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*Galatians: Freedom in Christ*

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What’s in Your Teaching Guide

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:
➤ to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
➤ to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
➤ to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

Teacher Helps

Bible Background
The Study Guide is your main source of Bible study material. This section helps you more fully understand and interpret the Scripture text.

Teaching Outline
provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

Teacher Options

The next three sections provide a beginning, middle, and end for the session, with focus paragraphs in between.

Focus Paragraphs
are printed in italics at the top of the page because they are the most important part of the Teaching Guide. These paragraphs will help you move your class from “what the text meant” to “what the text means.”

You Can Choose!
There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.
Bible Background

Acts 13:1–14:26 chronicles the story of Paul’s first missionary journey. The church at Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel to predominantly Gentile lands in Asia Minor. Paul and Barnabas traveled to the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, all within the Roman province of Galatia. They preached first in Jewish synagogues, and a great number of Jews and Gentiles came to faith in Christ at Iconium (Acts 14:1). Unfortunately, “the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers” (14:2), so Paul and Barnabas moved on to Lystra where Paul healed a man who had been crippled since birth. The people were amazed and immediately wanted to proclaim Paul and Barnabas as gods and offer sacrifices to them. However, the positive welcome did not last. non-Christian Jews arrived and incited the crowds to turn against the apostles, stoning Paul and dragging him out of the city. Paul survived and continued to preach in the other Galatian cities. Before leaving the province, he and Barnabas appointed elders to lead each of the churches they had planted (Acts 14:23).

This background information gives us a better understanding of Galatians. We see that the churches were formed in an atmosphere of conflict and that Paul faced severe opposition from the beginning of his church-planting efforts. Note also that some of the Galatians witnessed Paul perform a great miracle, and most others heard about it. Finally, remember that persecutors stoned Paul and left him for dead outside Lystra. Surely, that attack left scars on his body, scars that Paul would later refer to as “the marks of Jesus branded on my body” (Gal 6:17).

Many scholars believe that Paul wrote Galatians within a few months of his first visit to the province. If so, then he wrote the letter around AD 49, and it may well have been the first-written of all his letters later included in the New Testament.

Other scholars note that Paul also visited the province of Galatia on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16:6; 18:23). We have no details of these visits, but it is possible that it was after these visits (possibly to sections of the province farther north than he visited earlier) that he wrote his letter to the Galatians. In this case, he wrote around AD 54. Unfortunately, we have no idea where Paul was when he wrote Galatians. All we can say is that he was on one of his missionary journeys and apparently not in jail. The good news is that our uncertainty does not interfere with a clear interpretation of the letter.

Who were the opponents that Paul attacked so severely in Galatians? Some scholars think they were Gnostics, early
Christian heretics who emphasized special knowledge (Greek, *gnosis*) and the evil nature of all things physical. Other scholars find no evidence of Gnosticism in Galatia. Instead, the evidence of the letter strongly suggests that Paul’s opponents were Jewish-Christian missionaries. Like Paul, they affirmed faith in Jesus as the true Messiah. However, they believed that all Christians, including Gentile Christians, needed to obey the most important Old Testament laws, especially circumcision and food regulations. They attacked Paul personally, challenged his honesty, and insisted that the new believers in Galatia begin observing these important Jewish traditions. Paul reacted volcanically, defending his own integrity and calling down curses on these opponents and anyone else who would warp the basic gospel message. Their attacks led him to write his most concise, focused explanation of the Christian faith—Galatians.

Outline

**Introduction:** Our first session includes all of Galatians 1 and emphasizes two passages.

I. Greeting and Attack (1:1-8)
   A. Paul’s calling to be an apostle—from God
   B. Greetings to the churches of Galatia
   C. Amazement that Galatians are deserting the true gospel
   D. Paul’s attack on the opponents who are perverting the gospel

II. Paul’s Five-Minute Autobiography (1:11-24)
   A. Paul’s pre-conversion life as a persecutor of the church
   B. God’s revelation of Jesus Christ to Paul
   C. Paul’s commissioning to preach to the Gentiles
   D. Paul’s independence from the Jerusalem apostles
Defining the Term “Apostle”

Begin this learning option by asking the class how many “apostles” there were in the early church and what their names were. While most class members will not remember all the names, they will probably name most of the following group: Simon Peter, Andrew, James son of Zebedee, John son of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus (or Judas son of James), Simon the Zealot, Judas Iscariot. Several class members may say that there were only twelve apostles. Ask the class members why the following five people could also be referred to as apostles: James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19), Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7), Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14:14).

Clearly, Scripture refers to several people other than the Twelve as apostles. Ask the class what qualifications were necessary for apostleship. Some scholars believe that anyone who saw the resurrected Christ and received a specific calling could be considered an apostle.

Questions

➤ Why did Paul feel he had to defend his status as an “apostle”?
➤ What argument might some people have made to deny that Paul was a “real” apostle?
➤ Was it wrong for Paul to insist that he was an apostle?

Tracing Paul’s History on a Map

Secure a large map of Paul’s missionary journeys. If you cannot find a printed map, use the one provided in your Resource Kit. Ask class members to help you highlight the important cities and provinces in Paul’s life. Include his birth in Tarsus (in Cilicia) his student days with Gamaliel in Jerusalem, and his conversion near Damascus (in Syria). Point out his trip to Arabia, his return to Damascus, and his eventual return to Jerusalem three years after his conversion.

Questions

➤ What effects do you think being raised a devout Jew in a Gentile city like Tarsus might have had on Paul?
➤ When Paul returned to Jerusalem, what were the biggest differences his old acquaintances would have noticed about him?

Now trace Paul’s three missionary journeys on the map, beginning and ending in Antioch in Syria (don’t confuse this important city with the small town of Pisidian Antioch). Call special attention to the three times he traveled through the province of Galatia, in central Asia Minor.

