

AUTHENTIC GOSPEL

TRUTH • FAITH • FREEDOM

CURRICULUM

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WEEK 1: JANUARY 7, 2018
“BY FAITH OR WORKS OF THE LAW?”
GALATIANS 3:1-9

THE BIG IDEA

Christ's death frees us to live for Him and enjoy blessing instead of being cursed, emotionally, and eternally.

OVERVIEW

Paul expands on the theme introduced at the end of chapter 2: we are not only saved by the gospel, we also grow through the gospel and live by the gospel. Paul compares the law and faith and his conclusion is clear: faith in Christ saves; attempting to observe the law cannot. And faith in Christ is the way we continue to live as Christians. We do not begin by faith and continue by works. This is what the Galatians have begun to do and Paul rightly calls them “foolish.” Paul emphasizes that salvation has always been by trusting in God’s promise. Period!

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 3:1-9 as a group. What are the answers to Paul's questions in verses 1-5? What point is he making to the “foolish” Galatians?

THE CLAIM

Let's state it another way: The first five verses of chapter 3 make an amazing claim which is often missed by Christians, yet is absolutely critical for Christians. What is it?

CLARIFY

What is the point of God's law?

EXPLORE MORE

The gospel is the way we enter the kingdom of God. This passage highlights that we are not only justified by faith in Christ, we are also sanctified by faith in Christ. Hey, we never leave the gospel behind! Write your definition of both below.

Justification:

Sanctification:

After writing your definitions, read the following passages to help in your understanding. Discuss in your group.

Justification: Romans 3:21-26, 5:18-19

Sanctification: 1 Thessalonians 4:13; John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 1:30

EXPLAIN THIS!

The result of believing the gospel of Christ was that the Galatians “received the Spirit” (v. 2). The Holy Spirit enters a life through belief in salvation by grace alone through Christ alone. Jesus said we are given new birth through the Spirit (read John 3:5), yet James (read James 1:18) and Peter (read 1 Peter 1:23) say we are given new birth through the Word of God. Explain this!

DICTIONARY

Abraham (v. 6): Genesis 15:1-6 tells the events behind Galatians 3:6. Abraham was in his late seventies or early eighties when God promised him a son. His wife, Sarah, was around seventy and had never had a child. Consider the obstacles Abraham faced in believing what God said. Abraham was the ancestor of the nation of Israel, and the man with whom God made a binding agreement (covenant). God promised to make his family into a great nation, give them a land, and bring blessing to all nations through one of his descendants (see Genesis 12:1-3).

Blessed (vv. 8-9): A blessed person is the object of divine favor, resulting in spiritual and often material well-being, prosperity, and success (see Genesis 24:1; Ephesians 1:3). It is based on the word that God has given. To bless means to speak well of someone. God’s well-speaking is a promise that will be fulfilled (see v. 14).

ABRAHAM'S FAITH

According to Genesis 15:6 and Galatians 3:6, on what basis did God reckon Abraham as righteous (in right standing) before Him? Was it the law?

The Jews claimed to be the children of Abraham – the heirs of God's promises to him. From your previous answer, whom would you conclude should be the true children of Abraham (compare Galatians 3:7)?

Think about the kind of faith Abraham had to have in order to believe God would give him a son. What does this tell you about the kind of faith in Christ that a person needs to have? Give an example of how you have had this type of faith in your life.

PRAY

Thank God for salvation. Thank God for not only wiping our slate clean, but also becoming perfect in God's sight. And thank God that we stay perfect in His sight. We worship a great and loving God!

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 2: JANUARY 14, 2018
“REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE”
GALATIANS 3:10-14

OVERVIEW

A clear black-or-white issue is the contrast between the Law and grace. Many think you can gain favor with God by mixing grace and merit, faith and works. Negative! If anybody wants to work for their salvation, they will be required to keep the whole Law perfectly their entire life. James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” Game over! In this passage, Paul continues his argument from the Old Testament in order to champion the life of faith. He explains the Law actually voids righteousness. Instead of a blessing as they try to obey the Law, they fall under a curse. So how does faith remove us from the curse of the Law? Verse 13 gives us the answer and his name is Jesus Christ!

