



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Galatians, Philippians, Colossians

LEADERS GUIDE

From the study:

Paul, [depicted here by the Dutch master Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–69),] stands as a model of faithfulness. His life story demonstrates faithfulness to the Lord and to his God-given call. Without worrying about his own honor, he worked beside other Christians like Peter, James, or Barnabas, whom the Lord also appointed. He rebuked even those whom others saw as great when they strayed from the truth.

He was also faithful to the Galatians. He ministered to them twice on his first missionary journey and again on both his second and third journeys. In fatherly love, he rebukes them because of his great fear for their very salvation. His letter expresses not anger, but great love and concern for his children who are in danger of losing what God has given them.



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3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
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Cover art: *The Apostle Paul*, Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–69). Kunsthistorisches, Vienna/A.K.G., Berlin/SuperStock.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought,

- hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
 - encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 49.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 49**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough referencing guide (pp. lxx-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Paul Defends the True Gospel

Galatians 1:1–2:21

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The true Gospel proclaims that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. know that they are justified in God's sight *only* by faith in Christ, not by attempts to keep God's Law;
2. recognize attacks against the Gospel both in Paul's day and in the present time;
3. boldly proclaim, in both words and actions, the true Gospel that they are saved by faith in Christ Jesus.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 51.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes.) Follow with this devotion:

Devotion

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," St. Paul writes by divine inspiration in our study for this week.

We can have religion without being religious. And we can believe in a god without being Christian.

Paul was a religious man long before he became a Christian. All his life, he believed in things spiritual. His conversion did not change him from an irreligious man to a religious one. Rather, Paul's Damascus experience changed him from a religious man to a Christian. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit came to create faith in Paul's heart. Christ Jesus made His home in Paul, just as in our Baptism our Lord has come to indwell us. With Paul, we can confidently affirm, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

From the time of his conversion onward, everything Paul said and did—all he lived and longed for, all he worked and prayed for—centered on Christ. Because he knew what Christ had done for him on the cross, he could say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Because we know that same Christ, we can ask Him every day, "Lord Jesus, let me grow to be more and more like You."

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

How do you rebuke a wayward child whom you deeply love? Paul converted many members of the Galatian churches to the faith. They genuinely loved and appreciated his ministry and person as he labored among them. Paul was astonished at the quick change in attitude about his character and Gospel. Judaizers had moved in among the Galatians shortly after Paul's departure, perverting their minds and attacking the message and person of Paul. These Judaizers were Jewish Christians who believed, among other things, that a number of the ceremonial practices of the Old Testament were still binding on the New Testament church.

Following Paul's successful campaign in Galatia, they insisted that Gentile converts to Christianity abide by certain Old Testament rites, especially circumcision. The Judaizers failed to appreciate that these ceremonial laws were intended to point forward as signs to the coming Messiah. Now that Jesus the Messiah had come, these ceremonial laws were no longer in effect (Colossians 2:16–17). By insisting on them as requirements for salvation, these Judaizers perverted the Gospel of grace.

1 Salutation (1:1–5)

Paul's salutation summarizes the letter at its beginning. Do not write off these first five verses in your haste to get to the "meat" of the Epistle. They outline the heart of this letter and provide a pattern for you to follow as you study the rest of the letter. Paul begins with a defense of his apostleship as being from God, moves to defend the Gospel as being our salvation, and concludes with the truth that the Gospel enables us to live as God's people.

Paul (vv. 1–3) presents his credentials as one uniquely called by God and in fellowship with the brothers, fellow Christians. Because some among the Galatians were ready to diminish Paul's office and authority, Paul emphatically states that Jesus personally called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's message and call are in no way inferior to those of the twelve disciples. Yet Paul is also connected with the brothers who join with him and approve of the message he shares with them in the Lord. In one bold stroke, Paul silences the charges of inferiority and being an outsider.

While the words of verse 3 may seem to be a standard greeting, Paul unfolds before the Galatians' eyes the essence of what they are in danger of losing. As they abandon the grace of God freely given in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they lose the true peace emanating from the Gospel. Sadly, people still attempt to barter with God or please Him in an effort to gain His affection. They seek peace by their actions instead of accepting peace as a gracious gift from a loving God. However, peace cannot come unless grace precedes it.

