

Pandit Teaches the Bible Series

Let's Read Galatians!

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This book is the first English version of a textbook written for a Kannada medium Bible college in South India. It will be translated into Kannada.

It can also be used for Bible study groups in local churches and for individual students of the Bible. It was written it with the South Indian Christian context in mind. But with minor adaptations it should be useful in any cultural context.

The Bible quotations are basically my own. References are often made to two widespread Kannada translations of the Bible, **pavitra grantha** and **satyavEdavu**.

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Studies

Introduction to Galatians

A letter

A real letter is written from one person (or group of persons) to another person (or group of persons). So there will be a **sender** and a receiver (a **recipient**).

There are always circumstances, such as purpose and time, surrounding a letter. The reason for a letter to be written could be a concern or a message that the sender wants to convey to the receiver, or an answer to a question that the receiver has asked the sender, or thoughts that the sender wants to share with the receiver, or some other reason. This kind of circumstances are called the **occasion** of a letter.

Letters usually follow a certain **pattern**. Patterns vary from culture to culture and from time to time. So Galatians, which is a letter from the time of the Roman Empire almost two thousand years ago will differ from a letter that you write to your parents today. The New Testament letters usually follow the five-part basic pattern of Greek and Latin letters of those days: the sender – the recipient – a greeting – the main part – a closing greeting. But the New Testament letters are much longer than the thousands of letters that have survived from the days of the Roman Empire. For example, we often find a blessing and a doxology in the beginning and a closing blessing at the end of a New Testament letter. In addition, the main part of most New Testament letters are much more detailed in the way they deal with theological and ethical issues in the early church.

The sender

The sender of Galatians calls himself Paul and he describes himself as an apostle (1:1). Paul is one of the main characters in the New Testament. We first meet him in the book of Acts as a forceful persecutor of the church in Jerusalem and Judea. But Christ appears to him on the road to Damascus and calls him into Christian ministry. In Acts we then read about Paul serving his Lord and Savior as a pastor and missionary over a period of almost 30 years, from around AD 34 to around AD 62, ending with his imprisonments in Caesarea and Rome. Luke's account in Acts ends in Rome and has no information about Paul's later years.

Paul was not one of Jesus' original twelve apostles, and he probably never met Jesus in person – not until his dramatic experience on the road to

Damascus. Still Paul calls himself an apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father, an apostle appointed to serve among the Gentiles (1:1, 17; 2:8).

The recipients

Paul writes his letter to the churches in Galatia (1:2) and calls them “foolish Galatians” (3:1). Bible scholars do not agree on who these Galatians were. The reason for the controversy is that “Galatia” in those days was used about two different geographical areas, one smaller area (the district of Galatia) and one larger area (the province of Galatia) which also included the smaller district.

But the issue of who exactly the Galatians were – and their precise geographical area – is not important for our understanding of the background of the believers of the churches that Paul addressed. They were Gentiles (4:8) who had accepted Christ as a result of Paul’s ministry among them (1:8, 11; 4:13).

For more information about the “Galatians” and “Galatia” see **Appendix: Who and when?** at the end of this book.

When was the letter written?

The dating of the letter depends to a large extent on our answer to two questions:

- Who were the “Galatians” that Paul wrote to?
- Is Paul’s meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem in Gal 2:1–10 the same meeting as the “Jerusalem council” in Acts chapter 15?

Many Bible scholars think that Galatians was written after Paul’s first missionary journey (which probably took place AD 48–49) but before the “Jerusalem council” (which probably took place in AD 49).

Other Bible scholars think that Galatians was written during Paul’s third missionary journey (which probably took place AD 53–57). One reason for a later dating is that Galatians is very similar in content to Romans, which was written from Corinth at the end of Paul’s third missionary journey.

In this textbook we will follow the second option. In study 6, we compare Gal 2:1–10 with Acts chapter 15 and come to the conclusion that the two accounts probably refer to the same meeting between Paul/Barnabas and the apostles in Jerusalem.

For more information about when Galatians was written see **Appendix: Who and when?** at the end of this book.

The occasion of the letter

When Paul left the Galatians everything was just fine. They had understood the gospel that he had preached to them. They had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They had left their old sinful pagan ways and were living lives controlled by the Holy Spirit.

But then something happened. Other preachers came propagating a different message. We call these people “Judaizers”. Their background was Jewish. And their doctrine was that it was not enough that the Gentile believers had been baptized and that they had turned away from their old pagan practices. They also had to be circumcised as a sign of belonging to God’s people, and then follow the law of Moses. The Judaizers preached that it was necessary for Gentile converts to become “Jewish Christian believers”.

When Paul heard this, he became deeply upset and worried. He realized that the very truth of the gospel was at stake. So he decided to write a letter to the churches in Galatia to address the problems and to set things right again. He wanted to explain to the Galatians why he and his gospel were right and why the Judaizers and their false “gospel” were wrong.

Does this letter concern us today?

Paul did not write Galatians to the churches of Karnataka in the 21st century (or to churches in any other state in our present world) but to the churches of Galatia at the time of the Roman Empire. This means that Paul dealt with issues that were important to him and the Galatian churches in those days. So it is quite reasonable to ask the question, “Does this letter concern us today?” And if our answer is, “Yes!”, we need to ask another question, “So in what way does Galatians concern us?”

The answer to the first question is “Yes!”. Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia really concerns believers in Christ today, even if it was not directly written to us.

The answer to the second question is more complicated, but it can be summarized like this: The reason why Galatians is relevant to believers in Christ even today is that Paul – as he dealt with situation in the Galatian churches – clarified very important Christian principles that apply to the Christian church always and everywhere. These principles concern the

source of the true gospel, the message of the true gospel (justification, righteousness, and salvation), and the everyday life of a true believer.

We will look at these questions more in detail in **Study 16: The message of Galatians for us**.

Questions

The answers to these questions are easily found in the text above, so no answers have been provided in the answer section of this book. But try to answer the questions without first looking in the text above.

1. Explain the differences between an ordinary letter from the time of the Roman Empire and the letters found in the New Testament.
2. Explain why Bible scholars disagree on the recipients of Galatians.
3. Explain why Bible scholars disagree on when Galatians was written.
4. Explain why Paul wrote Galatians.
5. Galatians was written two thousand years ago to people who lived in a different part of the world. So why does this letter still concern believers in Christ?

Study 1: Read the whole letter

Introduction

When the churches in Galatia received the letter we today call “Galatians” from Paul, one of the elders of the church probably read the whole letter from beginning to end to the congregation gathered for the Sunday worship service. This is not how we read New Testament books in our churches today. Instead we select and read only a short Bible passage without paying much attention to the larger context of the text.

A serious study of a New Testament book should, however, be done like this: A reading through of the whole book followed by a more detailed study of each passage ending with applying the message of the passage to our own situation.

In this textbook we will study Galatians in three steps: First a reading of the whole letter in one sitting to get a feeling of Paul’s overall message. Then a detailed study of each passage to get a correct understanding of Paul’s arguments and points. The final study will highlight the relevance of Galatians to believers in Christ today.

Read and answer

Take turns reading the whole letter to the Galatians aloud in your groups. After each chapter, try to answer the questions below together. Don’t spend much time with each question. We will come back to them in detail in later studies.

Chapter 1

1. From where did Paul receive the gospel that he had shared with the Galatians?
2. Who appointed Paul as apostle?
3. Why did the churches in Judea praise God for Paul?

Chapter 2

1. Who were considered the main leaders of the church in Jerusalem?
2. What was the conclusion of Paul’s and Barnabas’s meeting with the Jerusalem leaders?
3. Why does Paul mention Titus in connection with his visit to Jerusalem?

4. How are we justified according to Paul's gospel?

Chapter 3

1. What is the connection between believers and Abraham?
2. What was the role of the law before the arrival of faith in Jesus Christ?
3. How had Paul described Jesus Christ to the Galatians when he shared the gospel with them?
4. How does Paul describe the unity of the church (defined as "those who have been baptized into Christ and put on Christ")?

Chapter 4

1. How does Paul describe the life of the Galatians before they knew God?
2. To which covenant do the children of promise belong?
3. As sons we are no longer slaves. What expressions does Paul use to describe our sonship?

Chapter 5

1. What link does Paul make between "yoke of slavery" and circumcision?
2. What would be the consequence for the Galatians if they tried to be justified through the law?
3. In the second half of the chapter Paul contrasts two ways of life. What are they?

Chapter 6

1. In the first part of the chapter Paul gives the Galatians several pieces of advice on Christian lifestyle. Which one do you think is most challenging for believers in Christ today?
2. As human beings we boast of many things. What does Paul boast of?

Study 2: Structuring Galatians

In the previous study you read the whole letter in one sitting. So now you should have a fair idea about what it is all about. You should also be able to structure the text without being overly misled by the chapter and verse divisions in your Bible. Paul's letter did not have any chapters or verses, nor any sections with clarifying headings. Chapters and verses were added to our Bibles centuries later, and sections with headings vary between Bible editions.

Make sure that you have access to both **satyavEdavu** and **pavitra grantha** as you work in your group.

The big picture

Bible scholars have suggested that the six chapters of Galatians can be divided into three main parts, each part consisting of two chapters. Try to do that in your groups! What do you suggest is the main topic in each part?

Don't get caught up in details. Instead think of the occasion of the letter: Why is Paul so upset about the situation in the churches in Galatia? What has happened there since he left them? What is his message to them? How does he want them to respond to his message?

Questions

1. What are chapters 1–2 **mainly** about?
2. What are chapters 3–4 **mainly** about?
3. What are chapters 5–6 **mainly** about?

A more detailed structure

A detailed structure of Galatians can be done in many different ways. This becomes evident when you compare different Bible translations, different Bible editions, and different study Bibles. Hardly any of them follow the chapter division completely:

- None of the chapters contains only one section. For example, **pavitra grantha** shows three sections in chapter 1.
- In some cases a section will continue in the next chapter. For example, **satyavEdavu** has one section that begins in 1:11 and ends in 2:10.

Question

Compare all the six chapters of Galatians in two Kannada Bible translations (for example **pavitra grantha** and **satyaEdavu**). Make a list of the sections for each translation. Also write down the headings.

The structure used in this book

In this book the text of Galatians has been structured into 12 studies, like this:

Greeting, 1:1–5

Only one gospel, 1:6–10

Paul's gospel, 1:11–24

Paul and the apostles, 2:1–10

Justified by faith, 2:11–21

Works of the law or faith, 3:1–14

The promise and the law, 3:15–25

Sons and heirs, 3:26–4:20

Two covenants, 4:21–31

The cross or circumcision, 5:1–12

Live by the Spirit!, 5:13–26

Sowing and reaping, 6:1–10

Paul's closing words, 6:11–18

In each study there are text questions (called “Questions”) and other questions (called “Think and discuss”). Answers to the questions and comments on Think and discuss can be found in the answer section of the book.

The final study (“Study 16: The message of Galatians for us”) revisits some of Paul's key issues in Galatians. No answers or comments have been provided with this study.

Study 3: Greeting (1:1–5)

Introduction and comments

A letter from New Testament times always begins by mentioning the sender and the recipients. Paul follows this tradition. Then he usually adds a blessing and a doxology (with a prayer of thanksgiving). But he often expands these four parts with details that point forward to the issues that he will deal with in the main part of his letter. So as serious students of God's word we should pay attention to the "clues" that Paul includes in his introductory verses. They are meant to prepare Paul's readers for his arguments in the main part of the letter.

Paul is upset about the Galatians, and in a hurry to come to main part of his letter to them. So he does not bother to include any prayer of thanksgiving. In spite of this, the first verses of Galatians have expressions that point forward to

- Paul's claims about his authority as an apostle
- Paul's gospel
- Paul's teaching on how to live as believers in Christ in this present evil age

apostle (v 1): The Greek word means "messenger" in general. In addition, the New Testament uses the word in a narrower sense with reference to Jesus' twelve disciples and a few others (for example James the brother of Jesus and Paul), whom God had entrusted to be "messengers of the gospel" in a unique way.

Galatia (v 2): In **Introduction to Galatians** we saw that Bible scholars do not agree on what Paul referred to by "Galatia". For a discussion about "the Galatians" and "Galatia" see **Appendix: Who and when?** at the end of this book. There you will also find information about when Paul could have written Galatians.

Questions

1. Identify these four main parts of the text:

- Sender
- Recipients

- Blessing
 - Doxology
2. Paul has two important pieces of information about himself. What are they?
 3. What aspects of God the Father does Paul include in this text?
 4. What aspects of Jesus Christ does Paul include in this text?
 5. How does Paul understand this present age?

