

Bible Reading Notes

July 2020 – Galatians (with Psalm 14)

How to use these Bible reading notes

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you dig into God's word and allow it to change your life. 'A little and often' is a good motto. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever the notes have got to.

Here's a guide to get the most out of these notes:

1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake.
2. Ask God to help you understand.
3. Use the notes to help you think about the passage:
 - 'Read' tells you which verses to read
 - 'Apply' shows how it affects you
 - 'Pray' suggests ways to talk to God about it
4. Pray about what you have read.
5. Look for an opportunity to share with someone what God has told you.

These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets. Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'subscribe to online feeds' and 'Devotional'. It's called St Philemon's Bible Notes. If you have any problems, email miriam@stphilemons.co.uk.

Wednesday 1st July

The human condition

Read Psalm 14 and Romans 3v10-18, 21-22.

Psalm 14 is quoted in Romans 3. Compare the two passages;

- How many similarities can you see?
- What is God's overwhelming verdict on humanity (including us)?

Both Psalm 14 and Romans 3 have the word 'but...' in them which brings a shift from hopelessness to hope.

- What is the hope in Psalm 14? (v6)
- What is the hope in Romans 3? (21)
- How are they similar? Different?

Psalm 14 ends with a sense of longing (v14).

- How does Jesus fulfil that longing? (Rom 3v21-22 might help.)

Apply

- Where can you see evidence of human corruption today? In our culture? In your friends/family? In yourself?
- In what ways is Jesus your refuge?

Pray, asking God to grow your dependence on, and deepen your joy in, Jesus' saving work each day this month.

Thursday 2nd July

Rescued!

We're going to spend the rest of this month in Paul's letter to the Galatians. It's a letter written to prevent us turning a relationship with God based on grace into a religion based on our works.

Read Galatians 1:1-5

- How does Paul describe himself?
- Galatia was a region in what is nowadays Turkey. How does Paul greet them?

Apply

- How are you aware today that the age we live in is evil/broken?
- In what ways has the cross of Christ rescued you from it already? In what ways are you still waiting?
- How does remembering the cross fill 'grace' (God's gift of relationship with him) and 'peace' (our secure standing with him) with meaning for you?

Pray

Thank God for these things that come to us for free through Jesus.

Friday 3rd July

The danger of desertion

The Galatians have been rescued by Jesus' death from the present evil age. But all is not well...

Read Galatians 1:6-7

- How does Paul describe what it is to be a Christian?
- What has happened lately to the Galatian Christians?
- Why is this so serious?

Apply

To 'pervert' means literally to 'reverse': by adding laws to the gospel, these preachers were changing the whole direction of Christianity: instead of being what God does for us so we can be saved, it becomes what we do for God so we can be saved. As Paul says, that is no gospel at all!

- What steps are you taking to ensure that the gospel you believe is the one God saves us by?

Pray

Thank God for calling us to live in the grace of Christ and pray that you and your church family would not desert him.

Saturday 4th July

Good disagreement?

Paul has been talking about his right gospel of grace and other wrong 'gospels' which change it.

Read Galatians 1:8-10

- Who is allowed to change the gospel?
- What happens to people who do change the gospel?
- Why might people want to change the gospel (v10)?

Apply

- How is Paul's gospel of grace offensive to human pride?
- How might adding some laws soften that offence?

Paul is very direct in his criticism of other teachers.

- Should we be just as direct? Why? When? How? Who?

Pray

Pray for God to make you more concerned with pleasing him than others. Pray for his help to grow in gospel understanding yourself and pray for love for others as you seek to help them.

Sunday 5th July

Whose gospel is it?

Paul claims to be preaching the one true gospel. So, where did he get it from?

Read Galatians 1:11-12

- Where did Paul not get his gospel?
- How did he get it?

Apply

'Revelation' implies that Paul did not himself earn any kind of understanding (e.g. through his moral virtue or diligent study).

- How does this fit with the content of the gospel itself?
- How do you view what Paul has written? Do you view it as on the same level as e.g. the gospels?
How do these verses affect that?

