



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?

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HG108 Pauls Letter To The Galatians
Living Life In The Spirit

Galatians 5:7-21

Home Group Study Notes

14 June 2015 - 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

Monday 15 June 2015 marks the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta (see Paul's article in June/July Pilgrim magazine or on our website!). What might, for you, be one of the outstanding features of the Magna Carta declaration?



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: What does v 8 say is *not* the answer to the question in v 7? What conclusions follow?

2: What proved Paul was not preaching circumcision (v 11)? Where else has persecution been discussed in Galatians? Why might someone claim Paul was preaching circumcision?

3: What does freedom in Christ *not* mean (v 13)? Where else have you read about freedom? Give examples of the kind of situation in which people might use freedom as an opportunity to do what they want.

I'm of course not saying we don't do that here - we do, but I'm ashamed to say that the giving demonstrated by many of my friends at Ciamanda is many more times sacrificial than mine is.

Three years ago I visited a Church in the village which three retired men are building on a plot of land which one of them owned. He gave the land to build a Church in an area where there was no Church. Land has become more valuable and he could have kept it for himself, but he didn't - he offered it to God. The three men have been building the Church since 2003 and it's still not complete, but they are able to use it. They have built it layer by layer as and when they could afford to buy the next layer of bricks or bag of cement.

This year I was able to take this Church a gift of £500 from Christ Church to help complete the Church. These three men have been led by the Spirit to build the Church, and led by the same Holy Spirit Christ Church has generously donated some money to help our brothers and sisters in Christ. Year by year, I just see God blessing and blessing this community in Kenya as they live by the Spirit of God. I have learned more from the people of Ciamanda about living by faith and in the Spirit of God, than I could ever have done here and I am very grateful and humbled by that experience.

Living by the Spirit means we are able to reject our natural desire to live according to our sinful nature. That is what walking in Christ enables us to do - to reject what is contrary to the nature of God. The sinful nature might seem obvious but Paul produces a list in case the Galatians are in any doubt. The first three on the list relate to sexual immorality which was a huge issue in the early Churches and Paul often had to warn against it (1 Thess 4:3; 1 Cor 6:18). Then we have idolatry and witchcraft. Of course we don't have anything to do with these do we? We don't worship our homes, our cars, our clothes, our possessions, our food, our children, our grandchildren ... do we? Do you know almost anything can become an idol if we allow it. If we spend an unnatural amount of time with anything or anyone other than God it could be we have become idolatrous. It sounds harsh, but it's true.

Paul then goes on to list some bad behaviour patterns that we might have got into, discord, jealousy fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension (which is divisiveness in a group) and factions (groups who hold to their opinions aggressively). And so the list goes on with envy, drunkenness, and orgies. Paul warns (and from v 21 it is clear he has warned the Galatians before) that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul's law-free gospel was not a license to live free from any restrictions; on the contrary, following the Christian life demands ethical standards of behaviour. Those who live an unethical life will not inherit the kingdom of God. Our inheritance can be lost through behaving selfishly and wantonly. We need to remain "in Christ" and live according to the Spirit in order to share in the inheritance we have in Christ.

Everyone is either under the control of the Spirit or under control of our old sinful nature; we are either on a road of peace with God, or on a road that leads to death. **Walking in the Spirit** is living and walking with Christ as the director of our lives.

Through surrendering to the Holy Spirit we can have a constant abiding love, power, and peace with God. Is that what you are experiencing right now? If it's not, it is possible to change that. You can decide to sign up to the great Magna Carta of spiritual freedom, but it's up to you to decide if you want to walk with Christ and live by the Spirit.

You may need some help with this, so if God is speaking to you today don't be afraid to talk to someone about it and to pray with you.

Jesus replies by quoting the centrepiece from the Shema - the Jewish Morning and Evening prayer - *“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord, is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

But the Galatians weren’t loving their neighbour. It sounds as if they were doing the complete opposite. There were terrible arguments going on among these Galatian believers - just look at vs 15 *“If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other”*. It sounds like they had been behaving towards each other like a pack of wild animals - because that’s how wild animals behave.