Think and discuss

1. What could be the reason for Paul to include the additional information about himself?
2. What conclusions can we draw about “Paul’s theology of salvation” from the introductory verses?
3. What conclusion about lifestyle can we draw from the introductory verses?

Study 4: Only one gospel (1:6–10)

Introduction and comments

Paul now jumps right into his reason for writing the letter: He is surprised and upset about the Galatians and the instability of their faith (compare 3:1–5). By listening to and accepting the heretic message of visiting preachers they have in fact abandoned their Christian faith. Paul is outraged as he defends the truth of gospel. The very gospel of Christ is at stake!

gospel (v 6–7): The Greek word **euangelion** means good news in general. In the New Testament it is used about the good news of God's work of salvation through Jesus Christ. So Paul sometimes calls it "the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1; 15:16). The gospel is about Jesus and his suffering, death and resurrection for all who believe. Consequently Paul calls it "the gospel of Christ" (verse 7; see also Romans 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 4:4; 9:13; 10:14; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thess 3:2). This is the gospel that Paul has been commissioned to preach on his missionary journeys. So he can confidently use the phrase "my gospel" about it (Romans 16:25; 2 Tim 2:6).

let him be cursed (v 8–9): The Greek word **anathema** is used for the Old Testament concept of "somebody or something that is set apart to the Lord by being condemned for destruction" (see for example Joshua 6:18). So Paul is handing over these false teachers to God for his judgment and eternal condemnation. Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor 16:22 about those who do not love the Lord. They are cursed (or condemned) as they do not belong to God's people. In Romans 9:3, Paul uses the word about himself: He would gladly be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his Jewish brothers.

a servant of Christ (v 10): Paul also uses this expression about himself in the beginning of Romans (1:1; compare "Epaphras our beloved fellow servant", Col 1:7 and "Tychicus ... a faithful minister and a fellow servant in the Lord", Col 4:7).

Questions

1. What can we understand about the initial relationship between Paul and the Galatian believers through this passage?

2. How does Paul describe the faith of the Galatians since he ministered among them?
3. How does Paul describe the “other gospel” and those who proclaim it?
4. At the end of this passage, Paul mentions a conflict that he faces. Describe this conflict.

Think and discuss

1. Explain Paul’s curse. Does Paul have the right to curse other gospel workers?
2. What is your own experience of the conflict that Paul faced (v 10)? It is a common conflict for gospel workers in South India?

Study 5: Paul's gospel (1:11–24)

Introduction and comments

Paul explains in detail to the Galatians the source of the gospel that he preached to them. It did not come from any human person. And he was not taught it by any human authority, not even by the apostles in Jerusalem. The source of Paul's gospel is divine. It was revealed to him. To prove this, Paul gives an account of the beginning of his life as a believer in Christ. In Acts (chapters 9, 22, and 26) we see how Jesus revealed himself to Paul as the Messiah and the forgiver of the sins of all who believe in him, and how Jesus appointed Paul as a servant and a witness of the gospel (Acts 26:15–18).

I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (v 12): The Greek phrase is “Jesus’ revelation”. It can either be understood as “a revelation of Jesus” (meaning that Jesus was revealed to Paul) or “a revelation from (or by) Jesus” (meaning that Jesus gave Paul a revelation). **pavitra grantha** and **satyavEdavu** have both chosen the second alternative. Other translations have chosen the first alternative (compare “God ... was pleased to reveal his Son in me”, v 15–16). Either alternative, however, supports Paul's argument: The gospel he preached had a divine source. Paul's gospel did not come from any human person.

Judaism (v 13): The Jewish faith and way of life developed during the centuries before Christ, first in Babylonia, later also in Judea.

Arabia (v 17): Probably referring to the Nabatean kingdom east of Damascus and Judea. Compare 2 Cor 11:32, where Paul mentions King Aretas (he was king of the Nabateans) in connection with his escape from Damascus.

Cephas (v 18): This was the apostle Peter's Aramaic name. Both names mean “rock” (see Matt 16:18). **pavitra grantha** has chosen “Peter” instead of “Cephas”.

James the Lord's brother (v 19): This James was not one of Jesus' original twelve disciples. But he soon became an important leader of the Jerusalem church.

Syria (v 21): Syria was a Roman province north of Judea. Damascus was situated in the southern part of the province. Antioch, with a large Jewish population, was its capital. Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman

Empire. Paul and Barnabas had their missionary base in the Antioch church (Acts 11:19–27; 13:1–4, 26–28).

Cilicia (v 21): Cilicia was a Roman province situated between the provinces of Syria and Galatia. Its capital city was Tarsus, where Paul was born and raised (Acts 21:39; 22:3).

Questions

1. What does Paul tell his readers about his gospel (v 11–12)?
2. What does Paul tell his readers about his life before and just after Jesus was revealed to him (v 13–17)?
3. How did the Jesus-believing Jews in Judea react when they heard about Paul's repentance and early ministry?

Think and discuss

1. Paul writes that he received the gospel through a divine revelation. What about us? Do we also need a revelation before we can preach the gospel? How do **we** receive the gospel that we preach?
2. What point does Paul make as he describes his early contacts with Jerusalem and Judea (v 17–23)?
3. Bible scholars struggle to understand how the various New Testament accounts of Paul's life after he became a believer in Christ fit together. Read and compare Acts 9:18–30 (Luke's account); Acts 22:1–21 (Luke's account of Paul's testimony to the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem); Gal 1:13–24 (Paul's testimony to the churches in Galatia). Note down a few observations.

In the following study we will compare Gal 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–29. Our understanding of the chronology of the events in Galatians and Acts impacts our opinion about when Paul wrote his letter to the churches in Galatia. In **Appendix: Who and when?** at the end of this book I present my own conclusions.

Study 6: Paul and the apostles (2:1–10)

Introduction and comments

Paul then explains to the Galatians that the apostles in Jerusalem actually recognized Paul's divine calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles preaching the gospel that God had revealed to him, a true gospel free from the slavery of circumcision and the observance of the Jewish law. This had been settled once and for all at a meeting between Paul and the pillars of the Jerusalem church (James, Peter, and John).

Fourteen years later (v 1): The context indicates that Paul means 14 years from the event mentioned in 1:18 (his visit to Jerusalem to speak with Peter/Cephas). Some Bible scholars think Paul means 14 years after he met Jesus.

Barnabas (v 1): A Jewish background believer from Cyprus and a member of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36). Later Paul's mentor (Acts 9:27). Co-pastor with Paul in the Antioch church (Acts 11:22, 25). With Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–4).

Titus (v 1): A Gentile background believer and Paul's co-worker (2 Cor 2:13; 7:6, 13–14; 8:23; 12:18). Not mentioned in Acts. The recipient of Paul's letter to Titus.

revelation (v 2): We do not know what revelation Paul is referring to. Revelations seem to have been a regular feature in the life of the early church (see 1 Cor 14:26).

compelled to be circumcised (v 3): Converts to Judaism had to be circumcised. The false brothers (v 4) were Judaizers who claimed that Gentile converts to the Christian faith (like Titus) also had to be circumcised.

the freedom we have in Christ Jesus ... make us slaves (v 4): The Christian freedom of not having to keep the Jewish ceremonial laws. Paul claims that compelling Christian converts from Gentile background to follow the Jewish law is like introducing slavery in the church.

pillars (v 9): The most important leaders of the Jerusalem church (compare v 2 and v 6). They must have been the main apostles (the word "apostle" is used about Peter in verse 8) and considered the final authority on church matters.

Questions

1. Why did Paul visit Jerusalem again after fourteen years?
2. Who did Paul meet in Jerusalem and what did he tell them?
3. How did Paul handle the “false brothers”, and what was the reason for his behavior?
4. What was the conclusion of Paul’s meeting with the apostles?
5. The Jerusalem leaders had one request. What was that?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the role Titus plays in Paul’s account.
2. Explain how this passage would convince the recipients of Paul’s letter (the churches in Galatia) that Paul was a true apostle who preached a true gospel.
3. Bible scholars disagree on how Gal 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–29 relate to each other. Do they record the same meeting? Or do they record different meetings? Compare the accounts and note down your conclusions.

Study 7: Justified by faith (2:11–21)

Introduction and comments

The previous passage ended in harmony as the leading apostles in Jerusalem shook hands with the two missionaries to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas. The matter about Gentile converts and their observance of the Jewish law had been settled.

But later there was a controversy in Antioch between two of the participants in the Jerusalem meeting. Paul openly accused Peter of hypocrisy in a matter related to the observance of Jewish customs and laws.

Paul then goes on to explain to his Galatian readers why he could not ignore Peter's behavior: It jeopardized the truth of the gospel. Jews as well as Gentiles are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not through the observance of Jewish customs and laws. We have been crucified with Christ and died to the law so that we might live to God a resurrected life by which Christ the Son of God lives in us.

Peter's behavior is surprising and sad in the light of his distinction as the first preacher of the gospel to Gentiles (see Acts 15:7 and Acts chapter 10).

Paul considered Peter's hypocritical behavior to be the first step toward accepting the heresy of the Judaizers. It nullified or rejected God's grace in Jesus Christ, and it damaged the unity of the church.

According to Paul, the only way for us to be justified is by faith in Jesus. Our righteousness is from God through faith in Jesus Christ, and it is for all who believe in him, Jews as well as Gentiles (compare Romans 3:21–22). Our righteousness does not come through the law. But this does not mean that the law is opposed to God's promise of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:21–22).

when Cephas/Peter came to Antioch (v 11): This visit is not recorded in Acts.

James (v 12): The brother of Jesus, a leading apostle in the Jerusalem church

the circumcision group (v 12): They were the Judaizers who taught that Gentile converts must become Jews (by circumcision and observance of the law of Moses) in order to be included among the people of God and become "real" believers in Christ.

the rest of the Jews (v 13): The Jewish background members of the church

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners (v 15): Paul's description of all Jewish background believers in Christ. Paul then goes on to say that even they ("who are not Gentile sinners") were justified, not by keeping the Jewish law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

we ourselves have been found to be sinners (v 17): Paul's expression "found to be sinners" probably means that the Jews called him a sinner because he associated and ate with Gentile converts who did not follow Jewish practices. Compare people's opinion of Jesus as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34) and Peter's opening words in Cornelius's house, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate or visit a Gentile ..." (Acts 10:28).

is Christ then a servant of sin? (v 17): Paul's opponents may have told Paul something like this: "You are making Christ an agent of sin by saying that Christ allows us Jewish believers to become lawbreakers by associating with sinners and by not forcing Gentile converts to observe the law!" They perhaps also said (compare Romans 6:1): "Come on, Paul! If we are justified by faith in Christ alone, then we can just keep on sinning. So your teaching will tempt people to become even worse sinners. Your doctrine of 'justification through faith in Christ only' makes Christ an agent of sin!" Paul's response to these allegations is, "Absolutely not!"

But if I build up again the things I earlier tore down, then I prove that I am a transgressor (v 18): Bible scholars have understood this verse in mainly two different ways:

1. Paul is referring to believers relapsing into thinking that they can be justified by the observance of the law ("they build up again the things that they tore down"). Such persons "prove that they are transgressors".
2. Paul is referring to believers who return to their old sinful ways after having been justified through faith in Christ. They cannot blame Christ for that. It is their own responsibility. They who were crucified with Christ, they in whom Christ lived, they who were justified by faith in Christ – they are the transgressors. They have set aside the grace of God (v 19–21).

Questions

1. Paul openly opposed Peter. This was a risky thing to do considering Peter's position in the early church. So why did Paul take this risk and what did he accuse Peter of?

2. What effect did Peter's behavior have on Barnabas and the other Jewish background believers of the church in Antioch?
3. What does Paul say about justification in verse 16?
4. How does Paul describe his life in verses 19–20?
5. What does Paul mean by “rejecting (or “making useless”) the grace of God” in verse 21?

Think and discuss

1. What could have been the occasion in the life of the church which made Peter's hypocrisy obvious – and a visible threat to the unity of the believers?
2. Explain Paul's argument in verses 15–16.
3. Explain the context of Paul's exclamation, “Absolutely not!” (v 17) without referring to my comment above.

Study 8: Works of the law or faith (3:1–14)

Introduction and comments

Paul has a good reason for calling the Galatians “fools”. They experienced great spiritual things, when they accepted Paul’s gospel about God’s gracious salvation through faith in the crucified Christ. But later they were confused by the legalism preached by visiting Judaizers. Their understanding of a gospel of grace and faith was corrupted by a false so called “gospel” of works of the law.

