

**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 groups<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 groups<sup>2</sup> that will each focus on one of the following scenarios<sup>3</sup>:

- 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 adult<sup>4</sup> (3:24-25; 4:1-3)

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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 question<sup>5</sup>:

What surprised you about what Paul said in your scenario?<sup>6</sup>

Invite members to share their personal reflections with the group.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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 Galatians<sup>7</sup>.

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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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".