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 3:10-14 as a group. In verse 10, Paul explains that the law, rather than adding anything to salvation, actually nullifies righteousness. How so? See James 3:2 and Ecclesiastes 7:20 for insight.

RIGHTEOUS VS. THE LAW

In verse 12, Paul says “*The one who does them shall live by them.*” To “live by” something means to rely on it for our happiness and fulfillment. It’s what gives us meaning, confidence and definition.

What does living by, or relying on observing the law lead to?

Why is this, do you think?

If verse 10 is true, how can God credit us as righteous without being unjust (v. 13)?

What does trusting in this give us? Why is this exciting?

GETTING PERSONAL

Have you appreciated that if you trust in Christ, you are living a life of blessing, and are not under any divine or emotional curse?

What causes you to become anxious, envious, or despairing? How will remembering that you are redeemed and blessed by God through His Son, and filled with His Spirit, help direct your emotions at those points?

2 TRUTHS

1. Salvation is a free gift; don't try to earn it.

Adding to the gospel of grace only confuses things. Attempting to earn salvation by any degree robs God of His glory. God is lovingly holding out His hand and saying simply, "Take it. It's a gift. You do nothing for it. You owe Me nothing in return."

Put into words how you would describe God's love for you, a love so much that He offers you this amazing gift? Read the following verses for encouragement: Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 86:15, 136:26 and John 3:16.

2. Legalism is an aggressive enemy; don't make friends with it. When you spot legalism in any form, get away from it.

When you spot legalism in any form, whether it is legalistic justification or legalistic sanctification – flee! Often legalism will make a rational appeal, quoting Bible verses (out of context) that emphasize the virtues of the law and the goodness of works. It can also tug at our emotions like fear – fear of “anything goes” living or maybe anxiety about pleasing God. Decide to always walk with the Spirit of God.

What is your no. 1 example of legalism in the Christian world today? How does legalism corrupt believers?

ONE FINAL THOUGHT

In God's plan of salvation, He did not need to relax one letter of His perfect law to accommodate us sinners who couldn't get through a day without breaking it. Instead, He sent His Son to fulfil every iota of the law for us and to suffer the law's sentence of death on us. How silly it seems then for anyone who is once saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ to seek their own righteousness in the Law. To backslide into legalism is an insult to the gospel and to God alone who saves us by His grace.

PRAY

Thank God that His grace is sufficient and put your entire trust in Him.

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 3: JANUARY 21, 2018
"THE PROMISE"
GALATIANS 3:15-18

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 3:15-18 as a group. Moses was given the law by God 430 years after God's promises of salvation to Abraham. So isn't the law an improvement on, or replacement for, the promises? If it is, we need to obey the law to be saved! How does Paul answer this objection (vv. 15-18)?

DICTIONARY

Covenant (v. 15): An agreement made between two parties. The word can mean "treaty," "pact," "contract," or "will." A marriage covenant, business contract, or political treaty is usually two-sided; each party makes certain promises to the other. God's agreement with Abraham was thoroughly one-sided; He made promises, and Abraham had only to accept them.

Offspring (v. 16): A future member of your family tree.

Promise vs. Law: For a promise to bring a result, it needs only to be believed; but for a law to bring a result, it has to be obeyed.

3 QUESTIONS

1. If we are "free from the law," does that mean we don't have to obey the law of God?
2. If I am saved only by Christ's performance and not my own, why should I strive to live a holy life?
3. Do I have an obligation to keep God's law, and why?

12 PROMISES

A promise from God is a statement we can depend on with certainty. After reading each passage below, summarize each promise, identify one personal example of how each promise has been realized in your life, and then discuss in your group.