Paul then reminds the Galatians of Abraham, his faith and trust in God’s promise of many descendants and of blessing even to the Gentiles. God’s promise of blessing was fulfilled in Christ Jesus who redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us on the cross. As a result of this redemption, all who believe in him, whether Jew or Gentile, receive the life of the Spirit and become Abraham’s true children, through faith and not through the works of the law. Through faith in Christ Jesus we are all the children of God, Jews and Gentiles alike. Together we are the people of God.

Galatians (v 1): The fact that Paul calls the recipients of his letter “Galatians” indicates that they were ethnic Galatians, who lived in the northern part of the Roman province of Galatia. Paul visited this area on his second and third missionary journeys, but not on his first.

Did you receive the Spirit (v 2): Paul’s phrase “to receive the Spirit” (compare Jesus’ phrase “to be born of the Spirit”, John 3:3–8) refers to the fact that we who have been justified through faith in Jesus Christ have been made alive (compare Paul’s use of the phrase “make alive” in verse 21). Unless God’s Spirit lives in us, we have no spiritual life, no real life.

Did you suffer (v 4): The Greek word means “to experience” but can also carry the meaning of “to suffer”, as translated in the Kannada Bibles. In the context of the following verse, “experience” makes better sense: “Were all your miraculous experiences in the life of the Spirit in vain?”

supply you with the Spirit (v 5): The presence of the Holy Spirit equipped and empowered the believers in Christ to work miracles. God’s Holy Spirit was at work in their ministry.

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (v 6): Quote from Genesis 15:6.

“In you all the nations will be blessed” (v 8): Quote from Genesis 12:3. God promised that all nations, Jews as well as Gentiles, would be blessed through Abraham.

Verse 9: God’s blessing is the result of faith. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, Jews as well as Gentiles, are the children/the seed of Abraham and the heirs of God’s promise of blessing through Abraham’s Seed, Jesus Christ (3:16, 29; 4:7).

“Cursed is everyone who does not observe all things that are written in the book of the law” (v 10): Quote from Deuteronomy 27:26

“The man who does the works of the law will live by them” (v 12): Quote from Leviticus 18:5

“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (v 13): Quote from Deuteronomy 21:23

the promise of the Spirit (v 14): The Old Testament promises associated the Spirit with the arrival of the Messianic age (the New Covenant), see for example Isaiah 32:14–17; 44:1–6; Ezekiel 39:29.

Questions

1. Why does Paul call the Galatians “fools”?
2. How did the Galatians become believers in Christ?
3. Who are “sons of Abraham” according to Paul?
4. What does Paul contrast in verses 9–10?
5. How did Christ redeem us from the curse of the law?
6. How was the blessing of Abraham fulfilled?

Think and discuss

1. Abraham is important for Paul’s argument in this passage. Explain how.
2. Summarize the passage Gal 3:1–14 in your own words without looking in your Bible.

Study 9: The promise and the law (3:15–25)

Introduction and comments

The previous passage ended with Paul stating that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise of blessing through Abraham for Gentiles as well as for Jews. God's promise of the Spirit is found through faith in Christ Jesus (3:14). In him we have life, the life of the Spirit.

Paul goes on to describe the function of the law in the history of God's people. The law has been useful. It protected the Israelites from the consequences of sin and transgressions. It supervised God's people until the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham with the coming of Christ. But it was not an institution through which man could be justified. Only the fulfillment of the promise would bring justification. So there can be no doubt about the superiority of the promise over the law. The gospel of God's gracious offer of justification through faith in Christ puts an end to the need for God's people to be supervised by the law. Later Paul will explain that we who have life through the Spirit must live by the Spirit and be guided by the Spirit (5:25). By doing so we fulfill the law of Christ (6:2).

covenant (v 15, 17): The Greek word means both “agreement, covenant” and “last will and testament”.

seed (v 16): The Greek word (as well as the corresponding Hebrew word in Genesis 12:7) means “offspring”. It primarily refers to many people (“descendants”) but its grammatical form is singular. Paul uses its singular form to make a point about Jesus Christ as the offspring of Abraham.

four hundred and thirty years (v 17): This figure probably refers to the time that the Israelites spent in Egypt (Exodus 12:40). Their sojourn in Egypt began with Jacob (to whom God renewed his promise to Abraham, see for example Genesis 50:24) and ended with Moses (the “mediator of the law” in verse 19).

inheritance (v 18): This is the fulfillment of the “last will and testament” (or “covenant”) referred to in the previous verses.

the seed to whom the promise was made (v 19): Christ, compare v 16

through angels by a mediator (v 19): The mediator is Moses who received the law from God at Sinai and gave it to the Israelites. Angels were present at

Sinai (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2). The fact that they were many symbolized to Paul the inferiority and incompleteness of the law.

God is one (v 20): But only one party, God himself, was present when Abraham received his promise. That fact symbolized to Paul the superiority and the completeness of the promise.

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! (v 21): Paul accuses the Judaizers of making the law contradict God's promise, the gospel. But they are wrong, he says, the law does not oppose the promises of God. No Old Testament law can give man life and righteousness. The reason is that no man has been able to keep the law. We are all sinners, prisoners of sin, and unable to keep the law and gain life through the law. So the law confirms the necessity of the promise of righteousness and life through faith in Jesus Christ (v.21–25).

guardian (v 24): The Greek word refers to the household slave who was in charge of the supervision of the children. He taught them health and hygiene and general behavior and to respect their elders. He also supervised their studies and ensured that they went to school.

Questions

1. Who is, according to Paul in this text, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham of many descendants?
2. How does Paul describe Moses and the law?
3. How long did the validity of the law last?
4. What happened when faith arrived?

Think and discuss

1. Paul argues in this passage that God's promise to Abraham is superior to the law given to the Israelites through Moses. What are Paul's arguments?
2. Explain how the law does not oppose God's promise (v 21–25 and my comment above). Use your own words as much as possible and try not to look in your Bible or at my comment.
3. What is the role of the law according to Paul in this passage?

Study 10: Sons and heirs (3:26–4:20)

Introduction and comments

The gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul preached to the Galatians totally changed their lives. They became the children of God, who could even call him “daddy”. They became the inheritors of God’s promises to Abraham. Christ lives in them. Christ has also pulled down the old divisions of ethnicity, status, and gender in their church fellowship. But now the Galatians seem to have lost their previous joy. They have exchanged their freedom in Christ for enslavement to the legalism of the Judaizers. Perhaps Paul’s ministry among the Galatians had been in vain? But they are his little children, and he is willing to suffer the pain of childbirth once again to see Christ embodied in them.

clothed yourselves with Christ (3:27): The imagery is taken from the practice of putting new clothes on a person who has been baptized.

seed (3:29): Refers to believers in Christ (compare Gal 3:7). In Gal 3:16–19, Paul uses the same expression (which goes back to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:7) with reference to Jesus Christ.

child (4:1): The Greek word means “a legal minor”.

guardians and stewards (v 2): A guardian is in charge of the legal matters of a minor. A steward is in charge of the property.

elements of this world (v 3): Paul most probably refers to the cosmic powers that influence this fallen world. So the Kannada translations may confuse a reader.

Abba (v 6): An Aramaic word meaning “daddy”. It conveys intimacy.

those who by nature are not gods (v 8): Paul probably refers to the previous idol worship of the Gentile converts.

observe special days, and months, and seasons, and years (v 10): Paul probably refers to both Jewish holidays and pagan astrology.

physical illness (v 13): The nature of this illness is not known. It is not mentioned in Acts.

the first time (v 13): The Greek phrase implies that Paul had been to Galatia at least twice earlier, probably on the occasions mentioned in Acts

16:6 (during his second missionary journey) and 18:23 (during his third missionary journey).

Questions

1. How do we become sons of God?
2. How does Paul describe the fellowship of believers in Christ?
3. How does Paul describe the fellowship of believers in Christ in 3:29?
4. How does Paul describe Christ in 4:4?
5. What happened to man when God sent his Son? Make a list.
6. What does Paul accuse the Galatians of in 4:9?
7. How did the Galatians receive Paul at his first visit to them?
8. What feelings does Paul have for the Galatians?

Think and discuss

1. Explain the imagery that Paul uses in verse 3:27.
2. Paul's description of the unity of the church in 3:18 is a challenge to every local church fellowship. What changes would you like to see in your own church in the light of this verse?
3. How does Paul describe man's condition under the law (v 1–3)? Use your own words as much as possible.
4. How does Paul describe man's condition after the coming of Jesus Christ (v 4–8)? Use your own words as much as possible.
5. Summarize the contrast found in 4:8 with as few words as possible.
6. How do you understand Paul's argument in verse 12?
7. What do you think are the two most important contrasts in 4:12–20?

Study 11: Two covenants (4:21–31)

Introduction and comments

In this passage Paul challenges those Galatians who want to follow the preaching of the Judaizers and submit to the requirements of the Jewish law in order to become members of the people of God. He does so by contrasting two covenants: The covenant of the law is a covenant of slavery. But the covenant of promise is a covenant of freedom.

law ... law (v 21): Here Paul uses the word “law” in two ways. The first “law” means “the law of Moses” (the Galatians wanted to follow the Jewish law), and the second “law” means “the book of the law” (which is the Pentateuch where the accounts of Abraham and his two sons are found).

For it is written (v 22): Genesis chapter 16 contains the story about Hagar and Ishmael. In Genesis chapter 21 we find the stories about the birth of Isaac (v 1–5) and the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael (v 8–19).

Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman, and one by the free woman (v 22): Ishmael was the son of Hagar, and Isaac was the son of Sarah. Hagar was Sarah’s slave maid.

Mount Sinai in Arabia (v 25): The Roman province of Arabia included the Sinai peninsula where Mount Sinai is situated.

Verse 27 is a quotation from Isaiah 54:1, the beginning of a passage about the future glory of Zion (Jerusalem).

Verse 28 varies in the original Greek manuscripts. Some manuscripts have, “But **you**, brothers, are like Isaac children of promise” (compare English NIV). Other manuscripts have, “But **we**, brothers, are like Isaac children of promise” (compare the two Kannada translations). Which version we prefer does not matter for our understanding of Paul’s message.

children of promise (v 28): Compare 3:29 and Romans 9:8.

persecuted (v 29): See Genesis 21:9, where the Hebrew verb used can mean “mock”. Some Jewish scholars think Isaac was persecuted, or even abused, by Ishmael.

Verse 30 is a quotation from Genesis 21:10, where Sarah tells Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son Ishmael.

Questions

1. Who were Hagar and Ishmael? And which covenant (see the introduction to this study) does Hagar represent?
2. Who were Sarah and Isaac? And which covenant (see the introduction to this study) does Sarah represent?
3. Paul makes a comparison between believers in Christ and Isaac. What is his point?
4. What does Paul say about the sonship of believers in Christ?

Think and discuss

1. This passage can be structured into three parts after Paul's introductory address to the Galatians in verse 21. Identify the three parts.
2. Summarize the two covenants as described in this passage.
3. What is Paul's main point in this passage?

Study 12: The cross or circumcision (5:1–12)

Introduction and comments

Paul passionately exhorts the Galatians to stand firm in the truth of the gospel that he preached to them. It is a gospel of God's grace through Christ and his cross. It is a gospel of faith and love, faith in Christ expressed through love for God and our neighbor. It is a gospel of life in the Spirit as we wait and hope for righteousness. Paul also exposes and strongly condemns the false teaching of the Judaizers, who claim that circumcision (and observance of the Jewish law) is an additional requirement for the justification and salvation of the Gentiles. They will be judged for their heresy.

the hope of righteousness (v 5): Our Christian hope is anchored to the return of Jesus Christ, compare Paul's words to Titus, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11–13).

castrate themselves (v 12): The Greek word means both "cut off" and "castrate".

Questions

1. What does Paul contrast in verse 1?
2. What happens when a person tries to become righteous by obeying the law?
3. How do we reach the righteousness we hope for?
4. What does Paul say about circumcision in verse 6?
5. Why is Paul still persecuted?

Think and discuss

1. How does Paul show his concern and irritation in this passage?

Studies

2. In verse 9 Paul uses a proverb to illustrate his point. Explain how.
3. In this passage Paul contrasts two kinds of faith (one Bible scholar has even called it a contrast between “two religions”). What are they? How are they different?

Study 13: Live by the Spirit! (5:13–26)

Introduction and comments

Paul now tells his readers not to let their freedom in Christ, their freedom from the bondage of the Jewish law, be misused. This will not happen if they live in accordance with the law of Christ which sums up the entire Old Testament law: “Love God, and love your neighbor!”