Pray

Ask God to help you receive Paul's words as Jesus'. And ask God to use the letter of Galatians this month to change you forever.

Monday 6th July

The proof that it's God's gospel (1)

Paul has claimed that his gospel is Jesus' gospel. Now for some proof!

Read Galatians 1:13-17

- What was Paul doing before he became a Christian? What did he believe and from where did those beliefs come?
- What changed? Why?
- When he then started to preach his new faith, had anyone taught him it?

Apply

Paul started preaching the moment he was converted (see Acts 9:20). Going to Arabia was no spiritual retreat, therefore (let alone theological college!); it was a mission trip.

- How does all this make you certain that Paul's message really came directly from God?
- How does it help you to trust Paul when he says things that your instincts disagree with?

Pray

Pray that you would see Paul as a horrible sinner but his message as a beautiful and entirely trustworthy word. And thank God for calling us by grace too.

Tuesday 7th July

The proof that it's God's gospel (2)

Read Galatians 1:18-24

Cephas is the apostle Peter, Jesus' right hand man. 'James' refers to Jesus' half-brother. Syria and Cilicia are non-Jewish (or 'Gentile') areas. 'Judea' is the traditional Jewish heartland.

- How would you describe Paul's relationship with other Christians?
- Why does it matter (in terms of where Paul got his message from);
 - that he is independent of these other Christians?
 - that he is on friendly terms with them?

Apply

Paul's message was just the same as that of the other apostles – as all the early Christians agreed – and it came just the same way: from Jesus himself.

- How does this leave you feeling? How do v23-24 show you the way?

Pray

Pray for a sense of partnership with Paul, Peter, James and all people who believe the gospel. And pray for that partnership to enable you to forgive others and rejoice in their gospel service.

Wednesday 8th July

The proof that it's God's gospel (3)

Read Galatians 2:1-5

- According to v2, why did Paul present his gospel to the Jewish Christians?
- In v4, how does Paul describe what it is like to believe the true gospel? How does he describe what it's like to believe a distorted gospel (e.g. one involving added laws like 'You have to be circumcised')?
- How does v5 help us to understand v2?

Apply

Paul did not go to Jerusalem for them to check his teaching. He went to check theirs! As an apostle, he is the one in the right.

- When you read the Bible (written by Jesus' prophets and apostles), do you try to correct it or do you let it correct you?
- Can you think of the last time you changed your mind in the light of what the Bible says?

Pray

Thank God for the freedom that comes from believing the true gospel. Pray for a soft heart that is corrected by it and a faithful will that sticks with it.

Thursday 9th July

The gospel of grace, revealed by grace

Read Galatians 2:6-10

From the perspective of the first Christians, there were two groups in the world: Jews, and Gentiles (everyone else).

- How did God arrange for all to hear the gospel?
- How does Paul show that he is in partnership with, but does not submit to, the other apostles?
- How does v10 fit with a gospel of grace?

Apply

When it comes to questions like, 'How can we connect to God?', 'How do we fix this world?', 'How do we break the power of sin in our lives?', humans always tend to come up with answers which focus on what we must do.

Paul's gospel gives a completely different set of answers, based on God's grace at work for us (through Jesus) and in us (by his Spirit).

- How does the way this gospel was first discovered and preached fit with what it says?

Pray

Praise God for this wonderful gospel and pray for grace to grip your life and lips.

Friday 10th July

Changing the gospel

Paul has been telling us that the gospel alone sets us free. So why would you change it?

Read Galatians 2:11-14

(Antioch was the first place where a church was planted with a good number of Gentiles there.)

- How did Peter change his behaviour after people from James came to him?
- Why did he? Was it because he had changed his mind on what the gospel was?
- What was the effect of his hypocrisy on him (v11)? on others (v13)?

Apply

Lots of people don't understand the gospel of grace and will always try to squeeze it into the mould of the world's religion.

- How does this passage help you to understand why you might go along with them?
- How can you see fear of others shaping your behaviour?
- Why does this matter?

Pray

Talk to God about your concerns.

