

Galatians

Free in Christ
Participant Guidebook

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INTRODUCTION

Before you begin this study, consider for a moment the nature in which we study the word of God. How should a Christian think about the process of study? How should we define study? What are its benefits? Why do we study? What is our study trying to accomplish? These are all important questions to consider. To these questions, the following thoughts are offered for your consideration.

Study is the ongoing process by which God remakes our minds according to the mind of Christ.

When we come to the word of God with a soft heart and faith, it is the Holy Spirit who is teaching us. This is a bold statement, but it is true. Jesus says in John 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” So, pray before you study and ask the Holy Spirit to teach you. Ask God to guide you into the truth and reveal to you his good, perfect and pleasing will.

A primary purpose of the study of God’s word is to be made new in the attitude of our minds. How do you think about God? How do you think about yourself? What do you believe about the world in which you live? These thoughts comprise our various attitudes, or habits of thinking. The reason we devote time to study is to be made new in our habit of thought. Ephesians 4:23 reminds us, “to be made new in the attitude of your minds.” We are made new in

the attitude of our minds as our habit of thought is brought into conformity with the mind of Christ through the study of God's word.

Study involves the discipline of taking captive every thought that enters our mind and bringing it under the truth of God's word.

Partial truths are big problems. The original temptation in the garden of Eden consisted of Eve eating the "forbidden fruit". That action was motivated by her believing a distortion of the truth. When we build our lives around partial truths, we are headed down a dangerous road. Colossians 2:8 warns the church, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." Rather than "be led astray" by teachings from the world, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Study begins and ends with God's word.

We can study many things. We can study paintings, nature and novels. Anytime we discipline our minds and focus our thinking on a particular idea we are, generally speaking, studying. As Christians, we believe the word of God has the authority and power to change our lives and to equip us for every good work. So, we continue the ancient tradition of studying the word of God. Not just because the church has studied the Scriptures for many years, but because many people have experienced the life changing power of the word of God. Consider the following passages:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Tim 3:16-17

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

Study begins with the word of God, but it does not end with Biblical knowledge.

Paul said it best in 1 Corinthians 13, “Knowledge puffs up.” Solomon reminded us that of the making of many books there will be no end and much study wearies the body (Ecclesiastes 12:12). The goal of our study of the word of God is not that we might know more, memorize more or be smarter. It certainly is not that we might be found to have superior insight as compared to our brothers and sisters in the faith. Pride in personal knowledge and perceived special insight can cause great harm to the body of Christ. We do not study for the sake of study, or to check off a task from our personal spiritual growth plan.

Study ends with the renewal of our thinking which leads to the transformation of our living.

The goal of our study, then, is that the faithful would be equipped for every good work. The goal of study is a renewal of our thinking which leads to a transformation of our living and relating. Paul said as much in Romans 12:1-2, when he wrote, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

In view of God’s mercy, then, it is our prayer that through the study of God’s word the way you live your life and the way you relate to others will be changed. We pray your thinking about God, yourself and the world in which you live will be washed by the truth. The truth is the truth, and it is the truth that has the power to set us free.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF GALATIANS

1:1-10 God has set us free from the present evil age; praise His name!

- 1:1-5 – Praise God for setting us free (rescuing us)
- 1:6-10 – Curse those who try to take away that freedom

1:11-2:14 God has set us free, but not everyone stays free.

- 1:11-24 – Authority and origin of Paul's message – Paul set free
- 2:1-10 – Paul's continuity with Jerusalem – Freedom is not rebellion
- 2:11-14 – Confrontation with Peter – Peter enslaved again

2:15-3:6 God has set us free through Christ.

- 2:15-21 – What Paul told Peter and a summary of his main point
- 3:1-6 – An appeal to not leave Christ and return to the law

3:7-3:29 God did not—and does not—intend for the law to set us free.

- 3:7-9 – Introduction to the heart of Paul's argument
- 3:10-3:14 – The curse of the law
- 3:15-18 – The late arrival and temporal nature of the law
- 3:19-25 – The purpose of the law
- 3:26-3:29 – Conclusion to Paul's theological argument

4:1-4:31 God is creating a new life in us and for us through the power of the Spirit.

- 4:1-7 – We are children of God through the Spirit
- 4:8-20 – An appeal to not return to slavery
- 4:21-31 – We are children born for freedom not slavery

5:1-12 God has set us free; let's stay free!