Question

➤ Had you spent years planting new churches, how might you have reacted if you heard that new missionaries were visiting some of these congregations and altering the basic Christian message you had given them as their spiritual foundation?
A Way to Explore Scripture

Very few autobiographical sections, like Galatians 1:11–2:14, exist in the Bible. This section helps organize the chronology of Paul’s life. However, the Galatians were certainly not clamoring for help in remembering the important dates in Paul’s spiritual pilgrimage! Paul authored this autobiographical section to prove a key point in his defense against the attacks the Jewish-Christian missionaries were making against him. They challenged his status as a “real” apostle, questioned his honesty, and belittled him as one whose message and understanding was totally dependent upon the “real” apostles in Jerusalem. These Judaizers offered to correct the deficiencies in the message that Paul had delivered to the Galatians. For all these reasons, Paul outlined his own personal history to demonstrate that his conversion and calling to preach the gospel were dependent upon Christ alone.

My Personal Spiritual History
Ask class members to imagine that someone is attacking their Christian witness because of past behavior. Give everyone a piece of paper and a pencil. Ask them to list some parts of their history that might be used against their current Christian witness. Ask if there is an interpretation of their autobiography that might help answer these attacks or reduce their effectiveness. Would the effects of your conversion to Christ be an important part of your autobiography; if so, how would that help you answer your critics? Now focus on the events of Paul’s life. List the key events to which he refers in Galatians 1:11-24.

Questions
➤ Is Paul bragging in 1:14 when he claims that he was spiritually advanced? Why or why not?
➤ Where can we find more details of the way God revealed his Son to Paul? (Acts 9)
➤ What commission did God give Paul at his conversion (1:16)?
➤ How many years did Paul proclaim the gospel before he met Cephas (Peter) or any of the other apostles (1:16-18)?
➤ Why would Paul feel it necessary to tell the Galatians that he was not lying (1:20)?

Paul as a Pharisee
Ask the class to pool their knowledge about Pharisees. List all the characteristics they can recall on the board. Explain that Pharisees were only one of several Jewish religious groups in the first century AD. Offer this outline as you study:
• Sadducees: This group lived mostly in Jerusalem and exercised much power at the temple. They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as Scripture.
• Zealots: They believed that political and military independence from Rome was of paramount importance to Judaism. Eventually the Zealots launched a war of independence against Rome in AD 66, which led to the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70.
• Essenes: They believed that Greco-Roman culture had hopelessly corrupted all other Jews, so they withdrew from society and lived in isolated colonies.
• Pharisees: These were Jewish laymen, not priests, who strove to apply the scriptural laws to daily living. They tried to live holy lives by honoring God in religious ritual and ethical living. Despite their conflicts with Jesus, they shared more in common with him than the other three major groups. Paul was one of the strictest members of this group (Phil 3:5)

Questions
➤ How did Paul’s background affect his early opposition to the Christian message?
➤ How did his Pharisaic background prepare him to debate the Jewish-Christian missionaries in Galatia?
Writing Your Personal Testimony

To conclude this session, ask class members to write an outline of their personal testimonies. Offer Paul’s testimony as a reference. Ask what important facts Paul included in his personal testimony. Refer to the session text for responses. Note that many personal testimonies feature the following elements:

• A brief characterization of my life before Christ
• A description of how God reached me or what led up to my acceptance of Christ as my personal savior
• A description of the changes God has brought since my conversion and/or what new purpose God has given me because of new life in Christ

Encourage your group members to include as many of these three elements as possible in their testimony outlines. If time remains, ask volunteers to share verbally their testimony with the class.

Personal Testimonies in Church—Positives and Negatives

There is a danger in using personal testimonies in church. People who share a particularly effective testimony may be tempted toward spiritual pride because of the praise of others. Conversely, Christians who do not have a dramatic story may feel discouraged. As a teenager, my pastor asked my friend Luis Govantes and I to give our personal testimonies in worship. Luis had a dramatic testimony about his escape from Cuba, including a harrowing brush with soldiers hunting for his family. I was afraid that my testimony seemed rather mundane by comparison. Fortunately, my pastor explained to me that God values every person’s salvation.

Questions

➤ What testimony have you heard that was particularly effective?
➤ When have you ever heard a testimony that seemed inappropriate in church?
➤ What is the most appropriate venue to share testimonies in your congregation? Worship? Private conversation among friends? Special services? Sunday school?
➤ How effective do you think Paul’s testimony was when the Galatians read it?

C

A Way to End

After his conversion, Paul could have lived the rest of his life ashamed of his persecution of the early church and his role in Stephen’s murder. Instead, he admitted his sinful past and used his testimony to advance the gospel and focus on God’s purpose for his life. While we might be uncomfortable comparing ourselves to Paul, each of us has a personal testimony that God can use to advance the gospel. **Encourage your class members to reflect on God’s purpose for their lives and to write an outline of a personal testimony.**
It is hard for modern Christians to imagine what deep chasms separated Gentiles and observant Jews in the ancient world. It’s no big deal for us to rub shoulders with people of different faiths, but it was for ancient Jews. The story of Simon Peter and the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10 illustrates the difficulties.

Cornelius was a centurion, a non-commissioned officer serving Rome in the Italian regiment stationed in Caesarea. Clearly, he was an uncircumcised Gentile, but he also believed in one God, prayed regularly, and gave generously to the poor. God spoke to him through a vision and told him to send messengers to Joppa to find Simon Peter. As those messengers approached Joppa, God also spoke to Peter through a vision. He showed Peter a large sheet coming down from heaven, filled with animals traditionally considered “unclean” by observant Jews. But God told Peter, “Kill and eat” (v. 13). At first, Peter refused to eat, but God insisted: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (v. 15). This statement referred immediately to the non-kosher food but more profoundly to the Gentiles Peter was about to meet. When the messengers found Peter, he invited them to stay with him. Then, traveling to Caesarea, he met Cornelius and other Gentiles, who demonstrated an openness and eagerness to hear the gospel. Peter summarized the basic dilemma and proclaimed his new perspective concerning Gentiles: “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean…. I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (vv. 28, 34-35). God affirmed Peter’s new understanding by sending the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles who heard the message. Peter then baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 45-48).