Saturday 11th July

Justified

Paul has just talked about 'the truth of the gospel' and now we come to the heart of it...

Read Galatians 2:15-18

- To be 'justified' means for God to be pleased with us. How is this achieved? How is it not achieved?
- How might understanding 'justification by faith' lead someone to ask v17?

Apply

Paul will give a fuller answer to the question in v17 as the letter goes on. (The gist of v18 is that the purpose of the Law was to lead us to Christ, so to add to faith in Christ is to break (the spirit of) the Law.) But in a sense v17 is a good question in that it understands how radical 'justification by faith' is.

- Why can faith in Jesus justify us when our own efforts can't? What was Jesus able to do that we cannot?

Pray

Take some time to think what it would be like if Jesus hadn't come. And talk to God about how the gospel leaves you feeling.

Sunday 12th July

New life in Christ

Today's verses show the new life that justification by faith in Jesus brings...

Read Galatians 2:19-21

(Verse 19 explains how the law of the Old Testament makes us long for a saviour, so that we don't need to be under the law anymore!)

- How does v20 explain the Christian life? What is at the heart of it?
- What does faith lead us to do? Why do we do it?

The key idea in this section is that we get this new life wholly through Jesus.

- What does adding requirements for obedience do to the idea of grace? (see v21)

Apply

Faith leads to us being right with God. But it also leads to a whole new life of trusting Jesus to lead us, rather than 'I' leading us.

- How does v20 encourage you to trust Jesus?
- How does it challenge you in your trust of him?

Pray

Talk to God about how your life can be more and more a life of faith.

Monday 13th July

Why does God bless us?

Christians are justified through faith. That's the heart of the gospel. But the Galatians were in danger of losing it!

Read Galatians 3:1-5

- How seriously is Paul taking the Galatians' problem?

Paul started the Galatian churches a few years earlier. They'd experienced persecution yet kept growing.

- Why did the Galatians receive the Spirit? Why have they experienced miracles among them? (Paul implies the answer)
- Why does Paul want to remind them of this?
- Why would all their previous experiences be 'in vain' if they now decided to obey the Law?

Apply

There's a big principle at stake here: why does God look favourably on us and bless us?

- In what ways do you try to seek God's blessing other than by simply trusting Him?

Pray

Think through your life & the blessings you've experienced as a Christian. Thank God that this all came from his grace and not through earning it.

Tuesday 14th July

A proof from history

The Christian life is all about faith. But isn't the Bible full of people who obeyed the Old Testament Law?

Read Galatians 3:6-9

Abraham was the father of the Jewish people and God promised that he would bless the world through him. And guess what? Abraham was circumcised!

- Why would Paul need to talk about Abraham with the Galatians?
- How did Abraham become righteous (pleasing to God)? What's the significance for this to Paul?

Gentiles is a term to describe all non-Jews.

- According to the Scriptures (which Paul quotes), did God actually say you had to be a Jew to receive Abraham's blessings?

Apply

It's an attractive thought to be 'connected' to Abraham and the blessings he received. But it comes by faith!

- If it's faith that brings God's blessings, how should we treat good things we do like going to church/praying/giving/serving at church?

Pray that we would have the right attitude to these things.

Wednesday 15th July

Not a bright idea...

Have you ever inadvertently put yourself in great danger? Can you remember how you felt?

Read Galatians 3:10-14

- What does the Old Testament itself (notice the quotation marks) say happens to anyone who trusts in its Law?
- Why is obeying laws so different to having faith?

It might be surprising to hear the Bible talk this way about its own commands and rules. Do they really bring curses upon those that try to obey them...?

- What important lesson do we learn about the value of our religious performance before God?
- How does Jesus relate to us and the curses?
- How is Jesus' work for us described?

By going back to the Law, the Galatians were putting themselves in great danger and forgetting the very reason Jesus came into the world!

Pray

Praise Jesus for each aspect of the gospel mentioned:

- Redeeming us from God's curse
- Experiencing God's curse upon himself
- Enabling God's blessings to flow to us

Thursday 16th July

Getting technical with the Law (1)

What's the point of the numerous laws of the Old Testament when they only bring curses on its followers?! Let's read on and see...

