

**Reading Together**  
**New Testament Bible Reading**  
**June 20 to June 26**

**Monday, June 20 – Galatians 3: 1 – 25**

As Paul really begins to develop his argument concerning the role of faith and the role of the law in the life of the believer, he asks the question “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” Who has cast a spell over you to turn you from the truth that righteousness comes by faith not by the law? Next, Paul asks them if the change that they experienced in their life came about because of faith or observing the law. Did they receive the Holy Spirit because they were such good observers of the law or because of their faith in Jesus Christ? The answer is obvious; it was because of faith in Christ.

To further make his point, Paul uses Abraham as an illustration. Remember this whole argument began as a result of some teaching that in order to be a Christian, one had to first be circumcised and become a Jew. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. Abraham was the first person God had commanded to be circumcised, and yet the Bible clearly teaches us that Abraham was made righteous by faith not by circumcision. This is an important point for us to remember as well. It is easy for us to get off track and to think that we are righteous because of the things we do. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our righteousness comes by way of faith in Christ, who did what we were powerless to do. He lived the perfect life we should have lived, and then he took the curse that we deserved (verse 13). Through faith in Christ our sins are forgiven and his righteousness becomes our righteousness.

Notice Paul’s argument in verses 19 – 25. The law wasn’t given to us so that we could be righteous on our own; the law was given to make us aware of our deep need for Christ, and his righteousness.

**Tuesday, June 21 – Galatians 3: 26 – 4: 20**

Paul’s argument in these verses is a little tricky to follow so let me try to make it as simple as possible. Anyone who is not a believer in Christ is a slave to the law. Without Christ, in order to be righteous in God’s eyes we must completely and perfectly obey the law. The law tells us everything we must do or not do in order to please God. Some will live under that slavery for their whole lives because they never understand the freedom that is available through Christ. The rest of us

are like children, who even though one day we will be made free from the law in Christ, are not free until we trust Christ in faith. Until faith comes, as children we are more like slaves than we are like heirs. But once faith comes it is as if we come of age and are no longer under the authority of the law. Because of Christ we can call God our Father (verses 6-7) and we are more than just sons of God we are heirs with Christ. Now let's make sure we understand what Paul is saying to us. It is not as if we can just ignore the law, but rather our focus should be obedience to Christ not to a set of rules.

When you can have Christ as your brother, why would you rather have the law as your master?

Notice what happens in verse 15 when we become zealous for the law instead of zealous for Christ. We lose all of our joy. Zealousness for the law just makes us self-righteous; zealousness for Christ makes us more aware of how deeply we are loved. That love fills us with joy and allows us to love others.

### **Wednesday, June 22 – Galatians 4: 21 – 5: 15**

At the end of chapter 4 Paul uses the Old Testament illustration of Hagar and Sarah. Both of these women gave birth to sons of Abraham. One son, Ishmael, the son of Hagar the slave woman, was born into the same slavery that his mother lived in. The other, Isaac, the son of Sarah, was born into freedom as a true son and as an heir to the promises God had made to Abraham. Hagar and Ishmael represent the earthly Jerusalem in slavery to the law. Sarah and Isaac represent the new Jerusalem (the heavenly Jerusalem talked about in Revelation 21)—children who are born into freedom in Christ and heirs with Christ to the eternal promises of God.

In chapter 5 Paul continues to discuss the freedom that Christians have in Christ. Look at verse 1. Paul tells us that Christ has set us free just so we can live in freedom. What does that mean? Since we are no longer slaves to the law we are free to live for Christ—loving others the way we have been loved. The law makes us self centered, worried only about ourselves. Christ makes us able to be outward centered, because we no longer have to worry about our performance. Notice that in these verses, Paul does not make an argument against circumcision (in verse 6 he says it doesn't really matter one way or another), rather, Paul makes an argument against circumcision (or any other performance of the law) that is done in an attempt to justify us

(make us right) in God's eyes. The crux of his argument is that if someone goes back to observing the law in an attempt to gain righteousness then what they are saying is that Christ was crucified for no reason at all.

#### **Thursday, June 23 – Galatians 5: 16 – 6: 18**

As Christians we are to live by the Spirit, not by the law, and verse 26 makes it clear why that is true. Adherence to the law just makes us conceited, envious and jealous of each other. Those feelings are exactly the opposite of the fruits of the Spirit.

In a sense chapter 6 serves as an application for how we live out the truths that Paul has taught in this letter. When someone is caught in sin we must deal with them gently, rather than using the law to condemn them, we should point them to Christ to restore them. As followers of Christ we are not bound to serve the law but Christ and fellow believers (verse 2). In verse 3 Paul teaches us that we must not think too highly of ourselves, but we should constantly be honestly evaluating ourselves and our actions to see if they are in line with how Christ has commanded us to live. We should never deceive ourselves by comparing ourselves to others because such deception will lead us to destruction rather than eternal life.

Paul closes this letter with two very powerful thoughts in verses 14 and 15. First, in verse 14, Paul tells the Galatians that the only thing we should ever boast in is the cross of Christ. What Paul means is that the only thing worth boasting in is what Christ has done for us, not anything we have done in our own strength. Next, in verse 15, Paul once again says that circumcision (or any other outward observance of the law) means nothing. The only thing that matters is “new creation” that is being born again as a new creation in Christ.

#### **Friday, June 24 – Ephesians 1: 1 – 23**

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus was written to a church that was struggling with divisiveness, and so the theme of the letter is unity in Christ. As Paul develops this theme he also develops some amazing spiritual truths that we can soak up into our lives as we read his letter. After Paul opens his letter with a traditional greeting, Paul outlines the blessings that we have in Christ, gives thanks for those blessings and then prays for the Ephesians that they would understand what those blessings mean for their lives.

Paul makes a very clear case in verses 4 and 5 that God chose us to be in Christ before the world was even formed and any of us had done anything. God chose us and orchestrated events so that we could become adopted as his sons through Christ's work on the cross, and all of this was done by God in such a way that He alone would get the glory for our salvation. Furthermore, in verses 13 and 14 Paul tells us that we have been given the Holy Spirit in our lives as a deposit that guarantees our inheritance in Christ.

Paul's prayer in the remainder of chapter 1 is that the Ephesians would see and understand the riches that they have in Christ.

### **Saturday, June 25 – Ephesians 2: 1 – 22**

In chapter 2 Paul continues to lay out his case for unity in Christ, by making the point that we are all the same spiritually. We were all dead in our sins and transgressions against God, and it is only by God's grace and the gift of Jesus Christ that we are made alive again in Christ. Notice that verse 10 makes a very clear point that we have been given this grace and made alive in Christ to do good works. Good works are not the means by which we are saved, but they are the fruit and evidence of Christ's work in our lives.

In the remainder of chapter 2 Paul makes the point that because we were all in the same boat (dead in our sins and made alive in Christ) we are all the same no matter how different our backgrounds might be. All of us are part of the spiritual building that God is building that has Christ as the chief cornerstone (the one the whole building rests on).

### **Sunday, June 26 – Ephesians 3: 1 – 21**

There were many divisions that plagued the early church, because it was comprised of people from all different walks of life. There were slaves and freemen, there were rich and poor, and, most notably, there were Jews and Gentiles. In this chapter Paul explains how it came to be that the salvation the Jews thought was only for them has been made known and available to the Gentiles also. In this chapter Paul refers to the Gospel as a mystery, an unfolding drama written by God that we must continually strive to understand. That's why Paul ends this chapter with what I think is the most powerful prayer in all of Scripture. Pray this prayer for yourself, but also pray it for others. If you are ever not sure how to pray for someone else this is the prayer to pray!