

A watercolor-style background featuring a silhouette of a person with their arms raised in a gesture of praise or freedom. The colors are warm, including shades of red, orange, and pink, with some darker spots and splatters. The overall mood is one of joy and liberation.

GALATIANS

FREED

FOR A PURPOSE

FREED FOR A PURPOSE

8 Studies in Galatians

Spring 2015



St. Faith's

ANGLICAN CHURCH NARRABEEN

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1. Introduction

Passion and Purpose

The first thing you notice when you read through this short letter, is that it is written with great passion and feeling. Paul, the great apostle, is very concerned about his friends in Galatia. He writes:

Ch 1:6 "I am astonished.....

Ch 3:1 "Oh foolish Galatians.....

Ch 4:12 "I plead with you, brothers.....

Clearly, for Paul at least, something important is at stake. Something that, - if ignored – will have terrible consequences in the lives of his friends. But what error, what practical harm, is before these people?

At first reading, the issue at stake seems to have little to do with us. Paul is warning his friends not to accept the teaching of a particular group who have come to them, teaching them that they need to be circumcised. (See Ch2:3, 2:12) Paul says that this is a serious error, to the point that if they allow themselves to be circumcised, they will not be saved, and Christ can be of no use to them. (Ch5:2) So upset is Paul with these "false teachers" that he tells the Galatians he hopes they (the "agitators") go the whole way with circumcision on themselves (5:12)

But why such passion? What is Paul's purpose in writing? And does all this matter to us today? After all, we do not have people urging us in this area. Well, Paul's purpose is, in the end, that his friends do not lose their salvation. With this, Paul knows that because some have accepted this teaching, great division and conflict has arisen between the Christians in Galatia. (See, e.g. Ch 5:15). More, the result is that the Lord Jesus is being dishonoured, because of the work of these "agitators".

The centre of the practical problem, is that the Galatian Christians are losing the freedom that is theirs, as Christians. As we begin reading this letter, it is worth pondering whether we have a sense of this freedom as a result of knowing Christ.

My conviction is that there are great threats to our freedom, to our freedom to love, today. While not from the teaching about circumcision, other similar errors are around us.

Our challenge as we read this letter will be to so clearly understand how the gospel of God is meant to work in us, that we are alert to teaching that enslaves us. Alert to teaching that robs the gospel of its power. Only then, can we be freed to love, in response to the great generosity of God to us, in Christ. So that with Paul, we can say:

"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

May God enable us, as we consider this letter, to be able to say this, for ourselves.

Kerry Nagel

September 2015

Study 1

“Is Rescue Required” Galatians 1:1-10

1. Getting Started

- (a) How do non-Christian people respond when they see conflicts over religious beliefs? Why? Discuss
- (b) How do you feel when this happens? How do you respond? Discuss

2. Turning to the Bible

- (a) Read Galatians 1:1-10. First, what things does the author, Paul, emphasize about himself in this introduction? (v1, 10)
- (b) In summary, what is the problem amongst the Christians in Galatia?(v6-9)
- (c) In verses 3 to 5, Paul speaks about what he believes God has done. How does he describe the wider world, of his time in Verse 4? Why, do you think?

(d) What has God done, to “rescue” people? (v4)

(e) From verses 7 to 9, why is Paul writing so urgently”?

(f) What does he wish for anyone who “perverts ”or confuses God’s message? (v8-9)

(g) Why, do you think, he feels this way?

3. Getting Personal

(a) Do you think our culture in Sydney deserves the description – “this present evil age”?
Why or Why not?

(b) What has struck you personally, from these verses? Discuss.

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.

Study 2

“Grave Responsibility” (Galatians 1:11 to 2:10)

1. Getting Started

(a) Have you ever been given responsibility for a task, by others?

(b) If so, why did they give you the job they did? Discuss

(c) How did you feel?

