Galatians

Study Guide

Week 1: No Other Gospel! (Gal. 1-2)

Watch the Video

Suggested prayer: *Blessed Lord, who caused St. Paul's letter to the Galatians and all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.* (adapted from BCP, 236)

Opening questions:

1. What would you say is the Gospel?

2. What do you hope to learn from this study of Galatians?

Read Galatians 1:1-4

3. Look closely at this opening section: Paul gives his customary 'grace and peace' greeting, but none of the other expressions of warmth he typically gives (cf. Philippians 1). What instead *does* he say? What does this tell us about the letter's tone and theme?

4. Notice what Paul says about "the Lord Jesus Christ": that he "gave himself for our sins to deliver us (e.g., rescue us, save us) from the present evil age" (1:3). How does this set a different tone than if, for instance,

he had said "our teacher Jesus Christ, who has shown us how to live our best lives now"?

Read Galatians 1:6-10

5. Paul describes the Gospel he taught the Galatians as about "the grace of Christ," and contrasts this with "a different gospel" that is now gaining ground in this young church. What do we know so far from this letter about what the difference is and why it matters?

6. Why is it so important to Paul that there is no other Gospel than the one Christ has delivered? Why does it matter so much to him that the Galatians believe in the true Gospel, and not something else?

Read Galatians 1:11-24

7. In this section, Paul is telling the story of how he learned the Gospel. Who did he learn it from? From what you can tell in this passage, how did it differ from what he believed previously when he was zealously persecuting followers of Jesus?

Read Galatians 2:11-14

8. In the verses we skipped over (2:1-10), Paul relates the story of how he went to consult with Peter and other apostles in Jerusalem, saying that they were in agreement about Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (e.g., non-Jews), and that they were not requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised. Why was this point so important to Paul?

9. Verse 11 is remarkable: Paul, who wasn't part of the original Twelve and who indeed had been persecuting Christians, opposes Peter to his face! Why did Paul think Peter was so wrong? What does Paul mean by his pointed question to Peter (v. 14)?

Read Galatians 2:15-21

10. Now with this passage, we're starting to hear more from Paul about what he thinks is at stake in this debate. No one, whether Jewish or Gentile, will be "justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." He repeats essentially the same thing three times in v. 16; we can assume he means it! Let's break it down bit by bit: what does it mean to be *justified*? What are the *works of the law*? And, what is *faith in Christ*; and how is it different from the works of the law? What does it mean to be *justified* by each of those two?

11. Focus on 2:19-20. What does it mean to die to the law, so that we might live for God? What does it mean to be crucified with Christ, so that it is no longer I that live, but Christ in me? What does it mean to live this earthly "life in the flesh" by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 2: Growing in the Gospel: Gal. 3

Watch the Video

Prayer: *Almighty Father, who gave your only Son to die for our sins and to rise for our justification: Give us grace so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.* (BCP, 224)

Read Galatians 3:1-9

12. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified." How is the "different gospel" the Galatians believe somehow forgetting or bypassing the cross of Christ?

13. Paul asks a telling question: "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Remember here what flesh (Greek: *sarx*) means: not the physical body so much as the old self, the sinful nature. What does this question reveal about the Galatians' mindset, and how it forgets the true Gospel and the cross of Christ?

14. Paul now begins to talk about Abraham, "who believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Like Abraham, we who "are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." Think about the story of Abraham: what does this tell us about faith? About the Gospel?

Read Galatians 3:10-14

15. "All who rely on works of the law are under a curse," Paul tells us, citing Deut. 27:26. Why would it be the case that those who rely on works of the law are under a curse? What does that mean?

16. Have you ever felt like you were relying on your own achievements and talents, rather than on God's grace? Have you been part of a culture like that? What is it like? How might we break out of this?

17. How then are we redeemed from the law's curse?

Read Galatians 3:15-29

18. Paul says something very important here about salvation history: that the Law given to Moses does not undo the promises made beforehand to Abraham and his offspring. And Paul identifies "his offspring" with Christ! What does this imply for us?

19. "Why then the law?", Paul asks. This is a very good question! If we can't be saved by the Law, then why is Paul saying that God gave it to us?

20. Many hold Gal. 3:26-29 to be some of the most profound passages of Scripture. What does it mean to "put on Christ"? To be "one in Christ"? For all of this to be ours "through faith"?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 3: Sons and Heirs: Gal. 4

Prayer: *O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope…, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.* (BCP, 236)

Watch the Video

Read Galatians 3:23 through 4:7

21. Paul is saying something extraordinary: not only are we adopted as God's children in Christ, but we are *heirs* with Christ. Until fairly recent times, it was sons (not daughters) who inherited estates; Paul is using this language not because he approves of this practice, but to highlight our status as *heirs.* What then are we heirs of in Christ?

22. Look closely at 4:1-3: what kind of condition is Paul saying we were in before Christ came? "When we were children," under the care of guardians and managers, even though as heirs it's like we were the owners of a great estate? What is Paul saying?

23. "Because you are sons," Paul says, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Note two things about the word *Abba:* It is a term of tender endearment, like a child saying 'Dada,' and it is the Aramaic word (unfamiliar to the Greek-speaking Galatians) that Jesus uses to address his

Father. What does this tell us about being "in Christ," having received "adoption as sons"?

Read Galatians 4:8-20

24. Paul is making an astonishing comparison in v. 8-11. Before the Galatians knew God, they were enslaved to things that are not truly gods; and now, their approach to Christian living has enslaved them once more! Remember, Paul thinks they have set aside the true Gospel and Christ's cross, and are relying on "works of the law" rather than God's grace for their salvation. How then should we understand the Galatians's error in observing "days and months and seasons and years"?