- 5:1-6 – Stand firm while you wait
- 5:6-12 – Don't let others trip you up

5:13-24 God has set us free to love one another not to destroy one another.

- 5:13-15 – Love is the fulfillment of the law
- 5:16-24 – Love is a work of the Spirit

5:25-6:18 Press on! Living the Spirit-empowered and love-filled life!

- 5:25-6:10 – Love applied to the community of faith

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from
the present evil age, according to the will of our God and
Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 1:3-5

GOD HAS SET US FREE FROM THE
PRESENT EVIL AGE; PRAISE HIS NAME!

GALATIANS 1:1-10

Week 1

GALATIANS 1:1-10 ~ WEEK 1

INTRODUCTION

This passage introduces the letter, the key ideas and the primary problem Paul will address. The passage is divided into two sections. The first section is the letter's introduction. The second introduces the primary problem (false teaching) and Paul's response to that problem (resist the false teachers). The problem and Paul's response to the problem will remerge throughout the letter.

God's desire—and plan—is to rescue all people from the powers of this present evil age. The powers of this age enslave us and lead to the destruction of human relationships. These powers include the desires of the flesh, the powers associated with the created world and the laws that govern human life and interaction, including the Torah. While these powers hold significant sway over our lives, they have no power in bringing us into a proper relationship with God. They have no power in transforming selfish, power-loving people into selfless, love-giving children of God.

God has rescued us from the power of the present evil age, and has—thereby—secured for us our freedom. He rescued us through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus; and, by sending the Spirit of His Son to dwell in our hearts through faith. For that, we praise God's name! However, we have not yet received our full inheritance. While we wait for our full inheritance, temptations abound. The temptation to forfeit the freedom God has secured for us and to return to the powers that enslave us is a very real temptation.

There have been, and always will be, people who live enslaved lives and want us to join them in their slavery. In his letter, Paul strongly refutes anyone who would bring the adopted children of God back into a life of slavery—back into an age that has been set aside for life in the Spirit.

4 This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. 5 We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Galatians 2:4-5

GOD HAS SET US FREE, BUT NOT
EVERYONE STAYS FREE

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14

Week 2

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

INTRODUCTION

This passage establishes the source and authority of Paul's gospel. It details the relationship between Paul and the church leaders in Jerusalem and concretely identifies the problem facing the Galatian churches. This section is a biographical outline of Paul's life. Its purpose is to establish the authority of the message he preaches and the grounds upon which his appeal to resist the false gospel is placed.

Even though God has set us free, not everyone stays free. In this passage, Paul retells his personal story and offers it as an example of a life that has been set free. He once was enslaved in a zealous life defending the law and Jewish puritanism; but Christ appeared to him, revealed to him the good news and set him free. This freedom allowed Paul to share the good news of freedom through Jesus to all people—including people who were not Jews. The direct revelation from Jesus launched Paul's mission to the Gentiles.

In contrast to Paul, Peter's story is offered as an example of someone who was set free from the enslaving powers of the evil age only to return to them. A return to the life of slavery has devastating consequences. It denies God's power, neglects the work of Christ and turns away from the power of the Spirit. Not only that, it also has devastating implications for the community of believers. When a member of the family of Christ introduces enslaving powers into the fellowship of the Spirit, the fellowship the Spirit is working to create and maintain begins to fall apart. This was true in Paul's day, and it is still true in our day.

Because only the true gospel has the power to set us free, Paul works with strong passion to keep believers and the church free from the powers that enslave.

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. To what event is Paul referring when we says he received the gospel from “revelation”?
2. What is the significance of Paul’s going to Arabia rather than Jerusalem after receiving his revelation? For what purposes did Paul go to Jerusalem?
3. What does Paul mean when he says we have “freedom?” From what and for what are we set free? Can you identify any ways in which Christians today might misunderstand /misapply the concept of freedom?

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

7. Describe the relationship between our theology (belief) and our social behavior (ethics)? In what ways do they influence each other?

GALATIANS 1:11-2:14 ~ WEEK 2

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

15 “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16 know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

Galatians 2:15-16

GOD HAS SET US FREE THROUGH CHRIST

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6

Week 3

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

INTRODUCTION

This passage transitions from the narrative/biographical part of the letter. In this passage, Paul introduces his main argument and reiterates his appeal for the Galatian churches to stand firm in gospel he proclaimed.