1. God's presence (Hebrews 13:5)
2. God's protection (Genesis 15:1)
3. God's power (Isaiah 41:10)
4. God's provision (Isaiah 41:10)
5. God's leading (John 10:4)
6. God's purposes (Jeremiah 29:11)
7. God's rest (Matthew 11:28)
8. God's cleansing (1 John 1:9)
9. God's goodness (Psalm 84:11)

10. God's faithfulness (1 Samuel 12:22)

11. God's wise plan (Romans 8:28)

12. God's guidance (Psalm 25:9)

Do these promises alter your view of God? If so, how?

IT COMES DOWN TO THIS

Comment on the following from pastor and author Timothy Keller: "There is no more practical question than that of the relationship of a Christian to the law of God. Our other questions about how to live – How should I treat my spouse? What shall I spend my money on? What corners can I cut in my job? – stem from the central question: What is my relationship as a Christian to God's law?"

GETTING PERSONAL

What difference does it make to you that your relationship with God and future expectations of good are based on God's promise, not on how well you keep the Law of Moses?

PRAY

Lord, if all You had given me was Your Son as a perfect payment for a debt I could never pay, I could spend eternity expressing my thanks. You have done and continue to do so much more. Your promises and faithfulness are new every morning, and I thank you. Thank you for revealing Yourself as the ultimate promiser in whom I can completely trust. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 4: JANUARY 28, 2018
"THE LAW"
GALATIANS 3:19-29

OVERVIEW

In this passage Paul is not stating that we no longer have any relation to the values of God's law, but that we no longer view it as a system of salvation. It no longer forces obedience through fear. The gospel means that we no longer obey the law out of the fear of rejection or hope of salvation by performance. When we grasp salvation-by-promise, our hearts are filled with thanks and a desire to please and be like our Savior, and the way to do that is through obeying the law. And at the time we come to the law motivated by thanks, we are better in our obedience of the law than we ever were when we thought that our obedience might save us.

START

Read Galatians 3:19-29 as a group. If the law has no impact on God's plan rooted in his promise, why was the law ever given (v. 19)? Hint: read Romans 3:20.

DICTIONARY

The Purpose of the Law: In verse 19, Paul tells us what the point of the law is. It was "added because of transgressions" until Christ came. The law did not come to tell us about salvation, but about sin. Its main purpose is to show us our problem that we all are law breakers; and to prove that we cannot be the solution since we cannot keep the law perfectly.

EASIER SAID THAN DONE?

Is it really impossible to keep the Law? If we're really disciplined and focused, aren't we able to fulfill at least the Ten Commandments? How hard is it to keep from murdering, committing adultery, or bearing false witness? But before we congratulate ourselves, let's consider what Jesus said is required to keep the commandments perfectly. Read Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28. What is Jesus saying about the law? Is keeping the law just a matter of outward conformity or is it something else?

Now turn back to the Old Testament and read the Ten Commandments, listed in Exodus 20:1-17. Using Jesus' explanation of keeping the commandments, how many do you think you've kept? All? Some? None?

Although none of us can keep the law, there was someone who did. Who was it? How did he keep all the laws? What does this mean to you?

UNDERSTAND

Why do people need to know God is a God who has laws before they can understand why Jesus' death is good news?

CREEPING LEGALISM

How might a professing Christian believer end up coming under the curse of law-observance without realizing it? What would you say to someone who had done this?

Why do you obey God's law? Do you ever obey it for the wrong reasons?

YOUR THOUGHTS PLEASE

Discuss in your group this scenario. What suggestions would you make to someone with this story?

Many Christians when they first became aware of their need for God go through a time of immaturity in which they became very religious. They seek to mend their ways and do religious duties to clean up their lives. They "gave their lives to Jesus" and "asked Him into their hearts." But often they were really only trying to be very good and very religious, hoping this would bring favor from God. At this stage, they tended to have a lot of emotional ups and downs, feeling good when they made a spiritual commitment and bummed when they failed to keep a promise to God. They often feel highly anxious.