When we received the crucified Christ as our Lord and Savior, “our flesh” (that is “our old sinful human nature”) with its passions and selfish desires was crucified with him, and we received spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God now lives in us and produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and so fulfills the law of Christ through us. But we must allow the Holy Spirit to mold us into the likeness of Christ, to use us, and to guide us.

the flesh (v 13, 16): The fallen human nature, the sinful nature of man in this world. Many translations avoid the word “flesh” and instead use expressions like “our sinful nature”.

The quotation in verse 14 is from Leviticus 19:18. It is also quoted by Jesus (see for example Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39), by Paul in Romans 13:9, and by James in 2:8). Compare also Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:12, “In all matters do to others what you want them to do to you. For this is what the law and the prophets say”.

walk/live by the Spirit (v 16): The grammatical form of the Greek verb for “live/walk” indicates a habit: “continue to live in the Spirit”, “keep on living in the Spirit”. Compare the phrase “to be led by the Spirit” in verse 18. In Romans 8:14 Paul says that “all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God”. Compare also my comment on verse 25 below.

led by the Spirit (v 18): See my note on v 16

not under the law (v 18): Not under the bondage of trying to be justified through the observance of the Jewish law

crucified the flesh (v 24): Compare Romans 6:6 and Gal 6:14.

walk by the Spirit/be guided by the Spirit (v 25): Here Paul uses a different Greek word than in verse 16. Our spiritual life began with our spiritual birth the moment we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Our continued Christian life is an outflow of the Holy Spirit at work in and through us. We have life by the Spirit, consequently we walk by the Spirit.

Questions

1. “Freedom” is a key word in verses 13–15. What is the source of this freedom (see verse 1), and what does Paul say about this freedom in verse 13?
2. What does Paul contrast “the flesh” with in Gal 5:16–26?
3. In Gal 5:16–26 Paul presents two lists, one with bad things and one with good things. What headings do these lists have?
4. What will happen to those who practice the works of the flesh?
5. What does Paul say about the fruit of the Spirit and the law in verse 23?

Think and discuss

1. What do we learn about Christian freedom in Gal 5:13–15?
2. What can we understand about the churches in Galatia from verse 15?
3. How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer in Christ? Limit your points to Gal 5:16–26.
4. Go through each word in Paul’s two lists and explain what they mean.
5. What can we understand about the churches in Galatia from verse 26?

Study 14: Sowing and reaping (6:1–10)

Introduction and comments

In this passage Paul shows the churches in Galatia some examples of what it means to live a life guided by the Holy Spirit in the church, a life fulfilling the law of Christ, loving your neighbor as yourself. We should not become weary in bearing the fruit of the Spirit, working for the good of all. Then on the day of God's harvest we will reap eternal life.

the law of Christ (v 2): The Great Commandment about loving God and one's neighbor as oneself.

burden (v 2) and **load** (v 5): Paul uses two synonymous Greek words. But note that he uses them in different contexts, so he is not contradicting himself.

Questions

1. What does Paul say should happen with a believer who has been caught in a sin?
2. How do we fulfill the law of Christ according to verse 2?
3. In what context does Paul say that "all must carry their own loads"?
4. In verse 7 Paul uses a metaphor from everyday life. Explain the metaphor.
5. Paul ends this passage with an exhortation to his readers. What does he tell them?

Think and discuss

1. What can we learn from verse 1?
2. How do you understand the connection between verse 2 and verse 1?
3. What do you think Paul means by "share all good things" in verse 6?
4. Explain Paul's message in verses 7–10. Use your own words as much as possible.

Study 15: Paul's closing words (6:11–18)

Introduction and comments

Paul writes his closing words in his own hand, perhaps to ensure that his readers really take notice of what he has to tell them. Circumcision is not the way for Gentiles to experience the new creation in the Kingdom of God. But the gospel of God's grace and their faith in the crucified Christ will lead them there. God's peace and mercy will be upon those who follow this rule.

large letters (v 11): Paul probably used large letters to emphasize the importance of his closing words.

in my own hand (v 11): Paul did not write his letters himself but used a secretary, (see for example Romans 16:22). He sometimes added a greeting written in his own hand (see for example 1 Corinthians 16:21), perhaps to show that the letter really was from him (compare 2 Thessalonians 3:17).

a new creation (v 15): God, through Christ Jesus, set us free from the present evil age (1:4). We were buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that – just like Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father – we too might walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:4). The old evil world is now crucified to us, and we are crucified to the world (Gal 6:14). We are God's new creation – a newly created people in Christ consisting of both uncircumcised Gentiles and circumcised Jews, the Israel of God (v 16 and my comment below).

Verse 16: The Greek word **kai** occurs three times in this verse. The word means “and”, but also “that is, namely”. The two meanings cause problems for translators. Does Paul wish peace and mercy on one or two groups of people? In other words, are “the Israel of God” the same people as “those who follow this rule” or are they different? Compare the two Kannada translations: **satyavedavu** has one group of people, **pavitra grantha** has two. See also the following comment.

the Israel of God (v 16): In the context of Galatians, this phrase refers to the fellowship of believers in Christ, the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. Earlier Paul has spoken of the believers as “Abraham's children” (3:7), “Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise” (3:29), and “children of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (3:26). See also Ephesians 2:11–13, Romans 4:12.

I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (v 17): Probably scars from torture and beatings that Paul had received during his ministry of preaching the gospel.

Questions

1. Paul accuses the Judaizers of two selfish motives for preaching circumcision to the Gentiles. What were their motives?
2. Paul also accuses the Judaizers of being inconsistent. In what way were they inconsistent?
3. The Judaizers boasted about how they had convinced Gentiles to be circumcised. What does Paul boast about?
4. Paul contrasts two things in verse 15. What are they? And how does he evaluate these things?
5. How does Paul close his letter?

Think and discuss

1. In verse 15, Paul is very casual about circumcision: If a man is circumcised or not does not matter to him. But this lack of concern seems to be a contradiction of his earlier statement, “Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.” (5:2). How do you solve this apparent contradiction?
2. Explain Paul’s understanding of the effect of “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” on his own life (v 14).
3. Explain in your own words the following phrases:
 - a. “a new creation” (v 15)
 - b. “the Israel of God” (v 16)
3. What “rule” do you think Paul is referring to when he writes “follow this rule” in verse 16?
4. Explain how Paul’s short closing blessing fits in with his overall message in Galatians.

Study 16: The message of Galatians for us

Paul's letter to the Galatian churches concerns us today!

In **Introduction to Galatians** (the first chapter of this book) we saw that this letter really concerns believers in Christ and churches today, even if it was not written directly to us but to churches in Galatia in Asia Minor about two thousand years ago.

We also saw that the reason for this continued relevance of Galatians is that Paul – as he deals with situation in the Galatian churches – clarifies some very important principles that apply to the church always and everywhere. These principles concern the messenger of the gospel, the true gospel (about justification, righteousness, and salvation), and the Holy Spirit's work in the everyday life of those who have received the gospel, enabling us to fulfill the law of Christ ("Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself!").

Then, in the **introduction to study 3** we noticed that Paul in his initial greeting (1:1–5) uses expressions that point forward to his three main topics:

- Paul's claims about his authority as an apostle
- Paul's gospel
- Paul's teaching on how to live as believers in Christ in this present evil age

So we will conclude our study of Galatians by returning to these three topics and reflect on Paul's message for us today. We have chosen these headings:

- The origin of the gospel.
- The true gospel.
- The Holy Spirit at work.

The origin of the gospel

The origin of Paul's gospel and his authority

Paul begins his letter by claiming that Christ himself had commissioned him an apostle and entrusted him with the "gospel of Christ". Paul then explains that he did not receive "his gospel" from the apostles in Jerusalem, who were

the pillars of the church and who had had personal experience of Jesus Christ during his years of ministry in the Roman province of Judea.

The Galatians had welcomed the gospel that Paul preached and been converted from paganism to the Christian faith. But later they had been confused by visiting Judaizers who claimed to represent the “true apostles in Jerusalem” and who preached what they called “the true gospel”. The Judaizers claimed to have greater authority than Paul, because their “gospel” had the approval of the apostles in Jerusalem.

So we can see that the origin of the gospel message (divine origin or apostolic origin) gave authority to the preacher of that gospel (the apostle Paul or the Judaizers who came from the apostles in Jerusalem).

The origin of “our gospel” and our “authority”

What about us? Whose “gospel” – and what “gospel” – do we believe and preach? Is “our gospel” divine or apostolic, and in what way? And where do we find the true gospel? And how do we know that what we find really is the true gospel? Where does our authority to preach the gospel come from?

As God’s people today – and as preachers and teachers of God’s word today – we need to address questions like these. Here, in the context of this textbook, we will limit ourselves and touch on only a few aspects of the topic:

1. We cannot compare ourselves to Paul, who was commissioned by Jesus Christ himself and whose gospel had divine origin. He lived at a time when the true gospel of Jesus Christ was being formulated, described and documented in the books of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul and the other authors of these books. The Holy Spirit guided the early church as it collected these books into a “canon”, a body of scriptures that carry divine authority for later generations of believers in Christ. Only the gospel revealed by Christ to his apostles – as found in the New Testament – is divine, apostolic, and correct.
2. Consequently, the origin of “our gospel” is found in the word of God, in the New Testament books. They document and describe the work of Christ (the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). They explain the gospel of Christ (the gospels, the letters). They describe the gospel of Christ manifested in and expressed through the early church (Acts, the letters). They reveal and explain Christ and his work (the gospels, Acts, the letters, Revelation).
3. So we can use Galatians to help us understand the gospel of Christ and his Kingdom better. And as we understand the gospel better for

ourselves, we will better equipped to evaluate speakers (including so called “apostles” and “great men of God”) who visit our churches proclaiming to preach and teach “the truth”.

4. In addition, our “authority” to preach the gospel of Christ and his Kingdom is also primarily based on the word of God as documented in the New Testament. It does not come from the Bible college that we attended, or from a great Bible teacher, or from an “ordination”. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) was not limited to Jesus’ eleven remaining disciples. This becomes clear as we study the book of Acts and the New Testament letters. No, by Jesus’ authority all God’s people have been commissioned to make disciples of all men. Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8 of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the gospel to be carried out to the ends of the earth was given to the disciples on Ascension Day. But the book of Acts and the New Testament letters show that this promise was extended to all God’s people who succeeded the disciples in the ministry of the gospel.

For reflection and discussion (I have not given my own answers!)

1. Go through the four points above again. Explain them in your own words.
2. Do you agree with my statement, “Only the gospel revealed by Christ to his apostles – as found in the New Testament – is divine, apostolic, and correct” (point 1). Why – Why not?
3. In what way has your study of Galatians in this course helped you to understand the gospel of Christ (see point 3) better? Explain.
4. Do you agree with my statement in point 4 that Jesus has commissioned, and given authority to, all God’s people to proclaim the gospel? Why – Why not?
5. In our churches we often arrange special meetings with outside speakers. How do we know that their message is “divine and apostolic”? Many of us watch Christian TV channels or listen to recorded Bible studies from all kinds of places. How do we know that the messages we watch or listen to are correct and not false?

The true gospel

The conflict in Galatians

Some people say that the message that the Judaizers preached to the Galatians does not concern us today. The reason, they say, is that circumcision is not an issue for us. They also say that no church today requires their members to keep all the laws of the Old Testament.

But those who say so have not understood that the conflict between Paul and the Judaizers was not primarily about circumcision and observing Old Testament laws. The issues at stake in Galatians addressed primarily two areas of faith and life in the early church:

- a. **Questions concerning justification** (“How are we justified?”), **righteousness** (“Where does our righteousness come from?”), **salvation** (“How can we be rescued/saved?” “How do we receive the Spirit?” “How do we inherit the kingdom of God?” “How do we become sons of God?” “How are we made spiritually alive?” “How do we reap eternal life?”), and **holiness** (“How can we live as God’s holy people in this evil world?”)
- b. **Questions concerning the identity of God’s people:** “How can Gentile believers in Christ become part of God’s people?” “How do we know that the Gentile converts to Christ belong to the covenant that God made with his people at Sinai?”

The false gospel of the Judaizers

The Judaizers claimed that the observance of the Jewish law (beginning with circumcision) is essential for our justification, our righteousness, and our holiness. They believed in Christ, but they claimed that faith in Christ is not enough for our justification/salvation. We also, they said, need to be circumcised and observe the Old Testament laws. So the false “gospel” of the Judaizers can be described as “faith plus law” or a “gospel of works”, because our own human efforts become necessary for our justification/salvation.

In addition, the Judaizers taught the necessity of observing the Old Testament laws for a godly life in this evil world. Our obedience to the law, they said, shows that we belong to God’s people and that we are holy as he is holy.