Finally, (v. 4) we are rescued from the present evil age by this gracious act of God. Our rescue doesn't mean we are somehow taken out of the world, but rather we are no longer enslaved to the world. The world is filled with evil due to sin. Many snares and temptations surround us daily. Jesus came to rescue us from the power of sin and the danger of being overwhelmed by sin. What a wonderful rescue this is indeed! As we rest in it, we can't help but join Paul in the doxology to God in verse 5: "to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

2 Look What You Have Lost (1:6–10)

Like a father expressing disappointment over a wayward child, Paul chastises the Galatians for their swift defection from the faith he has labored to bring them. (In other letters, such as Philippians and 1 Corinthians, Paul begins with thanks to God for all God has given

the readers.) Justification, reconciliation with God, and even eternal life were being torn from them by the false gospel of the Judaizers. The Galatians have left God and all the grace He had bestowed on them as they turned to a new gospel whose message undermined the truth that salvation is a gift and not a reward for good deeds. Paul tries to impress the Galatians with the extent of their loss gently, but firmly.

While (v. 7) the Judaizers might defend their actions as only correcting the shortfalls of Paul's message, Paul sees their message as one completely destroying the true Gospel. He mockingly calls their message a different gospel, but is quick to add that it is not a Gospel at all. Their message will not lead the Galatians to God but only confuse them with a perversion of Christ's Gospel.

We must remember that the Gospel is not ours to alter, but belongs to Christ. A twisting of truth, such as the Judaizers brought to Galatia, is often harder to catch than an outright lie. Be careful when people set up additional requirements for salvation. Such requirements deny the power and sufficiency of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul ends this section with a confident defense of God's Gospel. Paul (v. 8) hurls at them a warning curse. The impossible is put forward to show how serious it is to change the Gospel. Paul would curse himself or an angel if either proclaimed anything but the pure Gospel of Christ. God's people have the privilege of declaring the Gospel but not of changing it. Paul aims to promote the glory of God by bringing sinners into redemption. Unlike the Judaizers, Paul will not change his doctrine to accommodate men's desires. Those who seek to please men in such ways cannot be servants of God. Paul's sincerity of intent and devotion to God become his first proof of apostleship.

3 Paul Called Directly by God (1:11–24)

In attacking Paul's message, the Judaizers have attacked his credentials. The charge (v. 11) was laid that Paul spoke from human wisdom. Paul came to faith later than the 12 disciples, so it was natural to assume Paul had received his message from them. Since Paul's message was not the same as the message of the Judaizers coming from Jerusalem, it was assumed Paul had garbled the Gospel.

Paul sets out to prove the divinity of both his mission and message as he takes pains to show his call and message were directly from God. His credentials were as

solid as those of the twelve disciples. The Judaizers, not Paul, were latecomers and had obscured the truth.

Paul relates his life story as living proof of the superiority of the true Gospel. He had lived the religious life the Judaizers were advocating. He (v. 14) had kept the Law better than many people his own age and was so zealous for the traditions of the faith that (v. 13) he persecuted Christians. He was an admired master of the very life the Judaizers were proclaiming. Yet, while Paul had been sincere in his zeal, he had been wrong in his direction, leaving the God whom he sought to advance.

But God did not leave Paul. God dramatically came and changed Paul's direction from legalism to the Gospel. The NKJV translates "set me apart before I was born" (v. 15) as "separated me from my mother's womb." It is interesting to note that the Greek word for "Pharisee" means "one separated." When God made Paul a "separated one," in effect He made him a Pharisee for Christ! He was "separated," set apart to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (v. 16), to pull them from a life of sin and legal bondage into the grace of Jesus. In Paul's life, the powerful Gospel of the Son of God is revealed by the immensity of the change in Paul and the extent of God's grace to one who had been an enemy of the faith. Paul's dramatic change from Law to grace demonstrated God's desire for all people to live by grace. What a relief for us, too, to realize the meaning of the hymn in our own day-to-day living: "Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow, All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Paul was so confident of this message, he began proclaiming it immediately. It would have been natural for Paul to return to Jerusalem or to stay and learn from the disciples in Damascus before he spoke about the Lord. Yet Paul had been freed from the burden of the Law and could not hold in the message. He waited (v. 18) three years before visiting Peter and James. His message was not developed after years or even months of their tutoring but came directly from God. Even the churches of Judea (vv. 22–23) confirmed the message of Paul as they marveled and praised God for the change they had seen and heard in the great persecutor of the Church.

