

BIBLE STUDY BASICS

Galatians

*Get back to basics
with the truth of
the gospel.*



Paul wrote to the Galatians in a trying time filled with false teachings. Unfortunately, the Galatians had started to believe the lies. All Paul's hard work in establishing the church in Galatia seemed to be unraveling. We all have a tendency to pervert the gospel, and we are all susceptible to believing the false teachings of our day. The Book of Galatians will take you back to the basics—what the gospel is, how you receive it, and how you can apply it to your daily life. Even more, you'll discover how to combat the false teachings of today.



How to Use Bible Study Basics

We're so glad that you're using this study guide with your group. We know you'll gain a lot of wisdom through your discussion. Use this guide to make the most of this resource.

Decide How Many Meetings

Any of our **Bible Study Basics** can be covered as quickly or as slowly as you'd like. If the book you're studying has five chapters, you might plan on five meetings. Or to look at the passages more in depth, plan for ten meetings. Consider how long your group would like to meet to discuss this book of the Bible.

Decide Which Themes to Cover

In this resource, each chapter is divided up into major themes that are covered in the text. As you discuss a chapter, you may choose to discuss only one of the themes or all of the themes in the chapter. Or you might focus most of your discussion on one theme and only briefly cover another. If you're going more slowly through the book, you'll be able to cover all of the themes more in depth. As you prepare for your study, consider what main idea or ideas you'd like your group members to walk away with.

Choose 4–6 Questions

In the **Talk It Out** section, we've given you a variety of questions to choose from for your study, but please don't use them all! You simply don't have time to cover every single question we've written. Plan to cover 4–6 questions per meeting and choose them based on the themes you've chosen to cover. This will ensure you'll have enough time to discuss each of the questions thoroughly. If you have extra time, you can always ask additional questions.

Do the Activity

Start your meeting with one of the **Start It Out** activities to engage your group members. If you're covering multiple themes in one meeting, just choose one activity. The Start It Out activities will get your group focused and thinking about the important themes of your study.

Lead the Discussion

Use the tips and suggestions in “**Lead a Great Discussion**” and “**Engage Everyone in Your Group**” to make the most of your time together. This proven advice comes from the experts at SmallGroups.com.

Identify Your Next Step

The **Live It Out** section provides a list of possible action steps to take as a result of your discussion. Applying what you've learned will be unique to each group member. Let group members choose one application step from the Live It Out section or come up with one on their own. You might also consider what your next step as a group will be.

End With Prayer

Don't forget to share prayer requests. Pray that group members will follow through with their application. Thank God for all he's teaching you through your time together.



Lead a Great Discussion

For many, facilitating a group discussion—especially in a Bible study—can be intimidating. But the goal isn't to have all the right answers or even to get through all the material. To lead a great discussion, get all your group members involved, and help them connect the discussion to their lives. This is what leads to life change, and that's the goal. Here are a few tips for leading a great discussion with your group.

Get to know each other. Take some time, especially at the start of a new group, to get to know one another. As relationships develop, group members will be more likely to share authentically, which will help your discussion lead to life change. Share a snack, devote the opening 15 minutes to small talk, or intentionally linger after the meeting.

Create a safe environment. Trust makes your group a place where genuine community can form. Group members need to be able to trust that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on. Let everyone know that what's shared in group should stay in the group.

Ask follow-up questions. Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook.

Ask more questions that follow up on their responses. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short or simple answers that people often give:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that would've affected you if you'd lived at the time this was written?
- How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?

Make sure the rubber hits the road. Tell your group that by the end of the night you'll each decide how to apply what you're discussing. Otherwise you'll just leave a little smarter, rather than with changed lives. So whatever it is you're discussing, make sure to end with some application questions. Help your group members consider what the passage has to do with their lives today and what one thing they'll do differently this week as a result of your discussion. Use the Live It Out section as a guide for some ideas.