So the Judaizers claimed that circumcision and the observance of the law are the identity markers of God’s people. The converted Gentiles have to be circumcised and obey the law, they said. Only then will they belong to God’s people and be inheritors of God’s Old Testament promises.

Paul's true gospel

Paul strongly opposed this false “gospel” and the way the Judaizers identified God’s people. Not because he was against the Jewish practice of circumcision as such, or because he thought that it was wrong to follow Jewish laws and customs: During his second missionary journey, Paul had Timothy circumcised out of consideration for the Jews living in that area (Acts 16:1–3), and Paul himself took part in Jewish purification rites at the Jerusalem temple after his third missionary journey (Acts 21:17–26). No, the reason why Paul condemned the Judaizers was that their message could not be combined with the true gospel that Paul himself preached and the way in which Paul identified God’s people.

The true gospel, Paul said, is a gospel of God’s grace through faith in the crucified Christ. We are justified through faith not by observing the law. Our righteousness is not the result of our own efforts but God’s free gift to us. It is God’s grace. God declares us righteous when we place our trust in Jesus Christ. Christ’s death on the cross becomes our righteousness when we believe in him. Our justification is possible because of his sacrificial death.

Paul’s gospel of God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ had consequences for his understanding of the identity of God’s people. “Circumcision or uncircumcision” does not matter. All who believe in Christ – both Jews who are circumcised and Gentiles who are not circumcised – are heirs of God’s promise to Abraham, sons of Abraham, sons of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

Are we justified/Do we become righteous/Do we attain salvation by works (by keeping the Old Testament laws, by being good persons, by helping others)? Or is our way to justification/righteousness/salvation God’s free and gracious gift to us through faith in Jesus Christ and his crucifixion?

This issue concerns **us** just as much as it concerned the Galatians two thousand years ago.

For reflection and discussion (I have not given my own answers!)

1. Explain the conflict in Galatians without referring to my text above. Use your own words as much as possible.
2. Summarize “Paul’s gospel” without referring to my text above. Use your own words as much as possible.
3. A doctrine of “righteousness through works” is still seen in the life of many churches today. Give examples of occasions when “the law” (for example following church rules, or claiming that a certain kind of

behavior is necessary for our salvation) has been preached by a pastor or a visiting preacher in your own church.

The Holy Spirit at work

Paul mentions the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) about seventeen times in Galatians, beginning in chapter 3. In our studies we saw how Paul reminds his readers of the work of the Holy Spirit in various areas of their lives as believers in Christ:

1. Justification/salvation: Paul uses expression like “to receive the Spirit” (3:2), “to receive the promise of the Spirit” (3:14), and “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (4:6).
2. Empowerment: Paul touches on this aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in 3:5, as he reminds the Galatians of the Spirit having worked miracles among them.
3. Guidance: The guidance of the Holy Spirit (“to walk by the Spirit”, “to be guided by the Spirit”, 5:25) is an important theme in chapter 5. The Holy Spirit will guide us until our “hope of righteousness” (or our justification) is consummated at the second coming of Jesus (5:5).
4. Sanctification and “fruit-bearing”: This is the major theme of chapters 5 and 6. Paul uses expressions like “to live/to be led by the Spirit” (5:16, 18), “the fruit of the Spirit” (5:22–23), and “to sow and reap to the Spirit” (6:8). The Spirit of God lives in us, produces his fruit in our lives, enables us to fulfill the law of Christ (6:2, compare 5:14).

As we study these four points we should note at least two important matters:

- Galatians shows us that **the Holy Spirit is of crucial importance** throughout the lives of believers in Christ: our spiritual birth, the course of our everyday life, our spiritual development, the success of our ministry, the fruit and the spiritual quality of our life, our endurance until the end of our life and/or the consummation of the Kingdom of God with the return of Jesus Christ.
- Consequently, **Galatians has relevance for us today**. So we would benefit from reading it – again and again. And we would benefit from spending time studying these texts and applying the spiritual truths we discover in them to our personal lives and to the life of our church.

For reflection and discussion (I have not given my own answers!)

1. Reflect on each of the four areas of the work of the Holy Spirit (see above) in the light of
 - our own personal life
 - the life of your church
2. Help one another in your group carry any concern that you have in prayer to the Lord. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2)

Answers

Answers 1: Read the whole letter

Chapter 1

1. Paul received the gospel that he had shared with the Galatians through a revelation of Jesus Christ, not from any human source (1:11).
2. God the Father and Jesus Christ appointed Paul as apostle (1:1).
3. The churches in Judea praised God for Paul's changed life. He who had been a persecutor had become a preacher of the Christian faith (1:23–24).

Chapter 2

1. James (the brother of Jesus), Peter, and John were considered the main leaders of the church in Jerusalem. They were the pillars of the church (2:9).
2. Paul's and Barnabas's meeting with the Jerusalem leaders had this result: James, Peter, and John (the leaders of the Jerusalem church) realized and accepted that God had entrusted Paul with the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (2:7–9).
3. Paul mentions Titus, who was an uncircumcised Greek convert, in connection with his visit to Jerusalem to show his readers that not even the leaders of the Jerusalem church required Titus to be circumcised (2:1–3).
4. According to Paul's gospel we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not by keeping the law (2:16).

Chapter 3

1. The connection between believers and Abraham: Believers are children of Abraham, because we are justified by faith just as he was (3:6–8). So we are Abraham's offspring and heirs to the promise that God made to him (3:29).
2. Before the arrival of faith in Jesus Christ the role of the law was to keep us in custody (or to control us, or to keep us imprisoned) (3:23).
3. When Paul had shared the gospel with the Galatians, he had portrayed Jesus Christ as crucified (3:1).
4. Paul describes the unity of the church (defined as "those who have faith in Christ and have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ") as a fellowship with no distinctions of ethnicity ("Jew or Greek"), social

status (“slave or free”), gender (“male or female”). All are one in Christ (3:26–29)

Chapter 4

1. Paul describes the life of the Galatians before they knew God: It is a life enslaved by deities that in reality are not gods (4:8).
2. The children of promise belong to the covenant of the free woman, the heavenly Jerusalem, whose children are born free (4:24–26).
3. Paul uses these expressions to describe our sonship (4:6–7): God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. We are no longer slaves. We are now heirs.

Chapter 5

1. Paul makes this link between “yoke of slavery” and circumcision: A believer in Christ who has been set free by Christ becomes a slave again (puts on a yoke of slavery) if he undergoes circumcision (5:1–2).
2. If the Galatians tried to be justified through the law, they would abandon faith and cut themselves off from Christ (5:4).
3. In the second half of the chapter Paul contrasts two ways of life: A life led by the Spirit and a life that gratifies the desires of the flesh (the sinful nature) (5:16).

Chapter 6

1. In the first part of the chapter Paul gives the Galatians several pieces of advice on Christian lifestyle. I personally think that the first advice (to restore a sinful fellow believer in a spirit of gentleness, 6:1) is very challenging. You may have chosen some other point.
2. As human beings we boast of many things. Paul boasts only of the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified for him and through which Paul is crucified to the world (6:14).

Answers 2: Structuring Galatians

The big picture

Answer to the questions

1. Chapters 1–2 are mainly about Paul himself: His apostleship and his authority.
2. Chapters 3–4 are mainly about Paul's gospel: Justification, righteousness, and salvation are received by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are not justified and declared righteous by observing the law. Note that Paul does not use the words "salvation" and "saved". Instead he has expressions such as "receiving the Spirit", "sonship", "life", "inheritance". Bible scholars have suggested that Paul in these chapters focus on "getting in": God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the only way for man (Gentile as well as Jew) to join God's people, to become a member of God's family. It is how we enter the Kingdom of God (compare Jesus' words in Matthew 5:20).
3. Chapters 5–6 are mainly about true spiritual life. Paul uses expressions like "to be led by the Spirit", "to walk by the Spirit", "to be guided by the Spirit", "to bear the fruit of the Spirit", "to sow to the Spirit" to describe a life of Christian holiness. Bible scholars have suggested that Paul in these chapters focus on "staying in": God's gracious presence in our lives through the work of his Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to remain among God's people, to stay in God's family, to get ready to receive our future inheritance in God's eternal Kingdom (compare Jesus' words in Matthew 25:34).

A more detailed structure

Answer to the question

1. List of sections in **pavitra grantha**

Verses	Heading
1:1–5	No heading
1:6–10	
1:11–24	
2:1–10	

2:11–21

3:1–14

3:15–18

3:19–25

3:26–4:7

4:8–20

4:21–31

5:1–12

5:13–26

6:1–10

6:11–18 (Final words)

So the translators/editors/publishers of **pavitra grantha** have structured Galatians into 15 sections.

2. List of sections in **satyavEdavu**

Verses

Heading

1:1–5

(Greetings and praise to God)

1:6–10

1:11–2:10

2:11–21

3:1–18

3:19–4:7

4:8–5:12

5:13–24

5:25–6:10

6:11–18 (Final words written by Paul's own hand)

So the translators/editors/publishers of **satyavEdavu** have structured Galatians into 10 sections.

Answers 3: Greeting (1:1–5)

Answers to the questions

1. Four main parts of the text:
 - Sender: Paul (and his co-workers) (v 1–2)
 - Recipients: The churches in Galatia (v 2)
 - Blessing: Grace and peace ... (v 3–4)
 - Doxology: To God our Father be the glory ... (v 4–5)
2. Paul has two important pieces of information about himself:
 - He calls himself an apostle.
 - His apostleship is from Jesus Christ and God the Father and not from any human person.
3. Paul includes these aspects of God the Father in this text:
 - God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.
 - He is our father who grants us peace.
 - Jesus' work of salvation was according to the Father's will.
 - Eternal glory belongs to God the Father.
4. Paul includes these aspects of Jesus Christ in this text:
 - His resurrection from the dead
 - His sacrifice for our sins and rescue (salvation).
5. Paul understands this present age to be evil, something that human beings have to be rescued from (saved from).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The reason for Paul to include the additional information about himself has to do with the occasion of his letter: Paul had established the churches in Galatia during his missionary journeys. Later Judaizers had come with false teaching and confused the minds of the immature believers. The Judaizers, claiming to represent the apostles in Jerusalem, had questioned Paul's authority and told the churches that Paul was not a

legitimate apostle. Later in Galatians, Paul describes in detail how he became a legitimate apostle and the source of his authority.

2. We can draw these conclusions about “Paul’s theology of salvation” from the introductory verses:
 - Salvation of mankind from this present evil world is God’s will and plan.
 - Salvation is achieved through Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death and his resurrection.
3. We can draw this conclusion about Christian lifestyle from the introductory verses: This present age is evil. So we not only have to be rescued or saved **from** it, but we also need to be able to live **in** it in accordance with God’s will. Later in Galatians, Paul will explain how it is possible to live a holy Christian life in this world.

Answers 4: Only one gospel (1:6–10)

Answers to the questions

1. We can understand these things about the initial relationship between Paul and the Galatian believers:
 - Paul had met the Galatians in person at least once before he wrote his letter to them: He had visited their towns, proclaimed the gospel to them and established churches among them. Then he had perhaps visited them a second time to encourage them to stand firm and not listen to traveling preachers who attracted supporters by preaching “another gospel”. That kind of preachers would be judged by God and condemned (v 9).
 - Paul had been sincere in his ministry among the Galatians. He had been faithful to the gospel message about God’s grace through Jesus Christ (v 6). He had not tried to please people by adapting the gospel to what his audience wanted to hear. They preferred a distorted gospel to the true gospel (v 7).
2. Paul’s description of the faith of the Galatians since he ministered among them: It had not been stable. Soon after Paul left them they left Christ who in his grace had called them to salvation. Their faith had not been strong enough to withstand the temptations of a “different gospel”, which they seemed to have found more exciting or challenging (v 6).
3. Paul’s description of the “other gospel” and those who proclaimed it:
 - It is a perverted gospel. In fact, it is no gospel at all. The only true gospel is the gospel of Christ that Paul has proclaimed to them. To accept any other so called “gospel” is to desert Christ and refuse his grace.
 - The false preachers are cursed. Paul uses this strong expression to make it absolutely clear to the Galatians that there is only one gospel. Those who preach and believe in something else, even if they call this “the gospel”, are condemned as they have not accepted God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ. They do not belong to God’s people.
4. At the end of this passage, Paul mentions that in his ministry he faces a conflict between pleasing people and being a servant of Jesus Christ. A true and sincere servant of Christ must be faithful to the gospel. He must never compromise the truth of the gospel in order to make people happy.

