

AUTHENTIC GOSPEL

TRUTH • FAITH • FREEDOM

CURRICULUM

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WEEK 1: APRIL 8, 2018
"CHRIST HAS SET US FREE"
GALATIANS 5:1-12

OVERVIEW

Paul has repeatedly told the Galatians that Christians need not fear any condemnation because of their failure to keep the law, because they are righteous in Christ. When people hear this, a natural response might be to say: Boy! If I believed that, I'd be able to live any way I wanted! And at first sight, the gospel seems to remove all incentives to live a holy life. This is why, over the centuries, some churches have felt the need to tone down the claims of the gospel, trading a gospel freedom for a message which aims to stop people living "any way I want." So this is a key passage. Paul wants to show us that gospel freedom from fear and condemnation leads us to obey God, not to please ourselves.

DICTIONARY

Yoke (v. 1): Put over the back of an ox to control him.

Freedom (v. 1): Paul explains the concept of freedom in Galatians: Through the Spirit, Christ has freed us from the curse of the law and our obligation to keep it as part of our covenant with him. The freedom that Paul refers is freedom from slavery to the law and its prescriptions. This freedom is not to be used as a license for sinful, self-indulgence but for joyous service of the Savior. In Christ believers have freedom from the guilt, shame, and obligation associated with the Mosaic Law.

Circumcision (v. 3): The Hebrew rite in which a male's foreskin is cut away. As instituted by God, the ritual identifies the male as a participant in God's covenant with Abraham. In time, this feature became symbolic of the people, the covenant, and the culture. Many Jews thought the covenant sign of circumcision entitled them to blessings from God and exemption from divine judgment. Paul taught that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision had any significance, only salvation by grace through faith in Christ. So in Galatians, Paul insists that the Judaizers who were teaching that Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved were guilty of preaching a false gospel.

"Severed from Christ...fallen away from grace" (v. 4): Paul is not discussing here if a genuine believer can lose their salvation. He is only saying that people who may once have made a profession of faith, if they now are truly seeking to be justified, must not really have a relationship with Christ and have fallen away from the grace that was offered and available to them.

YOKE UPON US

Read Galatians 5:1-12 as a group. In verse 1, Paul exhorts them not to be burdened by a "yoke." What was the yoke that Paul was referring to (see Acts 15:10 and Matthew 11:29-30)? How do we place a "yoke" on ourselves today?

GRACE VS. LAW

The Galatians face an either-or decision. Will they make Christ their treasure, in which they find their forgiveness and fulfillment; or will they look to law-keeping, to circumcision? In verse 2 what is Paul's point if the Galatians follow the Judaizers teaching?

Paul then zeroes in on verse 3 that you cannot add to Christ without subtracting Christ. He is either all their value, or He is without value. What happens if "law obedience" becomes part of a person's system of salvation (see verse 4)? Why is this phrase accurate: We cannot hold on to grace if we are living by works.

ASSURANCE

Does verse 4 mean that real Christians can lose their salvation, can truly fall away from grace (see 1 John 2:3)? How do Paul's words in verses 5-6 help in clarifying your answer?

Is assurance of salvation possible if we think we must earn or even maintain our salvation by our efforts? If we keep ourselves saved by good living, can we be sure we are good enough to retain God's favor? Explain your answer.

Read 1 John 2:19. What is the Apostle John's point? Did Paul believe the Galatians were truly saved (see Galatians 5:10)?

REAL SAVING FAITH...AND NOT

The word "hope" in verse 5 does not have the same meaning in English. The word that means "total assurance" in Greek (see Hebrews 1:11) means "not so sure" in English. So Paul says in verse 5 we simply "await" this righteousness. What is it that we await? What are the expressions of real saving faith – and what aren't (verses 5-6)?

MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD

By referring to the future, Paul has us look to what it means to be radiant, glorious, and perfect (see Ephesians 5:27). We eagerly await this righteousness, this certain glory. Paul is talking about a spiritual discipline of meditation and reflection on our justification, adoption, and future glorification. Do you meditate on God's Word? How can you make sure you meditate regularly on God's Word and on your glorious future? What practical steps can you take?

