

▶ GLENSTONE CHAPEL ◀
Community Group Bible Study Guide

Passage: Galatians 4:8-31

For use May 18-24, 2008

**QUESTIONS TO USE IN GROUP
OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY**

LAUNCHING (Choose one or two to introduce passage.)

1. Remember those "New Year's resolutions"? We had hoped to break certain patterns, establish new habits, etc. What keep often keeps us from making life-style changes?
2. When did you first realize that God loved you?. Check **one**; **share if you care to**:
___ A. "I responded to an invitation to accept Christ at a church meeting (or youth rally or Christian camp or evangelistic crusade)."
___ B. "I was raised in a Christian home, so I kind of knew about a God of love from my earliest days."
___ C. "Some days, I'm not sure if God loves me or not!"
___ D. "I was reading the Bible on my own and I was touched by the Spirit to realize God's love."
___ E. "A friend witnessed to me about the love of God and I was moved to accept Jesus as my Savior."
___ F. "I was reading a Christian book or pamphlet that pointed me to the loving Savior."
___ G. Another option? _____
3. Would you to share about **an experience** in your life where you "**lost the joy**"? Like wanting to quit an athletic team? Wishing you had a different job? Fantasizing about a different family situation? Stopped going to a certain church? Broke my engagement?

UNDERSTANDING Galatians 4:8-31

1. Read the passage aloud. You may wish to tackle the two sections separately: (1) vss. 8-20, and (2) vss. 21-31. [The second section has some obscurities which might be better omitted to avoid getting the group bogged down in the allegory.]
2. If you could take Paul's blood pressure as he writes this passage, what seems to send him into the stratosphere? Do you agree with him?
3. What do you imagine the Galatians are thinking **and feeling** as this letter is read to them? What are the possibilities?
4. As it were, identify the players on stage. What does the passage say about each one? Compare the differences between Paul and

the false teachers. [Start with vss. 8-20, later vss. 21-31.]

5. "Normally, the Jews would regard Sarah as their spiritual mother and Hagar as the spiritual mother of Gentiles. Why does Paul reverse the picture? How are the spiritual descendants of Sarah distinguished from the other line of descent?"¹
6. Ask someone to retell the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar stories. Then, if possible, reproduce the chart from #15 (see below) to distribute, as an aid to unpacking vss. 21-31. Discuss any questions which arise.
7. How would former Jews interpret vss. 23 and 31? How about former Gentiles?

REFLECTING on Galatians 4:8-31

1. Whenever God has called you to greater intimacies with Him, how did you experience this invitation? **OR**, when did the concept of "sonship" with God the Father first enter your consciousness?
2. "What difference has knowing God — and being known by Him — made in your life?"²
3. What does it mean to you, that Christians are "children of the free woman" (vs. 31)? What practical implications derive from this insight?

FURTHER REFLECTION (on your own)

"What has happened to all your joy?" (Gal. 4:15).

To what extent does your life reflect the *joy of the Lord*? Why or why not? If your joy has been on a downward slide, ask yourself, "Why?" What might you do to return to a place of joy? Consider:

• **Isa. 44:22** "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

• **Hosea 14:2** Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips."

FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION

Passage: Galatians 4:8-31

¹ *John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 54.

² *John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 54.

1. To ponder: What is the Gospel, really? "The meticulous observances of the Pharisees Paul knew to a nicety. It hurt him to the quick after his own merciful deliverance to see these Gentile Christians drawn into this spider-web of Judaizing Christians, once set free, now enslaved again."³

2. Possible outline:

- Paul Exposes the Failure of Legalism⁴

1. The Danger of Reaction, vss. 8-11
2. Contrasting Motives, vss. 12-20
3. The Contrast of Bondage and Liberty, vss. 21-31.

3. Who's who? Get acquainted with the persons.

- **Paul.** Evangelized the Galatians; incredulous (vs. 9); perhaps discouraged (vs. 11); had been sick when visiting Galatia (vs. 13)⁵; adored by the Galatians during his visit (vs. 15); "in terrible pain" (vs. 19, CEV); "puzzled" (vs. 20).
- **Believers in Galatia.** Had heartily welcomed Paul on his visit (vs. 14); were compassionate (vs. 14); children of Promise (vs. 28); children of the free woman (vs. 31); had turned back from the true Gospel (vs. 9).
- **False teachers.** Had schismatic motives (vs. 17); "... are out to win adherents."⁶ "Paul was furious because [they] had come from Jerusalem hoping to impose a legalistic agenda on the new believers in Galatia. These teachers claimed that to really be a Christian a person had to first become a Jew."⁷
- **Abraham** (vs. 22). Had fathered one son with a slave woman, one with his legal wife Sarah.
- **Sarah** (vs. 22). Abraham's legal wife; a free woman; suffered from long-term infertility; her son was known as the son of God's Promise.
- **Hagar.** Sarah's household slave (vs. 25). "A helpless outcast and her experiences appear as an example . . . against turning to the Law for salvation."⁸ For more information, see Genesis 16:1-16; 21:9-21.
- **Ishmael** (vs. 29-30).
- **Isaac** (vs. 29-30).