You will have seen in the news last week about the American tourist, Katherine Chappell, who was killed by a lioness in a safari park in Johannesburg. Not content with killing one person, the lioness leapt back into the car again and mauled a passenger in the back seat.

Biting and devouring one another was definitely not fulfilling the words of Jesus’ to *“love your neighbour as yourself.”* Paul warned if they continued this kind of behaviour they would end up destroying one another.

The Christlike way to live is to **live by the Spirit**. I don’t speak Greek but I understand that the Greek word “live” translates literally as “walk”. A life that is lived in the Spirit is a life of continuance, progress, and daily attention. Paul also uses same the analogy of *walking* in Colossians 2:6 *“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”*. We walk in Christ in the same way that we received Him in the first place, by grace, through faith. And so Paul goes on with his plea, *“So I say live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature”*. Living by the Spirit is our protection against falling into sin or living our life contrary to God’s will.

Our life in Christ involves personal desire or will on our part: we need to make a conscious and continual turning away from everything that is opposed to the Spirit of God. Even long after coming to faith in Christ we need to be constantly aware of the need to live not just for our own comfort but for the well-being and good of others.

As some of you know I’ve just returned from a village in Kenya called Ciamanda. It was my 6th visit with the Diocesan link schools. Kenya is one of the better African countries, but the poverty I’ve witnessed is as bad as I ever want to see. But the community which I’ve been visiting since 2009 is an amazing community of selfless service which tries to alleviate the poverty as much as they can. Teachers at the school I go to are paid around £60 a month which actually doesn’t go very far even in Kenya. We’ve now set up a feeding programme for the poorest children, but before that happened the school teachers were bringing in extra food from their own allotments each day to feed the poorest children in the school. It was amazing act of love when these teachers, with little spare money, had their own children’s food and education to pay for.

Last year I saw a child in his mother’s arms in the entrance to the school at Ciamanda, and the child was clearly very sick. I thought the child was about a year old but he was actually 3. His eyes were glazed and I couldn’t communicate properly with his mother - my fault, not hers as I can’t speak Swahili. However, when I called one of the teachers to help, before I knew it she had put out a plate in the classroom and each teacher contributed money out of their meagre salaries towards fees so that the child could see a doctor. I could tell you many many stories about how the Spirit of God moves powerfully and swiftly through this community which demonstrates the command of Jesus to *‘Love your neighbour as yourself’*.

4: Some people might argue that ‘because Christ has set us free from the law, we can now ignore it altogether.’ How would you answer this?

5: What does love do (v 14)? Where else is this taught? What problem can come if we lack love (v 15)? Give examples from your own experience if you can.

6: What value, if any, is there in repeating what has already been taught to people (v 21)?



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



HG108 Pauls Letter To The Galatians *Living Life In The Spirit*

Galatians 5:7-21

Home Group Sermon Notes

14 June 2015 - Revd Margaret Fowler

I'm sure you've read Paul Carr's article on the Magna Carta in the Pilgrim this month. 800 years ago tomorrow the Magna Carta or "Great Charter" was signed. The Magna Carta is of course that great document of liberty and justice giving a great framework for freedom not just in this country but across the world.

It has possibly been mentioned before during this series that Paul's letter to the Galatians has been called the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty" because the letter maintains that it is only through the grace of God received through faith in Jesus Christ can a person escape the curse of sin and the law, and live a new life, in freedom of mind and Spirit through the power of God. Galatians is the Magna Carta document for spiritual freedom from the curse of the old law.

All the way through this letter Paul has been like a Barrister in a Court case fighting to defend his client, the Gospel. He began his letter by defending his own ministry as an apostle and then he goes on to defend the great argument which the early Jewish Christians battled with - whether observance of the law was now necessary.

We now arrive at Ch 5:7 and Paul has now finished his Defence arguments and he begins addressing the jurors, the Galatians, about the deceivers who have been persuading them to add circumcision to Christianity. Paul is appealing as if to a jury and he addresses the Galatians passionately.