Affirm everyone who shares. When people share in the group—no matter how much you may disagree, or how theologically incorrect they may be—make sure they feel affirmed about their answer in the moment. Thank them for sharing. Having the courage to share is a big deal, and you'll want to recognize it. If someone says something theologically off, consider talking with the person outside of group, one on one. And make sure to ask for clarification first. The person may have simply misspoken. If they still hold on to the incorrect belief, you can lovingly point out the truth to them.

Lead, don't teach. Empower others to discover the truth of Scripture for themselves by asking questions and refraining from lecturing. Allow the Holy Spirit to move in your group members.

Wait 30 seconds. While it may be tempting to ask a question and then immediately answer it, doing so will create an unsafe environment for sharing, and group members will come to expect your answers. It takes at least 20 seconds for many people to process a question, so allow them time to think. If there's still no answer, rephrase the question.

Pray together. As you dig into God's Word, don't forget to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. When you're finished with your discussion, pray for one another. Praying together not only brings your group members before God, but also allows your group members to care for one another.



Engage Everyone in Your Group

Studying the Bible is for everyone—from not-yet believer to mature Christ-follower. To ensure you're engaging everyone in your meeting, use these tips.

Dedicate time to small talk and casual conversation. As counterintuitive as that sounds, people need to get to know each other socially so they can come to understand each other spiritually. One great idea is to build a meal into your small-group time or dedicate a portion of your meeting to coffee and refreshments. The casual conversation over food will help build trust and deepen relationships within the group.

Incorporate icebreakers at the beginning of your study time. While icebreakers may not seem to have much lasting value, they actually go a long way in setting up a healthy environment that will help group members develop authentic relationships. Be sure to use one of the Start It Out activities to begin your meeting.

Read Scripture from multiple translations during your study. Use both a more traditional translation and a modern translation. Consider the differences in how the words are translated and the changes in language over the years.

Research the historical context or commentaries for passages that will be studied. When you share the background information, you'll give all group members, regardless of their level of maturity, a common place to start. You'll find a great overview at the beginning of this study. Alternatively, have some of the more mature believers volunteer to do this research and present it at the meeting. Tap into their knowledge.

Make it clear that all questions are welcome. Whether they're questions of clarification or deeper analysis, members should feel safe asking what's on their mind. Deeper questions may push new believers to take the next step in their relationship with God; questions from new believers may prompt seasoned believers to take a second look at a familiar passage.

Watch your language. Don't assume everyone knows what *covenant* means—or any other “church” word, for that matter. Always clarify the meaning of these words with your group. Ask group members to explain the concepts to the rest of the group. This will both challenge mature believers to articulate their beliefs and help new believers understand biblical terms.

Look for opportunities to break into smaller groups. If your group is getting large, break into groups of three to five for portions of your discussion or prayer time. More people can share when there are fewer in a group.

Empower those further along by asking them to help you in some way. Allow them to organize aspects of the meeting, present background information on a passage, lead a discussion from time to time, or facilitate the group prayer.

Let group members dig in at their own level. As group members prepare for the meeting, make it clear you'd like everyone to read the passage you'll be discussing. Challenge more mature believers to read the passage each day of the week to see if they gain any new insights. Or challenge them to read the entire book for context (if it's a shorter book like an epistle). They could also incorporate journaling into their reading. Or assign a more challenging question ahead of time to mature believers to research and report back to the group. Stretch group members with homework that fits their stage, allowing them to choose for themselves which level is appropriate.

Overview of Galatians



Why read these books?

People who care about nutrition often read the labels before buying packaged foods. Why? They're on the lookout for additives and ingredients that may be hazardous to their health. In a similar way, Galatians warns against mixing legalism and human works into the simple gospel. It describes artificial spiritual additives and their toxic effects. This book offers a spiritual health check—a clear explanation of what it means to be saved by faith.

Who wrote this book?

Paul, the apostle.

To whom was it written?

To Christians in Galatia, a Roman province in the central part of what is now called Turkey.

When was it written?

Probably around A.D. 48 to 53, less than 25 years after Jesus Christ's ministry on earth.

Why was it written?