KEEP ON RUNNING!

In verse 7, Paul compares the Christian life to a race. The Galatian believers had started well, but had veered off course. Read Philippians 3:12-14 and Hebrews 12:1-3. What do these passages tell us about how to keep running the Christian race? How do they motivate us to keep running?

FINAL THOUGHT

Here is how author and pastor Tim Keller sums up verses 5-6: "The more joy we have in our gracious salvation, the more we are driven by love and gratitude to do good for the sheer beauty of good, for sheer delight in God, for the sheer love of others. If we are reminding ourselves and living in light of our certain hope, we will have a heart overflowing with love. We don't need to seek righteousness and welcome from others, since these things are already ours. Since our faith in Christ gives us certain hope, which overflows as love for others, if we find our love running dry or cold, the solution is not to seek to love better or more. It is to look at Christ, who gives us an unlosable, unshakable acceptance from the Father, and as we dwell on our hope, we will find our hearts melted by his love, and overflowing with his love to others." If time permits, discuss in your group.

PRAY

Ask God for strength in living a life of freedom, a freedom from the guilt of our own imperfection, a freedom from the old drive to perform. And ask God for strength to keep "running well" and to not be detoured away from him.

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 2: APRIL 15, 2018
“WALK BY THE SPIRIT”
GALATIANS 5:13-26

OVERVIEW

Living the Christian life has two sides. On the one hand, we fight to remove bad vices from our life and avoid temptation. But a complete victory on this side alone is not enough. We also need to fill our life with virtues or expressions of our spiritual gifts. How do we cultivate these virtues? Do we even know what they are? Paul gives us a clear picture with the list of the fruit of the Spirit. To have this fruit, we must reject our sinful desires and ask the Spirit to mold us into the kind of people Jesus has freed us to be.

THE STRUGGLE

Read Galatians 5:13-26. There are two natures at work in every Christian: the Spirit and the sinful nature (verses 16-17). What is going on inside every Christian? What is encouraging about this truth? What is challenging?

DICTIONARY

Literally, “desires” (verses 16-17) means “over-desires” – when we feel we must have something. It is an all-controlling drive or longing for something; treating a good thing as though it is a god thing.

GETTING PERSONAL

Which “acts” in verses 19-21 do you struggle with? Don’t simply try to change your behavior or your feelings. Ask yourself: Why am I gratifying my sinful nature in this way? How am I looking to get myself security or satisfaction or significance, rather than allowing Jesus to give it to me?

Remember, that through faith you are a son of God (Galatians 3:26). How will this take away your motivation to sin?

WHY PAUL SAID FRUIT

Paul chose his images carefully. Why would he speak of "the fruit of the Spirit" (verse 22)? It takes us to agriculture and tells us three things about how the Spirit works.

1. Christian growth is gradual – as gradual as a turnip or potato growing. Often with botanical growth, you never see it happening. Instead, you can only measure it after a time. This is true with our spiritual growth. Name one area of your life where God has grown you gradually. When did you recognize the growth?
2. The growth of the Spirit's fruit is inevitable but beware! There will be growth. The fruit of the Spirit will burst through. Knowing this, we all have experienced a time when growth seemed to have stopped for a time. Have you experienced a time in your walk with the Lord where the fruit of the Spirit was stunted or stopped? What would cause growth to slow or stop? How did you recognize this? Did you or someone else bring this to your attention? And how did you respond?
3. The fruit of the Spirit has internal roots. It's not about traits or characteristics you might have, but change that is much deeper. Think about an apple tree. Do the apples on the tree make it alive? No, they are a sign that the tree is alive. The apples don't give life; instead they are a sign that the tree is alive. Do you have natural characteristics which could be confused with the fruit of the Spirit? Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. What is the key aspect of the fruit of the Spirit?

