



# GRACE WORKS

a teaching series on Galatians

## Summary of Galatians

In our overview of the letter at the start of September, we saw that Paul is addressing two very specific situations in Galatians. The first is table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles at Antioch (2:11-14), and the second is the circumcision of Gentiles in Galatia (5:1-15). Even more briefly, we could summarise it as simply “food and foreskins”! Both indicate divisions in the people of God on the basis of ethnicity, in this case between Jew and Gentile, and reflect a fundamental distortion of the gospel.

His response operates at three levels.

*Individually*, God rescues people on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, and not on the basis of any human standard, merit, activity or criterion of value (2:15-21). *Corporately*, this means that there is no division in the people of God, such that one group has to become like another

group in order to be accepted: if you trust in Jesus and have put on Jesus in baptism, then you are all one, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free (3:25-29). *Globally*, this forms part of an even bigger story in which God, in Christ, has rescued us from the present evil age, and started a new creation (1:4; 6:15).

All three levels are closely connected to each other. For Paul, the fact that the Galatians are urging Gentiles to be circumcised (corporately) indicates that they haven’t grasped the radical nature of God’s grace (individually), or the death of the old world in Christ and the birth of the new one (globally). The death and resurrection of Jesus mean that the Christian life is not defined by food, or foreskins, or the flesh—but by faith, forgiveness, freedom, Fatherhood, fellowship, family, favour and fruit.

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** Why do you think Paul introduces himself by saying “not through men or from man, but through Jesus” (1:1)? How does this relate to his concern about another gospel (1:6-7) and the approval of man (1:10)?

**b.** Ancient letters always start with greetings (1:1-5), but after that, compare what Paul says here (1:6-) with what he says in Romans (1:8-), 1 Corinthians (1:4-), Philippians (1:3-) or 1 Thessalonians (1:2-). What is the difference? What does that tell us?

**c.** The distortion of the gospel is so serious that Paul uses the word “anathema” (accursed) twice (1:8-9). What is it about the Galatian situation that makes him say this?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** The vast majority of the time, disagreements between those who say we follow Jesus do not need people to speak this strongly to one another (see e.g. Romans 14). But sometimes, this kind of robust clarity is needed. How do we tell the difference? (Try to avoid specific naming and shaming here!)

**b.** Confrontation can be awkward, especially for British people! How can we do it lovingly, courageously and yet gently? (Broaden out to confrontation in the home and the workplace, not just Christian doctrine).

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** Paul clarifies that his gospel is not “man’s gospel” (1:11). What do you think he means by “man’s gospel,” in the context of this letter?

**b.** The way Paul received the gospel was, he explains, “through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12). What did he suddenly have revealed to him about Jesus (Acts 9)? What difference did it make? How does it explain the dramatic turnaround he describes (1:13-15)?

**c.** Why do you think Paul’s focus is not so much on the nature of his conversion (which is the bit we find interesting), but on the fact that he didn’t consult with anyone after it? What point do you think he is trying to make here? How does it connect to the gospel of man / gospel of God point he keeps making? How does it connect to his purpose in the letter as a whole?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** How does Paul’s extraordinary U-turn (1:23) encourage us to pray for those who do not know Jesus? Who are the equivalents of Saul of Tarsus today? What did God do to Saul/Paul? How, in that light, can we pray for others? (It would be good to actually pray into this, here.)

**b.** What modern equivalents of “man’s gospel” might we be tempted to pursue?

# Week Three

Galatians 2:1-14

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** We cannot be sure, but when Paul says he went to Jerusalem “because of a revelation” (2:2), he may be talking about Acts 11:27-30. If so, how would this shape our understanding of his visit? How would it relate to his comment in 2:10 about remembering the poor?

**b.** Why is Titus relevant to Paul’s story in 2:1-10?

**c.** Paul introduces the freedom/slavery contrast in 2:4. What is it specifically about in this case? How does that link up with what it means in 5:1?