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

WEEK 5: FEBRUARY 4, 2018
“SONS AND HEIRS”
GALATIANS 4:1-7

OVERVIEW

When Christ redeemed His people from the law, removing all penalty or debt, God's people who had faith in the promise “came of age.” Before, God's people had been like kids, promised much in the future but actually still slaves. Jesus gives us “the full rights of sons.” He gave us “sonship,” which refers to a Roman process where a wealthy man could adopt one of his servants as his son. Verse 7 is a great summary. It is wonderful to be a son because it means we are not a slave. Through Jesus, we are legal heirs of all God has to give.

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 4:1-7 as a group. Why is it wonderful to be a son of God?

HEIRS

As God's sons and daughters, of what are we “heirs” (see Ephesians 1:13)? Make a list of these blessings. What is required of us for these blessings (see Ephesians 2:8-9)?

CONNECT

What is the connection between the work of the Son and Spirit (vv. 4-7)? Read Romans 8:15-17 and Ephesians 1:13-14 for insight.

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Why was it necessary for Christ to be born so entangled into the human situation (v. 4)? Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13 for insight.

Reread verse 4. If Jesus is so important for salvation, why did He wait so long to come? That is, why didn't He come when Cain and Abel were still arguing over their offering, or before God had to wipe out humanity from the face of the earth with the Flood, or when the nation of Israel was just beginning to play fast and loose with the Law?

DICTIONARY

“Fullness of time” (v. 4): In God's infinite wisdom and providence over the affairs of history, Jesus Christ came at just the right time. Think about it, this “time” was when the Roman civilization had brought peace and a road system which helped travel tremendously; when the Grecian civilization provided a language which was adopted as that of the empire; when the Jews had proclaimed monotheism and the messianic hope in synagogues. So, it was the perfect crossroad of history of religion, politics, culture and economics when Jesus brought about a spiritual revolution that would change the world forever.

Adoption to sonship (v. 5): In the Greco-Roman world, a childless wealthy man could take one of his servants and adopt him. At the moment of adoption, he ceased to be a slave and received all the financial and legal privileges within the estate and outside in the world as the son and heir. Though by birth he was a slave without a relationship with the father, now he receives the legal status of a son. It is a new life of privilege and it is a remarkable metaphor for what Jesus has given us.

Abba, Father (v. 6): The Aramaic word for Father, coupled with its translation. Aramaic was the language of the Babylonian Empire, so it became the native language of the Jews from the time of their exile to Babylon onward. Abba was a term by which a father was affectionately called in a family. It was equivalent to “Papa” or “Dad.” Such a familiar address of God was not practiced by the Jews, but rather was instigated by Jesus (see Mark 14:36).

APPLY

When we don't feel joyful as Christians, or loved by God, what do we need to do?

GETTING PERSONAL

The amazing bottom line of sonship is that God now treats us as though we have done everything that Jesus has done. We can approach God as if we were as faithful, beautiful and heroic as Jesus Himself. We are all heirs with Him. To God, we look like Him. Knowing this, how does this personally impact you?

What specific steps can a believer take in order to have a deeper experience of sonship? Or put another way, how can we as heirs grow closer to our Father?

FINAL THOUGHT

Sonship means we are each "an heir." So for a child of God there is a confidence and boldness every day. We don't have to be in fear of anyone or anything; our Father owns the place! God will honor us as He honors His one and only Son. And our sonship takes away the fear of missing fulfillment or losing approval that is at the root of much of our disobedience.

PRAY

Thank God again and again for His love for us. Thank God that He has made us heirs and we will share God's glory in our future. As Jesus said in John 17:21, 23-24 *"Father...let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given to me to be with me where I am."*

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 11, 2018
“PAUL’S CONCERNS FOR THE GALATIANS”
GALATIANS 4:8-20

OVERVIEW

These verses set before us two contrasts. One is between gospel faith and worldly religion (vv. 8-11), and is one of the most important and remarkable insights of the whole book. The other is between gospel ministry and worldly ministry (vv. 12-20), and gives us insights into how the gospel practically affects our relationships with others. And it matters that we understand the contrasts, and how to live among the contrasts. As Paul sees the Galatians failing to do this, he is in fear for and perplexed for them.