2. Turning to the Bible

(a) Read Galatians 1:11 to 2:10. What responsibility does Paul believe he has been given? (see especially 2:7-10)

(b) What does Paul emphasize about how he was given this “job” by God? Discuss (See 1:11-17, 1:18-23, 3:6)

(c) Why do you think Paul emphasizes all this? (2:1-5) Discuss

(d) What did Paul feel was at risk, for his friends? (2:4)

3. Getting Personal

(a) God called Paul, so we could know God's message about Jesus. How do you feel about Paul's efforts for us?

(b) What responses might we make to God's generosity?

(c) How can we "preserve" the message ourselves? (2:5)

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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Study 3

“Did Christ Die in Vain”

Galatians 2:11-21

1. Getting Started

(a) Have you ever, had a friend suddenly decide not to ‘associate’ with you? Not return your phone calls etc? If so, how did that make you feel? Discuss.

(b) Have you ever had people “shun” you, reject you, over your beliefs? How did you respond? Why?

2. Turning to the Bible

(a) Read Galatians 2:11-14. What actions does Peter take? (v12)

(b) Who else joins him in this? (v13)

(c) Why does Paul feel Peter has taken these actions? (v11-12)

(d) What does Paul charge Peter with? (v14)

(e) Why do you think Paul feels so strongly about this? Discuss

(f) Read Galatians 2v15-21. From Verse 21, what did Peter's actions teach (wrongly) was the way to righteousness of life? (see also v14, v15-16)

(g) What does Paul say is God's way to righteousness? (v15-12)

(h) In verse 20, Paul shares his own "philosophy for living". What drives Paul to live as he does?

3. Getting Personal

(a) What things should we, as Christians, not "break fellowship" over? Why?

(b) What is God's way of growing you in Godliness? Discuss

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.

Study 4

“It Works!”

Galatians 3:1-14

1. Getting Started

(a) What are your secrets to cooking a great steak? Why?

(b) Would you change your method just because someone told you to?

2. Turning to the Bible

(a) Read Galatians 3:1-5. From verse 1, what does Paul say about the behaviour of the Galatian Christians?

(b) What “change in method” have they made? Why, do you think? (v2-3)

(c) What “method” should they have stuck to?

(d) Why should they have known better? (v3-5)

(e) Read Galatians 3:6-14. From verses 6 to 9, what “blessing” was promised through Abraham?

(f) From verses 10 to 13, what did Jesus’ death achieve for us?

(g) From Verse 14, what is the practical benefit of this, for all christians?
(See also chapter 5:22-26)

3. Getting Personal

(a) This passage speaks of people being “children of Abraham”. (e.g. v6-9). Would you include yourself in this group? Why, or why not?

(b) What results does receiving God’s promised blessing lead to, in your life? Why Discuss.

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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Study 5

“The Promise Fulfilled”

Galatians 3:15-4:11

1. Getting Started

This is a fairly long section. In your group, take time to read a paragraph each. As you do so, note down:

(a) Any things that strike you as interesting e.g. images you like.

(b) Any things that puzzle you.

Discuss briefly the above.

2. Looking at the message

Look through the paragraphs again, and try to summarize what is better about being “in Christ”, compared to being “under the Law” (with its religious practices).

Verses	Life “Under Law”	Life “In Christ”

3. Getting Personal

(a) One of the things the Old Testament story show us is that the Law had failed to enable God's people to live his way (3:21). What has changed, according to Paul, for christians? (see e.g. 3:6-7) Discuss

(b) How does this "new element" affect you personally, at a practical level? Discuss

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.

Study 6

“The Purpose of Freedom”

Galatians 4:12 - 5:12

1. Getting Started

(a) Write your own definition of freedom, and share in the group.

(b) What, do you feel, robs you of true freedom, if anything? Discuss

2. Turning to the Bible

(a) In Galatians 4:12-31, Paul uses an Old Testament parallel to show that christians are free, while those under the Old Testament law are not.