God has set us free through the work of Jesus on the cross, and this was God's will—His plan—from the beginning. Christ's faithfulness to the will of God has inaugurated a new way God interacts with the world. That new way is anchored in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and defined by God's pouring out His Spirit on all who believe. It is a new way but not a new idea. It has always been God's plan to bless all people through the sacrifice of His Son, as is evident in God's interaction with Abraham.

It is the faith of a person that brings a person into a right standing with God. Ancestral lineage and personal obedience, while important, no longer provide the cornerstone of life with God. Life with God now rests on the cornerstone of Jesus, who has set free, and through the Spirit of Christ who empowers us to live the life of freedom.

Contrary to what others might say, our relationship with God is not made possible by anything from the created world—that even includes the law God gave Moses and the people of Israel. Moreover, the fellowship of the Spirit is not made possible by anything from the created world. In fact, when the fellowship of the Spirit is founded on anything other than the sacrifice of Christ and the power of the Spirit, the fellowship crumbles.

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3
YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. To what does the phrase “works of the law” refer?

2. Define, in your own words, the term righteousness ? Judging from the contexts, what do you think it means for a person to be described as righteous?

3. In what verse does Paul’s speech to Peter conclude?

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

4. Is the primary question in Galatians—“What is wrong with the law?” or “What is wrong with humanity that the law can’t solve?” What is the difference between these two options, in your view and why does it matter?

5. How does the emphasis on our right standing with God (our justification) have a present emphasis? What implications does our justification have for our future?

6. How did the Galatian Christians receive the Spirit, and why is that so important for Paul? How do we receive the Holy Spirit today?

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

7. In what ways does the coming of Christ affect the continuation of the law?

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 2:15-3:6 ~ WEEK 3

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”¹¹ Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”

Galatians 3:10-11

GOD DID NOT—AND DOES NOT—
INTEND FOR THE LAW TO SET US FREE

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29

Week 4

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

INTRODUCTION

This passage continues Paul's argument, specifically answering questions about the Mosaic law. What was the purpose of the law? Why did God give the law? What did the law do? What could the law not do? If not the law, how do we now live in terms of our relationship with God?

The created elements of the present evil age become evil when they are misused. The creation was designed to give glory to God, but it is often glorified. Likewise, the law was designed to reveal sin not to save us from sin. The law was given for a limited time and a specific purpose, but when that purpose is misunderstood, the law moves from a gift of grace to a curse.

To be sure, the law given to Israel was a gift and a revelation of the heart of God. But its purpose and function were limited. In this passage, Paul reminds us that God never intended for the law to set us free, and the law never will. In the end, the law is part of the create world, and has no power to set us free. The righteous, it turns out, have always (and will always) lived by faith.

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. According to this passage, how does the story of Abraham relate to the blessings found in Christ? What does the story of Abraham have to do with faith? What does it have to do with God's plan to bless the nations?
2. What does the phrase "rely on the law" mean? To whom do you think the phrase applies?
3. If the law did not add anything to the promise, why did God give the law? According to Paul, what was the purpose of the law?

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 3:7-3:29 ~ WEEK 4

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Galatians 4:4-5

GOD IS CREATING A NEW LIFE IN US
AND FOR US THROUGH THE POWER
OF THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31

Week 5

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5

INTRODUCTION

This passage continues Paul's main argument and introduces the Holy Spirit as the power for new life. It contains an allusion to the OT story of Ishmael and Isaac.

The new life we have in Christ is a gift from God and is secured through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is creating a new life in us and for us. The new life God is creating in us is characterized by freedom from the powers of the present evil age for the purpose of loving others. The new life God is creating for us is a new, Spirit-empowered fellowship of believers. This new life is only a foretaste of the full inheritance we are waiting for.

The kind of seed planted determines the kind of life born. If we allow the seeds of slavery to birth a new life in us, our lives will be defined by slavery to the powers of the world—and so will our community. If we allow the seeds of the Spirit to birth a new life in us, our lives will be defined by the Spirit of God—and so will our community. We have been born of the Spirit, and by the Spirit we have been adopted into the family of believers. That new life includes a new way of relating to God, a new way of living, and a new kind of community.