Read Galatians 3:15-18

- How do normal human covenants or agreements work (v15)? Can you just go back on the terms and conditions?

In v16 Paul talks about a promise that God made to Abraham: He would experience God's blessing, along with his offspring. This promise is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, one of Abraham's descendants (v16b).

- In relation to this promise, when did God establish the Law?
- Can it change God's original promise?

Apply

Many people think God's grace sounds like a great deal but there must be a catch you'll discover along the way.

- Is God like that, according to this passage?
- What promises from God do you find hardest to believe are true?

Pray that this passage would encourage you to believe that God's promises are unbreakable to him.

Friday 17th July

Getting technical with the Law (2)

We're finding out the point of the Old Testament laws. Yesterday we saw that they don't save us (overwriting God's promise).

Read Galatians 3:19-25

- Why was the Law added? What might that mean?
- Where was the Law pointing to ultimately?

It's easy to think that the Law was a bad thing that shows up sin and curses people. But the Bible has a positive view of what the Law was doing for us. It was a guardian.

- How was the Law a guardian? (think of the language of locking up)
- In what way do all the laws point us to Jesus?
- Is the Law still in control over the Christian?

Apply

When we read laws in the Old Testament (like in the first five books of the Bible):

- How should we read them as Christians?
- What would be a wrong way to read them?

Pray

Ask God that we would be excited to read the 'law' bits of the Bible and learn from them.

Saturday 18th July

One in Christ Jesus

People often live by the Law, trying to make themselves good enough for God. But what is it like to be free of it?

Read Galatians 3:26-29

- What's it like for believers now that Jesus has arrived?
- Does our background or status affect our standing in Christ Jesus?

Paul talks about being 'in' Christ Jesus.

- How does the language of baptism and clothing in v27 help us understand this concept?
- How must God look upon us if we are 'in' Jesus?

Think about this for a while: isn't it an amazing thought and doesn't it make sense of the rest of the verses?

Apply

We are all different people in church, with different situations, responsibilities, and gifts.

- How can your church better reflect the equal standing we all have before God in Christ?
- How can you help show this unity and equality?

Pray

Ask God that your church would live out more of this unity, equality, and joint status as heirs of God.

Sunday 19th July

Free heirs in Christ Jesus

In Galatians, Paul has been saying that we are saved by faith, and therefore we are all one family in Jesus. But there's more...

Read Galatians 4:1-3

- What was it like for Jews under the law before Jesus came?
- What is the image of a guarded child supposed to teach us?

We don't often think as Old Testament believers as 'enslaved' but it is a helpful thing to think about – they were waiting.

Read Galatians 4:4-7

- When the 'time had fully come' what did God do?
- What has this achieved for us?

Apply

- How do you feel about being called an heir of God in his family?
- What does this tell you about your future, your identity, and your status?
- How does having the Spirit in your heart encourage you in talking to God?

Pray to him now.

Monday 20th July

Two kinds of slavery

The previous verses were addressed primarily to the Galatian Jews. Today's passage describes the past and present of the Galatian Gentiles.

Read Galatians 4:8-11

- What was their religious background (v8)?
- What changed? How does Paul emphasise God's grace (v9)?
- But what are they doing now (v9-10)?

These 'days', 'months', etc are in obedience to Old Testament laws.

- So how is what they are doing now different from their background? And how is it the same?

Apply

Human religion is all about what we do for God. The gospel is all about what God has done for us – summarised here as 'knowing us' (v8).

- Why do you think the first is described as 'slavery'? How serious is 'a bit of religion' (v11)?

Pray, for your Christian life to be all about faith in Jesus and a growing relationship with God through him. Pray against living for other things or for merely religious habits and rules.

Tuesday 21st July

Two kinds of pastor

In today's passage, we think about the difference it makes if your pastor believes the gospel of grace or not.

Read Galatians 4:12-20

- How has Paul related to these Galatians? What does he want for them?
- How have they related to him: in the past? More recently?
- How has that affected him?
- How have other pastors (who don't understand grace) related to these Galatians (v17)?