Notice that criticism came quickly (see 11:3 for the earliest example) and that Jewish Christians reacted differently to this change in their relationships with Gentiles. For centuries, many non-devout Jews had ignored the food laws and associated closely with Gentiles in the Roman Empire. Devout Jews, especially the Pharisees, protested loudly that keeping the food laws and avoiding unnecessary contact with “unclean” Gentiles was essential. Peter and other Jewish Christians were trying to overturn centuries of tradition and ignoring what many considered the clear teaching of Scripture. No wonder the issue became so volatile!

When people who have held strong views on a particular issue are convinced to change their minds, they do not always
find it easy to consistently hold to their new convictions, especially in the face of strident opposition from those with whom they previously agreed. Peter found himself facing just such a dilemma when he was ministering in the late forties of the first century. Paul describes the problem quite explicitly in Galatians 2. Peter, John, and James led the church in Jerusalem and focused on spreading the gospel to Jews. They affirmed Paul and Barnabas’s ministry to the Gentiles and gave them “the right hand of fellowship” (2:9). They accepted the Gentile believer Titus without asking him to follow Jewish law (2:4). Later, however, when Paul and Peter moved on to Antioch, the Jerusalem church had a dramatic argument over Peter’s hypocrisy. A group called the “circumcision faction” surfaced. James, Peter, and even Barnabas wavered from their new convictions and stopped eating with Gentile Christians (2:12-13). Paul saw clearly that the issue was far greater than a question of lunch partners. If Jewish Christians like Peter and Paul told the Gentiles that Christ’s death changed everything, but then acted as if it changed nothing, the Gentiles would stop believing their message. Paul took a stand, insisting that Gentile believers in Christ be treated the same as Jewish believers who had been saved by the death of Christ on the cross. Paul prevented catastrophe. He made it possible for the Christian message to reach Gentiles throughout the world.

Outline

Introduction: This session includes all of Galatians 2, divided into three sections.

I. The Conference in Jerusalem (2:1-10)
   A. Paul’s conversion (or first Jerusalem visit?) took place fourteen years earlier.
   B. Barnabas and Gentile Titus attend.
   C. James, Cephas (Peter), and John accept the Gentile mission.

II. Paul’s Confrontation with Peter in Antioch (2:11-14)
   A. Peter and Barnabas fear the “circumcision faction” from James.
   B. They stop eating with Gentile Christians.
   C. Paul confronts their hypocrisy.

III. Paul’s Theological Lesson (2:15-21)
   A. All people are justified by faith in Christ, not works of the law.
   B. No one can be justified by obeying the Old Testament law.
   C. Acting as if justification comes through the law nullifies Christ’s death.
A Way to Begin

The specific issue that Paul addresses in Galatians, the equal treatment of Gentile Christians and their admission to the church because of their faith in Christ, has ceased to cause controversy. Our churches are full of Gentile Christians! To understand the extreme pressure that led Peter and Barnabas to act hypocritically and deny their new perspective concerning Gentiles, we need to consider an analogous modern-day issue. In some ways, the changes in relationship that have occurred between black and white Americans in the past fifty years offer us a look at similar emotions. Here are two ways to address this issue and to understand how difficult it can be for people to consistently live out the faith they profess.

Guess Who?
In the 1967 movie *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?*, Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn portray wealthy couple, Matt and Christina Drayton, who have raised their daughter to believe in racial equality. However, when their daughter returns from a Hawaiian vacation and introduces them to a black physician who is now her fiancé, they face a real dilemma. Will they act consistently with the values they have taught and face the possibility of social ostracism from their friends, or will they cave into peer pressure and act hypocritically?

You could choose several different clips to introduce the dilemma to your class. One clip shows the Draytons’ daughter introducing her fiancé to her mother: “Mom, this is John.... He thinks you’re going to faint because he is a negro!... I’ve told him ninety-seven times that it wouldn’t make the slightest bit of difference to you or to Dad.” A second clip captures the first discussion between Mr. and Mrs. Drayton. Mr. Drayton asks, “Did it ever occur that this might happen?” Mrs. Drayton replies, “The way she is is just exactly the way we brought her up to be. We answered her questions; she listened to our answers. We told her it was wrong to believe that the white people were essentially superior to the black people.... We did not add, ‘But don’t ever fall in love with a colored man.’ ”

Questions
➤ What kind of negative effects would a couple in your town have faced in 1967 if their daughter married a person of another race? How about in 2005?
➤ Why was it easier for the Draytons to teach their daughter the truth about race than it was for them to consistently follow through with the implications of that teaching?
➤ What does peer pressure have to do with this issue?

Invite a Guest
Invite an older African-American member of your church or a neighboring church to speak to your class. Make sure he or she will feel comfortable sharing personal experiences from difficult times in our country’s past. If you think that this issue will be uncomfortable for some of your members, tell them ahead of time or choose another teaching option. Ask your guest speaker to describe briefly his or her experiences when racial integration first came to the community. Ask specifically how white Christians reacted. Then ask if he or she ever saw white or black believers acting hypocritically—professing one thing but acting as if they did not really believe their own words. Invite class members to discuss the issue with your guest, remembering never to make your guest feel uncomfortable. Finally, ask how this discussion has made it easier for class members to understand the dilemma faced by Peter and Paul and other Jewish Christians regarding the issue of equal treatment for Gentile Christians.
A Way to Explore Scripture

We consider Paul a great theologian. He was also a zealous church planter who thought deeply about the theology of the faith he proclaimed. While in Romans he begins with theology and then draws ethical conclusions, in Galatians he begins with personal memories and then draws out theological implications of the issues raised. For Paul, the issue of full inclusion of the Gentiles was both personal and profoundly theological. The theological conclusion he drew came from a confrontation with Peter and it is one of the most brilliant explanations of salvation in the New Testament. Here are two ways to explore 2:15-21, which is the theological basis of the entire letter.

