

THE GOOD NEWS^{OF} CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

A Study of Galatians

Small Group
Leader's Guide

SESSION ONE

The Gospel in Crisis

Lesson Summary

This week's lesson introduces the book of Galatians and begins to answer the question of why we ought to continue to study and read it today. First and foremost, it notes, is that Galatians is a book that reflects a moment of crisis. Paul's passion and urgency as he writes the letter is unmistakable, and there is good reason for that. For what is at stake is the Gospel itself. The Galatians received Paul's good message but now seem to be unwittingly abandoning it for a rival "gospel." And it is this same danger that continues to make the message of Galatians so urgent and applicable today, for we too live in a world of competing messages and rival gospels. After introducing this theme, the lesson ends by drawing three conclusions about the nature of the true gospel from the autobiographical comments that Paul makes in Galatians 1:11-2:14.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Galatians 1:1-9** as a group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. How do you think you would have reacted if you had been one of the recipients of Paul's sharply worded rebuke? What situations might warrant such a rebuke from a Christian leader today?
3. Paul says that the Galatians are abandoning the gospel of Christ for a "different gospel." What "different gospels" might be attractive to people today? How do these challenge the true gospel?
4. The lesson identified three principles about the true gospel that emerge in Galatians 1:11-2:14. Which of these three did you find most intriguing? Which do you think is the easiest to forget?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

Group Prayer

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.

SESSION TWO

Freedom from the Law

Lesson Summary

In this session, we begin to focus on the central meaning of Paul's gospel, which is being summarized in this study as "the good news of Christian freedom," by looking at how the gospel of Jesus Christ frees us from the law. In Galatians 2:15-16, Paul says that we are "justified by faith" and not "justified by the law," which is another way of saying that what makes a person righteous is not some external standard of purity or moral performance, but is rather trust in the gift of Christ himself. And this is good news, not only because it means that salvation is not something we earn, but also because it means that our identity—who we are—is determined not by how we look, or what we can do, or who we know, or where we live, or any other such measure. All such standards of worth and identity have been put to death. The only identity with which we need to be concerned is whether we are, as Paul says, "in Christ."

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Galatians 2:15-21** as a group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. How would you define the phrase "justification by faith"? What difference has this teaching made to the way you think about salvation? What difference does it make to your daily life?
3. The lesson mentions a variety of standards that we use today to define ourselves and others—appearance, wealth, education, skills, possessions, family, political affiliation, etc. Which of these play a significant role in how you think about yourself? Which influence the way you think about other people?
4. How does the gospel free us from such external measures of identity? What difference would it make in your daily life if you thought of yourself first and foremost as a person in whom Christ lives? How would it change the way you relate to fellow Christians if you thought of them in the same way?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

Group Prayer

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SESSION THREE

The Freedom of Sons

Lesson Summary

In this session, we continue discussing a theme that was explored in session 2: how Paul's gospel of Christian freedom impacts the subject of identity. The question of identity—who am I and what defines me?—is one of the most fundamental questions of our lives and is central to our daily experience. And this is not new. It was a fundamental question for Christians in Galatia as well, which is why Paul dedicates so much attention to it. The answer that Paul gives to this question, for Christians, is this: you are “sons of God” because, by faith, you have become united with Christ and now share in his identity and relationship to the Father. The question for us is: how do we live into this identity? How does it transform the way that we think about ourselves and the way that we live?

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Galatians 3:23-4:7** as a group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What did you think of Pamela Drucker's reaction to being called “*madame*” instead of “*mademoiselle*”? What experiences have you had that have made you question your identity?
3. How would it change your life and attitude if you truly believed Paul's claim that what makes who you are is your union with Christ? What things might become less important to the way you think about yourself or the way others think about you?
4. What is your reaction to the suggestion from Rowan Williams to “put yourself in the place of Jesus” when you pray? How does that approach to prayer compare to your normal attitude when you pray?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

Group Prayer

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SESSION FOUR Freedom in the Spirit

Lesson Summary

What does it mean to be truly free? How would you describe a life of true freedom? Many people would respond that a free life is one in which you have the ability (or the right) to pursue happiness in the way that you choose. That is freedom—doing what you want without someone interfering. But this is not how Paul thinks of a life of freedom. True freedom, for Paul, consists not simply in pursuing what one wants but in wanting and pursuing what Jesus wanted and pursued. A truly free life is one which is lived in the pattern of Jesus, in service to others. That is the theme for this session, which we will explore by comparing Paul's description of a life dominated by the "desire of the flesh" and a life that is lived in the freedom of the Spirit.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Galatians 5:13-24** as a group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. How would you describe a life of freedom? How would you compare your understanding of freedom to Ron Swanson's ideal of being able to pursue happiness in the way you see fit?
3. Why does Paul contrast Christian freedom with a life that is dominated by the "desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16)? What does he mean by this phrase? What is it about this way of life that is unfree?
4. Why was Jesus the most free person who ever lived? How should Jesus' life influence the way that we think about freedom as Christians?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

Group Prayer

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SESSION FIVE A Free Community

Lesson Summary

The final two chapters of Paul's letter to the Galatians contain numerous comments and exhortations about Christian community life. At first glance, it might seem that these instructions are simply practical advice unrelated to Paul's theological message about the gospel earlier in Galatians. But in reality, what Paul has to say about Christian community is inextricable from his understanding of the gospel. Because it is in their life together as a community that Christians embody the freedom that they have been given. It is as a community that they show the world what it means to be free. And in Galatians, what we learn is that a truly free community is one that is (a) non-competitive and (b) mutually dependent. Christians serve one another and bear one another's burdens. That is how they live into the freedom which they have been given.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Galatians 6:1-10** as a group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Describe a positive experience that you've had of Christian community. What was unique about that community? How did your experience in it change the way you relate to other people?
3. How do you think the desire for honor and social competition of Paul's Roman culture compares to our culture today? Where do you see evidence of the love of honor and status? How does it lead to competition and hostility?
4. Why is it difficult for us to acknowledge our dependency on each other? Why do we find it hard to bear the burdens of others and be willing to burden them in return?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

Group Prayer

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