



Sterling

Study Guide to *Galatians*

How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups to read and discuss Scripture together. It is meant to be life-giving, not a chore. If this becomes a chore, change it or use something different.
- Use what you find helpful, but do not let yourself be bound to the guide. Feel free to expand what you like and disregard what is not helpful for your group. Do not force conversation, but allow it to come naturally. Some parts will speak more to some groups than to others.
- This study has been divided into sections that should be readable in one sitting together. Again, do not be bound to the guide. If you read more or less than what is planned, that is okay. Work at your own pace.
- There are two models of questions provided to guide your conversation. There are **general questions** that can be applied to any text, as well as **text specific questions**. Use what works best for your group, or both.
- Remember to read Scripture in context. It is easy for us to pick and choose what we like and to miss the bigger picture. Be mindful of the difficulty of reading in context especially when we only read short sections at a time.
- Read, listen, share, pray. Allow the Spirit to work.

General Questions (can be asked after each section)

1. Which parts of this text resonated with you? Which parts did you like?
2. Which parts of this text did not resonate with you? Which parts did you not like?
3. Which parts of this text did you not understand? What questions do you have?
4. Which parts of this text teach you something about God?
5. Which parts of this text can you apply in your daily life?

Background to *Galatians*

- The book of *Galatians* is a letter written by Paul to churches in the Roman province of Galatia around AD 49.
- There were other evangelists who were travelling and teaching the gospel like the early Apostles. This caused some controversy because they did not always agree on what was taught.
- There were teachers in Galatia from a Jewish-Christian background with whom Paul disagreed.
- The people in Galatia were mostly Gentiles (not from Jewish descent).
- Whether Gentiles could be Christian and whether or not they needed to follow Jewish traditions was a core piece of the early church's discernment.

Major Themes

- We should not work to please people, but only God.
- If people preach a gospel (good news) that is different than what Jesus came preaching, it is not gospel at all.
- We should never hold Christians to standards of belonging to God's family that we ourselves don't have or could ever live up to.
- Christians are free in Christ, because of Christ.
- The law will not save us. The only thing that matters is faith expressing itself through love.
- Living in the Spirit leads to real life and real change. The result is the fruits of the Spirit alive in our character.

Text Specific Questions

1. Paul begins his letter to the Galatians with a greeting. He says that God gave Himself to save us from the present evil age (1:4). How would you describe this evil age? What kind of age has Christ brought us into?
2. Paul is quick to criticize the Galatians for abandoning the message of the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus (1:6). How would you explain the gospel to someone who has never heard it before?
3. What are some of the messages from our time and culture that distort the gospel of Christ? What are the things that claim to be necessary for life or to be able to save us?
4. Paul questions whom he is trying to please, God or people (1:10). In your life, do you ever find yourself doing things in order to please, or appease people? What can we do to focus our attention on God and to work for His glory rather than our own?
5. In verses 11-24, Paul shares some of his own story. What can we learn from it? Why is he doing this?

Text Specific Questions

1. In this second chapter of *Galatians* we see some of the reasons why Paul is upset with the Christians in Galatia. What do you see as some of the controversy taking place in the church?
2. In this chapter, Paul refers to the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) where the church discerned to open its stance to Gentiles, allowing them to become Christians. How does their experience relate to some of the discernment our churches are currently engaged in?
3. Paul confronted Cephas, who is Peter, and told him not to hold Gentiles to the Jewish standards because not even Peter lives like a Jew. Are there standards that are not a part of the Gospel of Christ that we tell people to follow that we think are essential to being saved?
4. By what are we justified in Christ (2:16)? Why do you think the law cannot justify us? If we could be saved through the law, why would we need Jesus (2:21)?
5. What do you think it means to be crucified with Christ (2:20)? How can we allow Christ to live in us?

Text Specific Questions

1. Paul emphasizes that the thing that saves us should be the same thing that sustains us (3:3). How can we not only be saved, but allow our lives to be sustained by means of the Spirit?
2. What does Paul say is the requirement to be children of Abraham (3:7)? How do you think the Jewish Christians would have reacted to this kind of statement? What kinds of implications does this have?
3. How would you describe the law? How would you describe faith?
4. Paul talks about the promise, the law, and the fulfillment of the promise (3:15-22). The promise is given to Abraham and is fulfilled in Christ. What purpose does the law serve?
5. We are all children of God through faith (3:26). This means that Christians are family. Yet we don't always live like it. What are some of the boundaries that Paul says Christ breaks? What are some of the things that separate Christians today? What can we do to become one in Christ?

Text Specific Questions

1. Paul says that because of Christ we have been adopted as children of God (4:4-5). What does it mean for you to be adopted in, and to belong to the family of God?
2. Followers of Jesus have in them the Spirit of the son, who calls out “Abba, Father” (4:6). Describe your relationship with God. Do you consider Him to be as a father? What does this kind of relationship say about the nature of God?
3. Paul uses the story of Hagar and Sarah to illustrate slavery and freedom. Are you familiar with this story? You can read more about it in Genesis 16.
4. What do you think Paul means when he calls believers in Christ children of promise (4:28)? What is the promise Paul is referring to?
5. What does freedom in Christ mean? How is it lived in everyday life?

Text Specific Questions

1. Why has Christ set us free (5:1)? The false emphasis on circumcision was one of the things Paul mentions would bring people back into focusing on the flesh (5:3-4). What are some of the things that threaten to take us out of freedom and into slavery today?
2. Paul says that in Christ things like circumcision do not matter. What is the only thing that matters (5:6)?
3. Being called to be free (5:13) puts the emphasis on God’s action, not our own. Is everyone called to be free? How has God called you into freedom?
4. According to Paul, through which command is the whole law fulfilled (5:14)?
5. Freedom does not mean that we should do whatever we want (5:13). Living by the flesh is destructive to us and our relationships. How does Paul describe the results of living by the flesh (5:19-21)?
6. How does Paul describe the results (fruits) of living by the Spirit (5:22-26)? How is it that we can see those kinds of results in our lives? What does it mean to live by the Spirit?

Text Specific Questions

1. The family of God has a responsibility to one another to live as community. According to Paul, what is one part of that responsibility when it comes to sin (6:1)? How are we to deal with each other?
2. Why should we be careful when we are helping others who are caught in sin?
3. Paul says that we are supposed to carry each others burdens (6:2), but then he says that each one should carry their own load (6:5). This is not a contradiction, but two sides of the same coin that is community. What are the responsibilities of the individual and community? How can we support both?
4. Paul uses the imagery of reaping and sowing to encourage us to do good to all people when we have the opportunity. Why does Paul use this analogy? What does he mean by it? Do you agree with it?
5. Paul says that we should never boast except for in one thing (6:14). What/who is that? How can we do this?
6. Paul says that all that counts is the new creation (6:15). What is the new creation? How can we experience it?