To denounce and correct false teachings that had infiltrated the churches Paul and Barnabas had earlier established. False teachers insisted that Gentile Christians keep the ritual laws of the Jews. Paul, stinging from their personal attacks against him, also wrote to defend his integrity as an apostle and to reassert his love for the Galatians.

What to look for in Galatians:

Galatians will take you back to the basics—what the gospel is, how you receive it, and how you can apply it to your daily life. Paul uses several techniques (his own conversion story, an illustration from the life of Abraham, and even sarcasm) to persuade the Galatians to return to the true gospel.

—From the *NIV Quest Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2011)



CHAPTER 1

Only One Gospel

Galatians 1:1–10

► Start It Out

Bring a sheet of paper and an envelope for each group member. Invite group members to write a letter to themselves, making it about anything they'd like (encouragement, exhortation, etc.). Give everyone 10 minutes to write their letter. Then have them seal their letter in an envelope. Instruct everyone to save them and bring them back to the last study session on Galatians, at which point they can be opened and read.

► Talk It Out

- Who is John, the author of this book?
- What kind of book is Galatians? What genre is it?
- How does the fact that this is a letter affect our reading and interpretation of Galatians?
- Who is Paul? What do we know about him?
- Where is Galatia? What do we know about the people there?

- Paul is writing to the “churches in Galatia,” which probably means he’s writing to a somewhat large audience. How could this knowledge affect our interpretation of this letter?
- Who are the “brothers and sisters” with Paul in verse 2? Why do you think Paul mentions them?
- Why is it important that Paul was sent from Jesus Christ and not men? What could it mean that Paul decided to start the letter this way?
- Why does Paul include a prayer in verses 3–5? What could this tell us about Paul’s relationship to the Galatians?
- What do you think Paul meant by “the present evil age”? What could that tell us about the time they lived in?
- Who do you think was the one who called the Galatians to live in the grace of Christ in verse 6?
- If Paul called the Galatians to live in the grace of Christ, what more could that tell us about Paul’s relationship with them?
- In what ways do you think the Galatians have deserted Paul?
- Paul claims that the Galatians have turned to a different gospel. What do you think that means? What other gospel could they have turned to?
- Who might be throwing the Galatians into confusion in verse 7? How does Paul know about these people?
- In verse 7, Paul claims these people are perverting the gospel. How might they be doing that?
- Paul continues talking about this in the next 2 verses, basically saying that anybody preaching a different gospel, is under God’s curse. Why do you think he does this?
- In verse 10, Paul asks whether he is trying to win the approval of human beings or God. He even asks it more than once. Why do you think he does this?
- Why is it important that Paul is seeking to please God instead of people?
- Paul stresses the question of whether or not he is pleasing people or God three times. What does this say about how the Galatians perceive Paul? What is Paul trying to convince them of and why?

► Live It Out

- Write a Paul-like letter to a fellow Christian brother or sister. Ponder ways you can encourage his or her faith and/or help spur growth.
- Consider the ways people might be perverting the gospel in our own culture. Pray about how you can avoid this kind of false teaching.
- Ask God to reveal to you the ways you pervert the gospel. What one step can you take this week to change that?

Paul's Past

Galatians 1:11–24

► Start It Out

Invite one or two people to share a quick version of their testimony. Start out by sharing your own to break the ice. Allow people to comment or ask questions after each story.

► Talk It Out

- In verse 11, Paul addresses the Galatians as his “brothers and sisters.” How does this further our understanding of the relationship Paul had with the Galatians?
- Why is it important that the gospel Paul preached was not of human origin?
- In verse 12, Paul claims that he received the gospel from Jesus Christ and not from any man. How does this statement help us better understand verse 1?
- Why do you think Paul wants to make sure the Galatians understand that he was sent by Jesus Christ and that he received the gospel from Jesus Christ? What is he trying to prove?
- How do you think the Galatians knew of Paul’s previous way of life in Judaism (verse 13)?
- Why do you think Paul brings up his past in Judaism?

