Lesson 32
Acts 18:23–20:38; Galatians

The readings from Acts tell of Paul’s third missionary journey, to Galatia, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Greece. (See the maps in your LDS Bible.) Most of the questions for this assignment will be on Galatians.

Acts 20
Verse 28: To whom is Paul preaching in these verses? (See verse 17 and the LDS footnotes for verse 28.)

The Greek word translated overseer is episkopos, the root word for the English word episcopal. It is often translated bishop, but overseer is a good (and very literal) translation because it shows what the episkopos does: he watches over others to see that they do their jobs properly. Over whom should the elders first keep watch? Why?

What does it mean to say that Jesus has purchased the Church with his blood? What metaphor is Paul using?

Verse 29: How soon does Paul expect the wolves to enter the flock? Who might these wolves be?

He is leaving Ephesus to return to Jerusalem. Is that the departure he is talking about, or is he talking about his death?

Notice that the word translated grievous could also have been translated savage or cruel. Whom is Paul concerned about, and how are they cruel?
**Verse 30:** Does this verse say something different from verse 29, or does it repeat what verse 29 says in a different way?

Another good translation for *perverse things* is *distorted things.* As you read Paul’s letters, ask yourself, “Against what distortions of the gospel is he preaching?” Is the false doctrine itself a problem, or is the problem that these people draw disciples to themselves, creating divisions in the Church?

**Verse 31:** How long does Paul say he taught at Ephesus? Against what did he warn them?

**Verse 32:** What does Paul tell them will strengthen them, presumably against the distorted teachings that are to come?

What does Paul mean when he says, “I commend you to God”?

What does he mean when he says, “I commend you . . . to the word of his grace”? What does “word of his grace” mean? Some possibilities are the Old Testament (the scriptures of Paul’s day), Jesus’s teaching (had, at the time, primarily as something taught orally), or Paul’s teaching about grace. Are there other possibilities?

What does it mean to have “an inheritance among all them which are sanctified”?

Compare what Paul says here with Deuteronomy 33:1–4. Are they related? Is this, perhaps, what Paul had in mind?

**Galatians 1**

**Verse 1:** Why do you think Paul begins by emphasizing that he was made an apostle by God?
Verses 1–5: Why does Paul have such a long introduction? Letters often began “So-and-so to So-and-so, grace (or peace) . . .” Paul is using that standard format, but he has lengthened it considerably.

Why is it important for Paul to deny that his apostleship has a human origin?

Why is the fact that the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead the description of him that Paul thinks most appropriate to use in this letter? How is Paul’s apostleship related to Jesus’s resurrection?

In verse 4 the phrase “present evil world” is a translation of a Greek phrase that means simply “present evil.” Does that change of the translation, dropping the word world, change the meaning of the verse?

Verses 5–8: What problem are the churches in Galatia faced with?

Galatians 1:13–2:14

Why is it important for Paul to explain his relation to the other apostles? What might people have been saying about him that would require this history of his work? Compare his claim to apostolic office with the requirements for that office when Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:21–22).

Galatians 2

Verse 4: Of what bondage is Paul speaking?

Verse 6: “To be somewhat” could also be translated “to be somebody.” So what?
Verses 7–10: What is Paul’s point here?

Verses 11–13: What is Paul’s criticism of Peter? Why does Paul feel it necessary to deal with Peter’s problem publicly? Did Paul confront Peter publicly immediately, or did he do so only later?

Verses 15–16: Is what Paul says in these verses addressed to Peter alone or also to a wider audience?

Perhaps a better translation of by nature (verse 15) is by birth. What’s Paul’s point?

What does justified mean? Another translation has upright instead of justified. Made righteous is another way to translate the Greek. What does it mean to say that we are “not justified by the works of the law”? What does it mean to be justified “by faith of [in] Jesus Christ”?

What does “works [or “deeds”] of the law” mean? (Compare Galatians 3:2, 5, 10 and Romans 3:20, 28.) Compare the end of verse 16 with Psalm 143:2.

Why is Paul so emphatic about this teaching about works and faith? To what false teaching is he responding?

Verses 17–21: In verse 17 Paul seems to be responding to a hypothetical objection. What would that objection be? Do we encounter anything like that position today? Do we ever take a similar position?

