

1. Galatians 1-2

Synopsis

This week will be a bit different from other weeks, but this whole unit is a little different. This week you'll spend extended time with the Scripture, likely at the expense of some of the group's accountability time. But that's okay. For this week accountability will be the natural conversation around Bible study rather than spending specific dedicated time for accountability. This week you'll do some work, outlining the letter to the Galatians and walking through the first two chapters. Think of your extended time reading Galatians this week as tilling the soil. In the coming weeks, it will bear conversational fruit. But this week, the important work of listening to Galatians must take place.

You'll do an outline in the group: Paul is writing to a church influenced by false teaching—the teaching that you have to follow the Jewish law to be a Christian. Paul will speak of his disappointment, walk through his own past and where he got his authority, talk about the relationship between Law and Grace, and then urge the Galatians to not choose slavery when they're given freedom.

So here's **the win for this week**:

- 1) Gain a better understanding of how to study Scripture, by reading the letter as a whole and examining the central message of Galatians.
- 2) Affirm that the hope of Christians is not in our own righteousness or work but in faith in Christ.

Reading Galatians

The **first thing you'll do in your group is read the entire book of Galatians** to get a sense of what it's about and how it fits together. Either to yourselves or out-loud, read the whole letter of Galatians then have everyone in the group **fill out this worksheet** to do your overview of the letter. **Print out copies for your group to fill out as they read and discuss Galatians.** This will greatly help you in the weeks to come, and will teach the students how to study Scripture.

After doing the outline, you'll move on to the focus text of Galatians 2:15-21. Give a quick introduction to the background and the rest of chapter 1 and 2 before the focus text, but spend the majority of the time on the focus text in Galatians 2. As a leader, spending extra time with the background and chapters 1 & 2 before group will be helpful.

Background to Galatians

The clearest description of the gospel might be found in Galatians. Paul defends with every ounce of apostolic authority that the gospel is solely based on the work of Christ for us and our faith in Christ. He holds nothing back from condemning a false group of Christians (scholars call them “Judaizers”) who are adding to the gospel. What is at stake is the gospel itself. So how did we get here?

It’s somewhere between 49-52 AD. Paul has completed his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Sometime between Acts 14 and Acts 15 Paul is on the move and word reaches him about a group of people who have made it to the region of Galatia (southern Turkey today). These men are from Jerusalem and claim to have the “real gospel.” They’re urging the Gentile members of the Galatian churches to be circumcised and to celebrate Jewish feasts in order to be saved.

While this seems silly to us, this is a crucial problem. In short, they’re saying salvation is found in calling Jesus Christ Lord AND by adhering to the Old Testament Law (you know, all that stuff in Leviticus). Paul writes back with urgency and fury. **There is no salvation outside of Jesus!** It’s only by looking to him and what he did on our behalf that we can be saved.

Galatians 1-2:14 Summary

So you’ve gotten some background on the letter, and the first few verses of the book begin to make some sense. Paul introduces the letter with a familiar greeting in 1:1-4, then moves on to his purpose for writing: he’s astonished that the Galatians have abandoned the gospel. Some people have come in and preached against the gospel that Paul preached. Paul curses them, then he launches into his testimony. He persecuted the church (1:13-14), but was converted by a vision of Jesus (see Acts 9), and then he went to the desert to be taught by God (Gal 1:11-12). After a time he went to Jerusalem to meet up with Jesus’ disciples who received him as a brother and agreed that Paul taught the gospel. Paul was then charged to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (2:7).

Galatians 2

At the end of chapter 2, Paul recounts a conversation (really a confrontation) he had with Peter. At first, you might wonder why in the world he includes this story in his letter to the Galatians. What does beef between Paul and Peter have to do with them? But this response to Peter’s “hypocrisy” is a perfect summation of his central message to the Galatian churches.

Read Galatians 2:15-21

Commentary

It’s worth repeating from the background, false teachers have invaded Galatia, telling people that they have to obey the law (specifically get circumcised) to be a Christian. This passage

is the heart of Paul's letter to the Galatians. What *is* the gospel? How is a person saved? Belief in Jesus? Belief *and* circumcision? As a master of logic, Paul drills his thesis statement in verses: the gospel is not by following the Jewish Law. The law for us only brings death, because nobody can live up to it (this is the whole point of Romans 7). In the original language, there's a play on the word *faith*. It's only by *our faith* in Jesus Christ that we can be saved; it's only by Jesus' *faithfulness* to fully obey the Law that his sacrifice was sufficient for us.

Because of our *faith* in Jesus' work on the cross, we can be *justified*, declared innocent before God despite our many sins. Because of Jesus' *faithfulness* to fully obey the Law, he can put his very self into our hearts giving us power to joyfully obey the commands of God.

These are the themes that Paul is going to explain over and over again throughout the rest of Galatians—His faithfulness and our faith open up a new way of faithful living. In fact, this isn't just a new way of faithful living, but the *only* way to live a life of faith.

② Questions

What does the word “justified” mean? Paul keeps saying it, so it's probably helpful to think about.

Paul says that if the way that the Galatians are currently living—trying to earn salvation through their own actions—is true, then “Christ died for nothing.” That's a strong statement. Why is he making such a bold claim?

What would Paul's response be to the popular objection that it seems ridiculous for “good” people (like Ghandi) might not be considered righteous in God's eyes?

What does Paul mean when he says that he has been crucified in Christ and no longer lives? What does this mean for the way that we live?

Paul says in 1:6-7 that a different gospel is really no gospel at all. “Gospel” is a fancy word that just means “good news.” Based on what you've learned in the overview, why isn't the false teaching “good news”?

② Application Questions

What are the ways in which you normally engage with Scripture?

Have you ever found yourself doing something because it'll look extra spiritual? Is this the type of attitude Paul is talking about? How do you walk the line between being careful of your motivation and ceasing from any sort of effort to do good?

One of the causes of spiritual depression and feeling distant from God is trying to work for approval, doing something just because you "must" do it to be a good/faithful Christian. How does looking to the gospel overcome this spiritual depression?

If we can't earn our place in heaven, do we have any part at all in our salvation?

The people of Galatia questioned Paul's authority (that's why he gave his testimony that he was taught by God). Are you doing the same in your life? Are there parts of Scripture that your doubt are authoritative?

If there is no longer any law, does this mean we no longer have a prescribed way to live? How do we know if the way we are living is right? Does it matter how we live?

Circumcision is no longer a contemporary example for us (Gal 2:6-10), but the principle remains. Are there things in life you do that you think really cause God to like you more? Maybe you never say it, but when you joined a group or service role around CSF, did you think, "God will be happy with me for this?" What are other ways you may be adding to the gospel of faith alone?

Paul talks about how he learned the gospel from God, but then in chapter 2 Paul says that he went to meet with the leaders of the church to make sure that he was teaching correctly. How do we model Paul's example in our own lives with what we believe?

Accountability

We said this week that accountability would look a little different. One topic for discussion is how you're doing working through Scripture in your own life? Are you allowing Scripture to shape and form your experiences and your life? Have you devoted yourself to learning more about the Bible and reading it consistently?

We know it's hard to read Scripture consistently. Even if you do consistently read, we could probably all be challenged in our approach to Scripture. What is a step you could take to deepen your relationship and experience with Scripture?

Resource Toolbox



[N. T. Wright on Galatians](#)



[Tim Keller on Justification](#)



[How to Study the Bible](#)



[N.T. Wright on Theology in Galatians](#)



[Galatians for You by Tim Keller](#)