25. Are there ways we can fall into the same trap?

Read Galatians 4:21-31

26. In this passage, Paul reads the story of Hagar and Sarah as an allegory representing the Mosaic covenant (the Law) and the new covenant God has made in Christ. Think about the story: Sarah was well beyond childbearing years, and Hagar was not. It seemed to make sense for Abraham to make God's promises come true himself, taking matters into his own hands. But that is not how the "children of promise" were born. What is Paul telling us about reliance on "the works of the law" vs. God's grace?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 4: For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free: Gal. 5-6

Watch the Video

Prayer: *Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.* (BCP, 219)

Read Galatians 5:1-12

27. "For freedom Christ has set us free!" Clearly the first kind of freedom Paul is talking about here is the Gospel freedom to rely on God's grace instead of on keeping "the whole law"—that, he says, is to "submit again to a yoke of slavery." Why would Paul say this?

28. Paul pulls no punches in this chapter (v. 12!): if the Galatians accept circumcision, "Christ will be of no advantage to you." If we seek to be justified by the law, then we are "severed from Christ" and "fallen away from grace." This seems stark, but what is Paul getting at? What is it about relying on keeping the law that makes it impossible to receive the gift of grace?

29. Remember what Paul means by "accepting circumcision": it is not, he says, that either circumcision or uncircumcision "count for anything," but rather that by accepting it as necessary, the

Galatians are committing themselves to obey the whole Law rather than accept God's gift of himself in Christ. Paul says here that if he were to preach circumcision, "the offense of the cross" would be removed (cf. Gal. 3:1, 13). What's the connection?

Read Galatians 5:13-26

30. "For freedom Christ has set us free": as Paul says throughout his letters, this hard-won freedom is not for us to "sin all the more, so that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1), but instead so that we may "through love serve one another" (v. 13). To paraphrase the reformer Martin Luther on this point: "God doesn't need my good works, but my neighbor does." How does this change our motivation for Christian living, from what the Galatians had fallen into?

31. Look carefully at the "desires of the flesh (*sarx*)" and the "fruit of the Spirit." Note first that they do not correspond to any neat body/spirit distinction; our English translation of *sarx* as flesh can mislead us. What then do the things on the "desires of the *sarx*" list have in common? What do the fruits of the Spirit have in common?

32. The word translated here as "desires" is *epithumia,* better translated as "over-desires," or inordinate desires. Not, then, that desire itself is bad, but that our hearts will often desire good things in the wrong ways, in the wrong order, or at the wrong time. Does

this help us better understand the list Paul gives of the "over-desires" of the *sarx*?

33. What are some ways that we today might love/desire good things in the wrong way, or in the wrong order?

34. Why do you think Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit" by that name, fruit? What are they the fruits of? (Hint: yes, it's the Spirit! But what does that mean, and how does it relate to what Paul has been telling us about the Gospel versus reliance on the law?) Why are the things on this list the fruits of the Spirit?

35. "I warn you, as I warned you before," Paul writes about the "desires of the *sarx*," that "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." It might seem like Paul here is taking back everything he has said about relying on works of the law! But we must assume that he is not doing that. So what does he mean? Note that the phrase "do such things" may be better translated as those who "make a habit of doing such things."

Read Galatians 6:1-10

36. Paul can now speak of "the law of Christ," which we are to fulfill by bearing "one another's burdens" (6:2). How is this "law of Christ" different from the kind of relying on the works of the law that Paul condemns?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Small Group Resources

Videos: Each lesson includes a video that should be watched before the group meets or at the beginning of each gathering. This will set the context of the passage that is read. You can either search "Just For" on the church website or find it here: www.stmartinsepiscopal.org/just-for/.

Gathering Expectations: Building relationships and growing in faith are the two main goals of this small group series. Weekly gatherings could be roughly 20-30 minutes for socializing, 30-40 minutes for Bible study, and 10 minutes for prayer. But there is no one size that fits all!

Small Group Covenant: We are committed to maintaining a welcoming atmosphere in which each person can be open and honest in the pursuit of the knowledge of how God loves us and cares for us. We will establish this atmosphere by doing the following:

- We will always maintain the confidentiality of what is said in the group.
- We will pray for each other regularly and seek to support each other spiritually both inside and outside of our meetings.
- We will seek to be open and honest with each other and be our true selves. We will, however, not overshare or treat the group as a therapy session.
- We will not frog, hog, or bog. Meaning, we do not jump quickly from one subject to another, hog the conversation, or perpetually get stuck on one subject.
- We will open and close our meetings with prayer, calling on God's promise to be with us when two or

more gather in His name, through the presence of His Holy Spirit. We will be open to the mystery and surprise of God's presence in our group and in our lives.

- We accept that God will speak to all of us through each one's thoughts, and we will listen deeply with our hearts to new perspectives, seeking always to determine God's truth in them.

- We will avoid divisive topics, such as politics, which are not directly relevant to our spiritual journey. We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling among us, and we will treat each other with the utmost dignity and respect at all times. Should conflicts arise, we will respectfully resolve them. We will give advice only when requested.

- We will seek to have all others know us by our love of God and our neighbors. We will seek to become closer to God by listening and sharing within the group and by serving others outside of the group.

Further Reading: There are many excellent resources on Galatians for those who wish to carry this study further. Out of a long list, I recommend:

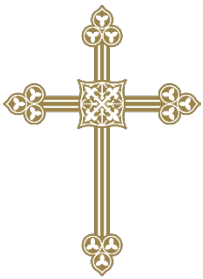
Galatians For You, by Tim Keller

Galatians: Gospel Matters (A 7-Week Study), by Tim Keller

Galatians: A 12-Week Study, by Geoff Ziegler

The Freedom of a Christian, by Martin Luther

This study was written by the Rev. Dr. Jordan Hylden



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