- If Paul tried to persecute the church and destroy it, what does that tell us about the nature of his past in Judaism?
- Why does it matter that Paul advanced in Judaism beyond others his own age?
- What are the “traditions of my fathers” that Paul mentions in verse 14? Why does he bring them up?
- What does it mean that God set Paul apart from his mother’s womb?
- How does the revelation in verse 16 help us understand verse 12 and verse 1?
- Who are the Gentiles? How do they relate to the Galatians?
- Why is important that Paul didn’t consult “any human being” when he received his revelation from God? What does this tell us about similar statements Paul has made previous to this?
- Why does it matter that Paul went into Arabia instead of Jerusalem when he received his revelation? What does that tell us about his call to preach to the Gentiles?
- What do you think Paul was doing during the three years mentioned in verse 18?
- Why is it important that Paul only saw Cephas and James, but no other apostles? How might this relate to verse 12?
- Why do you think Paul finds it necessary to claim he isn’t lying in verse 20?
- In verses 13–24, Paul begins telling his testimony to the Galatians, starting with his past. Why might the Galatians need to hear this? What could Paul be trying to convince them of?

► Live It Out

- Get together with a friend or family member and share your testimony with them. If appropriate, ask them if they’d be willing to share their testimony. What you can learn by sharing and/or hearing a testimony?
- Think about your own past and how Christ has changed and transformed your actions and motivations over the years, and make a list. Consider how Christ is helping you transform currently. Thank God for all the ways he is working and has worked in your life.
- Prayerfully consider the kinds of people God calls to teach, help, or encourage. Is there one type of person? Is it dependent on our previous successes? Why or why not?



CHAPTER 2

Paul Goes Back to Jerusalem

Galatians 2:1–10

► Start It Out

Invite group members to answer the following questions:

- Do you feel called to minister to a specific group of people?
- How would you feel if your small-group leader or pastor evaluated that calling (like the leaders in Jerusalem did for Paul)? Would that be a positive or negative experience? Why or why not?

► Talk It Out

- What's important about Paul waiting 14 years before going back to Jerusalem? How does this help us better understand verses 1:16–20?
- Who are Barnabas and Titus? What do we know about them?
- Do you think the Galatians knew who Barnabas and Titus were? If so, what more does this tell us about Paul's relationship with the Galatians?

- What do you think Paul's revelation was in verse 2?
- Why does Paul call the leaders esteemed/influential in verse 2?
- Is it important that Paul met with the leaders privately? Why or why not?
- In what ways could Paul have been running his race in vain?
- Why is it important that the Galatians understand that Paul had not been running his race in vain?
- Why does Paul bring up circumcision in verse 3?
- What does this reference to circumcision tell us about Titus (background, religion, etc.)?
- Do you think the false believers in verse 4 are similar to the people throwing the Galatians into confusion in verse 1:7? Why or why not?
- How does the topic of circumcision relate to the false believers?
- Do you think the word "slave" in verse 4 is literal or figurative?
- How were the false teachers trying to make Paul and his companions slaves?
- How did Paul preserve the truth of the gospel by not giving in to the false believers? Why is it important that the Galatians understand this?
- Why does Paul bring the esteemed leaders back up in verse 6?
- Why do the Galatians need to understand that God doesn't show favoritism?
- What does Paul mean when he claims the esteemed/influential leaders added nothing to his message? What could have they added to Paul's message?
- What is significant about Paul being called to preach the gospel to the uncircumcised?
- Why is the distinction between Peter and Paul important (preaching to the circumcised versus the uncircumcised)?
- What could be important about Paul using the title "apostle" when comparing himself to Peter?
- Who are James, Cephas, and John? Why does Paul call them pillars?

- How is uncircumcision/circumcision related to Paul’s call to preach to the Gentiles?
- Why do you think the “esteemed pillars” wanted Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor?

► Live It Out

- Pray about whether or not you feel called to minister to a specific group of people. Journal about places, groups, or people who come to mind. Share this with a trusted friend or your small-group leader.
- Meet with a trusted friend, your small-group leader, or your pastor and discuss what it looks like to “run a good race.” Come up with a few actionable steps to help you do this.
- Ponder whether or not you have someone like Barnabas (a close fellow worker or partner in the faith). If so, get together with him or her and discuss ways you can make your partnership even more effective. If not, pray about who might need your help or partnership in ministry.
- What threatens to make you a slave, taking away your freedom in Christ? Come up with at least one step you can take this week to minimize or eliminate the threat.

