

No Other Gospel: *an 8-Week Study of Galatians*

The Story Houston's Fall 2020 Discipleship Season

Session One: The Gospel of Inertia

Introduction

Welcome to our Fall 2020 study of Paul's letter to the Galatians! Over the next eight weeks, we'll explore the words written by the Apostle Paul 1,950 years ago in the year 50 AD. This letter, called *Galatians*, may be the earliest of Paul's thirteen letters that are included in the Bible, and if so, that would make Galatians the oldest book in the New Testament.

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 1:1-24 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

Let's create a timeline to help us get our minds around the order of events among first-generation Christians:

4 BC	4-6(?)AD	26-30(?)	33-35(?)	33-38	46-47	49-51(?)
Jesus born	Paul born	Jesus' Ministry	Paul's Conversion	Paul in Arabia, Syria, Cilicia	Paul's 1st Missionary Journey	Galatians Written Jerusalem Council

What stands out to you as you observe this timeline of New Testament events?

Who was Paul?

- Author of 13 New Testament books. List them in order here:

- Read Acts 22, and list what you learn about Paul's life and background here:

Conflict

What problem did Paul write to address among the Galatian churches?

Why did this problem matter so much to Paul? What was at stake?

Why did Paul feel the need to defend himself, his background, and his record as an apostle of Jesus Christ?

How do Christians today still fall into the same trap that the Galatian Christians fell into in the first century?

Correction

Read verses 9-10. What is the course correction Paul offered to the Galatians who had gone astray?

How would you define the *Gospel of Inertia*?

How do Paul's rebukes hit home for you? What is the "Gospel of Inertia" that you're most prone to follow, and what makes it inferior to the Gospel of Jesus?

"If Christ is not all to you He is nothing to you. He will never go into partnership as a part Saviour of men. If He be something He must be everything, and if He be not everything He is nothing to you."

— Charles Spurgeon

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Session Two: The Gospel of Favoritism

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Review

What circumstances led Paul to write *Galatians*?

This Week's Text

Read Galatians 2:1-21 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What was Paul's chief complaint about the circumcision group/Judaizers?

In verses 16 & 17, Paul says the word “justified” four times. What does he mean by being “justified”? (see also Romans 3:24-36)

How do we walk the balance of believing what Paul is saying and that faith without works is dead? (see also James 2:26)

Read Luke 18:9-14. What does Jesus say about justification and righteousness?

Conflict

The conflict in this week’s passage is found in two actual, face-to-face conflicts. The first one is found in Galatians 2:1-10, and the second is found in verses 11-14.

Conflict #1 - Galatians 2:1-10

Who were Paul’s adversaries in this conflict?

Who were “James, Cephas, and John”? Why is this confusing to some New Testament readers? (see also Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 17:1, Acts 12:1-2)

From Paul’s perspective what were the points of disagreement between Paul and his adversaries?

Conflict #2 - Galatians 2:11-14

In this case, Paul’s conflict is with Simon Peter (aka “Cephas”). Why was Paul upset with Peter? (see also Acts 10 and 11)

In both of these cases, Paul is concerned about *favoritism* infecting the Church. What is favoritism? Who did Paul suggest were “playing favorites”?

Usually, when the New Testament authors write about “works of the law,” we think of the Jewish Law (Torah) found in the Old Testament. But Paul writes plenty about the “works of the law” to his Gentile audience in Galatia. How could Gentiles have fallen prey to a devotion to the law? (see Romans 2:14-15)

Why is favoritism so contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Can you think of a time when favoritism infected the Church? What was the result?

Why might the idea of no favoritism be dangerous to religious people?

Correction

What was Paul’s solution to the conflict created by favoritism within the Church?

What did Paul mean by verse 18? How have you been tempted to “rebuild what you destroyed” after coming to Jesus?

In verse 20, Paul says he was crucified with Christ. What does that mean? (see also Romans 6:1-4)

When you think about your life before Jesus compared to now, what parts of your “old self” died in your baptism? What parts of your “old self” still remain?

*I do not set aside the grace of God,
for if righteousness could be gained through the law,
Christ died for nothing.*

- Galatians 2:21

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Session Three: The "Gospel" of Works

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Question from Last Week:

Are there levels to God's judgment, and are Paul and James speaking to different tiers?

This Week's Text

Read Galatians 3:1-14 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

Why did Paul write this letter to the Galatians?

What were the specific “works” Paul mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 that had been added to faith in Christ as a means of justification?

What was Paul’s personal manifesto as stated in Galatians 2:20? What did he mean?

Conflict

What is Paul’s tone at the beginning of chapter 3? What does this say about the importance of the issue at hand?

What in Galatians 3:1-5 gives a sense that Paul did not think the Galatian error was lack of knowledge?

What rhetorical questions did Paul ask in 3:2-5? What answer was he looking for to each of the questions?

What was Paul’s point in asking the questions he did? Why was he so angry with the Galatians?

Have you ever been in a season when your walk with Christ moved from faith to self-effort?

What do you think it means to live by faith instead of self-effort in the day to day?

Correction

Why would Paul turn to the life of Abraham in defense of his position?

What does Genesis 15 tell us about the time when righteousness was credited to Abraham?

How does Genesis 12:2-3 provide a peek at the gospel?

Why is the law an insufficient means to make us right with God?

How did "the curse" placed on Christ provide an opportunity for both Jew and Gentile to receive the promise of the Spirit?

Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

- Galatians 3:7

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Session Four: The "Gospel" of Entitlement

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 3:15-4:7 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What is the Law and where did it come from?

What did Jesus teach about the Law?

What did Jesus have to say about the sense of entitlement that was apparently prevalent among his people? (Matthew 20)

Conflict

What was the major conflict that Paul wrote this letter to address?