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul mean when he says he became “like them?” who is them?
2. In the context of Galatians, who was being persecuted and for what were they being persecuted? What affect did persecution have on Paul, the other preachers, and the Galatian believers?
3. Look again at the allegory in this passage. Who or what are being contrasted in the allegory? Does Paul’s allegory contrast Moses and Abraham, or does the allegory contrast the law and Christ?

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

4. According to Paul, how does one become a child of God?

5. What are the implications/blessings of being adopted into God's family?

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5
NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 4:1-4:31 ~ WEEK 5
NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

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.

Galatians 5:1

GOD HAS SET US FREE; LET'S STAY FREE!

GALATIANS 5:1-12

Week 6

GALATIANS 5:1-12 ~ WEEK 6

INTRODUCTION

This passage functions as the climax of Paul's main argument, offers another appeal to stay the course and transitions to the next part of the letter.

God has set us free, but not everyone stays free. God has set us free through the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit—not through the law (or any other aspect of the evil age). So, let us continue to live our lives trusting in Christ, and let us resist—at every turn—the temptation to return to the powers of the evil age.

GALATIANS 5:1-5:12 ~ WEEK 6

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Define love, in your own words, from a Christian perspective.
2. Define faith, in your own word, from a Christian perspective.
3. How do faith and love relate to one another as they are described in this passage?

GALATIANS 5:1-12 ~ WEEK 6
NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

GALATIANS 5:1-12 ~ WEEK 6

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.

Galatians 5:13-14

GOD HAS SET US FREE TO LOVE
ONE ANOTHER NOT TO DESTROY
ONE ANOTHER

GALATIANS 5:13-24

Week 7

GALATIANS 5:13-24 ~ WEEK 7

INTRODUCTION

This passage moves from Paul's main argument to the implications of that argument for the believer and the community of believers.

The desires of the flesh are obvious; they are part of the evil age. They enslave us, and they destroy us. Not only do they destroy us, but they also bring havoc into social relationships. Clearly, God has not set us free to indulge the desires of the flesh.

Freedom is a great gift, and it has been given to us by God so that we might be free to love others. To that end, the Spirit of God is creating in us the miraculous fruits of love. This is something the law could never do, and it is something that is not natural to us. The life defined by love is a gift from God's Spirit. The crucified life—a life whose interest in the world is waning—cannot be purchased, conjured or legally maintained.

It is a life born of the Spirit through faith in the power of God to create in us the life He has set us free to live.

GALATIANS 5:13-24 ~ WEEK 7

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 5:13-24 ~ WEEK 7

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does the material in this section of Paul's letter relate to the previous section of the letter?
2. In what ways does love fulfill the law?
3. What is the importance of the Holy Spirit for living the life God has set us free to live?

GALATIANS 5:13-24 ~ WEEK 7

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

4. How do Paul and the “other preachers” differ in their understanding of how a Christian should be guided in ethics? How are they similar?

5. How do the Spirit and flesh interact with one another in the human life?

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6:9-10

PRESS ON! LIVING THE SPIRIT-
EMPOWERED AND LOVE-FILLED LIFE

GALATIANS 5:25-6:18

Week 8

GALATIANS 5:25-6:18 ~ WEEK 8

INTRODUCTION

This passage concludes the letter, applies the love ethic in practical ways and summarizes the appeal of the letter.

This life of love God is birthing in us through the seeds planted in our heart by the Spirit is not just for us. The Spirit of Christ is also creating a community of believers who love one another. This love is expressed in numerous ways, like sharing each other's burdens and sharing our financial resources with those in need.

The fellowship the Spirit is creating lives under the constant threat of destruction. The powers of the evil age rage against it, but God holds the community together as believers continue to yield to and nurture the power of the Spirit in their lives. So, as we wait for our full inheritance, let us never give up. As we wait, let us stand firm against the temptation to rebuild our lives and community on the powers of the created world—human desire, the elements of the created world, the laws that govern human interaction.

Let us live the crucified life, sharing in the suffering of Christ, so we might share in His glory.

GALATIANS 5:25-6:18 ~ WEEK 8

YOUR PERSONAL, HAND WRITTEN COPY OF THE TEXT
FROM A TRANSLATION OF YOUR CHOICE

GALATIANS 5:25-6:18 ~ WEEK 8

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

3. What are the marks on Paul's body? According to Paul, of what value are marks on a person's body? What has value according to Paul?