4 Paul's Message Passes the Test (2:1–10)

Fourteen years have passed since Paul's conversion. God calls him in a vision to go up to Jerusalem so his message might be recognized and shown to be God's truth. He takes Barnabas and Titus with him as fellow witness-

es of all the Lord has done. The meeting (v. 2) with the leaders in Jerusalem is private, unlike the council of Acts 15, which many think comes later. Yet the two meetings have much in common. Both meetings are in response to those who came to the Gentile churches demanding that men must be circumcised (Acts 15:1). The perversion of the Gospel by the Judaizers had to be dealt with.

Paul (v. 4) calls these Judaizers false brothers who have come to spy on the Christian freedom of the Galatians. The group was probably composed of priests and Pharisees who had come to faith and still held a high regard for the traditions of the Jews and the ceremonies God instituted under the covenant of Sinai. They saw (Acts 15:1) circumcision as necessary for salvation. And, indeed, it was commanded by God. Yet if New Testament believers made circumcision a good work, one necessary for salvation, then the freedom they had in Christ would be lost and the Galatians would be slaves once again. Paul faced them here and would again face them in Jerusalem. The text warns us against adding anything—any human work—to the finished work of Christ—the Gospel.

This was not the first conflict Paul had experienced over his message. Opposition (v. 2) had led Paul to be concerned that his message might have errors or inadequacies. But the Jerusalem leaders of the church confirmed Paul's message. They (v. 3) did not even ask Paul's co-worker Titus to be circumcised. This complete acceptance of Paul showed that the Judaizers were not the true representatives of the Jerusalem church or of God.

Paul's actions show that conflict should not always be avoided in the church. Indeed, if the truth of God's Word is at stake, honest conflict can build real unity based on God's truth.

5 Paul Opposes Peter's Hypocrisy (2:11–21)

Here Paul sadly finds he must confront Peter. In their first meeting (1:18), Peter and Paul had good relations and a unity of purpose. Yet (v. 12), when certain Jews from Jerusalem came to the church at Antioch, Peter began to change his behavior. Instead of continuing to eat with the Gentile Christians in the church potluck supper, he backed away from them. His withdrawal (v. 13) influenced other Jewish Christians so they also began to back away. Even Barnabas, who had planted Gentile churches with Paul and had full fellowship with Gentiles, was influenced by this act.

Paul (v. 11) finds he must rebuke Peter, who knew better and had even been instructed by God Himself in Acts 10 to eat with Gentiles and not call them unclean. While we often think our actions are our own business, the example of Peter shows how we affect the lives of others and how important it is for other Christians to gently correct us.

Since (v. 14) this was a public offense, Paul corrects Peter in front of the group. Paul explains how Peter, as a Jew, was not obligated to live as a Gentile. He had done so in the freedom of the Gospel. By withdrawing from the Gentiles, he was forcing them to live as Jews if they wanted to continue in fellowship with him. The end result would have been to make Jews out of Gentiles or force the creation of a Gentile church inferior to the Jewish church. Neither option is in line with the truth of the Gospel, which treats all as equal in Jesus Christ.

Peter's actions were nothing short of going back to the Law. The Jewish Christians (vv. 15–16) knew the Law could never make anyone acceptable to God. So why go back to the Law as a means of salvation when you have been justified by faith in Christ? Seeking to save ourselves by the Law directly contradicts salvation by faith in Christ. Jewish Christians believed in Christ as the means of obtaining salvation, so why abandon the Gospel for the Law?

The Judaizers might counter (v. 17) that one must keep the Law, otherwise we make ourselves like the "Gentile sinners" (v. 15)—people who never observed the Old Testament laws regarding kosher foods and circumcision. If our faith in Christ leads us who are Jewish Christians to forsake these laws, does that mean that Christ promotes sins? Absolutely not! Quite the opposite is true. (V. 18) "If I rebuild what I tore down"—namely, my reliance on these Old Testament laws, ceremonial and moral—that is the real sin. By building up the Law again I forsake Christ. (V. 16) "By works of the law"—ceremonial and moral Law alike—"no one will be justified" because no one can do God's will perfectly.