**d.** Count the number of times Paul uses the word “seemed” in 2:1-10 (in the ESV, at least). What do you think he is up to here?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** What does the public confrontation between Paul and Peter (2:11-14) teach us about how to engage in discussion with other Christians today?

**b.** In what ways can majority cultures (in our case, white British) impose our own cultural values and expectations on other groups when they become part of the church? Try and distinguish biblical expectations (repenting of sin, being baptised, etc) from cultural ones.

**c.** What would Paul say or do about that? What could we?

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** What does it mean to be “justified” (2:16)? What kind of theological picture is involved? How does it happen? How does it *not* happen?

**b.** “If we too were found to be sinners” (2:17) probably refers to what happens when Jewish Christians eat with Gentile Christians, and so appear to be “sinners” in the eyes of other Jews. What aspects of genuine Christianity look unpleasant or ridiculous to people today (especially those we want to think highly of us)? What temptations might this present?

**c.** What do you think Paul means when he talks about not wanting to “rebuild what I tore down”? Assuming he is talking about the Jewish Law—which he elsewhere upholds (Romans 3:31) and describes as “holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12)—he cannot mean that he is destroying the law itself. What is it that the law *does*, torn down in Christ, which Paul does not want to rebuild?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** 2:20 is one of the most beautiful and extraordinary statements in Scripture. What does it look like to have been “crucified with Christ,” and have Christ living in us? What examples are there in your Christian life—putting to death your old life, finding new desires, thoughts and habits springing up as a result of the life of Jesus in us—of this happening? How can this give us confidence for the future?

**b.** In several places, Paul talks as if both he and Jesus are involved in making everyday decisions in his life (2:20; Philippians 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10). How on earth does this work? (Try and talk about how it works practically, in daily life, rather than trying to solve the mystery theologically!)

# Week Five

Galatians 3:1-14

1st October 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation.

Watch and discuss either:

*Luther (2003)* — DVD available on Amazon

*Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer (2017)* — available to rent on iTunes, Amazon Prime & Vimeo

---

# Week Six

Galatians 3:15-29

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** A lot of Paul's argument in this tricky section of the letter revolves around who Abraham's "seed" is (3:15-18). If God's promise of blessing and covenant was only made to the Jewish people, who were circumcised, then the Galatians are right: Gentiles must be circumcised to become part of God's people. But if the "seed" or "offspring" includes people who are not Jewish, then circumcision cannot be required. So: how does he make his case? Who does he say the seed is, based on the original promise? Why does he say that?

---

**b.** How does he argue from this that the Gentiles are included in Abraham's seed [3:27-29]?

**c.** What two criteria does Paul give for those who "put on Christ" and become "sons and daughters of God" [3:26-27]?

**d.** Other than Jewish people, what other group of people are included in baptism that would not have been included in circumcision? What significance does this have for our understanding of 3:28?

**e.** When Paul says "there is no Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free ...", he clearly doesn't mean that Jews and Gentiles no longer exist, or are no longer distinct. What *does* he mean?

#### **4. How we apply it**

**a.** What implications does this section have for divisions in the Church today (not just the local church, but the worldwide Church)?

**b.** What are we called to do about them: in our own lives, in our families, and at Kings?

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** In the ancient world, sons might have no more rights than slaves/servants, until they came of age and inherited what was their parents' (4:1-7). How does Paul use this as a metaphor for the history of God's people? Who are the "slaves"? Who are the "sons"?

**b.** Is there any significance in the change from "we" (4:3, 5) to "you" (4:6-8)? Who is "we"? Who is "you"?

**c.** We have talked a lot in this series about "food" and "foreskins", but we could also add "festivals" (4:10). Where do you think the Galatians got this idea from? Does Paul mean that Christians shouldn't celebrate Easter? Why / why not?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** Notice Paul's sense of concern and compassion here, particularly his use of the imagery of a mother in labour (4:19-20). What does this show us about our affection for, and tone towards, people we disagree with? It would be good to pray for some of them at this point.

