



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

emmanuel**church**billericay

Phone: 01277 632120 Email: emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
Web: www.emmanuel-church.info Twitter: @EmmanuelCM12



HG103: Pauls Letter To The Galatians
God's Promise & Abraham's Faith

Galatians 3:1-14

Home Group Study Notes

2 November 2014 - Revd Margaret Fowler



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

If you were sent to live on the International Space Station for three months and only allowed to take three personal items with you, what would they be?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: In verse 1, Paul suggests that the Galatian believers have been ‘bewitched’ by magic. Why do you think the Galatians might have been so interested in the teachings of these false teachers? (Acts 8:9-11 and 13:6-7)

2: Discuss ways in which we can recognise and avoid false teaching in our Churches today?

3: In verse 3, Paul again calls his readers ‘foolish’ and reminds them that although they have received the Spirit they are still trying to please God by observing the law. Can you think of any ways in which you try to please God by doing something rather than focusing on your relationship with Him?

Our own efforts to be right with God will always end in failure. In v 11 Paul points to Habakkuk 2 v 4 “*the righteous will live by faith*”. On the Cross Christ took the curse of the law upon himself so that we wouldn’t have to bear our own punishment, so believers put their trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus which has broken the power of our sin and failure.

We are redeemed from the curse of the law by the death of Christ, and ‘redeemed’ means that the price for our sins has been paid once and for all. There is no longer any need to seek friendship with God through the Law because we have faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul exposed this flaw in the false teachers’ arguments by showing that real children of Abraham are those who have faith, not those who keep the law. Abraham was himself saved by his faith (Genesis 15 v 6) and all believers in every age and from every nation share Abraham’s blessing - all believers are sons of Abraham. That’s you and that’s me. This is a great promise, a great heritage, and a solid foundation for our lives.

We have a lot to be grateful to St Paul because with his incisive arguments he almost single handedly turned the tide against this false trend going on throughout Asia Minor that Jewish and Gentile believers could not be mutually in fellowship. As I mentioned earlier if you want to read more about this question, read Acts 15 v 1-29 where Paul took the problem to the Jerusalem Council and won.

Conclusion

1. The Christian life is based on faith, not on our performance;
2. This is the way it has always been since the time of Abraham, that is it was always God’s plan to include Gentiles in His salvation plan;
3. There could be no other way to be in a right relationship with God because the Law did not work.

When it comes to the truth of the Gospel message we do have to be careful not to allow anyone to deceive us. There are plenty of people out there claiming to be Christians, people who knock on our doors, people who promise life success by paying them money. There are plenty of people who are sincere, but sincerely wrong, in their teaching. Paul’s impassioned plea for the Galatians and for us today is that we know and accept the truth that we are all children of Abraham, and there is no other way except the way of faith and trust in Christ crucified. Amen

Emmanuel Text for 2014

“As we know Jesus better,
His divine power gives us everything
we need for living a godly life.”

2 Peter 1:3

When we started the study I said absolutely nothing about the talisman, but as we went through the scriptures together she became increasingly uneasy. At the end of the study she said “I think I should take this off and throw it away; what do you all think?” We all agreed and she threw it away there and then. Scripture did the work of convicting her and we didn’t have to confront her with our own words or arguments.

As a former Pharisee Paul knew the OT scriptures very well and he quoted to the Galatians (v 6) Genesis 15 v 6 “*Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness*” - Abram was right with God because of his faith. Abraham was accepted by God before the Law came. God had also said to Abraham (Genesis 12 v 3 “..... *and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*”; Genesis 18:18 “*Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation and all the national of the earth shall be blessed in him*”; and in 22:18 “*and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves because you have obeyed my voice*”.

“All the families of the earth” includes all the Gentile nations. Paul quoted all these scriptures to the Galatians to demonstrate his argument that all who believe in Jesus Christ are children or descendants of Abraham, and that it was always God’s plan to include Gentiles in his saving grace of the Gospel. Abraham was faithful to God before the law came, and therefore being right with God is by faith not by obeying the law (or ‘works of the law’). Therefore, Paul says in v9, “*those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed*”. The Galatians were also Abraham’s children and so is everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ.

3) There could be no other way to be in a right relationship with God because the Law did not work.

Some people say at this point “Did God get it wrong then the first time, and because the Law didn’t work he had to send Jesus?”. The answer to that is “No, God didn’t get it wrong”. The Law served its purpose for a time, but God always knew He would need to send His Son to rescue His people from sin and eternal death. I think you’ll be hearing more about this in the next sermon on Galatians, but you do find the answer to this question in Galatians 3 v 23:

“Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith [in Christ] would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”

I needed to get that out of the way before we move on because the next section (v 10-12) is a heavy but significant passage - “*For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; ...*”. Paul here is spelling out the implications of trying to be right with God by keeping the law.

To try to be right with God by keeping the law means that a person must keep 100% of the law, 100% of the time. Anything less than that is failure. Deuteronomy 27:26 which Paul quotes says “*cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law*”. This does seem complicated, but it’s actually quite simple and that’s what Paul goes on in v 12 to say “*But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us*”. The law was an absolute curse to the Jews - they could not possibly obey all the tedious rules and regulations in order to please God. It was spiritually demoralising and meant that no-one could ever be in a right relationship with God. The principle of obeying laws means that we depend on ourselves and our own actions to be right with God; the principle of faith means the curse of the law is lifted and we are now dependent on Christ’s mercy, His love, and His forgiveness.

4: How relevant do you think vv 6-14 are to today's Christians? What do they tell us about the historic distinction between Jew and Gentile? Also in v 6-14 - What do these verses tell us about (1) the importance of faith; and (2) our tendency to give significance to our good works?