Paul Rebukes Peter

Galatians 2:11–21

► Start It Out

Share a time that you got in trouble as a child. What was the offense? How were you discovered and called out? What punishment did you receive?

► Talk It Out

- Paul focuses on Cephas a lot in chapter 2. Do you think Cephas is particularly significant to the people in Galatia? Why or why not?

- How does the earlier mention of Cephas in verse 1:18 help us understand the way Paul structures the flow of his arguments?
- Why is it important that Cephas used to eat with the Gentiles?
- Why do you think Cephas grew afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group?
- What was the hypocrisy that Cephas and the other Jews committed?
- What's significant about Barnabas being led astray?
- How did the circumcision group act out of line with the truth of the gospel?
- What's significant about Paul calling Cephas out in public? Why is it important that the Galatians understood this?
- How was Cephas living like a Gentile instead of a Jew? How could this help us understand verse 1:6 and 2:4?
- What Jewish customs was Cephas forcing upon the Gentiles?
- What does Paul mean by "justified" in verse 16?
- When Paul mentions "the law," what exactly is he talking about?
- Why can't a person be justified by following the law? What does Christ offer that the law can't?
- How might Paul and Cephas have found themselves among the sinners (verse 17)? How might this have contributed to Cephas' fear of the circumcision group in verse 12?
- Why do you think Paul finds it necessary to clarify that Christ doesn't promote sin? Do you think Cephas or the Galatians feared this? Why or why not?
- What did Paul destroy (verse 18)? Why would rebuilding it make him a lawbreaker?
- What's significant about Paul's use of the word "lawbreaker"?
- What does it mean that Paul died to the law through the law (verse 19)?
- How did dying to the law help Paul live for God?
- What does it mean for Paul to be crucified with Christ and to no longer live? How does this relate to him dying to the law?

- Why would Christ die if righteousness could be gained through the law?
- In verses 14–21, Paul recounts his rebuke of Cephas. Why do the Galatians need to hear this?

► Live It Out

- Think back: Have you ever been rebuked by another believer? If so, what was the result of that situation? Was it justified? Pray about whether or not any follow up is needed.
- Think about a time you rebuked another believer. What were the circumstances? Looking back now, were you in the right? Why or why not? Is there any follow up needed?
- Consider: Are you too quick or too slow to rebuke others? Think about the patterns in your life and how you handle issues like this. What steps might you take to grow and mature in this area?
- Spend time journaling about any ministry-related fears you have. Specifically: Are you afraid of the opinions of a particular group (like Cephas was with the circumcision group)? If you have fears, figure out if they are justified. If they aren't, brainstorm ways to overcome your fear.
- Contemplate some modern-day “laws” that you’ve let die in light of your faith in Christ. Write them down and keep them nearby as a reminder of the freedom you have in Christ.



CHAPTER 3

Faith Versus Works

Galatians 3:1–14

► Start It Out

(Note: This is meant to be a hyperbolized exercise to illustrate the limitations of works/deeds. It is not meant to actually evaluate righteousness)

Supply everyone with a small piece of paper and something to write with. Explain that everyone is going to take a “Righteousness” test based on their works/ actions. Tell them to mark a point for themselves each time they answer “yes” to the questions below. The more points they get, the more “righteous” they are.

1. Have you “prayed the prayer?”
2. Have you been baptized?
3. Have you been on a missions trip?
4. Do you tithe regularly?
5. Do you give to charities outside of the Church?
6. Do you often share you faith with others?
7. Have you led someone to Christ?

Afterward have a discussion about this method of determining righteousness. How did it make them feel? Do they feel like it’s a good way to tell whether or not

someone is righteous? Discuss the error in evaluating righteousness based on deeds and the issues/limitations it presents. Sharing scores with each other won't be necessary to have this discussion.