○ Conclusions about Salvation
Summarize for your group the information in the Bible Background portion of this Teaching Guide. Ask the class to read 2:15-21, and invite them to share their conclusions about salvation based on this text and your comments. Summarize their conclusions on the board. If they are not mentioned, offer the following theological points:
• Nearly two decades after his conversion, Paul still considered himself a Jew (2:15).
• The Greek verb dikaioo, translated “justify,” is a forensic metaphor drawn from a first-century courtroom. The idea is that God, acting as the judge, declares the accused person “justified” or “not guilty” because Christ received the penalty on behalf of the accused.
• In 2:16, the sentence that begins “And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ” can also read, “justified by the faithfulness of Christ.”
• Note the irony of Paul, formerly the strictest of all Pharisees, arguing that no one will be justified by works of the law (2:16).
• In addition to his famous metaphor of salvation by justification through faith, Paul also describes salvation in more mystical terms: “I have been crucified with Christ: and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (2:19-20).

○ Imagine a Scenario
Ask your class members to imagine the following hypothetical scenario, and then discuss that scenario as a group. Peter and Barnabas, fearing the Judaizers, stop meeting with Gentile Christians and Paul does not confront the issue. The influence of Peter and other Jewish Christians is overwhelming, and gradually Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire withdraw from table fellowship with all Gentile Christians. They tell the Gentile Christians, in essence, “You can be saved by faith in Christ, but if you want to be full members of the Christian church, you have to be circumcised, obey all the Old Testament food laws, and keep the Sabbath.” What implications might such a scenario have had on the development of the early Christian church?

Questions
➤ In what ways do we limit the gospel today?
➤ In what ways has the gospel refused to be hindered by human limitations?
A Way to End

We are not surprised that Paul considered the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ non-negotiable for the Christian faith. That is, he absolutely refused to compromise on these key theological beliefs. Does it surprise you that Paul also treated Christian fellowship as a non-negotiable? If the early church was to offer Christ as a savior to all people—devout Jews, immoral Gentiles, drunks, wealthy women, runaway slaves, city officials, and physicians—then the church had to show all these people that they could be accepted on an equal basis. Their sinful behavior would have to change, of course, and especially those who failed to see their own sin would have to change. But Christ died for them all, and they could all be justified on the basis of their faith in Christ.

Check-Up

Most of us agree that people are justified because of their faith in Jesus Christ. There is no different method of salvation for some because of their race, social status, financial gifts to the church, education, beauty, or community influence. However, churches must continually guard against developing cliques or hierarchies within the membership. Consider the following questions for reflection.

Questions

➤ How would you describe the majority of your church congregation?
➤ Does your church welcome visitors with equal enthusiasm, regardless of race or perceived social class?
➤ Are singles in your church offered as many ministry opportunities as are families?
➤ Does your church seek to minister to people very different from the majority of the congregation?

Make an Exchange

If your church is not integrated racially, ask your pastor if your class can help plan a pulpit exchange with a neighboring church whose congregation is predominantly of a different racial group. If this is not practical or is already being done, ask your class members to plan a joint class social with a Bible study class from that same neighboring church. Living out the faith we profess is different from merely professing that faith.
Bible Background

To understand Galatians 3, it helps to remember key Old Testament events involving Abraham and Moses. Genesis 12 tells us that God called Abram (his original name) to leave Haran (near modern-day Turkey) and travel to the land God promised. Genesis 17 recounts the beginnings of the Jewish rite of circumcision. When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God reaffirmed his covenant and gave him a new name, Abraham. God also reaffirmed that Abraham would be the father of many nations and would inherit the promised land. In return, Abraham and his offspring would honor God and keep the covenant. As a sign of the covenant, God told Abraham, “Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old…. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he had broken my covenant” (Gen 17:10-12, 14). In response to God’s command, the Jewish people adopted circumcision as a physical symbol of their status as God’s covenant people. When Jesus and Paul were born more than 1,000 years later, devout Jews continued this tradition. We can easily understand why any attempt to lessen the importance of this ancient tradition would have met great resistance.

Centuries after the time of Abraham, after the covenant people had moved to Egypt to survive a famine, God formed a new covenant with the Hebrews and their new leader, Moses: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the people. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex 19:4-6). God then called Moses to Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments, along with many other ordinances. This Mosaic covenant greatly influenced Hebrew history (it was especially esteemed by the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, because they emphasized God’s Torah, or law). Again, it is easy to understand why any attempt to lessen the importance of the law would have been met by strong opposition.

Jesus clashed with the Pharisees over the importance of the law and his willingness to reach out to uncircumcised people. After Paul’s conversion, he argued about these same issues with Jewish Christians who defended the importance of these traditions associated with Abraham and Moses. These Jewish
Christians wanted new Gentile believers in Christ to honor the ancient Jewish traditions. They wanted them to believe in Jesus, be circumcised, and honor Jewish law (especially the regulations they deemed most important, such as food and Sabbath regulations).

Paul realized that according to Scripture, before God ever mentioned circumcision to Abraham, God justified Abraham because of his faith. When Abraham asked God how he was to become a father of a great nation even though he had not yet fathered any children, God “brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ Then God said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 5:5-6). To be “reckoned as righteous” means the same as to be “justified.” So while Abraham was still uncircumcised, he had faith in God’s promise, and God justified him on the basis of that faith.

In Galatians, Paul uses this brilliant interpretation of Scripture to defend his ministry to uncircumcised Gentiles. Like Abraham, the Gentiles were justified by their faith, not by circumcision or any other legal obedience. Abraham was the father of all who believe God and God’s promises.

**Outline**

**Introduction:** This session includes most of Galatians 3, divided into four sections.

I. An Appeal to Experience (3:1-5)
   A. Charge that Judaizers had “bewitched” the Galatians
   B. Did Galatians receive the Spirit on the basis of faith or law?