4. "But now that you know God --or rather are known by God --" (vs. 9A)

- "The privilege of knowing God," one of the marvelous benefits of New Testament Christians.⁹
- "... through the preaching of the Gospel, and in the light of divine grace; God having caused light to shine in their dark hearts; and having given them the light of the knowledge of Himself in the face of Christ. . . . what knowledge they have, they have it first, originally and wholly from Him -- that knowledge which He has of them . . . is to be understood, not of His omniscience in general . . . but of His special knowledge, joined with affection . . . and care. . . ."¹⁰

³ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

⁴ *The New Testament*, by Merrill C. Tenney, page 285.

⁵ "... he labored among the Galatians under personally difficult physical circumstances." *Galatians: The Gospel According to Paul*, by David K. Huttar, page 121.

⁶ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 53

⁷ *Word in Life Bible*, page 1837.

⁸ *Word in Life Bible*, page 1837.

⁹ *Galatians* . . . , by David K. Huttar, page 111.

¹⁰ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

• "... God's elective grace reaching them. . . ." ¹¹

• "Knowing God cannot be separated from how we are to live." ¹² Cf. Jer. 22:15-16.

• "... it is the glory of the gospel age to have access to a more extensive understanding of God's truth." ¹³

5. "... those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" (vs. 9B)

- "The same [principles] . . . from which they had been delivered . . . [enslaved] still in their utter impotence from the Pharisaic legalism . . . and the philosophical and religious quests of the heathen. . . ." ¹⁴ Cf. Gal. 4:3.
- "... the ordinances of the ceremonial law . . . they could not give life, righteousness, peace, joy, comfort, and salvation; and, since the coming of Christ, were become impotent. . . ." ¹⁵
- "... impotent -- unless people deliberately put themselves back under their control." ¹⁶

6. "You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!" (vs. 10)

- "Paul does not object to these observances for he kept them himself as a Jew. He objected to Gentiles taking to them as a means of salvation." ¹⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 16:8; Acts 20:16.
- "... bondage to the ceremonies of the law . . . a religious observation of days, etc., not of the lucky and unlucky days, or of any of the festivals of the Gentiles, but of Jewish ones." ¹⁸

7. "I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. (vs. 11)

- "Paul fears that the worst has happened." ¹⁹
- "Paul . . . tries to shock them into coming to their senses and finding their rest and salvation in Christ and Christ alone." ²⁰

8. "Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself." (vs. 14)

- Paul acted in a role with them similar to that of an angel making an announcement. ²¹
- "Perhaps there is an allusion to the time when Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra and were mistaken for gods (Acts 14:11-13). In any case, the contrast is between the greeting given an angel or Christ Jesus and their present attitude toward Paul." ²²
- You "should now . . . have confidence in [me, your spiritual mentor] at this present moment." ²³

¹¹ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

¹² *Galatians* . . . , by David K. Huttar, page 112.

¹³ *Galatians* . . . , by David K. Huttar, page 113.

¹⁴ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

¹⁵ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

¹⁶ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 53.

¹⁷ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

¹⁸ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

¹⁹ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

²⁰ *Galatians* . . . , by David K. Huttar, page 121.

²¹ *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 146.

²² *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 53

²³ *Galatians* . . . , by David K. Huttar, page 122.

8. "What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me." (vs. 15)

• "... when the Gospel was first preached to them by him; when ... the Spirit of Christ was sent thither, crying "Abba", Father, but ... where was this blessedness now, since they were ... bring[ing] themselves ... into a state of bondage? ... The apostle hereby puts them in mind how they were looked upon as happy persons by himself at that time ... and even at that time they thought themselves the happiest persons in the world, and that they could not have been more so, unless they had had Christ Himself in person among them.²⁴

• "... how happy you were when you received the Gospel.²⁵

• "... the apostle ... was ready to attest the truth of this in any form to any persons that ... they would even have plucked out their eyes, than which nothing is dearer, or more useful to a man, and have parted with them ... for his sake; and ... would cheerfully have laid down their lives for him; but things had taken another turn since."²⁶