Why were Jewish people susceptible to a sense of entitlement regarding their place with God compared to the Gentiles?

What good is the Law now if Jesus made it obsolete? (Gal. 4:19)

Optional question: Why should Christians care at all about the Old Testament, especially the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)?

Correction

How is the sin of entitlement a problem for many Christians today?

What would Paul tell Christians today who have a sense of entitlement about their place with God compared to other people?

What does Paul mean when he compares slaves to children in 4:1-7?

What does being baptized have to do with “clothing yourselves with Christ”?

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

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Session Five: The "Gospel" of Tradition

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Welcome to week five of our Fall 2020 study of Paul's letter to the Galatians! For eight weeks, we're exploring the words written by the Apostle Paul 1,950 years ago in the year 50 AD. This letter, called *Galatians*, may be the earliest of Paul's thirteen letters that are included in the Bible, and if so, that would make Galatians the oldest book in the New Testament.

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 4:8-20 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What were the traditions first century Christians were still clinging to? Why were they so significant?

What are the traditions that current Christians have created today?

What's the relationship between following human traditions versus following Jesus?
(see also Mark 2:23-28)

Conflict

What are the Galatians doing that makes Paul so angry?

A "turn back" (verse 9) is an indication that the Galatians are going back to what they came from. What are they returning to? Is Paul saying that Judaism is Paganism?

Why does Paul criticize the observance of holy days in verse 10?

If the Galatians came to know God through Christ, what were they turning against to become slaves once more? How is this a return to slavery?

How would you characterize true freedom in your walk with Christ? How are you tempted to return to the bondage of sin?

Correction

What command does Paul give in verse 12?

What does it mean to know God, and how do we know God through Christ?

What was Jesus' solution to the conflict created by tradition? (see also Mark 7:5-9)

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Galatians 4:8

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Session Six: The "Gospel" of Secularism

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 4:21-5:12 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What is the backstory involving Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael?

Why did Paul equate Ishmael with slavery and Isaac with freedom?

You've probably noticed that we refer to the slavery/freedom metaphor a lot when studying the Bible and applying it to our lives today. How have you experienced spiritual slavery in the past (or the present) and how have you experienced the freedom of the gospel?

Conflict

What is the main concern Paul is raising in today's passage?

Why is circumcision something that symbolizes the beginning of bondage according to Paul, and why is he so adamantly opposed to people taking this first step?

How do Paul's stern warnings apply to us today?

Correction

In 5:4, Paul said that when we choose to prove our own righteousness by our works, we "fall away from grace." Have you ever tried so hard to rely on your own works that you felt as though you were living apart from God's grace?

If relying on your own works is "falling away from grace," then how would you describe the choice to rely completely on God?

In 5:2 and 5:6, Paul again makes it clear that circumcision holds no value to the ones who put their faith in Christ. This week's passage culminates in the second half of 5:6, where he writes, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Why is this "the only thing that counts"?

In 5:9, Paul wrote: "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." What did he mean by this?

And finally, in 5:7, Paul said, “You were running a good race. Who [cut you off]...?” And, in a hilarious turn of phrase, he wrote about his adversaries who were misleading the Galatians by insisting on circumcising Gentile believers: “I wish they would go the whole way and [cut themselves off].” How was this tongue-in-cheek insult also a meaningful critique of their reliance on the Law?

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again with the yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

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Session Seven: The "Gospel" of Indulgence

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This Week's Text

Read Galatians 5:13-26 twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

Throughout this passage, Paul contrasts *flesh* and *spirit*. What are the key differences between the two concepts throughout the Bible?

The Bible writers often draw clear lines between two groups: the righteous and the unrighteous, the wise and the foolish, those who live by the spirit and those who live by the flesh, etc. Did they really assume that righteous people never do unrighteous things, and vice versa?

Conflict

In Galatians 5:16-18 what does Paul say is the conflict within every believer? (See also Romans 7:15,21-23)

How would you define the “gospel” of indulgence?

What are the fruits of the flesh and what do they lead to?

What are some of the acts of the Flesh you struggle with?

What does Jesus ask his followers to do in Matthew 16:24-26?

Correction

What are the fruits of the Spirit, how do they provide a correction to the fruits of the Flesh?

How is indulgence an issue among modern day Christians?

How can Gospel freedom be the antidote to indulgence?

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Session Eight: The "Gospel" of Pride

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This Week's Text

Read **Galatians 6:1-18** twice, once silently and once aloud, making notes of any words and phrases that you're not sure about, and writing down any questions that immediately come to mind.

Context

What, specifically, does Paul say about how believers should treat each other?

On a couple of occasions in this passage, Paul appears (to some readers) to be internally inconsistent. Are we supposed to restore believers who are caught in sin, or should we play it safe and avoid being tempted by their sin (6:1)? Are we supposed to carry each other's burdens (6:2), or should each of us carry our own load (6:5)? Are we supposed to be proud of ourselves (6:4), or are we only to "boast...in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14)? How do we make sense of these paradoxical statements?

What is pride? What is the difference between “good” pride and bad? How can pride open people up to other sins? (Galatians 6:3)

Conflict

Why does Paul warn us about self-deceit? How is that a recurring theme in scripture?
(See Gal 6:3 - "For if anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.")

Why is Paul so adamant about helping us understand the conflict that exists between the flesh and the spirit? How is human pride a recurring theme in scripture?

Correction

Why were the “Judaizers” or “the Circumcision Party” trying to compel the new, Gentile Christians in Galatia to be circumcised?

Verses 15-16 provide a thematic summary of Paul’s many arguments throughout his letter to the Galatians. Why doesn’t circumcision (or uncircumcision) matter anymore for Christians? (See Galatians 3:28)

...What counts is the new creation.

Galatians 6:15