Paul points out (v. 19) that by the Law a Christian sees his need for Christ and the Gospel. Having accomplished its purpose, the Law has no effect on those who live for Christ. Paul emphasizes (v. 20) that the focus of the Christian life is not dying, but living. The Gospel empowers us to live a new life different from the world and in service to our loving God.

Conclusion

These first two chapters contrast for us the unfaithfulness of the Galatians with the faithful service of Paul. The Galatians had so easily been tricked into deserting the Gospel and the Lord who had sacrificed so much to save them. They had accepted lies about Paul, whom they had previously trusted, and elevated the liars to Paul's place of honor.

Their actions are a warning for us. Satan desires to tear us away from those whom God has entrusted with the message of salvation. If Satan can lead us to question our pastors' or teachers' integrity or calling, he has brought into question the message they proclaim. The Galatians lost the freedom the Gospel proclaimed and brought the fears of works-righteousness upon themselves by their unfaithfulness.

Paul, however, stands as a model of faithfulness. His life story demonstrates faithfulness to the Lord and to his God-given call. Without worrying about his own honor, he worked beside other Christians like Peter, James, or Barnabas, whom the Lord also appointed. He rebuked even those whom others saw as great when they strayed from the truth.

He was also faithful to the Galatians. He ministered to them twice on his first missionary journey and again on both his second and third journeys. In fatherly love, he rebukes them because of his great fear for their very salvation. His letter expresses not anger, but great love and concern for his children who are in danger of losing what God has given them. Paul stands out as one to emulate in his humility and unselfish devotion to God and to those he is called to serve.

Above all else, Paul points us away from our own works so that, relying only on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we would receive and forever enjoy God's free gift of salvation.

Concluding Activities

Distribute study leaflet 2 and remind participants to check the enrichment magazine for materials they find interesting in light of their daily study.

The Law and the Faith

Galatians 3:1–4:31

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The heart of what we believe is that Jesus died for our sins and came alive again. We are God's children and inherit all God's wonderful blessings only by our faith in Christ.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. understand that God gave the Law both as a guide for their behavior and to show them the impossibility of keeping it perfectly in their own power because of their sinfulness;
2. know that Christ fulfilled the Law perfectly in their place and redeemed them from its curse once and for all by dying and rising again;
3. rejoice that through faith in Christ Jesus, God has adopted them as His own children and has made them heirs of all His good gifts as He first promised to Abraham;
4. trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to continue to work faith in them.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses

are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes.) Follow with this devotion:

Devotion

How do you see yourself? When you look in the mirror, does joy fill your heart? Maybe questions like these embarrass you. Maybe a sheepish grin spreads across your face as I ask questions like these. But think for a moment about what our Lord says concerning us. God, the only one whose judgment of our lives stands final and irrevocable, has accepted us in Jesus Christ. It is to this thrilling and inspiring truth that Paul alludes when he reminds us in our study for this week that we have been "baptized into Christ." That means we are covered with Christ—His goodness, His love, His perfection. Others may see our glaring flaws, faults, and failures and never cease parading and publicizing them before us and the world. We may be all too painfully conscious of our repeated sins, our obvious shortcomings and inadequacies. But God sees none of this. He looks on us and beholds only His once dead but now ever-living Son. And He pronounces His verdict: "Perfect! This child of mine couldn't be better."

With that divine pronouncement ringing in our ears, we are able to rise each morning, look at ourselves in the mirror, and say: "You're the greatest and I really love you. In Baptism, God has covered you with Christ His Son." That kind of view of ourselves brings certain inner peace and joy regardless of how many times Satan reminds us of our sins.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Having defended his apostleship and the authority of his message, Paul now goes on to vindicate the truth of his message. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul will assert the truth of his message with a series of successive appeals. Paul will begin with an appeal to the Galatians' own experience and the experience of Abraham as proof of the power of God's promise as opposed to the Law. He will expose the proper place of the Law and show the blessings of the Gospel. He will even appeal to an anal-

ogy from the Old Testament. All are arguments from a man who loves those to whom he is writing and who is using every argument he can muster to help those he loves avoid a grave mistake. Paul does not want them to abandon the Gospel. He wants them to hold onto the grace that God has given them in love.

