

Galatians Study

This Bible Study is an eight-week study on Paul's letter to the Galatians. The outline provided is not all encompassing but is a good place for core group leaders to begin their preparation for their individual core groups. We strongly encourage you to tailor this to your specific core group.

Written in the late 40's or early 50's AD, Galatians became a cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation almost 1500 years later. Paul writes to the church in the region of Galatia about false teaching that was on the verge of driving Gentile Christians from the faith. Jewish teachers began teaching Gentile converts they must be circumcised and follow the Law given to Moses to be truly saved. Simply, Jesus plus Moses brings salvation.

Paul, in this letter, confronts that idea and reminds the Church that salvation comes by grace through faith alone. Not from holy works. That the true Gospel that brings salvation is Jesus plus nothing. He also addresses the concern of Jewish Christians that teaching grace-based salvation would lead to immorality, reminding everyone to use the freedom in Christ to serve each other in love.

Galatians is described as the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty." Paul viewed the idea of salvation by grace through faith in Christ as the indispensable foundation of Christian life and conduct. This letter has been life changing for Christians throughout history setting them free from the bonds of legalism. The goal is for those in your core group to experience that freedom in Christ as well.

Week One Galatians 1:1-2:10

Reminder of the Objective:

Galatians is a call to true freedom in Christ. Paul's desire is to see followers of Christ live fully in His grace and experience the heart-level transformation that comes from that not living under the weight of certain rules as a means to earn God's love.

Opening Questions:

1. Who are some of the people you seek approval from for various things you do?
2. Are you a people pleaser or independent/confident?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

This week's passage contains the motivation for Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. He has gotten reports that many Christians of Galatia are on the verge of turning from the true gospel, salvation by grace through faith, to a counterfeit one that demands participation in certain religious laws and customs (in this case circumcision) as evidence of "true" salvation.

Text questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. What is Paul referring to when he speaks of a "different gospel" in verse 6?
2. What does Paul teach in vs 1:6-10 about how we should think about:
 - All truth-claims by teachers/philosophers
 - Our own feelings and experiencesWhy is he so uncompromising? How does he apply this standard even to himself?
3. What is Paul's past like (v 11-24)? How does that affect his understanding of the gospel and his life?
4. Why do you think Paul is concerned that his preaching to the Gentiles was "in vain" (2:2)?
5. What do you think Paul is talking about in Galatians 2:4 when he mentions freedom versus slavery?

Application Questions:

1. In what ways do you find yourself adding something to the Gospel, like the Gentiles were adding Jewish laws and customs to the Gospel preached to them?

2. How do you live out the good news? How does the truth of the gospel shape your life?
3. What kinds of false teachings about God and the gospel are floating around today in our culture?
4. How can we ensure that the gospel we believe and share with others is the true gospel?
5. How does your past affect where you are on your spiritual journey now?

Week Two Galatians 2:11-21

Reminder of the Objective:

Galatians is a call to true freedom in Christ. Paul's desire is to see followers of Christ live fully in His grace and experience the heart-level transformation that comes from that not living under the weight of certain rules as a means to earn God's love.

Opening Questions:

1. Describe a situation when you've felt like a hypocrite.
2. Have you ever had to confront someone?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

Paul describes in this passage a significant disagreement he has with Peter(Cephas). Paul draws issue with Peter's hypocrisy in eating unclean foods with Gentile christians but then quickly withdrawing from those relationships when James and other Jewish christian leaders arrived in the city.

What follows is a more in depth communication of what it means to be justified by faith in Christ and not in our works. "...for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"(vs 21)

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. Why do you think Paul was so mad at Peter?
2. Why would Peter encouraging Gentile Christians to follow Jewish religious laws/ customs be damaging to their faith?
3. What does Paul mean when he says that Peter was not "acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (v. 14-16)?
4. How does the gospel of grace (v 15) free you from pride and from guilt?
5. What does the concept of justification mean (vs 16-17)? How do you think a person is "Justified in Christ?"

Application Questions:

1. What parallels could you draw between the race related divisions between Jews and Gentiles brought to light in this passage and those we face in the church currently?