9. "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you," (vs. 19)

• "He addresses them very tenderly as their spiritual parent."²⁷

• "I am in birth pangs ... powerful picture of pain."²⁸

"This figure is the embryo developing into the child. Paul boldly represents himself as again the mother with birth pangs over them."²⁹

• "It is expressive of the apostle's strong love and affection for them, and ... signifies that he had been ... an instrument of their conversion, and was their spiritual parent."³⁰

• "Paul ... plays the part of a mother, and so expresses his deep love and concern."³¹

10 "... Christ is formed in you." (4:19)

• Sanctification³² is "... a fruit of the union of life with Jesus Christ." ³³

• "Paul's desire is that they come to possess Christlike characters."³⁴

• The union Christ has with believers "... is the vitalizing and dominating principle of the whole body of believers. It is none other than the life of Christ that indwells and animates believers, so that ... 'Christ is formed' in them.

By it, Christ becomes the formative principle of their life, and leads it in a Godward direction."³⁵

• "Paul longed for their spiritual growth in Christ."³⁶

11. "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the Law says?" (vs. 21ff.)

• Paul compares the covenants. "The covenant that proceeds from Sinai and centers in the earthly Jerusalem, is placed over against the covenant that proceeds from heaven and centers in Jerusalem that is above, that is -- the natural and the spiritual."³⁷

12. "Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother." (vss. 25-26)

• Paul develops "... a complex allegory based on the experience of Hagar and Sarah and their two sons. ... His main thesis is that Judaism is based on the Law, while Christianity is based on the Promises of God. The Law brings slavery, while the Promises bring freedom."³⁸ • "When Paul wrote 'the present city of Jerusalem,' he was referring to these teachers [of legalism]. They had enslaved Jerusalem itself with their teaching, and he resented their coming to Galatia to enslave Christians there. By contrast, 'Jerusalem in heaven above' is free, free from legalism and free from sin. It is more than a city; it is a symbol of God's rule and kingdom. Jerusalem is the place where God has fulfilled His Promises in Christ, just as Isaac was born because of God's Promise."³⁹

13. "These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar." (vs. 24)

• "... the mystical interpretation of Hagar and Sarah, and their sons."⁴⁰

14. "But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son'" (vs. 30). Cf. Gen. 21:9-10.

• "When Sarah sees Ishmael playing with Isaac, she recalls her jealousy of Hagar and so tells Abraham to drive them from the camp. ... 'legal bondage and spiritual freedom cannot coexist.'"⁴¹

• "Yet the point is too direct to need explanation: Get ride of the false teachers and their followers!"⁴²

15. "Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman." (vs. 31)

• "The conclusion of the former allegory, that we by no means procure and call back again the slavery of the

²⁴ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

²⁵ *Geneva Bible*.

²⁶ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

²⁷ *People's New Testament Commentary*.

²⁸ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

²⁹ *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

³⁰ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

³¹ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 53

³² "... that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works." *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 532..

³³ *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 532.

³⁴ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 53

³⁵ *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 450.

³⁶ *Galatians. . .*, by David K. Huttar, page 125.

³⁷ *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 297.

³⁸ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 55.

³⁹ *Word in Life Bible*, page 1837.

⁴⁰ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

⁴¹ *1 John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 55.

⁴² *Galatians. . .*, by David K. Huttar, page 128.

Law, seeing that the children of the bondmaid will not be heirs."⁴³

- "... the bondwoman; the figure of the first covenant, which gendered to bondage, and typified the Jews . . . under a spirit of bondage to the Law; New Testament saints are not under it, are delivered from it, and are dead unto it. . . ."44

- "... Sarah, . . . was a type of the new and second covenant . . . free from the yoke of the Law; and whose children . . . are made free from all . . . slavery; so the children of the mistress and of the maidservant are opposed to each other. . . ."45

- The contrasts of Paul's allegory, by Dr. Shaff/⁴⁶

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL-- -JUDAISM	SARAH AND ISAAC-- CHRISTIANITY
The Old Covenant	The New Covenant
The Law	The Gospel
Natural Birth	Spiritual Birth
Mount Sinai in Arabia	Mount Zion Above
The Earthly Jerusalem	The Heavenly Jerusalem
Bondage	Freedom
Persecuting	Persecuted ⁴⁷
To be Cast Out and Off	Heirs of the Inheritance

⁴³ Geneva Bible.

⁴⁴ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

⁴⁵ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

⁴⁶ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

⁴⁷ "In 1 Thess. 2:14-16, Paul mentions Jewish persecution of Christians" / *John/Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 55.