

Part 6: **galatians— a people reconciled**

Rite Privilege

Biblical Background to Galatians

Paul challenges the Galatian Christians to look beyond the letter of the law.

The church in Galatia was divided over issues of Torah observance. Many leaders were requiring non-Jewish Christians to live by Jewish laws, missing the point of the Gospel message. Jesus fulfilled the law and reconciled all who believe in him. When people trust in Jesus as the Messiah, his life, death, and resurrection become theirs. They are new creations, free from the laws and the old covenant. The book of Galatians reminds Jesus' followers to embrace the Gospel message of the crucified Messiah, that justifies all people through faith and empowers them to live like Jesus did. Courtesy of The BibleProject

Watch the Bible Project Galatians Overview video here: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/galatians/>

Specific Context for Galatians 3:27 - 4:20

In this passage, Paul talks about “the law.” Sometimes “the law” refers to the instructions given by YHWH to Moses in Exodus 20-31. Other times, as in this case, it refers to Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

In the first 10 verses of Galatians 4, Paul uses a metaphor to describe Israel's relationship to the law. This is actually the third metaphor he has used to describe the law. In 3:23, he described the law as a sort of jailor. In 3:24-25, he described it as a guardian or tutor.

Here, Paul describes the law in terms of a patriarchal household in which a young boy who is the rightful heir of the entire estate still must obey and honor guardians and teachers until the day when his father decides he is mature enough to take responsibility for his inheritance and make his own decisions. Before that day, the child doesn't have much freedom. His life is not all that much different than a household servant (assuming the servants are treated well). In fact, the social status of children was similar to that of servants. However, after that day, the boy's life changes drastically. He is granted the freedom—and responsibility—to choose what to do with the resources given to him by his father.

Engage the Practice

We are all being formed by something. The question is, what? The Bible is a library that tells a unified story that leads all the way to Jesus. But, are the stories and wisdom found in them still relevant for us

today? Jesus believed the scriptures were trustworthy, had authority, and showed us a new way to live that is still relevant for us today. There are many approaches to studying and uncovering the multi-layered meanings of the Bible, but the goal should be the same; taking our knowledge from our head to our heart. So throughout this series we'll explore the spiritual practice of STUDY to help transform us into the image of Jesus.

In part 6 we're going to focus on culture and context clues!

Culture and Context Clues

Have you ever considered how confused our great grandparents would be if they listened in on one of our present day conversations? Daily we use terms such as "social media," "email," "Starbucks," or "iPhone!" A person hearing these terms without understanding our cultural context would be unable to make sense of our conversations. In the same way, the Bible, which was written over 2,000 years ago, also has a cultural context. So this week, we want to answer the question, how can context clues help us better interpret the beloved scriptures that we read today?

Check out this 6 minute video for a great visual on studying the Bible in context:
<https://youtu.be/R-rDUoKmceg>

Try this Exercise

- For this exercise you will need your Bible, a notebook, a pen and a device capable of accessing <https://www.biblestudytools.com/>.
- Open to our passage Galatians 3:27-4:20 and read it through one time.
- Then you will use a specific bible study strategy to help you identify clues and answer questions that will help fill in the full picture. This strategy has an acronym, C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, and Application).

C.O.M.A.

Context

This refers to the background of the passage and the circumstances in which it was written. Answer questions like who wrote the passage? Why was it written? Who was it written to? What is the literary genre? What happens immediately before and after this passage? Are there specific themes or ideas that are expressed?

Throughout our study, we've provided two types of context for you at the top of this Guide (overall book and specific passage context). But did you know you could find this on your own? Go to <https://www.biblestudytools.com/> and click on a book of the bible. If you enter Galatians and click on the book, you'll see all the background information that answers the context questions above.

Observation

This means to carefully examine the passage you are reading. Look to answer questions like is there any structure or arrangement to the passage? Is there any repetition or comparison or contrast? Are there any

keywords or phrases? Does anything surprise you or stick out? If there are characters, what do they say and do?

Use your journal to write down the answers to these questions if you haven't already. As you read through the passage, circle words, phrases, or sentences representing context clues that you would want to find out more about. Be curious, and don't assume that you already know the answer to the idea.

Meaning

This refers to the main point or idea the author wanted his original audience to understand. Ask questions such as how does the passage describe, point to, or refer back to Jesus? What is the reader supposed to learn about God from the passage? If you could sum up the writer's main point in a sentence, what would it be?

Write a summary of each of the paragraphs in your journal using the context clues you've identified. Think about how your summary might be different if that specific context clue was removed?

Application

This refers to how you, as the reader, are supposed to respond to the text. Think through questions like, does this passage challenge or confirm my beliefs? Is there an attitude or assumption I must change? Are there any changes to my actions or the way I live being advised by the passage? Is there a promise I should be believing or an attribute of God's nature that I should be trusting?

Write a specific application question from your summary above.

Walk It Out

Alright, let's take what we've gathered in our heads, and allow it to impact our hearts. Grab your journals and take the next few minutes to sit in silence with the Holy Spirit. Meditate on what you've just studied and any new dots you've connected in your mind. After you come out of silence, use this next section to help you process WHY it matters, and what the Holy Spirit wants you to do with that information.

- As you learned of the cultural and historical contexts that Galatians 3:27-4:20 was written in, what new understanding did you embrace from this passage? Take some time and write and reflect on what you learned.
- In Galatians 3:27, Paul says to the churches of Galatia that they were clothed in Christ, evoking an image of being covered. Clothing is meant to cover and provide a barrier between us and the elements, and it helps us to express our unique style. Write down a few ways your faith in Christ covers you, protects you from possible dangers, and helps you express your unique identity.
- Before we came to know God and be known by God, we all had vices or habits that enslaved us. Reflecting on your freedom in Christ, what are some habits that you are still wanting to break free from? Ask the Holy Spirit to heal the brokenness in your life and reveal to you pathways to freedom.

Next Series: Part 7

In the next series we'll look at Galatians 4:21-31 and discover how to use the tools of Bible Commentaries.