What is he referring to when he speaks of something being built again after the person who built it destroyed it (verse 18)? What does verse 18 imply about the Judaizers?
To understand verse 19, compare Romans 6:11 and 2 Corinthians 5:15. How has the Christian become “dead to the law” (verse 19)? Does Paul have a particular law in mind, or is he speaking of law in general? What difference does it make which law he is speaking of?

How did the law bring death about? What does it mean to “live unto God”? We know that baptism is a symbol of our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus Christ. What does that have to do with our death to the law (verse 20)?

What does Paul mean when he says (verse 20) that he is no longer alive but that Christ lives in him?

Against whom is verse 21 directed? Are there any contemporary positions like that against which it is directed?

Why has Christ died in vain if we can be made righteous by the law? Are we ever guilty of assuming that we can be made righteous by the law?

What does the word grace mean? To think about that, think about the many ways in which it can be used in English: in its scriptural context, as here; to describe a person (“He carried out his duties with grace”); as the name of a prayer of thanks (“She said grace before the meal”). What do these usages have in common that might help us understand its use in the scriptures?

**Galatians 3**

As you read this chapter, ask yourself how the things that Paul reminds the Galatians of in this chapter support his
claim at the end of chapter 2 that if the law brings righteousness, then Christ died in vain.

**Verse 1:** “Translate” this verse into contemporary English for yourself. You can do that by paraphrasing its meaning, but be sure that your paraphrase leaves nothing out. Does doing that allow you to see how insulting verse 1 is?

What must Paul’s relation to the Galatians have been like for him to get away with this insult?

**Verse 3:** What does verse 3 tell us about the preaching of those who have corrupted the Church in Galatia?

**Verses 1–5:** In the first five verses, Paul appeals to the experience of his hearers. What does he imply about that experience?

**Verse 6:** Why does Paul turn to scripture in verse 6, in particular to the example of Abraham? Of what is Abraham an example in the context of this letter?

**Verse 7:** What is the teaching of verse 7?

**Verse 10:** What does verse 10 tell us about the law?

**Verses 10–12:** Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4. Why does he quote this from the Old Testament? What is he teaching about the law in the verses?

**Verse 13:** What has verse 13 to do with verse 10?

**Verses 15–18:** The word translated *covenant* has two meanings, and Paul is playing on those meanings. It means “last will and testament” as well as “covenant” as we use it in understanding Israel’s relation to God. How does that word-play work? Is it important to what Paul is teaching?
Paul explains scripture in verse 16, pointing out that in Genesis 15:18 and similar scriptures the word seed is singular, not plural—in other words, descendant, not descendants. What descendant does Paul have in mind?

What point is Paul making about the covenant and the law in verse 17?

How does verse 18 show that the Judaizers are wrong?

**Verse 19:** According to verse 19, what is the purpose of the law? Why was it given? (See Romans 4:15; 5:13–14, 20 and 7:7–13.)

**Verses 24–29:** How does verse 24 explain the law?

Does verse 25 mean that we no longer need to be obedient? If not, why not?

What is the point of verse 28?

What is the promise of verse 29?

**Galatians 4**

**Verse 1:** The beginning of chapter 4 might be better translated as “This is what I am saying.”

**Verses 1–3:** As you read this chapter, it is important to remember what Paul reminds his hearers of in verse 1: children in a household had no more rights than did slaves. The father of the family had the right to do with them as he wished. Technically that right included killing his children, though few did so and doing so was strongly disapproved of—but it was not illegal. It may also be helpful to remember that tutors and governors (verse 2) were almost always themselves slaves.
Verses 4–5: What is the point of saying “made of a woman, made under the law” (verse 4)? Another translation could be “born of a woman; subjected to the law.” What is Paul saying about the Savior?

What does it mean to redeem something or someone? How is that the right word for Paul to use when speaking of Christ’s atonement for us? From whom or what have we been redeemed?

Why is the teaching of adoption important? Aren’t we already sons and daughters of God? If so, why do we need to be adopted?

Why is adoption something that we receive? The word that Paul uses here (apolambanō) means “to receive,” as the King James Version has it. But it can also mean “to receive back something.” Is that a relevant meaning?

Further, the word can mean “to welcome.” Is that relevant to interpreting what Paul says?