Apply

- Why will not understanding grace tend to make a pastor want to win people for themselves?
- Why will understanding grace help to free a pastor from that sin?
- Does this passage suggest anything about which kind of pastor we naturally prefer?

Pray

Talk to God about what you tend to want out of a pastor. Ask him to help you to let the gospel shape your desires.

Wednesday 22nd July

Sons or slaves

Paul is helping us as Christians to think about what it means to live as a child of God's.

Read Galatians 4:21-5:1

- Who is Paul addressing (v21)?

Paul refers them back to a story in Genesis.

- How were Abraham's two sons born? What was the result for them? How is this a picture for us?

Apply

One son was born as a result of Abraham trying to 'make things happen' – in a way he was trying to save himself. But the other was born as a result of Abraham's faith in God's (seemingly-impossible-to-keep) promise. Only when we put our trust in God's Spirit to save us can we be truly free.

- How are you tempted to 'get results' by making your (or someone else's) acceptance before God dependent upon performance?
- How does v29 warn you? How do 4:30-5:1 reassure and challenge you?

Pray, asking God to help you to continue to trust simply in his promise to save you. Pray that your status as his son or daughter would fill your mind today.

Thursday 23rd July

All or nothing!

Galatians chapter 5 is all about two ways to grow as a Christian. But only one way works...

Read Galatians 5:2-6

- What action is Paul warning them against? Why might they want to do it? For it to work, what would they have to do? How serious is this mistake?

Paul describes the God-given approach to growing as a Christian in verses 5-6;

- What are the different elements to it?

Apply

‘Righteousness’ in v5 refers to living in a way that pleases God. It comes by the Spirit, over time, and through us exercising faith.

- How are you needing to ‘eagerly await’ righteousness at the moment? How are you responding to that?
- How is your faith increasingly expressing itself in love?

Pray

Talk to God about your answers.

Friday 24th July

'A little yeast...'

Paul planted the Galatian church by preaching the true gospel. But someone come in and changed the message.

Read Galatians 5:7-12

- According to v7-9, how *were* they doing? What happened? How did it happen?
- According to v10, now that Paul has written, how does he think things will turn out for his readers? And for those who have been confusing them?
- In v12, Paul evidently feels strongly – how does v11 help us to understand why?

Apply

Saying that we must rely entirely on Jesus and his cross is offensive to human pride. People will always want to 'soften' it by adding things we must do. But that robs Christ of his glory and Christians of their assurance.

- Have you ever seen a legalistic attitude spread like yeast in your church or family? How did it start? How did it gather momentum? How was it stopped?

Pray

Ask God to use faithful teachers to keep you running a good race of faith expressing itself in love. Ask God for wisdom on helping those who tend towards legalism.

Saturday 25th July

What is freedom for?

Anyone can be adopted as God's child and be free from condemnation through faith in the gospel. But what next?

Read Galatians 5:13-18

The 'flesh' represents 'us when we leave God out of the picture'.

- What comes naturally to us when we do that?
- What is the alternative that God wants? How do we know he wants it?
- According to v16, how can we live this different life? What does it feel like to live it?

Apply

In v17-18, Paul defines freedom not as 'doing whatever you want' but as 'being led by the Spirit'. That is a different definition from most people.

- Why is Paul right?
- What does it mean to 'live by the Spirit'? How does the rest of Galatians help you to answer that question?

Pray, asking God to help you to live by faith, not leaving God out of the picture. Pray that he, rather than your own natural desires, would shape the way you live.

Sunday 26th July

The acts of the flesh

- How does the world encourage us to treat our dreams and desires?

Read Galatians 5:19-21

- How would you summarise this list?
- Where do all these 'acts' come from?
- Humans are made in the beautiful image of God but something has gone wrong inside us. How much can we trust our desires and emotions?

Paul talks in these verses about people who embrace these things as a way of life.

- How does Paul warn such people?
- How can that warning encourage Christians who might not 'embrace' these practices, but fall into them again and again by temptation?