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Below are definitions of each aspect of the singular fruit of the Spirit (verses 22-23), including the opposite definition. Read each one and discuss in your group. Give examples of each, whether from your life or maybe how you have observed this fruit in another's life.

Agape = love. It means to serve a person for their good value, not for what the person brings you. Its opposite is fear: self-protection and abusing people. Its counterfeit (a fake version) is selfish affection, where you are attracted to someone and treat them well because of how they make you feel about yourself.

Chara = joy. Joy is a delight in God for the sheer beauty and worth of who he is. Its opposite is hopelessness or despair, and its counterfeit is an elation based on experiencing blessings, not the Blesser, causing mood swings based on circumstances.

Irene = peace. The meaning is a confidence and rest in the wisdom and control of God, rather than in your own. It replaces anxiety and worry. The fake version of peace is indifference, apathy, not caring about something.

Makrothumia = patience. This is an ability to face trouble without blowing up or hitting out. Its opposite is resentment toward God and others, and its counterfeits are cynicism or lack of care.

Chrestotes = kindness. This is an ability to serve others practically in a way which makes you vulnerable, which comes from having a deep inner security. Its opposite is envy, which leaves you unable to rejoice in another's joy. And its fake alternative is manipulative good deeds, doing good for others so you can congratulate yourself and feel you are "good enough" for others or for God.

Agathosune = goodness, integrity. It is being the same person in every situation, rather than a phony or hypocrite. This is not the same as being always truthful but not always loving; getting things off your chest just to make yourself feel or look better.

Pistis = faithfulness, loyalty, courage. It means to be utterly reliable and true to your word. Its opposite is to be an opportunist, a friend only in good times. And its counterfeit is to be loving but not truthful, so that you are never willing to confront or challenge.

Prautas = gentleness, humility. The opposite is to be superior or self-absorbed. Humility is not the same as inferiority.

Egkrateia = self-control. This is the ability to pursue the important over the urgent, rather than to be always impulsive or uncontrolled. The counterfeit is a willpower which is based on pride, the need to feel in control.

HOW?

All this talk about the fruit of the Spirit leads to a natural question: How? How do we walk in the Spirit? How do we keep the flesh from getting a foothold? How do we live a life that consistently reflects the goodness of God? Read the following passages before answering: Galatians 5:24-26; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:5; Philippians 2:13.

PRAY

Thank God for the freedom you have as his son to serve him and love others. Thank him for putting his Spirit in you. Thank him for the fruit that you can see him growing in the members of your community group.

Confess to God the ways in which you gratify your sinful nature instead of keeping in step with the Spirit; and thank him that you are saved by grace, not by works.

Ask God to work through his Spirit to grow gospel fruit in you. Talk to him about any people you know who need to be served in love, and ask him for help to do so.

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 3: APRIL 22, 2018
“BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS”
GALATIANS 6:1-10

THE BIG IDEA

Christ is all we need. Our identity should not come from what others are doing, or what others think of us, but from who we are in Christ.

UPKEEP OF THE BODY

Read Galatians 6:1-6. Explain in your own words what this passage teaches you to do in the following situations:

Someone else in the church is sinning –

Someone else is experiencing difficulties –

You feel you are doing better than most in your church –

Someone is sacrificing time and income to be your teacher -

RESTORE

Consider Paul's cautions about restoring a sinning brother. What could happen if you ignored these warnings?

“...restore him in a spirit of gentleness” –

“Keep watch on yourself” –

How does Paul's approach to dealing with sin differ from legalism?

DICTIONARY

“**Burdens...load**” (6:2, 5): Verse 2 speaks of an unsought and oppressive burden, while verse 5 uses a word often used of a man's pack, a load he is designed to bear.

CARRYING YOUR OWN LOAD

Read John 13:34 and 15:12. Now carefully explain “the law of Christ” stated in Galatians 6:2. How does Christ's example show you what it means for you to carry someone else's burden?