START

Read Galatians 4:8-20 as a group. The Galatians had become Christians out of a pagan, idolatrous background. Now they are in danger of turning to a Judaistic law-keeping religion. But what does Paul say they're turning to in verses 8-10? What is the implication of what Paul is saying here?

EXPLORE MORE

How does Paul's ministry differ from that of the false teachers:

- In its goal?

- In its means?

What does this teach us about true, faithful, gospel ministry?

GOSPEL MINISTRY

In this passage we're given an insight into how Paul planted a church there. As he does so, Paul is looking back on a time when his gospel ministry flourished in Galatia, and when the relationships between him and the young Christians were healthy. There is much for us to learn here about gospel ministry and relationship in our settings today. From Paul's example, here are three truths about gospel ministry:

1. Gospel ministry is *culturally flexible* (v. 12). How does the church today exhibit being culturally flexible without compromising on our beliefs?

2. Gospel ministry is *transparent* (v. 12). Paul says to become “*like me.*” Why would Paul want the Galatians to imitate him and how is this being transparent?

3. Gospel ministry looks for *opportunities in hardship* (v. 13). Read Romans 8:28. God does not promise to bless Christians by removing suffering, but to bless Christians through suffering. Why?

DICTIONARY

Bodily ailment, condition (vv. 13-14): The Bible gives no clear indication of what Paul's illness was. Verse 15 implies to some readers that it was an eye problem, while others suggest epilepsy or malaria. Paul's illness either caused a detour to their area or kept him in their area while traveling through.

TWO EXTREMES

Paul's approach in this passage instructs us as we reach the world for Christ. We face two extremes in our churches today. One is distancing ourselves from non-Christians to such an extent that there is never any meaningful contact with them. The other is identifying so closely with nonbelievers that we become basically indistinguishable from them. Paul models the balance we need to seek. What is that balance? See 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 2:11-21 for insight.

APPLY

Galatians 3:23-4:11 reminds us that we have been adopted as children of God. We are called into an intimate relationship with almighty God. To have this intimate relationship with “Papa” requires a time to season and deepen. What do you do during this time? If we look to Christ's own personal relationship with His Father, we see several key attitudes and actions that lead us toward a meaningful intimacy with our God. Below is a list of essentials to help us grow closer to our Lord. How are you doing in each of these essentials? Discuss in your group.

- Simplicity – uncluttering our lives and minds from things that distract us from God.

- Silence and Solitude – slowing our pace and making space in our schedules for God.

- Surrender – releasing our grip on things that take our attention from God.
- Prayer – calling out to God with our praise, thanksgiving, and petitions.
- Humility – bowing our entire lives before the will of God.
- Self-control – holding back our own priorities in favor of God's priorities.
- Sacrifice – giving up the things God expects us to surrender to Him.

APPLY 2.0

As a follow-up to the above-mentioned list of essentials, take some time to reflect upon your own intimacy with God. Answer the following questions:

How much time do you spend each day with God? Do you talk to Him or just mumble a few words?

Do you pause and listen to Him in your times of silence and solitude, as you thoughtfully read His Word? Or are you so obsessed with your schedule that you rush through your reading to finish your checklist?

Do you live a life of surrender and self-control, or do you clutter your life with a bunch of distractions?

PRAY

- Thank God for revealing Himself to you in the Bible and in His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Thank God for freeing you from your former slavery to sin and the false gods of this world by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- May God strengthen your faith daily as you pray and read the Scriptures so you will not turn away from God.
- Help me reach out to all people as You would have me do.

