

**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?<sup>1</sup>

*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 22-31<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 way<sup>3</sup></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 way<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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?<sup>5</sup>

*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?<sup>6</sup>

*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).*

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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)?<sup>7</sup>

*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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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.