A preacher who wants to attract followers will be tempted to adapt his message. But Paul wants to serve Christ, not people.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Paul's curse: I don't think a servant of Christ has the right to curse false preachers – or anybody else. So we should not understand Paul's words in Gal 1:8–9 like this, "I hereby put a curse on all false preachers!" Paul is really upset about what has happened in the Galatian churches. So with words and expressions of agitation he states a spiritual fact: Those who preach and believe a false so called "gospel" have not accepted the true gospel of God's gracious salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently they do not belong to the people of God. And consequently they will be condemned when they face God's judgment. Paul's words can be rephrased like this "There is a curse on you, false preacher!"
2. I think most gospel workers in South India have experienced the same conflict that Paul faced in his ministry (v 10). There is, of course, a need for us to adapt our message to those who listen so that they really understand God's word for them. But we must not give in to the temptation to adapt and change the gospel message itself so that it becomes more pleasing to the listeners. We want to have followers and supporters. But these followers and supporters must be the fruit of us preaching the true gospel of God the Father's gracious and merciful salvation through the suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Answers 5: Paul's gospel (1:11–24)

Answers to the questions

1. Paul tells his readers these things about his gospel (v 11–12):
 - It is not of human origin.
 - He did not receive it from any human person.
 - He received it by a divine revelation (from God the Father or from God the Son).
2. Paul tells his readers these things about his life before and just after Jesus was revealed to him (v 13–17):
 - He was a Jew eagerly following the law of Moses and the traditions of Jewish scribes (his teacher was Gamaliel, a famous Jewish rabbi and scholar, a Pharisee, and a member of the Jewish council, Acts 5:34; 22:3).
 - He was more zealous in the defense his Jewish faith than most other young people.
 - He violently persecuted the Christian church.
 - He became a believer when Christ was revealed to him.
 - After his repentance he realized that Christ had been revealed to him for a purpose and that God already had a plan for his life: To proclaim the gospel of Jesus among the Gentiles.
3. The reaction of the Jesus-believing Jews in Judea when they heard about Paul's repentance and early ministry was one of great happiness. They glorified God because of the amazing change in Paul's life – a former persecutor of the believers was now a proclaimer of the Christian faith!

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Paul received the gospel through a divine revelation. We cannot compare ourselves to Paul. I do not think that we should expect to receive a divine revelation before we can preach the gospel. The gospel we preach has already been revealed. We find it in the New Testament texts. These texts were written by people chosen by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul was one of these persons. What they wrote is sufficient and

complete. Nothing, not even a divine revelation, can add anything to the gospel documented in the New Testament.

2. Paul's point as he describes his early contacts with Jerusalem and Judea (v 17–23): He certainly did not receive his gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem or from any other person in Judea. No, his gospel is of divine origin!
3. Bible scholars struggle to understand how the various New Testament accounts of Paul's life after he became a believer in Christ fit together (Acts 9:18–30; Acts 22:1–21; Gal 1:13–24). I have two main comments:
 - The details between the three accounts vary. It seems as if neither Acts nor Galatians give a complete picture of what happened. Luke does not record every event, only the events that fit into his narrative in Acts. Neither does Paul record every event, only the events that fit into his argument about the source of his gospel.
 - So the differences have to do with the context and perspective of each account. Paul's perspective in Galatians is to “prove” to the Galatians that his gospel does not have any human source and that he certainly did not receive it from the apostles in Jerusalem or from any other Jewish believer. Luke's perspective in Acts chapter 9 is Paul's dramatic experience and his change from a fanatic persecutor to a zealous evangelist and propagator of the gospel (note for example v 13–16, 20–21, 22, 27–29). This perspective is reinforced in Paul's testimony in Acts 22 (see for example v 4, 14–15, 18–21).

Answers 6: Paul and the apostles (2:1–10)

Answers to the questions

1. Paul visited Jerusalem again after fourteen years because God must have told him to settle the matter about the validity of his gospel once and for all. We understand this: 1. Because the “revelation” he refers to (v 1) must have been from God and, 2. The content of the meeting was “the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles” (v 2).
2. In Jerusalem Paul met “the pillars of the church” (referring to the main church leaders James, Peter, and John). He told them about his ministry among the Gentiles.
3. Paul was very firm in the way he handled the “false brothers”: He did not give in to any of their arguments. The reason for his behavior was his refusal to compromise with the truth of the gospel that he had been preaching among the Gentiles (v 5).
4. The conclusion of Paul’s meeting with the apostles: The apostles realized that the gospel Paul had preached among the Gentiles was the true gospel. They also realized that God had anointed Paul to minister to the Gentiles just as he had anointed Peter to minister among the Jews (v 7–8). Then they all shook hands to show that they had come to an agreement and they were all serving God together (v 9).
5. The Jerusalem leaders had one request: They wanted Paul and his co-workers to remember the poor believers in Jerusalem and Judea by sending (financial) support (v 10).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Titus’s role in Paul’s account: He is the “test case”. If the apostles in Jerusalem did not insist on circumcision for Titus (who was a Greek and who had not been circumcised earlier), then Paul was right about “his gospel”.
2. This passage would convince the recipients of Paul’s letter (the churches in Galatia) that Paul was a true apostle who preached a true gospel:
 - The apostles in Jerusalem (who were considered the final authority in the early church) had confirmed his apostleship as being of the same dignity as Peter’s. Just as Peter had been appointed by God to be an apostle among the Jews, so Paul had been appointed by God to be an

apostle among the Gentiles. Of course, Peter and Paul both ministered among Jews as well as Gentiles. But their their main focus was on one of these groups.

- The apostles in Jerusalem had met Titus and listened to the report that Paul and Barnabas presented about their ministry among Gentiles. They had approved of Paul's missionary strategy of not circumcising the converts ("they added nothing" to Paul's practice, v 6). So the false preachers who had come to Galatia questioning Paul's authority and who preached a different "gospel" (claiming that Paul's gospel was wrong) were themselves wrong and didn't have the approval of the apostles in Jerusalem.
3. Bible scholars disagree on how Gal 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–29 relate to each other. In **Appendix: Who and when?** at the end of this book I present my own conclusions. There you will also find information about when Paul could have written Galatians.

Answers 7: Justified by faith (2:11–21)

Answers to the questions

1. Paul openly opposed Peter, which was a risky thing to do considering Peter's position in the early church. But Paul had no option: The truth of the gospel and the unity of the church were at stake as a consequence of Peter's hypocrisy. Peter had enjoyed meals together with all the members of the church in Antioch, irrespective of their Jewish or Gentile background. But when Judaizers came from Jerusalem to Antioch, he suddenly stopped having meal fellowship with Gentile background believers.
2. Peter's behavior affected Barnabas and the other Jewish background believers of the church in Antioch: They too did no longer have meal fellowship with Gentile background believers.
3. Paul about justification in v 16:
 - We cannot be justified through works of the law!
 - We can only be justified through faith in Christ!
4. Paul description of his life in verses 19–20:
 - Paul's old life is dead: When he was justified through faith in Christ Jesus, his old life in observance of the law died, crucified with Christ.
 - Paul's new life is Christ living in him: His new life is a life for God. In this world Paul's life is lived by faith in the Son of God.
5. Paul says that if justification had been possible through the observance of the law then there would have been no need for Jesus to die (which was an act of God's grace). So teaching "justification through works of the law" is actually a "rejection of the grace of God" or "making the grace of God useless" (v 21).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The occasion in the life of the church which made Peter's hypocrisy obvious – and a visible threat to the unity of the believers – was the fellowship meal in connection with the celebration of the Lord's supper when the church met for its weekly worship service on Sundays (compare 1 Cor 11:18–29). Before the Judaizers had come, the believers sat in mixed groups. After the Judaizers had come with their heresy, first

only Peter, then Barnabas and all the other Jewish background believers moved away from the Gentile background believers.

2. Paul's argument in v 15–16: “Peter, Barnabas and I are God-fearing and law-abiding Jews by birth, and we certainly cannot be called Gentile sinners. But even we experienced salvation (“were justified”, “were declared righteous by God”) through faith in Jesus Christ. We were certainly not saved (“justified”, “declared righteous by God”) through the observance of the law and through fulfilling the requirements of the law!”
3. The context of “Absolutely not!” (v 17) is explained in my comment on verse 17.

Answers 8: Works of the law or faith (3:1–14)

Answers to the questions

1. Paul calls the Galatians “fools”, because they were so easily bewitched by the heresy of the Judaizers, and so they became unfaithful to the gospel of the crucified Christ that Paul had painted before their eyes (v 1). They had experienced the truth of the gospel (“received the Spirit” v 2, “begun a life in the Spirit” v 3). They had also seen the Holy Spirit work miracles through their ministry (v 5). But then they accepted additional requirements for salvation, such as circumcision and observance of the Jewish law (things that Paul calls a life “in the flesh”, v 3).
2. The Galatians became believers in Christ (“received the Spirit”, were “made alive” by the Spirit, compare v 21) through faith in Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, not through the works of the law (v 2–3). The Spirit makes us alive, but “the flesh” (including trying to achieve righteousness through the works of the law) leads to death (compare 6:8).
3. According to Paul those who believe, Jews as well as Gentiles, are the “sons of Abraham” (v 7). All who believe are one people, sons of Abraham and heirs of God’s promise.
4. In verses 9–10 Paul contrasts “blessings” and “curses”: Those who like Abraham believe are blessed. But those who rely on the works of the law are cursed.
5. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us when he died on the cross (v 13).
6. God’s promise to Abraham is fulfilled like this: The Gentiles experience blessing through faith in Christ. The Jews receive the promise of the Spirit (true spiritual life) through faith in Christ (v 14). In Christ God’s promise to Abraham is fulfilled for Gentiles as well as for Jews. In Christ we are all one people of God (3:28).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Abraham is important for Paul’s argument in this passage:
 - Abraham’s **faith** shows us that faith is our way to righteousness. Abraham was not declared righteous because he observed the law

but because they had faith in God. In the same way, we cannot be declared righteous through the works of the law (including circumcision and other Jewish customs) but through faith in Jesus Christ.

- Abraham's **children** are those who are believers like him. The gospel of justification by faith was foreseen in the Old Testament and announced to Abraham. This "gospel of justification through faith in Jesus Christ" applies to both Jews and Gentiles. It is our faith in Jesus Christ that makes us true children/descendants of Abraham and heirs of God's promise to Abraham.
 - Abraham received a **promise** from God that all nations on earth would be blessed through him. Abraham was a man of faith, and we who have faith are blessed along with him. This blessing of salvation (of "life in the Spirit") came through Jesus Christ.
2. Your summary of Gal 3:1–14 in your own words should have covered at least these key points:
- Paul calls the Galatians "fools".
 - The experience of the Galatians
 - Abraham's righteousness
 - Abraham's blessing
 - The curse of the law
 - Blessing through faith in Christ
 - The one people of God

Answers 9: The promise and the law (3:15–25)

Answers to the questions

1. According to Paul in this text, Christ (“the seed”) is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham of many descendants. Paul uses the singular form of the Greek (and Hebrew) word for “seed” to argue that the promise primarily refers to one person – Jesus Christ.

Note that Paul in other passages (see 3:7 and 3:29) uses the phrases “sons of Abraham” and “Abraham’s seed” about all those who believe in Christ Jesus, Jews as well as Gentiles.

2. Paul describes Moses as the mediator of the law, and the law as the guardian and protector of those who received the law, the Israelites.
3. The validity of the law only lasted until the arrival of Christ (the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham).
4. When faith arrived, the function of the law as guardian and supervisor of God’s people ended.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Paul argues like this to show that God’s promise to Abraham is superior to the law given to the Israelites through Moses:
 - The promise is like a “last will and testament” or a covenant which cannot be changed. So when the law was given, it did not cancel the promise. This shows that the promise about the coming of Christ is superior to the law given at Sinai.
 - The law is limited in time. It was good and useful as the guardian and protector of God’s people only until the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham – the arrival of God’s grace with Christ (“the seed”) and with justification for mankind. This shows that the promise is superior to the law.
 - The promise was given by God who is one, but the law was mediated through many angels and Moses. This shows that the promise is superior to the law.
2. The law does not oppose God’s promise – your own answer.

John Stott has this summary: “The Judaizers falsely claimed that the law annuls the promise and supersedes it. Paul teaches the true function of the law, which is to confirm the promise and make it indispensable”.

Martin Luther describes the main function of the law like this: “It is not to make people better but worse. This means that the law shows them their sin. This knowledge humbles, terrifies, bruises and breaks them – and drives them to seek grace and come to the Blessed Seed, Jesus Christ”.

3. The role of the law according to Paul in this passage is to protect God’s people from the severe consequences of sin. But also to guide and supervise God’s people until the arrival of Christ, who is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. With God’s gracious offer of justification through faith in Christ there is no longer any need for God’s people to be supervised by the law.