1 Faith or Observance of the Law? (3:1–14)

The Galatians (v. 1) had become bewitched by the false teachers' message like children fascinated by a magician's trick. The newness of faith had "worn off." In any case, the Galatians had taken a step backward as they decided to insist on keeping the Jewish laws. Paul turns to four elements from their own lives to prove the Gospel he shared with them was from God. First, Paul himself had already preached the Good News about the crucified Christ. Second (v. 2), they had seen that through the message about Christ, the Holy Spirit had given them faith. Third (v. 3), the Spirit had brought salvation, but they were abandoning Him as they tried to be perfect by their own efforts. Finally (vv. 4–5), Paul asks if the miracles had come because of the faith they had in Christ or because they were trying to keep the Law? Still today, the temptation is to add *something that we do* to the simple receiving of what God has done for us in Christ.

Quoting Genesis 15:6 (v. 6), Paul pointed out that Abraham was saved by faith long before the Law was given. Abraham didn't rely on anything he himself did, but put his confidence in what God had promised—the Savior who was to come. As Jesus said to His enemies, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Therefore (v. 7), those who believe are the real children of Abraham. It doesn't matter (v. 8) whether they are Jew or Gentile. The promise of Genesis 12:3, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed," extends grace to all the world. From Abraham was descended Christ, the Savior. Those (v. 9) who believe will be blessed just as Abraham was.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in verse 10 to show that contrary to what the Judaizers claim, the Law can only condemn. Unless we do all the things the Law requires and do them for all of our lives, we will fall under its curse. The Law allows no forgiveness and no room for even one mistake. If we choose to live under the Law, we have an impossible burden to bear.

Therefore (v. 11), faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to escape the curse of the Law, for (v. 13) God's own Son

became a curse *for* us. And so (v. 14) the blessing of salvation that Abraham received by faith is received by all who trust in Christ for forgiveness of sin.

2 The Law Leads Us to the Promise (3:15–25)

Paul (v. 15) points out that even in human arrangements, when a contract is made, both parties are bound to the agreement, which cannot be altered. The same is true concerning the Law and the Gospel. The promise made to Abraham came before the Law. The Law, which came after the promise, has no authority to alter the character of the promise. The Law (v. 16) also has no effect on those who receive the promise. The covenant was made with Abraham and his Seed; that is, Christ. The Law (v. 17) given to the Jews 430 years after the promise to Abraham doesn't set aside that promise. The promise (v. 18) remains.

What, then (v. 19), is the purpose of the Law? The Law was added because the Israelites were sinners and needed to be convinced of their sin and their need for salvation. The Law opens our eyes to see we cannot please God by ourselves but must look toward Jesus, the Seed, who brought the promised redemption. Men still deny their need for a Savior by calling sin "just human nature" or "a mistake" instead of acknowledging their guilt. The Law was given to confront us and demonstrate our guilt and strengthen our weak consciences.

Another difference between the Law and the promise (Gospel): When God gave the Law on Mount Sinai, "He came from the ten thousands of holy ones," or angels, as Deuteronomy 33:2 tells us. This indeed underscores the solemn significance of the Law. The "intermediary," (or "mediator") the go-between for God and His people, was Moses. Moses (v. 20), the mediator, received the Law as the representative of God's people. "But God is one"—He acted for Himself and gave the promise unilaterally to Abraham. When the promise came to pass in Jesus, "God was reconciling the world *to Himself in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 5:19 NIV, emphasis added).

Paul's opponents (vv. 21–22) charge that he has set aside the Law because it is opposed to the Gospel. Paul rejects their argument. The Law can never give the righteousness the Law demands. The Law was given as a servant to show the need for a different way of salvation. All are under sin; the Law has shown each of us our guilt. Being guilty, we throw ourselves upon the mercy of Christ.

"Before faith came,"—the period from Moses to Christ (v. 23)—"we were held captive under the law." The

Law kept on accusing the consciences of people, until “faith”—Christ—“would be revealed.” Now that Christ has come to free us, what folly it is for the Judaizers to put people back into the prison of the Law.

“The law was our guardian” (v. 24)—The phrase refers to the personal slave-attendant who accompanied a freeborn boy, watching over him and disciplining him when needed. That’s the function the Law had before Christ came. Paul here is thinking of all the regulations of the ceremonial law—the sacrifices in the temple, the special holidays, circumcision—all of which pointed forward to their fulfillment in Christ. And so Old Testament believers came to believe in the coming Messiah, even as we believe and are justified by faith in the Christ who has come. Now (v. 25) that Christ has come, we are no longer under the tutelage of the Law.