2. How can we avoid adding our own rules to follow (for our justification) and at the same time avoid sin?
3. People often struggle with being either legalistic or morally apathetic, which is the greater struggle for you? Why?
4. Are there people around you that you have not been “eating with” (v 12) because they are not “like you”? What self-righteousness or fear lies beneath this attitude?
5. How would you explain the difference between being a good moral person and being a Christian to someone who thinks being good makes them acceptable to God?

Week Three Galatians 3:1-14

Reminder of the Objective:

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Opening Questions:

1. Are you a "rule follower" or a "go with the flow" person? How do you view those opposite of you?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

In this weeks passage, Paul confronts the wrong thinking of the Galatians regarding their justification. He reminds them that they are justified by their faith and not their works. In faith, they are adopted into the family of God through the promise given to Abraham and the work of Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection.

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. How are the Galatians to grow? What does Paul say are (supposed to be) the elements in their continual spiritual progress? (vs 3-5)
2. Why (if verse 10 is true) can God credit us as righteous and not be unjust? (v 13-14)

Application Questions:

1. It is so easy to live by our works and not by faith. What does it actually mean for us to live by faith (v 2)?
2. How does having righteousness credited to us change the way we see ourselves (v 11)? Jesus Christ?
3. What are some ways we can course correct(get back on track) when we've gotten lost in legalism?

Week Four Galatians 3:15-29

Reminder of the Objective:

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Opening Questions:

1. What was your favorite Bible story or fairytale as a child? Why?
2. Have you ever developed a friendship that surprised you?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

In this passage, Paul gives an answer to a very common question, "why were we given the law when we are saved through faith in Christ?" He explains that the law was given as a "guardian." To guide us until Christ would come and fulfill the promise given to Abraham in the covenant God made with him.

Our faith not only justifies us before God but brings us into relationship with God, through Christ, as children. In turn, our identity as children of God brings unity among people who are naturally different because it gives a common denominator as a lens through which we view our whole selves. We are children of God first and gender, race, nationality, economic status, etc. second.

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. Why does Paul in verse 16 make a point about the promises to Abraham (Gen 12: 2,3,7) applying to a singular noun (seed), not a plural one? How does that help him make his statement in verse 18 that the law does not save?
2. If, as verse 18 says, the law is not the way we inherit the Spirit or a right relationship with God, then what is the law for?
3. What does it mean that we "clothe ourselves with Christ (v 27)?"
4. How does the gospel of grace lead to the unity of verse 28?

Application Questions:

1. What barriers divide people in the area where you live/at Yale? How does knowing others are also created in God's image change how you relate to them?

2. How does knowing God's law increase your gratitude to Christ? What difference does this make to your affections?
3. If we are saved by grace why do we still obey God?
4. How can you be passionate for Christ and add spiritual disciplines to your life (reading and memorizing the Bible, prayer, fasting, etc) without being legalistic?

Week Five Galatians 4:1-7

Reminder of the Objective:

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Opening Questions:

1. Tell a story about one of the happiest moments with your family

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

Our passage this week dives deeper into the idea of our adoption into the family of God. Paul speaks of our being under the bondage of spiritual forces in the world until Christ came. When Christ came, he lived within that environment and redeemed us through his death. Making us no longer slaves, but children. We are given the position of children but also the experience of being children through the work of the Spirit. (vs.6)

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. Paul imagines a child-heir of a very rich family (who is still taken care of by guardians). How does this illustrate the condition of a person who is under the law/ doesn't have a relationship with God?
2. How do you feel about being an adopted child of God (v 5)?
3. What has God done in order to make us His children? (vs 4-6) What was Jesus' part? The Holy Spirit's part?

Application Questions:

1. Which of the characteristics of a slave mentality (a person still living as if they are "under the law") are strongest in you? How can you overcome that mentality?
2. How can we daily rejoice in the change God has made in our station of life (from slaves to freedom and adoption)?
3. A child has certain rights in a family - what are your rights as a child of God?
4. Is it easy or difficult for you to believe that God sees you as a loving father sees his child? Why?

Week Six Galatians 5:1-15

Reminder of the Objective:

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Opening Questions:

1. If you could instantly change one habit in your life what would it be?
2. What does freedom mean to you (free to do or not to do)?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

Christ has set us free from sin through his death on the cross. But the freedom we are given doesn't end there. He has also set us free from the need to do all the "right" religious things. We don't need to keep up appearances.