Paul's words in verses 4-5 tell us not to compare ourselves with others. Instead, we must look at our own particular tests and duties and respond to them obediently. What would happen if we see life this way? How would this affect how we see others? Or how we compare ourselves to others?

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 6:7-10. What is the principle of verses 7-8?

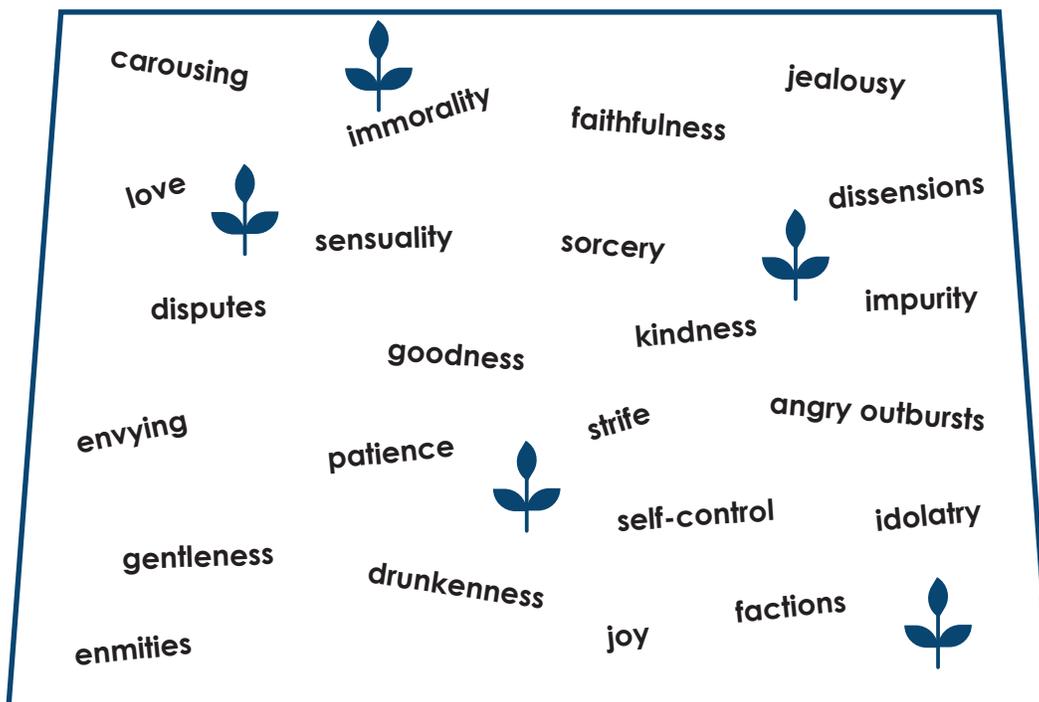
EXPLORE MORE

Read Luke 6:46-49. Jesus is using an image from the building site, while Paul in Galatians 6 is thinking of the farmer's field. But what are the similarities between Jesus' and Paul's words? How does Luke 6 help us to understand how we sow to please the Spirit?

WEED 'EM AND REAP

One thing is clear from Galatians 6:1-10. The spiritual life is anything but passive. Our lives are like gardens or fields in which we can sow good seed, resulting in many blessings. Or we can sow bad seed, resulting in weeds of corruption. One way to keep the fruit of the Spirit growing and to reap its blessings is to continually weed the gardens of our lives. This means constant attention to our attitudes, thoughts, and actions.

In order to begin the weeding process, it's important to first identify the weeds that happen to have invaded your own personal garden. In the diagram below, you'll find aspects of the fruit of the Spirit as well as weeds of the flesh. Consider each one of the weeds shown and determine if it tends to be a problem in your life. Cross out the weeds you need to focus on plucking, and then circle the fruit of the Spirit that will be positively affected if you rid yourself of that particular weed.



Discuss in your community group. How is your "garden"?