► Talk It Out

- “You foolish Galatians!” seems pretty severe. Why do you think Paul found it necessary to address them this way?
- Why do the Galatians need to be reminded that Christ’s crucifixion was clearly portrayed to them?
- How does bringing up Christ’s crucifixion in verse 1 expand upon Paul’s words at the end of chapter 2?
- What did Paul mean by “receive the Spirit”?
- How are the Galatians trying to finish by means of the flesh? How could this relate to circumcision?
- What experiences do you think Paul is referring to in verse 4?
- What kind of miracles do you think the Spirit worked among the Galatians?
- Why do you think Paul repeats his question in verse 5 (seen earlier in verse 2)?
- In verses 2–5, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions. Why do you think he does this?
- Who is Abraham? What do we know about him?
- Why do you think Paul decided to bring up Abraham in verse 6?
- How did Abraham’s belief grant him righteousness?
- Why do you think the label “children of Abraham” might be important to the Galatians? How does this help us understand what’s going on with the people throwing the Galatians into confusion (verse 1:7)?
- How could the Galatians rely on faith in the same way that Abraham did?
- What do you think the curse is in verse 10? What effect does it have?
- What is the “Book of the Law”? What does it entail?

- In verse 11, Paul states that no one who relies on the law is justified before God. Do you think Cephas felt this way (verse 2:12)?
- In verse 12, Paul uses a statement from the law (Leviticus 18:5) to argue against the law. How do you think this would have affected the Galatians reading Paul's letter?
- How did Christ become a curse for us (verse 13)?
- Leviticus and Deuteronomy are part of the "Pentateuch," another name for the first five books of the Old Testament. These books are often seen as law books or the "Law of Moses." Paul quotes from these books often in verses 8–13. Why is that significant?
- How does Paul create a strong argument in verse 14? What elements are present?

► Live It Out

- Paul uses some harsh words to get the Galatians' attention: You foolish Galatians! How does God get your attention when you need correction?
- Pray about ways you might be prone to seek justification through works rather than faith. Share these with a trusted friend or your small-group leader. Brainstorm ways to focus on justification through faith in your everyday life.
- Journal and pray about times you've seen or heard of God's Spirit working miracles. Spend time praising God for the gift of the Spirit through faith (as opposed to works).
- Read chapters from the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy). Ponder how knowledge of these books helps to shape your understanding of what it means to have freedom in Christ.

The Law

Galatians 3:15–25

► Start It Out

Split your group into two teams. Have each team write down as many Old Testament laws as they can think of. Bring them back together and have a spokesperson from each group recite their list. The team with the most verified laws wins. (Leaders, you can find a great list [here](#).)

Were any of the listed laws surprising or confusing? Discuss the meaning or purpose of any in question.

► Talk It Out

- Why do you think Paul finds it necessary to use an example from everyday life?
- What is Paul's example from everyday life helping to explain?
- Why can't anyone set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established (verse 15)?
- What were the promises spoken to Abraham and to his seed?
- Why is it important that Christ is Abraham's seed in the promise? How does this help us understand verse 8?
- Where does Paul get the number 430 from? Why do you think he brings up this number?
- Why didn't the law replace the covenant God made to Abraham?
- What is the inheritance Paul mentions in verse 18?
- Why does the inheritance depend on the promise instead of the law?
- In what way does this promise matter to the Galatians?
- Why did transgression/sin make the law necessary (verse 19)?
- In verse 19, Paul implies that the law was only in effect until Christ came. Why is this implication important for the Galatians?
- How was the law given through angels? Why does this matter?
- Who is the mediator Paul mentions in verses 19 and 20?
- Keeping the concept of a mediator in mind, what was different about the way God entrusted the law versus how he entrusted his promise to Abraham?

- How did the law work toward God’s promise to Abraham (as opposed to against it)?
- What does it mean that Scripture has “locked up everything under the control of sin” (verse 22)?
- How does Scripture and the law illuminate our sin? How does this concept help us understand verse 22?
- How do words like “custody” and “locked up” in verse 23 help us understand verse 2:4 as well as Paul’s concern for the Galatians?
- How might Paul’s use of the word “guardian” helped reshape our understanding of the law?

