

What major lessons stand out to you from our studies in Galatians?³

Share one or two favourite verses from Galatians and why they are significant to you personally.

Pray

Praise God for the letter to the Galatians.

Thank God for the great truths that he has taught us through this part of his Word.

Ask God to help us to live in light of what we have learnt.

¹ The strength of having a Review study is that it helps people to put the book back together again. Originally it would have been read out in one sitting. We have broken it up into different sections so that we can spend more time considering its teaching in greater depth. However, reflecting on the book as a whole helps people to see how it fits together and also to see the connections that could be lost if their only experience of it was to look at its various parts. It is also beneficial, if possible, to read through a book as a whole at the beginning of a series, and then look at the various parts. For this term we only had space to either do this at the end or the beginning of our series of studies.

² This Activity helps people to process what the big idea of the book has been. It should help group members to realise that they have come to a better understanding of this part of the Bible as a result of their time at Growth Group.

³ It would be good if discussion here consisted of a good balance between the theological/doctrinal lessons that people have learnt and also the practical outworking/application of those truths.