Answers 10: Sons and heirs (3:26–4:20)

Answers to the questions

1. We become sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ, Jews as well as Gentiles.
2. Paul describes the fellowship of believers in Christ as consisting of those who have been baptized into Christ and thereby “clothed themselves with Christ”. In the fellowship of believers all are equal. Ethnic background does not matter (neither Jew nor Greek). Social status does not matter (neither slave nor free). Gender does not matter (neither man nor woman).
3. In 3:29 Paul describes the fellowship of believers in Christ (those who belong to Christ) as the seed of Abraham and inheritors of God’s promise to Abraham (also in Romans 4:16; 9:7–8). Note that Paul uses the same expression “Abraham’s seed” about Jesus Christ earlier in the chapter.
4. Paul description of Christ in 4:4:
 - He was sent by God at the right time.
 - He was born into a life under human conditions: A woman was his mother. He was under the law just like every other human person.
5. This happened to man when God sent his Son:
 - The Son came to redeem us from enslavement to the law.
 - The Son made it possible for us to become God’s children. We were adopted with all the rights of a true son. We became heirs of God, inheritors of God’s promises to Abraham. This applies to people of all nations, Jews as well as Gentiles.
 - The Son gave us the Spirit of sonship and made it possible for us to have an intimate relationship with God the Father.
6. In 4:9 Paul accuses the Galatians of returning to their old enslavement to the law and so again becoming slaves under the powers that control this fallen world. Paul is shocked that they – who had experienced the sonship of God – could even consider to do so.
7. At Paul’s first visit to the Galatians they received him with compassion for his sickness and with enthusiasm for the gospel message he preached to them (4:13–14).

8. Paul has passionate feelings for the Galatians. He wants the very best for them, without any selfish motives, unlike the Judaizers. He is even willing to go through great pain and suffering (like a mother giving birth to her baby) for their spiritual welfare and to see Christ again embodied in their lives. He really wishes that he could be with them and express his passion for them (4:17–20).

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The imagery that Paul uses in verse 3:27 is that of a person putting on new clothes. In the early church it was common for persons who had been baptized to dress in new clothes. This was a symbol of the new life, a life together with Christ and controlled by Christ. Paul's point to the Galatians is that their life has been changed. They are no longer the same persons as they were before their conversion. Now they think differently and they act differently.
2. –
3. Paul's description of man's condition under the law (v 1–3):
 - He is no better than a slave, because he is not free and independent.
 - He is like a minor whose life is controlled by a legal guardian.
 - He is like a minor who has not yet taken charge of his own property. It is under the care of a steward until his father decides to let him have it.
 - He is actually a slave under the cosmic powers of this fallen world.
4. Paul's description of man's condition after the coming of Jesus Christ (v 4–8):
 - He is redeemed from enslavement to the law. He is no longer a slave
 - He is adopted by God and a child of God. So he is now a member of God's family, of God's people.
 - He has intimate fellowship with God and even calls him "daddy".
 - Through Christ he is an heir of the future Kingdom of God
5. The contrast in 4:8 summarized: Either you know God or you are a slave!
6. Paul's argument in verse 12: Paul's new life with Christ liberated him from enslavement to the law and enabled him to have fellowship with Gentiles ("I have become as you are"). The Galatians are now

tempted by the preaching of the Judaizers to submit to enslavement to the law. So Paul asks them to be like him, to be free from Jewish legalism (“I beg you to become as I am”).

7. The two most important contrasts in 4:12–20 (my suggestion):
 - About the Galatians: Then they were happy in the freedom of their salvation. Now they have lost their joy to enslavement to legalism.
 - About the preachers: The Judaizers (selfish heretics) and Paul (unselfish proclaimer of the true gospel)

Answers 11: Two covenants (4:21–31)

Answers to the questions

1. Hagar was the slave servant of Abraham's wife Sarah. Ishmael was Hagar's son and Abraham's firstborn son. Hagar represents "the covenant of slavery".
2. Sarah was Abraham's wife. Isaac was Sarah's son and Abraham's second son. Sarah represents "the covenant of freedom".
3. Paul's comparison between believers in Christ and Isaac: They are both children of promise (referring to God's promise to Abraham).
4. Paul about the sonship of believers in Christ: We are not the children of the slave woman but of the free woman. So we are the children and inheritors of God's promise.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The structure of the passage Gal 4:21–31:
 - Introductory address to the Galatians: "Answer me!"
 - Part one (v 21–23) gives the historical background: Abraham and his two sons. Paul signals this by referring to the Pentateuch ("It is written in the law").
 - Part two (v 24–27) is Paul's allegorical interpretation of the previous verses. Note that Paul's use of the word "analogy".
 - Part three (v 28–31) is the application of Paul's "analogy": What does this mean for believers in Christ?
2. The two covenants as described in this passage:
 - The covenant of the law, characterized by key expressions like these: Hagar the slave woman. Ishmael the son born by the flesh into slavery. Mount Sinai the present Jerusalem. Persecutor. Slavery. The flesh.
 - The covenant of God's promise, characterized by key expressions like these: Sarah the free woman. Isaac the free son of promise. Persecuted. The Jerusalem above. Freedom. The Spirit. Inheritor of God's promises.

3. Paul's main point in this passage: believers in Christ belong to the covenant of promise. We were born to freedom and not to enslavement to the law. We are the inheritors of God's promises.

Answers 12: The cross or circumcision (5:1–12)

Answers to the questions

1. In verse 1 Paul contrasts “freedom in Christ” with “slavery to the law”. Paul exhorts the Galatians to remain in the freedom that they received through faith in Christ and not to submit to the legalism of the Judaizers (using the expression “again submitting to a yoke of slavery”).
2. The person who tries to become righteous by obeying the law rejects the grace of Christ (compare 2:21) and is alienated from Christ (v 3–4).
3. We will reach the righteousness we hope for “through the Spirit by faith” (v 5). This means that we live our lives in the hope of the second coming of Jesus and the day of God’s final judgment. On that day our “hope of righteousness” (or our justification) will be consummated. Until then, God wants us to lead godly lives – with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit.
4. Paul about circumcision in verse 6: Whether a man is circumcised or not is of no consequence to a person in Christ. The life of a believer in Christ stands on two legs only, faith and love. Faith in Jesus Christ brings us righteousness. Love of God and love of our neighbor is the manifestation of God’s righteousness in us – and it is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our faith is expressed through our love. Our faith works through our love. So circumcision becomes a hinderance rather than a help. Earlier, in verse 2, Paul warned the Galatians of the danger of circumcision: To think that circumcision (and with it the observance of the Jewish law) will bring us closer to God and his righteousness is actually to deny Christ!
5. Paul is still persecuted because of the gospel he preaches, a gospel of justification through faith in Christ and his crucifixion – and through nothing else. If he instead would preach a false gospel of “faith plus circumcision” as the way of justification and salvation, he would no longer be persecuted. Paul’s preaching of the cross (“justification through grace”) is offensive to all who believe in “justification through works”.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. Paul clearly shows his concern and irritation in this passage:

- He addresses the Galatians repeatedly (v. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8) urging them to listen to him, hammering his message into them, warning them, questioning their behavior.
 - He is very upset about the Judaizers, describing them as “yeast” that will affect all the churches (v 9, trouble them and confuse them, v 10) and who will be judged (v 10), saying they should castrate themselves (v 12, and not only have the foreskin removed which was done at circumcision).
2. In verse 9 Paul uses a proverb to illustrate his point: A little yeast will leaven the whole dough. Paul refers to the preaching of the Judaizers and the effect it has on the churches. Their false doctrine (“Why don’t you get circumcised? It will please God and bring you closer to him! How can a person become righteous unless he observes God’s commandments?”) would gradually turn the believers away from the true gospel of God’s grace and salvation through faith in the crucified Christ.
3. In this passage Paul contrasts two kinds of faith (one Bible scholar even uses the expression “two religions”):
- Justification and salvation through the observance of the law. This is “salvation through works”. Paul uses words and expressions such as these to describe this kind of faith: yoke of slavery, circumcision, trying to be justified by the law, obligated to keep the entire law, fallen away from grace, cut oneself off from Christ, Christ becomes of no benefit.
 - Justification and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This is “salvation through grace”. Paul uses words and expressions such as these to describe this kind of faith: freedom, Christ has set us free, the Spirit, by faith, hope of righteousness, in Christ, eagerly wait by faith, faith working through love, obeying the truth, the cross of Christ.

Paul makes it very clear to the Galatians that these two kinds of faith cannot be combined. The Judaizers were preaching a false gospel which can be described as “justification and salvation through works plus grace”. This was the heresy that was poisoning and destroying the churches in Galatia. Paul exposes this heresy – and strongly opposes it!

Answers 13: Live by the Spirit! (5:13–26)

Answers to the questions

1. The source of our freedom as believers in Christ. He has set us free (verse 1). In verse 13 Paul adds two important things about our freedom in Christ:

- It is our Christian calling to be free.
- This freedom can be misused, so we must be careful how we use it.

2. In Gal 5:16–26 Paul contrasts “the flesh” with “the Spirit”. The contrast between these two is a recurring theme in Galatians (see 3:3; 4:29; 6:8). “The flesh” stands for the fallen human nature, the sinful nature of man in this world. “The Spirit” is the Holy Spirit who lives in believers and who works through us who believe in Christ.

(In 4:23 Paul contrasts “the flesh” with “the promise” when he compares Abraham’s two sons Ishmael (son of Hagar the slave woman) and Isaac (son of Sarah his wife). Those who depend on the law for their righteousness instead of trusting in Christ as their Savior are Abraham’s children according to the flesh. We who trust in Christ for our righteousness are Abraham’s true children, children of the promise.)

3. In Gal 5:16–26 Paul presents two lists: The list with bad things has the heading “The works of the flesh”. The list with good things has the heading “The fruit of the Spirit”.
4. Those who practice the works of the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom of God (v 21). So they cannot look forward to a future with God’s people.
5. The law is not against the fruit of the Spirit (v 23). We who are led by the Spirit are free and not slaves to the law (4:7). So we are no longer under the law (5:18). Instead we fulfill “the law of Christ” (6:2) by following the Great Commandment (“Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself”, v 14) with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ – through the Holy Spirit – lives in us who believe. So we fulfill the law of Christ as we become more and more like him (2 Corinthians 3:18), our lives producing the fruit of the Spirit.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. We learn these things about Christian freedom in Gal 5:13–15:

- Freedom is basic to Christian life and experience: We are called to freedom in Christ and not to slavery to sin. We live in freedom and not in slavery to the Jewish law.
 - Christian freedom comes with a responsibility. This responsibility is to Christ our Savior. It is not a selfish freedom of indulgence to our sinful nature. But it is a freedom to submit to and to serve one another. So our life of freedom will reflect Christ and his kingdom values. In the following passage (5:16–26), Paul shows that this is possible because the Holy Spirit of Christ lives in us and works through us.
 - Christian freedom is expressed through the Great Commandment of love: “Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself”.
2. Verse 15 reveals that the conflicts within the churches in Galatia were severe. The heresy preached by the Judaizers had caused tensions that threatened to destroy the churches and the faith of the believers.
 3. The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers in Christ (based on Gal 5:16–26):
 - We have life through the Spirit (v 25): This means that when we received Christ, the Holy Spirit made our human spirits truly alive, spiritually alive. Jesus uses the expression “to be born again by the Spirit” (John 3:3–6).
 - The Holy Spirit lives in us who believe, and we must continue to live (to walk) in the Spirit (v 16). In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul exhorts his readers “not to quench the Spirit”. We must stay spiritually alive, not be diverted, not backslide. We must be “led by the Spirit” (v 18 and my comment).
 - The Holy Spirit works through us who believe and produces spiritual fruit in our lives as long as allow him to do so (v 22–23). We must actively encourage the growth of spiritual fruit in our lives.
 - The Holy Spirit guides us who believe (v 25). So we must learn to trust the Holy Spirit for daily guidance – and to be obedient to his guidance.
 4. –. Note that Paul’s lists are, of course, not complete!
 5. From verse 26 we can understand there was a problem with conceit and spiritual pride in the churches in Galatia. Some believers considered themselves to be more spiritual than others. This led to competition and envy, threatening the unity of the church.