II. An Appeal to Scripture (3:6-9)
   A. Quotation from Genesis 15:6
   B. Example of Abraham—justified by faith

III. The Temporary Purpose of the Law (3:15-25)
   A. The Mosaic covenant does not annul Abraham’s covenant of promise.
   B. The law was given to deal with sin.
   C. The law could not make people righteous.
   D. The law was a *paidagogos* (nanny) to prepare us for Christ.

IV. “You Are All One in Christ” (3:26-29)
   A. Faith in Christ unites all Christians.
   B. Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female barriers fall away in Christ.
   C. All believers in Christ are Abraham’s heirs.
Old Traditions
Ask members of the class to tell about old traditions that were modified only after much debate and disagreement. If members are slow to give examples, suggest issues that have created much debate in some churches in the past:
• Changing what is considered appropriate clothing in worship
• Introducing a paid musician as a minister of music
• Launching a contemporary worship service
• Building a new sanctuary
• Removing a century-old tree from the church property
• Replacing one youth or children’s program with another
• Modifying a long-held missions offering

Questions
➤ Why are long-held traditions hard to change?
➤ Is it intrinsically bad to have long-time traditions?
➤ What arguments are most effective in your church when changing an old tradition is discussed (arguments from Scripture, declining attendance, majority opinion, compatibility with church’s mission statement, avoiding an “old-fashioned” appearance)?
➤ When have you favored changing an old tradition?
➤ When have you opposed changing an old tradition?

Witness Clip
Secure a copy of the movie Witness, starring Harrison Ford. Show the clip that includes the Amish barn-raising, and use this as a launching point to discuss the attractiveness of a legalistic lifestyle in certain situations.

Questions
➤ What legalistic traditions do the Amish have that seem strange to us?
➤ Why would anyone stay in a legalistic environment if they did not have to?
➤ What aspects of Amish legalism allow them to develop a strong sense of community, as exemplified in the barn-raising scene from this movie?
➤ Detective John Book (played by Ford) saw the problems of a Philadelphia society that refused to deal effectively with evil. Why might that specific problem make a legalistic system more appealing?
A Way to Explore Scripture

In writing to the Galatians, it was not Paul’s intention to attack the law of Moses. Nevertheless, he had previously decided that the law of Moses did not lead to true righteousness, nor was it able to make people who tried to follow the law “righteous” before God. For these reasons, Paul needed to answer the question, “If God gave the law, don’t we all have to obey it?” He elected to make two major points about the Old Testament law. First, Paul notes that the Mosaic covenant came 430 years after God’s covenant with Abraham, which was based on faith. The second covenant did not nullify the first one. Second, Paul describes the law as a “paidagogos,” whose job was preparatory and temporary.

Old Testament Law for Christians Today
Have the class form two groups to debate what relevance Old Testament law has for Christians today. Ask group A to list reasons why the Old Testament law should be binding on Christians today. Ask group B to list reasons why the Old Testament law (or a portion of it) is not binding on Christians today. List the reasons pro and con on the board. After all reasons have been read aloud, see if the class can develop any consensus on this question.

Questions
➤ What might Paul have said about this question?
➤ Which of Paul’s arguments do you find most persuasive?

Group Loyalties and Personal Identification
Roman society was stratified, and people found their identity within the various groups to which they belonged: “I am a slave”; “I am freeborn”; “I am a Jew.” Paul knew his church members had various identities, but he wanted them all to think first, “I am a Christian.” Other than your identity as a Christian, what group identities are strongest for you?
• Your local social organization (Garden Club, Masons)
• Your level of education
• Your alma mater
• Your racial or ethnic group
• Your home state or region

Which of these identities makes it difficult for you to develop a sense of equality with Christians who do not share that identity, or who share a competing identity (southerners who give “Yankees” a cold welcome, wealthy people who fear rubbing shoulders with lower-class folks, Florida Gators who really don’t like any Georgia Bulldogs)?

Questions
➤ What does Galatians 3 have to say about the modern “identities” that divide us from other Christians?
➤ How can your church reduce the alienation other Christians may feel if they have a group identity different from the majority?

Give some good examples from within your congregation of people who have vastly different backgrounds but who obviously experience what Paul describes in Galatians 3:28: “For all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

16 Lesson 3
A Way to End

Paul clearly opposed legalism, as this letter (along with Romans) indicates. However, Paul intended for his churches to offer a very powerful sense of unity to their members that would help them withstand the appeal of legalism. He wanted their unity built on their faith in Jesus Christ. He also wanted that sense of common oneness in Christ to be far stronger than the various other “identities” that separated the members of the Galatian churches. He wanted a female slave to first think, “I am a Christian,” rather than, “I am a slave who is also a Christian.” He wanted a Jewish believer’s most important self-understanding to be, “I belong to Christ.” He wanted all his members to first think, “We are one in Christ.”

Historical Discussion
In Galatians 3:28, Paul decrees the essential oneness of all believers. He knew some were Jews and others were Gentiles, but all are one in Christ. Slavery still existed, and Paul did not campaign for its abolition, but he called for slaves and free people to see that they were essentially equal in God’s sight. Paul wanted them to know that differences meant essentially nothing compared to their equality in Christ.

Questions
» Which of the three barriers—the one between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, or men and women—does Paul focus on the most in Galatians?
» Why do you think Paul worked hardest on eliminating that barrier between people?
» What barriers are we working to eliminate today?
» What keeps us from experiencing oneness or equality in Christ?

God Loves Us, Despite Ourselves
Ask the group to join in the following litany as a means of committing to and celebrating the unity you share.

Leader: Even though we are a people of sin;
People: God loves us, despite ourselves.
Leader: Even though we fail and fall to temptation;
People: God loves us, despite ourselves.
Leader: Even though we disobey and doubt;
People: God loves us, despite ourselves.
Leader: God’s love is greater than all our sin.
People: God loves us, despite ourselves.
Leader: God calls us, as community, to work, live, and worship in communion.
People: God loves us, despite ourselves.
Leader: Despite our differences, our sin, our temptations, and even our fears, let us join together in God’s name.
People: For we are baptized into Christ and are now clothed with Christ. In our midst, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus. And if we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.
Leader: Thanks be to God—Amen.
This series of studies on Galatians skips Galatians 4 because of space constraints. However, Paul included important aspects of his complete argument in that chapter, and a full and fair evaluation of that material is necessary for a balanced understanding of the entire letter.