Read Galatians 5:1-12. From Galatians 5:1-2, what do christians have, that the Galatians are in the process of losing?

(b) What “action” are the Galatian christians being urged to take, and why (v2:12)

(c) What value does Paul give to this action, or “mark”? (v6)

(d) How strongly does Paul feel about this, and why? (v12)

(e) From verses 5 and 6, what does faith in Christ lead to, (that the law does not produce)? Discuss

3. Getting Personal

(a) 'Freedom' in this chapter, has a purpose. Why, do you think, God has set us free, from sin and the law, in Christ? (see again verse 5,6, then verse 13)

(b) What practical result is this freedom having in your life? Discuss.

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.
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Study 7

“What died?” Galatians 5:13-26

1. Getting Started

We use the phrase “under the influence” in various ways. What sort of ‘influences’ control people you know, and in what ways? Discuss

2. Turning to the Bible

(a) Read Galatians 5:13-26. The passage contrasts two ways of using freedom (5:13). What are they?

(b) To compare life under these two “influences”, complete the following table:

	Flesh/Sinful Nature	Spirit
Who is influenced		
What actions follow this influence (Summarize)	(e.g. v15:19-21)	(e.g. v22,23)
What is the end result	(eg v15,21)	

(c) Given the results above, what does Paul urge the Galatian Christians to work at? (v 25-26)

3. Getting Personal

(a) What is necessary, before a person can “keep in step with the Spirit”? Why?

(b) How can we do this together? Discuss

(c) To what extent (if at all) has your sinful nature died? (v24). Discuss

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.

Study 8

“A Burden Shared”

Galatians 6:1-18

1. Getting Started

We all have responsibilities. Which people do you feel most responsible for? In what ways? Discuss

2. Turning to the Bible

(a) Read Galatians 6:1-10. From verses 1 to 5, how are we to respond when a christian friend is “caught in sin”?

(b) What two things must fellow christians be careful of? (v1, then v4-5)

(c) Why do you think, Paul emphasizes these dangers?

(d) From verse 6, what are all christians to share, and with whom?

(e) Practically, what does Verse 6 mean for us?

(f) From verses 6 to 10, what two alternatives does Paul put forward? (Summarising the Letter) What is the result of each?

(g) Who are Christians particularly to feel responsible for? (v10)

(h) Read Galatians 6:11-18. What does Paul emphasize, as he closes this letter? Why, do you think?

3. Getting Personal

(a) What responsibility, if any, has God laid on your heart, from this study?

(b) What one key encouragement have you received, from studying this letter?
Discuss

Prayer Points

Group member	Praying for...
	1. 2. 3.
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	1. 2. 3.

Appendix 1

Background to the Letter

1. Approach

The studies in this booklet are written from my understanding of the Letter, which is different to that of other commentators and scholars at points. Of course, the studies themselves leave the reader to decide what he or she thinks God is saying, in this part of His Word. Yet, a certain 'slant' will be apparent. In the following outline of the background to the letter, I will explain my thinking in this regard. Many people more learned than I have written commentaries on this letter, and please do consult, (such as by Leon Morris and F.F Bruce, to mention two I have consulted) I simply outline the following for consideration as well.

2. The Opponents – who were they, and what did they teach?

There is a general consensus that the false teachers who have come to Galatia are Jewish Christians (at least, they see themselves as christians). And they are urging the Gentile, uncircumcised christians in Galatia that they need to be circumcised. It is worth pondering two questions. First, why are they teaching this? What personal motives might they have? Second, what reasons are they giving, to the Gentile Christians, for being circumcised?