GALATIANS 5:25-6:18 ~ WEEK 8

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

- Adoption** The process by which one that is not a natural part of a family becomes a part of the family by the choice and activity of the parent. In this case, Paul describes adoption as one of the blessings of the new life in Christ. As adopted children we are no longer slaves; we are, rather, heirs. And, as heirs, we are promised an inheritance. We are included in the family of God, and not just us! All people alike— Jews and Gentile— are invited to share in the promise new life.
- Alienated** Severed, cut off, useless, ineffective. Used in 3:17, 5:4, and 5:11. Those who have returned to the power associated with the evil age have been separated from Christ. It is this belief that so powerfully drives Paul to defend the “true” gospel message. For Paul, to be cut off from Christ is to be cursed.
- Apostle** One who is sent out, messenger. The term apostle is important because Paul’s identification as an apostle established his authority and legitimizes the gospel he is preaching among the Gentiles. Paul does not see himself as a man preaching a human message. He sees himself as one who has been sent on a divine mission, ordained by God. It was always God’s will to invite the Gentile world into His family, and Paul has been sent to carry that message to the Gentile world.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

- Baptized** Most likely, a reference to water baptism; which, is often spoken of in connection with the Holy Spirit, incorporation into Christ, the ethical life and the unity of believers. For Paul, baptism was part of the conversion process and it dramatized our union with Christ. Baptism is neither a replacement for faith, nor is it an act one does to earn salvation.
- Blessed** To speak well of. This is not the same word used in the beatitudes. It is a term that stands as the antithesis of cursed. Those who return to the elements of the present evil age are cursed, and those who turn to God in faith will be blessed—just like Abraham was blessed. The blessings promised to Abraham are ultimately fulfilled in Christ, for it is through Christ that God’s promise to bless the nations comes to fulfillment.
- Boast** To glory in, to brag about. The only thing worth bragging about is the work of Jesus Christ, who is creating a new life in those who come to him in faith. While those presenting a different message brag about the number of Gentiles who are being circumcised, Paul brags about Jesus; moreover, he argues the only thing worth boasting about is Jesus himself.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Curse literally a gift given by vow for the purpose of destruction. Curse is a term standing in contrast to blessed. To be blessed is to be delivered from the evil age, justified before God, adopted as an heir to the promise, included in the family of believers and empowered by the Spirit. To be cursed is to be enslaved by the powers of the evil age, stand guilty before God, be excluded from the family of believers and dominated by the desires of the flesh. Just like Israel was cursed when they did not follow the law by being taken into exile, people in the new age will be cursed if they try to gain life before God through the powers of the evil age.

Elemental spiritual forces Those powers and forces that belong to the present evil age, those powers could include: elements and beliefs of the created world, principles of an area of study, spiritual beings, cultural and systemic powers and rulers, aspects of or all of the OT law. These are the powers from which believers had been set free.

Eternal life A description of one of the blessings received by those in Christ. The idea is often thought of as an everlasting, eternal life with the Father characterized by freedom from suffering. Eternal life is a blessing from God, is promised to all who live by faith in Christ and is both a present and future reality.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Evil age Key term built on Paul's understanding of history, and—especially—his belief that the coming of Christ into the world has brought the world into a new age. The present evil age could refer generally to the world we live in or it could refer more specifically to life under the OT law—or both. The evil age is dominated by the law, the desires of the flesh and the powers of the created world. For Paul, it is possible to return to the evil age from which one has been set free. Paul bases his argument on this assumption—to return to the law is to return to the evil age. The present evil age is characterized in the following ways: (1) it is the age in which we now live, (2) the age from which we have been rescued and (3) the powers associated with the present evil age enslave us. Complete and final freedom from the present evil age will be given to those who have been adopted through the work of the Holy Spirit when Christ returns—this is the inheritance promised those who have been redeemed.

Faith Conviction, firm persuasion. Faith is more than believing something is true—intellectual ascent. It involves more than the mind; it involves a person's entire life. Faith is a firm conviction that the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for both our right standing before God and for the Christian life; it leads to one building his or her life on and around that belief.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Fallen away Those who turn back to the powers of the evil age for their right standing with God, or for the power to live the life God has called them to live, are characterized as fallen away.