At the end of this passage Paul seems to contradict himself by telling the Galatians not to indulge their sinful nature. It appears that he is telling them to do the very thing he has just discouraged. But he is saying that their freedom should be fully expressed in living lives marked by love for others not the judgmental actions he has previously rebuked(questioning others faith because they aren't keeping certain religious rituals).

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. What do you think it means that Christ has liberated us into freedom (vs 1)?
2. What does Paul say about love? (vs 6, 13, 14)
3. Why does Paul make such a big deal about circumcision? What do you think of Paul's denunciation of those who preach circumcision (vs 12)?
4. In verses 13-15 Paul is clarifying what gospel freedom does NOT mean. What misconception is he addressing? In what way are Christians free from the law and in what way are they not?

Application Questions:

1. What rituals or traditions in the church today might be similar to circumcision to the early church?

2. When or in what ways have you gotten off the track in the “good race” of the Christian life? What are you relying on besides Christ?
3. The gospel says that we are accepted totally by God through the work of Jesus. It has nothing to do with our own performance. When acceptance/love is so complete that it makes our performance invisible, how is that an incentive to you for holy living?
4. Why do you think people are attracted to religious rules?

Week Seven Galatians 5:16-26

Reminder of the Objective:

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Opening Questions:

1. If you described yourself as a fruit, what kind would you be?
2. Who or what in your life has influenced you the most so far?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

This passage compares living by the Spirit verses a life lived by the flesh. Flesh should be understood as sinful nature. When he is making his lists of characteristics of a life lived by the flesh he is not speaking to isolated incidences of sinful action but long-standing habitual sin that is never dealt with. When a person chooses to follow Christ they put to death, forever turn from, those characteristics that mark a life in service to the flesh. A life lived in the Spirit produces in those of us who follow Christ fruit that reflect who God is. Just as most of us carry traits of our parents likewise we will begin carrying traits of who God is in greater fullness as we follow him.

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. What do you think it means to be "led by the Spirit...not under the law" (v 18)? How can you explain the difference between living under the Law and walking by the Spirit?
2. Look at the list of "the flesh" compared to the list of the fruit of the Spirit. After listing the fruit of the Spirit, in verse 23, Paul says, "Against such things there is no law." What does this mean?
3. What, if any, common thread do you find in the behaviors listed in verses 19-21?

Application Questions:

1. In what situations do you find it easy to walk by the Spirit (v 16)? In what situations do you find it hard?
2. How has God been at work in your life this week?

3. How can you see the fruit of the Spirit growing in your life(v 22)?
4. How will you remind yourself of the gospel of grace to undermine controlling desires?

Week Eight Galatians 6:1-18

Reminder of the Objective:

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Opening Questions:

1. Describe a moment when you felt loved by God.
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to ask for help from others? Why?

Important to Know(For CG Leaders):

Paul closes this letter with bringing in some final practical applications. He speaks to what a follower of Christ should do when finding out about a brother or sister's sin. The word restore in verse 1 is a medical term for setting a fractured bone. It needs to be set straight not neglected or openly exposed. Those who seek to restore others when they sin should be ones who are mature and whose lives are marked by the Spirit as Paul spoke of at the end of chapter 5 and should do so with gentleness, not being harsh or publicly exposing their failure, and with the realization that they are not immune to sin themselves.

Finally, Paul ends his letter with an encouragement to be financially generous(vs. 6-10) and by compelling them to boast only in the work of Christ in them not in their own good works.

Text Questions:

(Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group!)

1. At first glance, verses 2 and 5 seem to be a contradiction. What do you think Paul means (carrying burdens and loads)? What is the "law of Christ" (vs 2)?
2. In what ways could a person be tempted when trying to restore another?
3. In the previous chapters, Paul has very strongly taught that we are not justified by our actions but by faith in Christ. Now in verses 7-10, he clearly links eternal destiny to what we do- "you reap what you sow." How can these seemingly opposite ideas be reconciled?

Application Questions:

1. What does this passage say to you about humility and responsibility?

2. What do you think restoring someone gently looks like today?
3. In which areas of your life are you knowing the peace of living by the gospel(v 12-13)? In which are you forfeiting this peace by living for the world's approval?
4. How do we develop a lifestyle of boasting in the work of the cross rather than in our own good works or achievements?