**b.** How can we square it with the fiery comments Paul makes in 5:1-12?

**c.** What implications does 5:13 have (if any) for the way we think about suffering and the purposes of God?



## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** Paul's use of the word "law" can often be confusing. What do we generally assume it means? What does it clearly mean when Paul quotes from it here [4:21]? How does that help?

**b.** The contrast between slavery and freedom will be hugely important in chapter 5. How does Paul see it reflected in two women, two sons, two mountains, two covenants and two peoples?

**c.** When Paul reminds the Galatians that Scripture talks about "casting out the slave woman", he is obviously not telling Gentiles to cast out Jews, or anything like that (compare Romans 9:1-5!) But what is he wanting them to do [5:1-7]?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** The new birth is a miracle, like the birth of Isaac, the son of promise. There are things we can do to see people become born again—as Abraham and Sarah presumably did something to conceive Isaac!—but ultimately it is a gift of God that comes miraculously. What does this mean for our understanding of our own salvation?

**b.** What does it mean for the way we pray for, and act for, the salvation of others? It would be good to spend some time in prayer for people to be "born into freedom" here.

# Week Nine

Galatians 5:1-15

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

- a. Why does Paul speak so strongly about the damage done by Gentiles getting circumcised (5:2, 4, 12)?
- b. What does he mean by “falling away from grace” (5:4)?
- c. If the whole law is summed up as “love your neighbor as yourself” (5:14), what does that look like, in the context of chapter 5?
- d. Given the two main problems Paul is addressing in the letter (see the summary), why do you think he chose to say “if you bite and devour one another” (5:15)? What does this strong (and rather unpleasant) image achieve?

## 4. How we apply it

- a. What equivalents are there in the modern world of “falling again under a yoke of slavery” (5:1)? Where does the temptation to do that come from? What can we do about it, on a daily basis?
- b. It is clearly possible for false teaching to “hinder [us] from obeying the truth,” which is a big problem. How does false teaching reach people in the church? How can we guard against it?
- c. 5:11 clearly suggests that persecution is a fact of life for those who proclaim the gospel of the cross. What forms does this take in the world today? Pray for those affected by it.

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

**a.** Some people get nervous that if you talk too much about grace, and emphasise that people are not justified by works of the law, you will end up with people who have no concept of righteousness or spirituality, no fear of God, and no idea how to live. How does Paul's teaching here (5:16-18) avoid that problem?

**b.** Paul lists fifteen "works of the flesh" in 5:19-21. The first five and the last two are fairly standard examples of things that fleshly people do in the Bible, but the middle eight (enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy) are basically lots of ways of saying the same thing. Why do you think Paul is doing this, in the context of the letter as a whole?

**c.** What happens to people who live like this (5:21)?

**d.** Do you think there is any significance in the contrast between "works" of flesh and "fruit" of the Spirit? How would you explain it?

## 4. How we apply it

**a.** If people who do things like this do not inherit the kingdom (5:21), what does that mean for the way we challenge, encourage and disciple one another? What does that look like, without sinking into judgmentalism?

**b.** The fruit of the Spirit is a glorious gift of God, which he works in us. What, if anything, are we responsible for doing? Can older believers in the group give practical examples of ways in which we can receive this fruit, and "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25)?

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what Paul means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we interpret it

- a. Does it make sense for Paul to tell us to carry one another's burdens (6:2), and yet to carry our own load (6:5)? How?
- b. What do you think "sowing to the Spirit" is (6:8)? How does it relate to "keeping in step with the Spirit" (5:25)?
- c. Who is "the Israel of God", in the context of Galatians (6:16)? Why does this matter?

## 4. How we apply it

- a. What is "boasting", for Paul? How, when and in whom should we "boast"?
- b. Paul gives several practical instructions here, which will help us see the transforming power of grace increase in our lives. There are two in 6:1, one in 6:2, one in 6:4, one in 6:6, one in 6:9, and one in 6:10. What are they all? What do they look like in practice?
- c. What does it look like to "do good to everyone, especially the household of faith" (time? money? abilities? resources? homes? other?)