Paul concluded chapter 3 by comparing the law’s purpose—to get people to Christ, the real master teacher—to the significant but temporary function of the Greek paidagogos. Furthermore, faith in Christ unifies people in a way the law never could. All Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ are heirs of Abraham, who was the first to be justified by faith in God’s promise.

Galatians 4 begins with a continuation of the analogy of Christian believers as heirs of Abraham. Heirs, while they are children, experience limited freedom until the time of their actual inheritance. Heirs who are minors must obey orders in much the same way that slaves do. However, the heir gains freedom and is no longer treated like a slave. For Christians, freedom arrived with the coming of Christ.

Paul then mixes his metaphors, switching from an illustration of an heir receiving his inheritance, to a slave being redeemed, to an orphan being adopted. All three images convey the same idea of a dramatic change in status brought about by a key event. Inheritance, redemption, and adoption all describe the experience that follows a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ. The Galatians, most of whom were Gentiles, had previously been “enslaved” to the weak and miserable “principles” or “elemental spirits of pagan religious life” (4:8). Paul did not want the Galatians to exchange slavery to pagan religious principles for slavery to Jewish religious principles.

Following these analogies, Paul changes his tone to make a personal appeal to the Galatians, reminding them of the first time they met, when Paul was suffering from a physical infirmity and the Galatians took him in and tried to help. He refers to them warmly as his “little children,” suggesting that most, if not all, of them were converted under Paul’s ministry.

Finally, Paul refers to the Genesis story of Abraham’s two wives, Hagar and Sarah. Paul interprets the story allegorically, suggesting that the Galatians were children of Sarah, just like Isaac. Like Isaac, they were children of the promise. In contrast, Paul’s opponents, the Judaizers, were children of the slave woman Hagar. They taught slavery to the law.

These arguments prepare the reader for the material that Paul includes in Galatians 5. Summarize them for your class to help them understand how
Galatians 3 and 5 connect to one another.

The big picture that Paul wanted his readers to grasp was that he was offering them freedom in Christ, while the Judaizers were offering slavery to the law. He understood that obedience to the law might have seemed appealing to the Galatians, especially since they were having some problems with relapse into immoral, pagan behavior. But Paul wanted them to see that submitting to circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath regulations was actually a move toward slavery. Trying to please God by observing the law was a step backward from the freedom of life in the Spirit that believers in Christ can experience. Paul worked diligently to convince his readers not to make this mistake.

Outline

Introduction: This session includes most of Galatians 5, divided into four sections.

I. Christian Freedom (5:1-6)
   A. Christ offers freedom, not slavery to the law.
   B. Seeking righteousness through the law demands obedience to the entire law.
   C. “In Christ,” faith working through love makes circumcision irrelevant.

II. “Love Thy Neighbor” (5:13-15)
   A. Freedom from the law should not lead to libertine living.
   B. Christians are called to fulfill the law’s purpose by loving their neighbors.

III. Living by the Spirit vs. the Flesh (5:16-21)
   A. Each believer has two choices: life in the Spirit or life in the flesh.
   B. These choices are mutually exclusive.
   C. Christians are free from the law but subject to the Spirit.
   D. Living continuously “in the flesh” disqualifies a person from salvation.

IV. Life in the Spirit (5:22-26)
   A. The Spirit creates wonderful “fruit” in the believer’s behavior.
   B. The Spirit-guided believer crucifies his or her own passions and desires.
The Relationship between Freedom and Rules

Americans who lived through the Revolutionary War would be amazed by the tremendous freedom of movement that we experience today. When John Adams traveled from Boston to Philadelphia, his journey took weeks. Traveling to the South would have taken him months. Today, such trips are made in a day or two by car and in mere hours by plane. Such freedom would have overwhelmed Adams, who loved to travel. He would be equally amazed by the rules we must follow to enjoy safe travel. Lead a discussion about driving and flying rules with the following questions.

Questions
➤ What is necessary to legally drive a car?
➤ List the signs that limit the freedom of drivers on a typical auto trip (stop signs, speed limits, double yellow lines, yield signs).
➤ What additional rules have been added to make air travel safe since 9/11?
➤ What rules do airline pilots follow in the takeoff sequence, mid-flight, and landing?
➤ Do all these rules demonstrate that we have no “freedom” in the area of transportation? Are countries with fewer rules freer?
➤ What kind of freedom would a country experience if it eliminated all rules related to driving and highways?

Understanding Freedom

Freedom carries certain responsibilities. Paul says that we are free from the law but subject to the Spirit. In our country, we are free to do many things, but are subject to certain laws that protect the rights of others. All freedoms have its limits, otherwise we would too quickly tread on the freedom of others. Ask the group to list on the board some of the freedom we enjoy today in our country, for example: freedom to worship and freedom of speech. Once the group has a working list of freedoms we share, ask them to agree on at least one responsibility that goes with each freedom listed.

Questions
➤ Why is the relationship between freedom and responsibility important? What happens if that relationship is broken?
➤ What are the positive outcomes when people experience an increase in freedom? (For example: when a teenager secures his or her drivers license) What are the negative ones?

Bring the discussion to a conclusion around the point of the complex interplay between the “freedom” of one person to act and the fact that some limits to that freedom are necessary for the safety and “freedom” of others.
A Way to Explore Scripture

When most Christians think of the Old Testament laws, they think of the Ten Commandments. Most of the Ten Commandments are quite consistent with New Testament Christianity, leading some Christians to think that there is no real tension between “following the law” and “faith in Christ.” In Galatians 5:3, Paul points out that the decision to build your relationship with God around the Old Testament law obligates a person to obey the entire law. **Encourage the class to explore Paul’s understanding of the law and freedom in Christ thoroughly.**

○ Old Testament Laws
Retrieve the Resource Kit page for this session, and display the list of Old Testament laws for the class to discuss. Ask questions such as these: Which of these laws are consistent with the teachings of Jesus? Which ones vary slightly? Which ones are incompatible with a New Testament Christian perspective?