Answers 14: Sowing and reaping (6:1–10)

Answers to the questions

1. Paul says that a believer who has been caught in a sin should be restored. But this must be done in a spirit of gentleness and concern (v 1).
2. Paul says in verse 2 that we fulfill the law of Christ by carrying one another's burdens. This metaphor means that we should help and encourage one another within the life of the church and as we face the difficulties and temptations of the outside world.
3. Paul says that "all must carry their own loads" (v 3–5) in the context of our individual responsibility to God for our attitudes (such as conceit, pride, jealousy, disregard for others) and actions (for example our treatment of our fellow believers).
4. In verse 7 Paul uses a metaphor from everyday life: sowing and reaping. A farmer will reap the same crop that he has sown or planted. He will not reap chillies if he has planted tomatoes. The same principle applies to our life as believers: We cannot expect to reap good things, if we have sown bad things.
5. Paul ends this passage with an exhortation to his readers. He tells them to do good things ("to sow a good crop and not a bad crop", according to his metaphor). This is of special importance in the life of the church.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. From verse 1 we can learn how we as spiritual people (people who belong to Christ and have been born again by the Spirit of Christ, people who live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit) should deal with a fellow believer who has been caught in a transgression or sin. Our goal must be to bring that person back into full fellowship with Christ and with the church. We should "restore" him, but be careful of two things:
 - We must restore that person with gentleness. Here the transgressor is in focus. He must be treated in a loving, positive, and constructive way.
 - We must be careful that we ourselves are not tempted. Here the focus is on the person who restores. I do not think that Paul means that "the restorer" will be tempted to commit the same sin as the transgressor. I

rather think that Paul wants us to restore a sinner gently and lovingly. Our temptation is to become hard, inconsiderate, unloving, condemning, accusing, and so on.

2. The connection between verse 2 and verse 1 can be understood like this: One example of “bearing one another’s burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ” in the life of the church (v 2) is the restoration of transgressors and sinners in a gentle and spiritual way (v 1).
3. I think Paul’s phrase “share all good things” in verse 6 should be understood as a variation of what he later writes to Timothy, “The laborer deserves to be paid” (compare 1 Corinthians 9:6–11). A church should take care of the material needs of its pastor. When the believers are blessed by the teachers of the word of God, they should share their blessings with those who have taught them. This is an example of “bearing one another’s burdens and fulfilling the law of Christ”.
4. Paul’s message in verses 7–10: God sees my heart and spirit. I cannot fool God by pretending to be godly and spiritual. What I sow now will bear fruit at the harvest time (on the Day of God’s judgment). So the Holy Spirit in my life will not only produce the fruit of the Spirit now in this world. The spiritual fruit in my life now will also have consequences for eternity. On the Day of judgment I will receive my reward – eternal life in the Kingdom of God. But if I “sow to the flesh” now, I will receive destruction on that Day. So I must be careful about how I live my life. I need the guidance of the Spirit so that I always work for the good. I must faithfully and patiently carry on sowing to the Spirit – until the Day of God’s judgment, until “the harvest time”.

Answers 15: Paul's closing words (6:11–18)

Answers to the questions

1. Paul accuses the Judaizers of two selfish motives for preaching circumcision to the Gentiles (v12–13):
 - They wanted to avoid persecution. To preach that the only way to justification and salvation is faith in a crucified Christ and to trust in God's free gift of grace brought opposition and persecution from their Jewish brothers. But to preach the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts brought praise from their Jewish brothers.
 - They wanted to boast about their achievement. Their preaching about the need for Gentile converts to be circumcised had been successful. The proof of success was the men who had had their foreskins ("their flesh") removed.
2. Paul also accuses the Judaizers of being inconsistent (v 13): They preached the law (that Gentiles had to be circumcised and observe the Jewish law), but they themselves did not keep the law. Paul is probably referring to "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), compare Matthew 22:36–40.
3. The Judaizers boasted about how they had convinced Gentile believers that it was necessary for them to be circumcised. Paul boasts about what Jesus did for him through his death on the cross. Paul does not want to boast about any of his own achievements, only about Jesus' achievement for him (v 13–14).
4. Paul contrasts two things in verse 15: Circumcision (which is of no importance) and a new creation (which is really important).
5. Paul closes his letter with a blessing.

Comments on Think and discuss

1. The apparent contradiction between 6:15 ("circumcision or no circumcision does not matter") and 5:2 ("if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you") can easily be solved. Circumcision as a cultural tradition or a surgical procedure for better personal hygiene is fine, it does not matter. But circumcision (and attached with it the observance of the Jewish law) as the way to please God and to achieve righteousness is absolutely wrong. To believe that is

to deny God's gracious free gift to us: Our justification and salvation through Christ and his death on the cross.

2. Paul's understanding of the effect of "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" on his own life (v 14) has two aspects:
 - The world was crucified to Paul. Paul's priorities changed completely after Jesus Christ revealed himself to him on the road to Damascus. What was important to him earlier (his heritage, his education, his religious zeal, his achievements) became rubbish and of no value to him (compare Philippians 3:4–8). All the things that people value in this world no longer mattered to him (compare Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 6:4–10).
 - Paul was crucified to the world. Paul no longer lived in "the flesh", controlled by sinful passions, which were aroused by the law and which brought forth fruit to death (Romans 7:5). Instead he lived in the Spirit, led by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit.
3. A summary of my comments on verse 15 and verse 16:
 - a. God's newly created people in Christ consisting of both uncircumcised Gentiles and circumcised Jews (v 15)
 - b. The fellowship of believers in Christ, the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles (v 16)
3. When Paul writes "follow this rule" in verse 16, he must be referring to the cross of Christ (v 14) and the new creation (v 15) – God's new people in Christ, consisting of both circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles.
4. Paul's short closing blessing fits in with his overall message in Galatians: God's grace in Christ Jesus and his death on the cross is the only way to obtain justification, righteousness, and salvation for the believers in Christ in Galatia. Human efforts through circumcision and the observance of the Jewish law (the message preached by the Judaizers) is not an option for them!

Appendix: Who and when?

Who were the Galatians?

Paul writes his letter to the churches in Galatia (1:2) and calls them “foolish Galatians” (3:1). Bible scholars do not agree on who these Galatians were. The reason for the controversy is that “Galatia” in those days was used about two different geographical areas, one smaller area and one larger, which also included the smaller area.

The ethnic Galatians had immigrated from Europe a few hundred years earlier and settled in the central part of Asia Minor (around Ankara in present-day Turkey). Their area or “country” was called Galatia. With the expansion of the Roman Empire, the Romans formed a larger province, also called Galatia, inhabited by Galatians in the north and Lycaonians, Pisidians and other ethnic groups in the south.

So did Paul write to churches where the original Galatians lived (the northern part of the Roman province of Galatia)? Or did he write to churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia where mostly Pisidians and Lycaonians lived?

According to Luke in the book of Acts, Paul visited the Roman province of Galatia on all his three missionary journeys. On his first journey he only visited the southern part of the province (Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, see Acts chapters 13 and 14). But on his second and third journeys (Acts 16:6; 18:23) he seems to have also visited the northern part of the province, the part where the “real” Galatians, the ethnic Galatians, lived.

The issue of the ethnic and geographical background of the recipients of Paul’s letter does not affect our understanding of their cultural and religious background. We know that they were Gentiles (4:8) who had accepted Christ as a result of Paul’s ministry among them (1:8, 11; 4:13).

But it does affect the question of when Paul wrote this letter.

When was Galatians written?

The dating of the letter depends to a large extent on our answer to two questions:

- Who were the “Galatians” Paul wrote to? If they were ethnic Galatians who lived in the northern part of the Roman province of

Galatia, Paul probably wrote the letter during his third missionary journey (AD 53–57).

- Is Paul's meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem in Gal 2:1–10 the same meeting as the "Jerusalem council" in Acts chapter 15? If they are different meetings, then Paul probably wrote Galatians before the "Jerusalem council" which took place in AD 49.

The first question cannot be answered with any certainty. This means that the dating of Galatians depends on how we answer the second question: Did Paul have one or two meetings with the Jerusalem apostles to decide about the necessity for Gentile converts to the Christian faith to be circumcised?

Two meetings. Those who think that Paul's account in Gal 2:1–10 describes an earlier meeting between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles, place it during Paul's and Barnabas's "famine visit" to Jerusalem in Acts 11:29–30. They conclude that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians from Antioch (in AD 48–49) after his first missionary journey (after he had visited Antioch in Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium, Derbe) but before the "Jerusalem council" (in Acts 15). Consequently they see Paul's recipients as the churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (who were not ethnic Galatians). They also consider Galatians to be the earliest of Paul's letters in the New Testament.

One meeting. Those who think that Paul's account in Gal 2:1–10 refers to the "Jerusalem council" in Acts 15, usually conclude that Paul wrote Galatians during his long stay in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (AD 53–57). By then he had probably visited the northern part of the Roman province of Galatia (where the ethnic Galatians lived) at least once. They find it unlikely that Paul would address his recipients as "You foolish Galatians!" (Gal 3:1) if they were not ethnic Galatians. Another, more important, reason for the later dating of Galatians is that it is very similar to Romans which we know was written from Corinth toward the end of Paul's third missionary journey, after Paul's long stay in Ephesus. But their main point is that it would be no reason in the early church to have two meetings between the same people who come to the same conclusion: It is not necessary for Gentile converts to be circumcised.

How do Galatians 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–29 relate to each other?

We have seen above that Bible scholars disagree on how Galatians 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–29 relate to each other. Do the texts describe the same meeting or two different meetings between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles?

My own understanding:

- The two accounts differ in details but deal with the same issue: Gentile converts and circumcision (and in extension the need for Gentile converts to observe the Jewish law). I find it very unlikely that there were two meetings between Paul and the apostles in Jerusalem about Gentile converts and the Jewish law. One such meeting would have settled the issue once and for all.
- So the differences between the two accounts must arise from the different perspectives of the authors. Paul and Luke wrote about the same meeting in different contexts. Paul needed to prove to the Galatians that his apostleship and the gospel he preached had been authorized by the leading apostles in Jerusalem. Luke records this crucial meeting between the missionaries (Paul and Barnabas) and the apostles in Jerusalem in the context of the expansion of the gospel: The issue of Gentile converts and the Jewish law had to be solved for the gospel to expand throughout the Roman Empire. When this matter had been settled, Paul could carry on his Gentile ministry with the approval of the Jerusalem church.
- The differences between the accounts are possible to reconcile, once you accept that neither Paul nor Luke recorded everything that happened. For three examples of this, see the following section.

Galatians 2:1–10 and Acts chapter 15:1–29

The differences between the accounts are possible to reconcile, once you accept that neither Paul nor Luke recorded everything that happened. Three examples:

1. The famine relief visit to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29–30)

Question: Why did not Paul mention in Galatians that he and Barnabas were sent by the Antiochian church to Jerusalem with famine relief (compare Acts 11:29–30)?

Answer: This visit had nothing to do with the issue of his apostleship and the gospel he preached. So there was no need for him to mention it.

2. “In response to a revelation” and Agabus’s prophecy

Question: Paul writes that he went to Jerusalem through a revelation (Gal 2:2), so doesn’t he refer to Agabus’s prophecy in Acts 11:28?

Answer: Agabus’s prophecy was about famine, not about apostleship and the gospel. So it cannot be Agabus’s prophecy that Paul refers to by “in response to a revelation” in Gal 2:2.

My conclusion: Barnabas and Paul, who were pastors in Antioch, were sent by their church to Jerusalem with famine relief as a response to Agabus’s prophecy (Acts 11:19–30; 12:25), so this is not the visit Paul refers to in Galatians 2. Then they went on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–4). They returned to Antioch, gave a report of their successful tour and remained there for some (Acts 14:24–28). Judaizers came from Jerusalem and caused controversy in Antioch (Acts 15:1–2), so the church were told by the Holy Spirit to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to settle the matter with the apostles there (Acts 15 and Gal 2:1–10).

3. Only the “pillars” or the whole church?

Question: But according to Luke, Paul and Barnabas met not only a few apostles but the whole church (Acts 15:4, 12, 22), so this cannot be the meeting that Paul writes about in Galatians!

Answer: Paul does not mention the involvement of the church in Jerusalem because his concern in Gal 2:1–10 is to prove that he and his ministry have been authorized by the apostles in Jerusalem. Peter and James had delivered the “verdict”: Acts 15:7 (“Peter stood up and said”) and v 13 (“James spoke up”) and v 19 (“Therefore I have reached the decision”). Then the elders and the whole church agreed with James and Peter.

My conclusion: This is what could have happened. The delegation from Antioch was received by the apostles, elders, and the congregation. They all listened to Paul’s and Barnabas’s testimony (Acts 15:15). Then there was a small meeting between Paul/Barnabas and James/Peter/John where the issue was discussed in detail and settled (Gal 2:2, 6, 9 and Acts 15:6). Then all the elders and the whole church gave their sanction to the settlement, and a letter was written to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22–23).

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