False believers Literally false brothers. Most likely, they were Christians who traveled from another location to assess the message Paul was preaching there. They probably believed Gentile Christians needed to follow the Law of Moses, especially circumcision, to complete their conversion to Christ. They also were zealously teaching and enforcing this practice. They probably shared some type of relationship with James, the brother of Jesus, who either sent them or approved of their work. They were the people in Galatia teaching a different gospel message, and Paul is standing against their message.

Flesh A term used dynamically by Paul. It can refer to life in a human body, life here on earth, to humanity in general, to human effort, or to human appetites and desires. All of this taken together, it generally refers to enslaved humanity being dominated by the powers of the present evil age.

Freedom God's gracious activity in Christ has delivered us from the powers of the present evil age, and has secured our freedom. Because we are free from the enslaving powers of the evil age, we are free to live the life of love in the fellowship of the Spirit. To be clear, we have not been set free to return again to the enslaving powers of the evil age: sin, fleshly desires, false gods, powers and ideas of the created world.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

- Gospel** Announcement of good news. Features prominently in the first two chapters of Galatians occurring in 1:6, 1:7, 1:11, 2:2, 2:5, 2:7, 2:14. It does not occur again in Galatians. This is a very important term because the conflict in Galatians ignites as two different “gospel messages” collide. The different messages have different lifestyle and social implications for the community of believers. Galatians is, in part, an articulation and defense of the message Paul is sharing with the world concerning the will of God. Nowhere in the letter does Paul explicitly and definitively state the message he is sharing, so the content of his message must be discerned through careful thought and prayer. The gospel is the announcement of the Lordship of Jesus over all other lords and gods—including the emperor of Rome.
- Gentiles** Peoples, nations. From a Jewish perspective, the term refers to those who are not biological descendants of Abraham. To the Jews, the world was divided into two spheres: Jews and Gentiles. Jewish distinctiveness, of religious and cultural purity, was a hallmark of Jewish identity and a core aspect of the OT law. When Jewish Christians began to worship with Gentile Christians, one perplexing question emerged: what do we, Jews, do with our rich tradition of cultural purity? As God’s plan to deliver the Gentiles from the powers of the evil age unfolded, the Jews were forced to see God and what God desired in a new way.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

- Grace** Kindness, gratitude. Also used in Galatians in 1:3, 1:6, 1:15, 2:9, 2:21, 5:4, 6:18. Paul sees God’s work of deliverance as a gift of grace. The coming of Christ and the gift of the Spirit are both expressions of God’s kindness for which we praise His name. God’s gracious activity is both a NT and OT reality—it is intrinsic to the nature of God and does not change. It says as much about how we receive gifts from God as much as it says about the content of those gifts. As grace, God’s gifts are received when they were underserved, unasked for and unearned.
- Guardian** A schoolmaster. In Greco-Roman society a slave was typically assigned to shadow a child to keep the child out of trouble. Paul establishes a connection between the images of a “master over a child” and the function of the law. The law was only for a time and kept people under its thumb. Some have understood this to represent a more positive idea—the law as an educator.
- Heir** One who belongs to the family and is the rightful recipient of an inheritance. Paul speaks of those who have received the Spirit as being adopted and as people who live as heirs to the promise.
- Into Christ** Some have said this is the heart of Paul’s theology. The phrase could mean our being changed into the image of Christ, our union with Christ or our being incorporated into Christ.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Israel of God Is a difficult term to define. It could refer to the Jews specifically, to the church, or to some combination of the two. It is the Israel of God who received Paul's blessing and is defined by those who "follow this rule."

Jesus Christ faith This phrase could be translated "the faith Jesus had" or "the faith people have in Jesus." Traditionally it has been translated as "the faith people have in Jesus." The faithfulness of Jesus to obey God the Father in dying on the cross as a sin offering for the world changed the way the world would relate to God and the way God would relate to the world. Truly, a new age of history arrived. After the coming of Christ, all people would be declared right with God on the basis of their faith in Christ.

Justified To be made right, in right standing, not guilty, acquittal, to be declared free of guilt or charge in a legal sense. The same root word is translated justified, justify, righteous, righteousness. Right standing before God cannot be acquired through components of the evil age. Right standing with God does not begin with the law, it is a gift from God and begins with faith. Right standing with God does not end with the law either; rather, it ends with believers yielding to and nurturing the Spirit.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Kingdom of God This is a robust phrase. In the gospels it has been popularly defined as “the rule of Christ in human hearts and on the earth.” In Galatians, the phrase most likely connects to the inheritance the heirs of the promises are waiting to receive.