Exodus 21:15: “Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death.”
Exodus 21:16: “Whoever kidnaps a person...shall be put to death.”
Exodus 21:18-19: “When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, but recovers...then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for full recovery.”
Exodus 21:33-34: “If someone leaves a pit open, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restitution, giving money to its owner, but keeping the dead animal.”
Exodus 22:7: “When someone delivers to a neighbor money or goods for safe keeping, and they are stolen from the neighbor’s house, then the thief, if caught, shall pay double.”
Exodus 22:18: “You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.”
Exodus 23:4: “When you come upon your enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.”
Exodus 23:10-11: “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat.”

○ Breaking the Law?
Show the clip from the movie Chariots of Fire where the great Scottish runner, Eric Liddell, refuses to run in an Olympic race because it was held on Sunday. Let the class know that Liddell’s story is true and that this event cost Liddell a good chance at winning a gold medal. Then tell them the rest of the story. Liddell later served as a missionary to China. After the Japanese invaded China, he and other missionary families were moved to an internment camp. He refereed the various games played by the teenagers, but he refused to do so on Sunday. One Sunday afternoon, a fight broke out among the teens because they had no adult referee. The next Sunday, Liddell broke his own convictions and refereed the game, in order to keep the teenagers from getting hurt in a fight (Magnuson, 164).

Questions
➤ Do you agree with Eric Liddell’s view of applying the Old Testament Sabbath regulations to Sunday?
➤ What do you think of his decision to forfeit his chance at Olympic gold for his principles?
➤ What do you think of his decision to referee the youth game on Sunday afternoon?

Read Galatians 5:6 aloud to the class, and ask how the verse relates to Eric Liddell.
A Way to End

In other letters, such as 1 Corinthians, Paul is clear that he has very strong convictions about what behavior is acceptable for Christians and what is not. Here in Galatians, he gives few specifics. However, he does make it clear that every person is either led by the Holy Spirit or by the desires of the flesh (also called “the compulsions of selfishness” by Eugene Peterson in The Message). Paul believes that, for Christians, the Holy Spirit takes the place of the Old Testament law as the guide to our behavior.

Use the following options to discuss both the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, how we experience the tension between them, and Paul’s challenge to live by the Spirit.

The Works of the Flesh or “Compulsions of Selfishness”

Read Galatians 5:19-21 aloud. List the fifteen specific “works of the flesh” on the board. Compare various translations of terms that are not widely understood. If time permits, read the entire list from Eugene Peterson’s The Message. Close your discussion with the following questions.

Questions

➤ Which of these sinful behaviors are most widespread among people in your community?
➤ Which of these behaviors are most widely seen in your congregation (no names please!)?
➤ Which of these behaviors would you admit are ones you still struggle with in your personal life?

Then read aloud Galatians 5:22-25, asking your group to listen for the nine “fruit of the Spirit” in these verses. List them on the board.

Close with prayer, asking for God’s grace as we struggle with sin and for God’s strength to live by the fruit the Spirit.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Read aloud Galatians 5:22-25. Ask your group members to list the nine specific “fruit of the Spirit” that Paul mentions in these verses. Write them on the board, leaving space next to each term. Then ask for volunteers to discuss these statements/questions.

• Give the name of one person, living or dead, from your past who exemplified one of the fruit of the Spirit. Describe how they demonstrated that particular fruit of the Spirit.
• Give the name of one person in your church who exemplifies one of these fruit.
• What fruit would you like the Holy Spirit to develop in your life?
• How is living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit different from living under the Old Testament law?
Bible Background

In many ways, we should consider Galatians a “minor” book in the New Testament. It is much shorter than Romans or either of the Corinthian letters. It is addressed to small mission churches planted in minor cities of a small Roman province. In contrast, Paul wrote Ephesians to Christians in a large, important city. Furthermore, even centuries later, the Galatian churches never became leading churches. Finally, the letter addresses issues such as circumcision and Jewish food laws, which were completely settled for ninety-nine percent of all Christians by the end of the first century.

Despite all these considerations, however, the message of Galatians is one we need to hear. In studying Galatians, Martin Luther rediscovered salvation “by faith alone.” This reaffirmation led him to overturn the widespread understanding of “earning” one’s salvation, a view that dominated the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1500s. Luther’s denial of the possibility of earning one’s salvation and his insistence that salvation comes solely through God’s grace provided the basis for the Protestant Reformation. Luther himself wrote two commentaries on Galatians and considered it one of the clearest explanations of the Christian gospel found anywhere in the Bible.

Today, Galatians continues to hold a crucial place in the New Testament. Together with Romans, it proclaims that we cannot earn salvation in Jesus Christ by obedience to even the Old Testament law. It continually confounds individuals and groups who try to turn Christianity into a legalistic system.

When we speak of the authority of Scripture, we must interpret each biblical book in the context of the entire Bible. We can learn a great deal about Paul from Galatians, but we do not get a balanced portrait of the Apostle from his most fiery letter. If we only read Galatians, we might think Paul was always angry and uncompromising. We might think that he spent all his time writing about the essential Christian message of salvation while ignoring the various moral issues that Christians confront. However, when we balance a reading of Galatians with Paul’s other letters, we can put this letter in proper context.

By reading Philemon, we can see the more compassionate and sensitive side of the Apostle. In Romans 14, we see that Paul could be very flexible on issues that he did not consider essential. First Corinthians reveals that he dealt extensively with moral issues and opposed hedonism as firmly as he did legalism. Romans demonstrates that he could include his emphasis on justification by faith within a much larger context of the Christian faith. But if you want a succinct explanation of exactly what it takes to become a Christian, it is hard to beat...
Galatians. Here, Paul gets right to the heart of the gospel.

