



## NG Study Guide: Galatians 4:12-31, "Freedom for Passion" [3.3.19]

### Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

### The Study

**Thesis:** True believers in Jesus Christ have been set free from the bondage of the Mosaic Law. No longer do we need to strive to obey the Law in order to be accepted by God. Instead, our relationship with God is secure because of Jesus Christ, and what He accomplished for us on the cross. Continuing to live by the Law divides and enslaves us; living by the promise of God sets us free. Every believer has the choice of whether to be a child of the Law, or a child of the promise

#### **I. living by the Law divides (vv. 12-20)**

In spite of their hostility, Paul still addresses the Galatians as family. He urges them to become like him- free from the bondage of the Law, and he reminds them that he used to be like them- caught up in trying to live by it. He assures them he hasn't been hurt by them, i.e., he holds no grudges.

Paul reminds them of how lovingly they received him while he was with them, in spite of his physical condition. He encourages them to remember how blessed they felt, how much joy they experienced, how unified they were, when he shared the gospel with them. He challenges them to consider how he could suddenly become their enemy, just because he continued to tell them the truth.

Paul warns them the Judaizers are actively trying to win them over because they are seeking followers- their motives are evil. He points out how they're trying to exclude them from the unity and blessings they have in Christ. Paul expresses his pain in trying to once again help them understand the truth of the gospel, and likens it to giving birth all over again.

Something had changed in the Galatians relationship with Paul, and the cause was them abandoning the truth of the gospel- that they were made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. They'd been deceived by the Judaizers, and had fallen back into trying to get right with God by doing good works, i.e., by obeying the Law. Their choice to live by the Law had divided them and damaged their relationship.

This can still happen to believers today. When rules become more important than relationships, the unity we experience in Christ will suffer. Choosing to live by the Law, as opposed to believing we are reconciled to God by faith in Christ, can cause us to compare ourselves with one another, and judge each other. Even our perspective of God can be altered, as we strive to be right with Him through our obedience, not our faith.

#### **II. living by the Law enslaves (vv. 21-25)**

Paul now uses the Law, the very thing upon which the Judaizers were basing their false teaching, to prove they are wrong. He references the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, showing how these historical characters and events demonstrate the effectiveness of the gospel, and the inadequacy of the Law to reconcile people to God. (For a review of these events, please review Genesis chapters 12-21).

Paul explains how the child (Ishmael) from the bondwoman (Hagar) represents human effort, or the Law; and, how the child of promise (Isaac) from the freewoman (Sarah) represents God's promise of salvation through faith. He further demonstrates how these two children and their mothers represent the two covenants: Hagar and Ishmael parallel the Old Covenant/Testament, and Sarah and Isaac parallel the New Covenant/Testament. Mt. Sinai, where Moses and the Israelites originally received God's Law, is represented by Hagar; in fact, this mount was called "Hagar" (rock) by the Arabs of that region. Paul also draws a parallel between the earthly Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religion and the Law, and the eternal Jerusalem, which represents heaven.

Paul's point is that trying to get right with God by obeying the Law is slavery. Living one's life trying to be good enough, or do enough good deeds, to gain God's acceptance is the worst kind of bondage, because you can never know if you've done enough, so you're always worried you need to do more. This can lead to a life of enslavement to performance, fear, anxiety, insecurity, doubt, and guilt.

### **III. living by the promise frees (vv. 26-31)**

Paul references a passage from the book of Isaiah (54:1) to further make his point. He's bringing forth the truth that there will be more people in heaven, saved by faith in Jesus Christ, children of the promise, than people who try to get right with God by obeying the Law. In other words, although barren for most of her life, Sarah will ultimately have more descendants through God's promise than Hagar will have through human means.

Paul encourages the Galatians to realize they are "children of the promise," as Isaac was- that their standing before God is based on God's promise, not on their efforts. He also warns them that just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac (Gen. 21:9), those who choose to live by the Law will also persecute those who live by the promise of God.

Finally, Paul encourages his readers to realize they are "children of the freewoman," of the promise, and are therefore, "free!" They are free from trying to obey the Law in order to be right with God. They are free to know they are completely accepted and loved by God solely because of their faith in Jesus. They are free to be themselves, knowing God accepts them the way they are, because when He looks at them He sees His Son.

#### **Study Guide Qs**

***Q1: How does trying to be right with God by obeying the Law create division among believers?***

***Q2: In what ways does trying to be accepted by God by obeying the Law enslave us?***

***Q3: How does understanding we're made right with God solely through faith in Jesus Christ set us free?***

**Q4: Why are we so easily tempted to believe we must DO something in order to be right with God?**

**“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)**

1. Review Genesis chapters 12-21 to learn more about the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac.
2. Read this article <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html> to learn more about “legalism.”

**Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:**

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

**The next time you're at church, grab some Calvary Nexus invitation cards from the welcome center in the foyer, carry them around with you, and prayerfully seek opportunities to invite a neighbor to attend church with you.**

**Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:**

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

**Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:**

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

**Leader Notes:**

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

**2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.**

**3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

**4. Every time you meet consider asking:**

**a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.