3 Sons, Not Slaves (3:26–4:7)

The great privilege (v. 26) we have under the Gospel is that we are now full children and are not kept at a distance as the Jews of the Old Testament were. We came by this privilege through faith in Christ. All who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior (v. 27) are brought into the family of God and enjoy the privileges of belonging to that family. Like a Roman youth who has come of age and lays aside his child’s robe to put on the toga (adult clothes) of a man, the Galatian Christians have laid aside the old ways of life and clothed themselves with Christ in their Baptism.

The Law (vv. 28–29) drew distinctions between Jews and Greeks, males and females, slaves and those who were free. For instance, the Jews had ceremonial laws and holidays that pointed forward to Christ. Gentiles did not observe these. But now faith in Christ transcends all these differences and makes all believers one in Christ. Faith, not race or gender or economic status, determines who can claim to belong to Abraham’s seed and inherit the blessings and privileges of the promise.

The Old Testament church (vv. 4:1–2) was like a minor child waiting for the time when it would reach maturity. While the people of God had grace before Christ, it was darkness compared to the joy they experienced when the fullness of God’s promise came. The Old Testament people were subject to the “guardians and trustees” of the Old Testament rites, which were given to teach them and prepare them for maturity in Christ.

“Elementary principles of the world” (v. 3) refers to the earthly jurisdiction of the Jewish Laws—“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch” (Colossians 2:21).

Old Testament people of God had been obliged to keep the rituals and prohibitions of the ceremonial law. But when the time of the Messiah came, all the Old Testament rituals (the “tutor” or “schoolmaster”) were fulfilled. These ceremonial laws had “done their duty,” so to speak. Now, like a Roman son coming of age, believers in Christ could live in freedom.

At God’s perfect time, maturity came, brought by the Son of God Himself. Jesus was born as a Jew so He might be subject to all the ceremonial laws as well as the moral Law, the Ten Commandments. Having kept them perfectly, and also suffering for us the penalty of sin (death), He “redeemed” us—bought us back from the curse and power of the Law, so that we might have full adoption into the family with all the rights of sons. The Spirit Himself (v. 6) testifies to our close relationship with the Father and cries out in prayer to the Father for our needs. We are now heirs entitled to the heavenly inheritance and the benefits of sons and daughters in the Kingdom. This should give us comfort in our times of distress. While we may wonder if God will answer certain prayers, we can have confidence He will answer us in just the right way at the right time. What a wonderful and gracious God we have!

4 Concern for the Galatians (4:8–20)

Paul (vv. 8–9) recalls the wonderful change that had occurred in the lives of the Galatians when Christ had come to them. At one time, they did not even know of God’s existence. They were under the worst of slaveries as they slaved for creatures who were not God and who could not help them in their miserable lives. The preaching of the true Gospel had recovered them from their ignorance and brought them into a wonderful relationship with, and knowledge of, the true God.

It was literally madness to return to the bondage of their old ways and old gods. The Galatians had never even been under the Law as had the Jews, and it should have held no lure for them.

“Days and months and seasons and years” (vv. 10–12) refers to such Old Testament regulations as fasting, not working on the Sabbath Day, and observing prescribed festivals. The Galatians’ relationship with the Lord had created a very deep bond between them and Paul. His love for them is still great, and he calls them “brothers” even though the Judaizers have alienated them from him. His admonishments flowed from the deep love he shared for them, not from any anger or feelings of rejection. Their love for him had been great as well.

Paul's illness (vv. 13–14) had been a trial for them, yet they did not scorn him. They loved him and received him as an angel or messenger of God despite the illness. His plea is for them to abandon legalism and become again like himself, free in the Gospel, just as he had become a Gentile like them in the way he lived among them. How difficult for Paul to see them like this! We must not reprove others near to us in anger or avoid the pain or difficulty of admonishing them. As we love them, we will alert them to the dangers they have put their faith in by their actions.