Let's see what we can find out, first about the motives of the false teachers Paul charges them with two motives in Chapter 6v12 and v13. Firstly, from verse 12, they themselves want to avoid persecution for "the cross of Christ". It seems that the Jewish Christians were under pressure – I assume in Jerusalem especially – to be seen to uphold the basic customs and beliefs of Jewish Society. If they were known to invite people – Gentiles – to join the predominantly Jewish Christian communities of the time, without insisting on circumcision, this may well be seen as tantamount to "treason". Betrayal of Jewish society. We need to remember that circumcision, and keeping the law in general, were the basis of Jewish culture. A culture already under threat through Roman occupation, rule, in Judea. Now if Jewish Christians did insist on Gentiles being circumcised, the whole Christian community could be seen as almost a "branch" of Judaism. But, to accept Gentiles into fellowship without circumcision? That would enrage other Jews. We have Paul's previous persecution of christians as an example of the result. So, first reason, to avoid persecution.

Secondly, from Chapter 6:13, it seems that to report that they had made some “proselytes to Judaism” brought credit before other Jews for these false teachers. Personal ‘glory’ seems to be the other motive Paul charges them with.

3. Their argument for circumcision

But what reasons then did they give Gentiles, for being circumcised? This question strikes to the heart of the letter, and Paul’s theology. There has been much debate about this amongst scholars over the centuries. This is not the place to outline all the views. The prevailing view amongst protestant scholars is that the “circumcision group” were saying that a person was not “justified” unless they are circumcised. ‘Justified’ means to be declared not guilty, and so, to be acceptable before God, and acceptable amongst God’s people. And Paul does keep raising this issue, (e.g. 2:15-16) when debating why they should not be circumcised. But it seems to me that what the opponents are teaching has more to do with what a righteous life looks like, for a christian, not so much “how you become one”. They are teaching that “in Christ”, a holy life involves the keeping of the law, shown by circumcision, food, laws and special feasts etc. i.e. the public trappings of Judaism.

4. Connections to modern debates

Typically, “keeping the law” is equated today with seeking to earn favour with God, through moral effort. “Works” are likened to earning merit with God by “keeping the 10 commandments” etc. In other words, the idea of being justified by being “good enough”. This is clearly not possible, but I doubt it is why Paul raises the issue of Justification.

I think he raises Justification because he, Paul, believes that only the person who is justified in Christ, is set free by God to live a “justified” i.e. righteous life. And I think the false teachers emphasised religious observance, over true godliness of life. So, they ended up saying that if you were circumcised, and followed the Jewish religious calendar (see Ch 4:8-11) then God would be satisfied. Satisfied, even if there was a bit of immorality, hatred etc in your life. That is why Paul has to re-affirm, in Ch 6:7ff, that God will NOT excuse a life lived for the flesh.

So, each of the above elements of the teaching of the “false teachers” in Galatia needs to be kept in mind, as we read the letter.

Kerry Nagel

Appendix 2

A note on Justification in Galatians

1. Meaning

To be justified means to be declared by God, to be righteous. In Galatians Chapter 3:6, Paul uses Abraham as his key example of someone who was “credited” or “reckoned as if he were” righteous, even though he did not deserve that verdict. His life and actions were not consistently righteous or godly. Yet, God overlook his behaviour, and gave him the “standing” of being righteous.

2. Significance for Paul

Now, this is significant for Paul, when he announces that Christians, people who put faith in Jesus, are also justified. For Paul, this is not just a declaration that their standing before God has changed. (Galatians 3:8)

For Paul, God is the one who has declared that all human beings will be sinners, and so, guilty and condemned. (Galatians 3:22). While still responsible for sin, we human beings have been handed over to its rule, by the Word of the Sovereign God. (See Romans Ch1:18-32 e.g.).

So when God speaks a new sovereign Word to any person “You are declared righteous” - at this point the rule of sin is broken.

So then, God will give to this person, the gift of his Spirit, (Ch4:6 etc). The Spirit is the one who then produces righteousness of life, in the believer.

For Paul, to return, then, to the law as the means to righteousness, is to deny the cross, to deny the gospel; because it is to think that the law can achieve righteousness in my life. (See Ch 3:21).

Paul is convinced, due to his own experience in part, that this is not God’s way. Because it is not how God justifies.

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