Apply

- What are the particular desires that deceive you and harm you and lead you to do these 'acts'?
- How can you cultivate a healthy scepticism of your emotions?

Pray

Ask that God develops a culture within you and your church where you truly reject these 'acts of the flesh.'

Monday 27th July

The fruit of the Spirit

Paul is encouraging us to be led by the Spirit, rather than the flesh.

Read Galatians 5:22-23

- How does a list of fruit differ from a list of acts (such as we read yesterday)?
- What would it be like to meet someone who displayed the virtues listed here? (You might be able to think of one man in particular!) How would they treat us and speak to us?
- Why does Paul use the word fruit (in the singular) rather than the word fruits? What does this teach us about how we must read this list?

Apply

- Are there particular virtues in this list that you have neglected?
- How can you better encourage and participate with the Spirit as he grows this fruit within you?

Pray

Think through people in your church who demonstrate particular aspects of this fruit. Thank God for them and pray that the fruit of the Spirit would be increasingly on display in you and your church family.

Tuesday 28th July

Crucified and yet alive

The freedom Christians have is not something to abuse – that’s why we must live by the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Read Galatians 5:24-26

Paul starts by speaking about when someone becomes a Christian.

- What happened at that point with our sinful desires (‘the desires and passions of the flesh’)?

You may not have thought of becoming a Christian in this way, but it is like we were giving our sins to Jesus to pay for. Crucifixion is vivid language!

- If that’s what happened in the past, how should we approach those desires now?
- What has the Spirit achieved for us (v25)? Note the contrast with the language of crucifixion.
- Why does it therefore make sense to live ‘in step with the Spirit’ (following his desires for us)?

Apply

- How can you be better at keeping in step with the Spirit?

Pray, asking God that you would truly have nothing to do with the passions and desires which were crucified.

Wednesday 29th July

Going beyond pleasantries

Read Galatians 6:1-6

- What relationships are particularly in view in these verses?
- In what ways can people be caught in sin? You might want to think of examples where you have seen this in yourself or others.
- What is the response of love that Paul is looking for?

Re-read verses 3-6 and notice how the focus shifts in those verses.

- In seeking to help people who are 'caught' in various ways, what must Christians be careful about?
- Why is comparing ourselves to others a particularly foolish thing to do?

Apply

- Can you think of any particular people you need to care for in this way? What are you doing for them at the moment? Are there things you can do better?
- What temptations might this love and care bring up for you?

Pray, asking God to make your church a strong community of love rather than a simply religious gathering.

Thursday 30th July

Would I mock you, God?

As we draw to a close in the book of Galatians, Paul has a stark reality for us to consider.

Read Galatians 6:7-10

- How might a Christian mock God? (the language of Spirit and flesh have come up in the recent days)
- What illustration does Paul use from the world of farming? What should it teach us?
- Sowing to the Spirit can sound quite spiritual but what does it actually mean? (see v9-10)
- What encouragements are there for someone who sows to the Spirit?

Apply

Ever since 5:13, we have been thinking about the way we “use our freedom.”

- Where are you tempted to mock the God who set you free by the way you live your life?
- Where are you tempted to give up or become weary in doing good?

Pray

Ask God to help you persevere in sowing to the Spirit and using your freedom for good.

Friday 31st July

My one boast

Galatians has taught us a lot about being saved by faith and freed from working for our salvation.

Read Galatians 6:11-18

Paul's farewell appeal in these verses echoes his whole letter. It gives us a good opportunity to think back...

- What are the big lessons you want to take away about faith and freedom in Christ?

One particular word comes up in these verses which we haven't thought much about: boasting. The teachers Paul has been disagreeing with are preaching that the Galatian churches must obey the Law.

- What do they think matters and what does Paul think of their motivations?
- In contrast, what does Paul think matters and what does he want to boast in?

Apply

- How would considering everything meaningless except the cross of Jesus (by which we have died and been made new creations) change the way you live?

Pray, asking God to write grace so deeply on your heart that it becomes the whole method you live by.