Paul is very fond of using athletic imagery to describe the Christian life. To him life is a race, demanding adherence to rules and discipline if the race is to be completed successfully and the prize of eternal life obtained. The Galatians had begun the race well. They had assented to the truth about Jesus and they had adopted a Christian lifestyle - they had been converted in their heads and in their hearts. "*You were running a good race*" Paul says, but someone had hindered them by setting up an obstacle in front of them.

From this we can gather that the Galatians had in fact already ceased to obey the truth of the Gospel - they had lost ground in their race — no wonder Paul was making such a passionate appeal to them.

Paul makes an analogy by using what sounds like a proverb "*A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough*". It was apparently quite common to use yeast as a symbol for evil's capacity to corrupt. In Mark 8:15 Jesus said "*Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod*". Yeast is symbolic of corruption.

He goes on to clear up any grounds for the accusation that he has been preaching circumcision: "*If I am preaching circumcision why am I still being persecuted?*"

The jury of Galatians would know well that the religious authorities would have left Paul alone if he really was preaching that circumcision was necessary. So it's a bit of a dark but brilliant sentiment that Paul expresses his outrageous desire in vs12 that he wishes those who are deceiving the Galatians would let the knife slip on themselves!

Paul is saying a surgical procedure doesn't matter. Our dress code doesn't matter (as long as it's decent!), what we eat doesn't matter - all these things are shallow and false. The only thing that matters is faith in Jesus Christ and trusting that the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross was sufficient to pay for our sins. We don't have to add our own rules to what God has already done for us.

Paul assures the jury of Galatians that those who are trying to deceive them will one day pay the price for presenting an alternate gospel. Just last Sunday a young man at Christ Church asked if I would like to read a magazine in which he had had an article published. On the front page was emblazoned advertising for New Age groups, crystal healing, spiritualism and lots of others dodgy groups. I had to tell the young man he oughtn't to be paying attention to things like that. There are endless groups and cults who today are still trying to deceive those who have faith in Jesus Christ. People will come along sounding very sincere about their faith, but they can be sincerely wrong. We need to know what really matters so that if anyone comes along with a different Gospel, we will be able to identify it as false. One way we can do that is to know scripture well. Sometimes God will tell us by His Spirit whether something right or not, and we just cannot explain why we know that. This week I had occasion to contact Paul Carr about a group of people who claim to be Christians, but I felt something wasn't right. Their website certainly looked as if they were true believers and I couldn't identify anything, but when I emailed Paul he confirmed that they were not Christian in the true sense. God by His Holy Spirit had caused me to question the validity of this group of people.

In vs6 which is the verse immediately prior to the text we started with, Paul says: "*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*" and I thought this verse linked with the next few verses from 13 - 21. It seems to me that verses 7 - 12 were another sudden thought that Paul had as he was dictating to his scribe, and he went off on a tangent for a while, but now he's back on the theme that he left behind in verse 6 which is "*Faith expressing itself through love*".

Vs13 begins "*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another humbly in love.*"

Paul preaches that new life in Christ is 'freedom' but that freedom doesn't mean self-indulgence or **servng self**, it means **servng one another**. Here, Paul was using one of his most potent arguments. The ancient philosophers thought a great deal about how one could be **free** through different approaches to life, so by identifying his message with **freedom** Paul was appealing to the present culture which had a strong desire for personal and political **freedom**. Remember that many people were slaves at this time, and the Romans were the political rulers. These Galatians had reverted to believing that **freedom** could be gained **within** the law, but Paul's argument is that **freedom** in Christ has the highest standards of personal relationships, that of **servng others**.

We find that all the way through Galatians, St Paul supports his arguments using Old Testament scriptures, and here, to support his claim that Christians should serve one another humbly in love, he confirms (in Galatians 5:14) that this is God's will by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Lev 19:18) "*Love your neighbour as yourself*".

Jesus himself quoted this scripture to one of the teachers of the law who came to him asking "*Of all the Commandments, which is the most important?*"