Law of Christ Is offered as a contrast to the Law of Moses. If believers desire to follow a law, they should follow the law of Christ. The phrase is probably used to summarize the ethical guidance under the Spirit Paul described in the previous section of his letter.

Love Good will, fellowship, affectionate regard. Not sexual love or familial love or even friendship. This kind of love is deeper and unique as a Christian virtue. Love is presented by Paul as the fulfillment of the law and the fruit of the Spirit. The enslaving powers of the present evil age ravage social relationships, but love strengthens and builds up the community of faith. Love, under the guidance of the Spirit, is a principle player in the ethical life of believers expressing itself in a selfless concern for others, an aptitude to help those who are spiritual struggling and sharing one’s material resources.

Marks A literal mark on human flesh. In this context it probably refers to marks left on Paul’s body as a result of persecution for the cause of Christ. These marks mean more than the mark of circumcision to Paul because they reflect his dedication to continue to live his life in Christ and by the power of the Spirit.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

- New creation** A phrase referring to the new life being offered to those who have been delivered from the present evil age. It could refer to a new life for believers, the creation of a new community of believers or to the new world God will one day bring—in the fullness of time. In Galatians, the new creation is described as valuable in contrast to circumcision, which no longer has any value.
- Rescue** To deliver or tear out. This word is used eight times in the New Testament and only one time in Galatians. The word is used twice in Acts 7 (v10, v34) to refer to God's deliverance of Joseph and Israel out of slavery. The enslavement of Joseph and Israel—and God's role in their deliverance—form an important OT backdrop for God's continued role as Israel's (and the world's) deliverer. It is here that we first pick up slavery and freedom as two of the primary metaphors Paul will use throughout his letter.
- Slaves** Refers to one who is under the control of another person or thing. It is the term that most naturally stands in contrast to freedom. The law enslaved. Sin enslaved. People are enslaved by their desires. People are enslaved by the power associated with the elements and ideas of the created world. Life in the present evil age is characterized by slavery, and it is God's will to set us free.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Spirit Often referred to as the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is in nature God, part of the Trinity. The Spirit is God's presence among believers and works powerfully in the lives of believers. It is the Spirit that brings about our adoption into the family of God and produces in us the fruit of love. The Spirit was received by hearing faith (not by following the law), and is the mark of all true believers. Once the "true" family of God was marked by circumcision, but in this new age, those who belong to the family of God are marked by the Spirit.

Walk The way one lives his or her life; that is, how one behaves or orients one's life.

Works of the law In Galatians, works of the law most certainly refers to one keeping the OT law given to Moses—the Mosaic Law. Some limit the meaning to refer only to those parts of the law that led to the exclusion of other people or reinforced Jewish distinctiveness—like food laws, festivals and circumcision. Others broaden the meaning of this phrase to refer to anything someone might do to earn right standing before God.

KEY WORDS

DEFINITIONS

Will of God Refers to God's pleasure (that which pleases God, or what God desires) or his plan (as in an expression of what God wants to happen). In Galatians the will of God is seen in terms of God's desire to set all people free from the powers of the evil age through the sending of (1) his Son as an enduring sacrifice and (2) His Spirit as His enduring presence. Paul sees the story of the OT and the NT relating to one another as part of God's plan in both continuity and discontinuity—the will of God has not changed, but the coming of Christ changes how the world will relate to God and God to the world, for example: (1) It has always been God's will for justification to come about through faith; now, that pathway is offered to all people. (2) It has always been God's will for the justified to live lives of love in community; now, that community will include all people of faith and be empowered by His Spirit.

Zealous To be zealous might mean to be a member of a particular Jewish sect, the Zealots. The Zealots sought to set Israel free from Roman occupation through the use of military force. The deliverance God promises is not the same kind of deliverance the Zealots sought. Zealous could also have referred to an unrelenting passion to maintain a distinctive Jewish identity. As the Pagan-Roman world pressed in on the Jewish culture, it was increasingly important to guard against assimilation. As Paul will argue, those who are zealous for the elements of the evil age are not leading people in the right direction.