As the love and trust of God and Paul has gone (vv. 15–16), the joy the Galatians experienced in Christ has departed as well. Legalism saps joy away because it makes people feel guilty rather than loved by God. Instead of the joyful humility of the Gospel, it produces a hatred of self, as one never can live up to the Law. Finally, the Law points out how far short we fall rather than how far we have come in Christ. As they left their first love, the Galatians forgot the pleasure of the Gospel and their love for Paul. At one time, they would have given Paul their eyes. They were so delighted to have God's servant and the wonderful message he proclaimed among them. Now, they are cool to Paul because he has spoken the truth.

While Paul (v. 17) loves the people of Galatia, the false teachers have other motives for their attention. Under the guise of caring, their purpose is to draw the Galatians' affections away from Paul and God's truth so the Galatians will bond to them. While Paul speaks the truth in love, the Judaizers have resorted to flattery to win their affections. At one point, the Galatians had been zealous for Paul. Such zeal (v. 18) can be good if it is for the right thing and is consistent. The Galatians were now zealous for something other than the Gospel and had departed from the zeal they had when Paul was with them. Paul was not against another ministering to them (1 Corinthians 1:10–17), but he was concerned their newfound zeal be for something good so they might not lose their salvation.

Paul (v. 19) agonized over the Galatians like a mother in childbirth. He desired the full forming of their faith so they would not be so easily deceived and in danger of losing what God had given them by grace. How he wishes (v. 20) to be with his wayward children because he knows a visit with them will accomplish more than a letter. Paul's words remind us that when we lead people to Christ, we must be ready to stand by them through difficult times so they grow in the faith and overcome

the many difficulties Satan brings into the lives of new believers.

5 Hagar and Sarah (4:21–31)

Paul (vv. 21–23) presents a story from the Old Testament to demonstrate the difference between those who rely on Christ and those who trust in the Law. It contrasts Hagar, representing those enslaved by the Law, with Sarah, who stands for those of the promise. Hagar was the mother of Ishmael; Sarah, of Isaac. Paul takes for granted that the Galatians know the story and are able to see the applications he draws from it. One son was born in the ordinary way. He is the result of human expediency trying to accomplish God's plan. (In much the same way, the Judaizers were sidestepping God's plan by focusing on their own ability to please God by the Law.) The other son was the fulfillment of God's promise. (The gracious plan of God for salvation is a result of God's promise too.) Paul introduces the story as a convincing way of showing their weakness in departing from God's truth.

Paul (vv. 24–27) explains that the women represent two covenants of God. Hagar's covenant is one of Law and was given at Mount Sinai. It brings people into bondage, particularly when one tries to use the Law as a means to salvation as the Judaizers were doing with their legalistic adherence to the covenant that denied the promise fulfilled in Christ. Sarah was intended to prefigure Jerusalem above as a place where we are free from the curse of the Law. "Jerusalem above" refers to the "city" or community in which Christ reigns and of which Christians are citizens. This covenant was open to all people who believe in Jesus Christ. Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1, the context of which speaks of the triumphant anticipation of Israel's deliverance and the growth of the population of Israel. His point seems to be that Sarah may at first seem to be cursed, but will rise in triumph in the end. While she was discouraged at first about being barren, she should rejoice in the abundant descendants the Lord will give her, which will outnumber those of her rival. Those who follow the Gospel may seem defeated at first, but God will show them to be triumphant and to outnumber the stars in the sky.

In case (vv. 28–31) they have not caught the analogy, Paul applies his analogy to the situation in Galatia directly. The church of Galatia are children of promise like Isaac and are the spiritual seed of Abraham. They are entitled to the promised inheritance and blessings of Abraham as his children. They should expect they

will be persecuted just as Hagar abused Sarah (Genesis 16:4), for the children of the Law resent the blessings the Lord gives to the children of the promise. Paul points to Scripture, quoting Genesis 21:10 as God's advice for His people who are persecuted. They are to cast out the children of the Law—refuse to listen to them. While the Judaizers might persecute and hate them, the Judaizers will sink and perish while true Christianity will flourish and last forever. Paul closes with a reminder that the Galatians are not children of the slave woman and of the Law, but children of promise who are free to live in God's grace.

Isn't it great? We too can live—this week and always—enfolded in the forgiving love and grace of God that is ours in Jesus!

Concluding Activities

Distribute study leaflet 3 and remind participants to check the enrichment magazine for materials they find interesting in light of their daily study.