After you review Galatians 6 with your class, encourage them to discuss their overall impressions of Galatians. It is far more important than its size or placement in the canon would suggest.

Outline

Introduction: This session includes all of Galatians 6, divided into three sections.

I. Doing Good to Others (6:1-10)
   A. How to gently rebuke a fellow Christian
   B. Warning to examine one’s own behavior
   C. Call to give generously to Christian teachers
   D. Letting the Spirit lead you to do good for others

II. Conclusion: The Only Grounds for Boasting Is the Cross (6:11-17)
   A. Paul writes the conclusion with his own hand in large letters.
   B. His opponents want to boast about getting Gentile Christians circumcised.
   C. The only grounds for boasting is the cross of Christ.
   D. Paul carries “the marks of Jesus” on his body.

III. Final Benediction (6:18)
A Story from History
Summarize this historical incident from a church in Virginia in the early 1900s: Church members discovered that a couple from their congregation was participating in square dancing. They brought the couple before the church board and warned them to stop dancing or face dismissal from the congregation. Use questions like the following to lead discussion.

Questions
➤ Why do you think church members living a century ago opposed dancing so vigorously?
➤ If you had been that couple, how would you have reacted?
➤ Today, churches would likely not threaten dismissal from the membership, but would there be any behavior that would lead to mild correction? If so, what behaviors might lead to a gentle correction?

Tell Your Story
Ask class members to recall a time when they received a gentle correction that had a positive effect on them. It does not need to have occurred in church, although a few stories about a gentle correction received in church would be helpful.

Questions
➤ Did your parents correct you in worship when you were a child? If so, tell what behaviors led to the correction. Looking back on the incident, was their correction helpful or not?
➤ Tell about a time when someone corrected you as a teenager. It might have been at church, in school, at basketball practice, by your band director, an older sibling, or a friend. How did you react to the correction? Was the long-term impact of the correction different from the short-term impact?
➤ What difference does it make if a correction is gentle or harsh? Tell about the differences through specific incidents, if possible.
➤ Paul told the Galatians to correct one another “with a gentle spirit” (6:1-2). Do you think his words still apply to our churches today? If so, how do we apply Paul’s teaching?

Most Christians are not comfortable dealing with one another’s shortcomings or faults, to say nothing of dealing with each other’s sins. We have lost the art of gentle correction. Sometimes we see a fault clearly but deal with it in an unhealthy manner. We gossip to others about the fault, hoping they will agree there is a problem. We treat others coldly, without explaining why. They, more often than not, withdraw from us. In turn, we withdraw from their presence, or from the class we share in common, or, as a last resort, from the church. At root of the Galatian problem was how church members dealt with each other’s sin. Paul encouraged the believers to learn the art of gentle correction.
A Way to Explore Scripture

Paul knew he had written a stinging rebuke to his beloved converts in Galatia. He skipped the note of thanksgiving typically included with his letters. He criticized them harshly and called upon them to return to the gospel message he first proclaimed to them. Now, Paul wanted to end on a more positive note. He wanted the Galatians to raise one another up. He called upon them to correct one another gently, to avoid self-centered pride, to share generously with their teachers, and to work for the good of others, especially for fellow church members.

“You Raise Me Up”
Secure a copy of Josh Groban’s CD that includes “You Raise Me Up.” Read aloud Galatians 6:1-10 before listening to the song. As you play the recording, ask group members to think of people who fit the description this song invokes.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up...to more than I can be

There is no life—no life without its hunger
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly
But when you come and I am filled with wonder
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity

Questions
➤ Who did you think of as you listened to the song?
➤ Who might think of you as an encourager?
➤ What effect might appropriate encouragement have on the fellowship of your class or your church?

A Message from Lewis
Ask class members to read Galatians 6 and list every verse that warns against boasting or spiritual pride—include the verses that do not mention those words but address the idea. Note these verses on the board. Then read the following passage from C. S. Lewis’s Mere Christianity:

I now come to that part of Christian morals where they differ most sharply from all other morals. There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves.... The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit; and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility. You may remember, when I was talking about sexual morality, I warned you that the centre of Christian morals did not lie there. Well, now we have come to the centre. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. (45)

Questions
➤ What is your response to Lewis’s statements about pride?
➤ Do Paul and Lewis agree about pride?
Living in Grace
Ask the group to join in the following litany as a means of dedicating themselves to the kind of life Paul encourages.

Leader: As followers of Christ, we are called to live the grace we have received. Let us confess the sin and inconsistency of our lives, saying:
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: When we separate worship and world, practicing religion but not loving our neighbor,
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: When we are driven by desire for money and power,
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: When we love the wrong things,
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: When we cling to our thoughts and ways refusing yours,
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: Where our pattern has been to take, abuse, and hide, restore us to your pattern of blessing, breaking, and giving.
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: When we are tested by temptation,
People: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways.
Leader: When we do not live the life to which you call us,
All: Lord have mercy and call us back to your ways. Amen.

The Place of Galatians
Ask the class to summarize the distinctive contributions that each of Paul's letters makes to our understanding of the Apostle. It is not necessary to include all twelve of the other letters, but be sure to include a summary of these key letters:
• Romans—Paul’s most famous letter, Romans is similar to Galatians in that it emphasizes justification by faith alone, but more sweeping in its relation of this concept to Paul’s entire theology.
• 1 Corinthians—In some ways this is the counterbalance to Galatians in the Pauline collection. If the Galatians were tempted toward libertinism, the Corinthians were tempted toward hedonism. Paul strongly rebuked their immoral behaviors. Galatians is all about what is necessary to become a Christian. 1 Corinthians is about a dozen different issues.
• Philemon—Paul mixes boldness with compassion in this very personal letter.
• Ephesians—Paul focuses more on the church rather than the salvation of individual believers in this majestic letter.

After the class has made comments on many of Paul’s other letters, ask them to summarize the contribution that Galatians makes to our understanding of the Apostle from Tarsus. What is the biggest contribution that Galatians can make to the twenty-first-century church?