PRAY

Ask the Lord to continue to empower you to labor faithfully as he causes the growth. Pray for the burdens and conflicts between sinful nature and Spirit that members are experiencing. Ask the Lord how you can sow into the Spirit. Ask him for the strength to not grow weary in doing good, but to rejoice in the eternal harvest that awaits you.

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 4: APRIL 29, 2018
“FINAL WARNING AND BENEDICTION”
GALATIANS 6:11-18

OVERVIEW

The last words from Paul to the Galatians emphasizes his main argument, namely that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, not by the works of the law. So Paul points to the cross one last time and sends a final rebuke to those trying to take over the faith of the Galatian Christians.

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 6:11-18 as a group. In verse 12, Paul is again talking about his opponents, the false teachers. Why are they telling the Galatian Christians that they must get circumcised to be saved (vv. 12-13)?

What does this tell us about what they most want in life? In other words, what they are trusting in and worshipping?

How is real Christianity different (vv. 14-15)?

How do verses 14-15 provide a summary of the whole letter?

DICTIONARY

Force (v. 12): Compel

Flesh (v. 13): Paul is describing what people do to their own bodies (i.e. getting circumcised).

Israel of God (v. 16): In contrast to the children of the “present Jerusalem” (4:25), the true people of God are the believing children of Abraham (3:7, 29), who belong to “Jerusalem above” (4:26-27).

Marks of Jesus (v. 17): Scars that Paul has suffered because of his ministry.

WALK BY THIS RULE

Paul finishes by encouraging the Galatians to “walk by this rule” (v. 16), that is, to live by the gospel of Christ crucified. What four things do living like this produce (vv. 16-18)?

Why is each of these a consequence of loving and living for Jesus?

APPLY

How would you sum up the letter of Galatians in one sentence?

3 PRINCIPLES

As we conclude Paul’s letter to Galatians, let’s see how we can apply the main truth of the book to the Christian life.

Principle #1: No one is immune to the temptation of drifting. It happened then and it can happen today. It could be you are drifting away from the purity of the gospel of grace. Or maybe you are being influenced by legalists. The point is to stay on the alert.

What safeguards can you take to stay focused on the gospel and thwart the temptation of drifting away from the gospel of grace?

Principle #2: Some things are worth fighting for. The great news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is one of the foundation stories of the Christian faith. Like Paul, we need to uphold the true gospel. We need to stand firm against compromise in accepting a watered-down gospel.

What ways can we uphold and fight for the gospel? How have you responded in the past to those who have argued for “a different gospel”?

Principle #3: We all began at the same place, which puts us all on the same level. We all start out as rebels against God but through faith in his son, we become fellow heirs of salvation and the blessings of Christ. Your social, economic, and ethnic distinction has no bearing on one's standing before God (Galatians 3:28). If you have never set aside your own attempts to win God's favor or earn his love, start now. For believers, we have no reason to boast about our own salvation or to take credit for our spiritual growth.

Pray a prayer of thanks for God who loves us so much that whoever believes in him should not perish, but will have everlasting life. Pray for strength that your feet are firmly planted on the solid ground of grace.

SUMMER BREAK – THANK YOU!

This is our last "official" meeting for community groups as we now break for the summer. Spend time discussing any summer plans as a group. Thank you for your involvement in your community group. Thank you to those who lead groups and shepherded those God has given you.

FINAL THOUGHT

Did you realize that, as a believer in Jesus Christ, you are a spiritual descendant of Abraham? By your spiritual incorporation into Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you are just as much an heir of the promise as Jesus Christ is. So you are a part of the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. And here is the key: The promise, not the law, makes you part of God's family. The law shows us as we really are. And so the law points us to see Christ as He really is; our Savior and the One who obeyed the law on our behalf and then died in our place so that we might receive the promised blessing. The law allows us to love Jesus, and enables us to show our love in grateful obedience to him.

PRAY

Thank God that his promises to you are irrevocable. Thank him for his law that guided and protected you until you were ready for freedom in Christ. Thank him for that freedom. Ask him to help you to live joyfully in the security of freedom and promise.

PRAYER REQUESTS