Verses 6–7: Paul gives an overview of what it means to be a Christian: Christ’s redemption makes it possible for us to be children of God. If we receive that adoption, then we can have his Spirit. As a result, we are no longer servants of God, but his children and, being children, we receive an inheritance from the Father, which comes to us because of what the Son has done. How does what Paul says here map onto our usual way of talking about the plan of salvation?

Verses 8–11: In these verses Paul asks a rhetorical question—“Having become a child of God, how can you now have become, once again, slaves to the weak, poor things of
the world” (verse 9)—and he expresses his concern: “I’m worried that the work I did for you was useless” (verse 11).

This backsliding has happened even though “ye have known God, or rather are known of God” (verse 9). Why does he make that change from known to known of? What difference is he underlining?

In verse 10 Paul gives a general description of ritual observance. This is what religions often do: they order what they do by the calendar, with feast days and Sabbaths, and so on. He uses this as his evidence that the Galatians are on the verge of apostasy. But what is wrong with such calendars? We have a less full religious calendar than most, but we nevertheless order our lives by the Sabbath and by holidays like Easter and Christmas. Can you explain Paul’s criticism?

**Verse 12:** Why does Paul tell them not to worry about having injured him? What is he thinking of?

**Verses 12–16:** What is the point of these verses? Could you paraphrase them using your own language?

**Verses 17–18:** To whom does they refer in verse 17? Has Paul said who these opponents were?

Verse 17 is difficult to translate, and the King James Version is likely to leave most readers baffled. Here’s an alternative translation: “They court your favor, but not for the good; rather, they want to shut you out so that you will court their favor.” The overall meaning is clearer in that translation, but a problem remains: from what do these enemies want to

What is the good thing that he describes in verse 18?

**Verse 19:** How does Paul’s image of giving birth to the Galatians fit with the images of the sermon he has been preaching? What do you make of the additional image, that of the Galatians gestating Christ in themselves? Can you explain each of these images and their relevance to Paul’s sermon?

**Verse 20:** One commentator says that “change my voice” means “exchange my voice for this letter,” in other words, speak to them in person.¹ Do you think that is a good interpretation? What are the other possibilities?

**Galatians 5**

From 5:1 to 6:10, Paul offers a series of exhortations to the Galatians. This is not a sustained argument on one topic, but a series of exhortations that he thinks they need. There is general agreement that the King James Version of the first verse of this chapter is weak. Here is the translation of the New American Bible, a Catholic translation: “For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” Does that translation help you understand anything that you didn’t understand with the King James Version? What liberty (freedom) has Christ given us (verse 1)? How do we receive that freedom? What bondage is he admonishing us to avoid?

**Verse 15:** Explain what Paul is saying.
Verses 15–16: How do the verses explain the difficult teaching of chapter 3?

Verse 16: What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

Verse 24: What does it mean to crucify the flesh? What did it mean for Christ, and is that helpful in understanding what it means here? Is the resurrection relevant to understanding the crucifixion of Christ? If so, is it relevant to understanding what it means for us to crucify the flesh?

Galatians 6

Verses 1–10: How can Paul give these admonitions, having just argued that the law cannot save us?

Verses 12–13: To whom do these verses refer? How do they help us understand the problem that Paul is facing?

Verse 15: What does it mean to say that “a new creature” is required of those who are in Christ Jesus?

Verse 16: What rule is Paul referring to here?

Verse 17: What might Paul mean? How are the marks he bears related to the trouble that some have given him?

Warriors sometimes showed their scars as a way of proving their courage. Is that the metaphor that Paul is using?

Some have understood this to mean that Paul received the stigmata, the marks on the hands, feet, and sides that are said to have appeared mystically in some saintly people. Is that what he means?

Paul has described himself as a slave (servant) of Christ. Might he be referring, metaphorically, to the brand often
given to slaves? After all, the word translated *marks* is the Greek word meaning “brand.”

What about the wounds that some of his enemies may have inflicted?

Or is he thinking of his imitation of Christ: Jesus suffered and was wounded; Paul imitates Christ.

Can you think of other explanations?

**Verse 18:** What does it mean for Christ’s grace to be with a person’s spirit? When Paul says this, does he mean “with the individual spirit of each of you,” or does he mean “with the spirit of the congregation of the Galatians”?