5: In verses 10-13, Paul quotes three Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 27:26, Habakkuk 2:4, and Leviticus 18:5). What do these Old Testament passages tell us about the law?

6: How does Jesus’ death and resurrection solve the problem for those attempting to live by the law? (Romans 4:9, 4:16, Acts 2:33)



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG103: Paul's Letter To The Galatians **God's Promise & Abraham's Faith**

Galatians 3:1-14

Home Group Sermon Notes

2 November 2014 - Revd Margaret Fowler

Introduction

For those who have been following this series on Galatians you will have learned by now how dismayed St Paul is that false teachers claiming to be from James, the Lord's brother, had been preaching "another gospel" to the Galatians. These false teachers were conservative Jews who taught that Paul was wrong in his doctrine. They claimed that Gentiles had to obey the Law of Moses to be put right with God, and in order to receive grace of Christ they would need to be circumcised. This letter from Paul is an impassioned plea to the Galatians to remember his teaching that legalism (or obeying Jewish law) is not the way to be made right with God, but rather by faith in Jesus Christ.

There's been something of a trend going on in recent years, apparently caused by the recession, of "going back to the old ways of doing things". The cookery programme "Bake off" has become popular in part because it reminds us of when our mothers or grandmothers made cakes (perhaps not quite so elaborately!) and it seems good to try to recapture those happy homecomings with the smell of fresh baking and then the delightful comfort of eating them still warm from the oven. There's also been a revival in growing our own food, and also in knitting and sewing. There's a great deal of satisfaction to be gained and money to be saved by going back to the "old ways of doing things".

But what if we looked at the "old ways of doing things" from a slightly different angle? What if a surgeon found some surgical implements and an instruction manual from the 19th Century and decided to use them on a patient instead of using modern medicine because it seemed more satisfying or exciting? The consequences could be terrible and his patients would more than likely die. If a surgeon decided to do this what would we say? "You must be out of your mind - you'll kill your patients! Who or what has misled you into thinking you could do such a thing? Was your medical training all for nothing?"

That's the same incredulity with which Paul is addressing the Galatian Christians who were now listening to the false teachers who were teaching that believers needed to go back to the old ways of obeying the Laws of Moses. Paul, in his frustration and possible anger, says: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" The conduct of the Galatians is so irrational and foolish that Paul is actually suggesting that something close to witchcraft has been involved here - it's that serious. There are three main points which Paul makes to here to address this particular false teaching.

1) The Christian life is based on faith, not on our performance.

Paul says in v 1 "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!" - he and his companions had taught them about Jesus so clearly just as if he had put a blackboard or poster in front of their eyes, yet now they were turning away from it.

The central theme of Paul's argument and of the Christian faith, is always "Christ crucified". In a letter to the Corinthian Church he said "*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified*".

The Galatians had at first believed this teaching by Paul and his companions, and they received God's Spirit - they had witnessed miracles - how could they now be going back to the old ways? Paul wants the Galatians to answer his questions - he wants them to verbalise their understanding about the message they received from him which they are now rejecting. Paul was trained as a Pharisee to question people about what they believed, and he knows that in giving people the opportunity to speak out answers to his questions they are likely see their own downfall. It's good to ask questions to find out where people are at in their understanding and he asks four questions in a straight row:

"The Message" version puts Paul's list of questions this way: "*How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God's Message to you? Are you going to continue in this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it?*"

We don't have the Galatians answer to the questions because we don't have the reply to this letter, but we know from Acts 15 that Paul went to the Jerusalem Council and argued the case that Gentiles believers are accepted in Christ by faith alone and are not required to obey the Law.

Paul reminds the Galatian believers that when they first accepted Christ they received the gift of the Holy Spirit (v2) - the power to live for God - and they had witnessed miracles (v5). What had happened to change things? Perhaps, after Paul had left, their lives settled down to something more ordinary which is what must happen. Our Christian life is lived out in our workplaces, our homes, at schools, uni, Church, prayer, bible studies, and it can sometimes seem less exciting than the spiritual experiences we had at first. But when the false teachers who came to the Galatians with different teaching they were offering something fresh and interesting and the fickle foolish Galatian believers devoured this different teaching as truth.

2) This is the way it has always been since the time of Abraham, that is it was always God's plan to include Gentiles in His salvation plan.

Paul had been defending the Gospel from these false teachers since the beginning of this letter - and this question about the need for Gentile Christians to obey the Laws of Moses leads Paul to give a vigorous scriptural defence of the Gospel. And so he goes right back to Abraham, the acknowledged father and founder of the Jewish nation. He reminds Galatians Christians of the true meaning of the promise to Abraham that "*All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you*".

We might sometimes be tempted to argue the case for Christ by using our own arguments, but it is never as effective as using scripture. Someone who I had known for years and who was in my bible study group suddenly appeared at the group wearing a strange talisman on the same chain as her Cross. She said her son, who was not a Christian, had given it to her. It was said to be an American Indian spiritual protection against illness. This lady had been very ill in her life and she was afraid of illness returning, so she was rather vulnerable. She said wearing the talisman and the Cross was "belt and braces" - if Jesus couldn't protect her then she had something else as a back up". I was alarmed but I didn't say anything other than "*That's interesting*" (a useful phrase when we're confronted with a spiritual dilemma we're not sure how to deal with there and then. It's neither an acceptance or a rejection and keeps the conversation open for another time). The following time the group met I had looked out a study by Canon Roger Matthews on "Wholeness and Healing" and part of the study was on faith healing which was not in the name of Jesus, as well as occult involvement and superstitions.