PRAYER REQUESTS

WEEK 7: FEBRUARY 18, 2018
“EXAMPLE OF HAGAR AND SARAH”
GALATIANS 4:21-31

OVERVIEW

These verses are explosive. They round off the themes Paul has been highlighting since the middle of chapter 2. His point here is not only that the gospel makes absolutely anyone a child of God, but that the most proud and moral and able are often the ones left out of God's family. The gospel reverses the world's values. In this passage, Paul presents his closing arguments against the legalistic Judaizers. He uses the Judaizers' own methods of argument and biblical interpretation to disprove their position. He opens with a question (v. 21), provides some historical background from the life of Abraham (vv. 22-23), then gives an allegory in Jewish form (vv. 24-27), finally applying the allegory to the Galatians' situation (vv. 28-31).

INVESTIGATE

Read Galatians 4:21-31 as a group. What are the differences between the births of these two sons?

What does Paul say each mother represents (vv. 24-26)? Why?

How much faith did Abraham need to have a son with Hagar? How much faith did he need to have a son with Sarah?

The residents of Jerusalem would have thought of Sarah as their mother, and Hagar as the mother of unrighteous Gentiles. Why does this give extra force to what Paul says here?

What is Paul saying the Galatians should expect (vv. 28-29)?

DICTIONARY

An allegory of the Gospel: Paul is using the story of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah only as an allegory. "Now this may be interpreted allegorically" (v. 24); in other words, though we read the account as a literally true story and learn the theological and moral lessons of it, that is not what Paul is doing here. He finds the story to be a good, symbolic illustration of grace and works. It is not that he doesn't think it is historical, but he wants to use it as an illustration of a biblical truth.

LAW VS. GRACE

Paul gives some historical perspective and points out a spiritual analogy that exposes the inherent weakness of the Judaizers' legalistic approach to inheriting the promises of God. The chart below brings out the many contrasts Paul makes between law and grace.

LAW

Hagar, the bondwoman

Ishmael born "according to the flesh"

Old covenant of law given at Mt. Sinai

Earthly Jerusalem

Slavery to the law

Judaism

GRACE

Sarah, the free woman

Isaac born "according to the Spirit"

New covenant of grace given by Christ

Heavenly Jerusalem

Freedom in Christ

Christianity

This chart illustrates that there are really only two religions. The first religion, which comes in many shapes and sizes, is the religion of human effort and merit. In other words, salvation or blessing come from what a person does, accomplishes or earns. The second religion is the religion of divine grace and mercy. Those who profess the second religion forsake their own efforts and rely exclusively on the provision of God, which is not based on anything we have done, but on what God has done for us. All this person can do is believe, accept, trust, and acknowledge.

Which of these two religions are more popular and embraced in the world today? Why? Or how do you explain this?

THREATENING

In verse 28-31 Paul is flatly stating that the children of the slave – those seeking salvation through law-obedience – will always persecute the children of the free woman, those enjoying salvation by grace. Ishmaels have always persecuted Isaacs. Why is this? Why is the gospel more threatening to religious people (i.e. religious people who claim to be part of God's family but are not) than non-religious people?

SUM IT UP

So let's sum it all up: Why are the law and grace completely and totally incompatible?

REFLECT

As you reflect on this passage, has the Holy Spirit convicted you of any ways in which you "want to be under the law?" If so, how? What are some of the obstacle that keeps you from sole dependence on Christ?

PRAY

Pray: Praise God each day this week for bringing you into His family. Ask Him to grow your understanding of your identity as His child.

Confess: Confess your sins to God this week. Pray for practical ways to repent and the strength to see it through.

Let Go: Pick one "god" in your life that you need to let go (money, a relationship, food, media, appearance, etc.).

Reflect: Think back over all that God has taught you through this series so far. Write down areas of your life where you aren't walking in the freedom of the gospel. Pray that God would continue to work in your heart.

Encourage: Talk to a friend or family member who knows someone who has wandered from the faith.

PRAYER REQUESTS