► Live It Out

- Get together with another Christian and ponder any modern-day laws or rules you see in the church. Consider the necessity of these rules and if they ever seem more important than faith in Christ. If so, brainstorm ways to avoid this kind of thinking and practice.
- Research the promises God makes in Scripture. Pray through each one and thank God for keeping his promises.
- Pick one or two of the Old Testament laws that your group brainstormed during “Start It Out.” Try to abide by them for a few days or a week. Journal about your experience. What would it be like to follow those laws your entire life? Praise God for the freedom you have in Christ.
- How would you explain to someone why we still need the Old Testament? Think it through so you’re ready to give an answer.



CHAPTER 4

Paul and the Galatians

Galatians 3:26–4:2

► Start It Out

The distinctions of “neither Jew nor Gentile” or “neither slave nor free” were more relevant to the culture the Galatians lived in. Brainstorm as a group what kinds of seemingly opposing distinctions exist in our own culture. Discuss how freedom in Christ can break these divisions down even today.

► Talk It Out

- How are we all children of God through faith in Christ? How does this help us understand God’s promise to Abraham?
- What does it mean to be clothed in Christ?
- In what way had the Galatians clothed themselves with Christ by being baptized into Christ?
- How does verse 3:27 help us understand verse 2:20?
- Why was it important for the Galatians to hear that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ?
- How might Paul’s statement in verse 3:29 directly oppose the false believers confusing the Galatians?

- In verse 4:1, Paul begins yet another example to explain freedom from the law in Christ. Why do you think Paul finds it necessary to give the Galatians so many examples?
- How is an underage heir no different from a slave?
- How does the concept of guardians and trustees in Paul's heir example (verse 4:2) help us understand the law's role as a guardian in verses 3:24–25?
- How were the Galatians like the underage heir?
- What does Paul mean by “elemental spiritual forces of the world” (verse 4:3)?
- Why is it important that Jesus was born “under the law” (verse 4:5)?
- How are the Galatians God's sons?
- What does it mean for God to send the Spirit of his Son into our hearts (verse 4:6)? How does this help us understand verse 2:20 and justification apart from the law?
- What does “Abba” mean? Why do you think Paul uses the word “Abba” in verse 6:6?
- What were the Galatians slaves to before they knew God (verse 4:8)? What does Paul mean by “those who by nature are not gods”?
- What's the difference between the Galatians knowing God and God knowing them (verse 4:9)? Why does Paul clarify this?
- What are the “weak and miserable forces” that the Galatians are turning back to? How does this help us understand the “elemental spiritual forces of the world” mentioned in verse 4:3?
- What could the special days/months/seasons/years be that the Galatians are observing? How do these tie into the “weak and miserable forces”?
- Like the “you foolish Galatians” statement in verse 3:1, Paul's words in verse 4:11 are equally severe. How might his efforts have been wasted on them?
- How did Paul become like the Galatians? How are the Galatians supposed to become like Paul (verse 4:12)?

- Why do you think an illness allowed Paul to first preach the gospel to the Galatians (verse 4:13)?
- According to 4:14–16, what can we learn about the relationship Paul once had with the Galatians? How does this compare to the relationship they now have?
- How can the positive sentiments in verse 4:14 help us understand the overall intensity of Paul’s letter to the Galatians?
- Who are the zealous people in verse 4:17?
- How would alienating the Galatians from Paul help the zealous people?
- In terms of jealousy, what is the difference between Paul and the false believers?
- What does it mean that Paul was in pains of childbirth for the Galatians (verse 4:19)?
- Why do you think Paul couldn’t be with the Galatians (verse 4:20)?
- How do you think Paul’s tone would change if he could be with the Galatians?
- Why do you think Paul’s writing is so severe?

► Live It Out

- Brainstorm whether or not you’ve inadvertently placed modern-day versions of labels like “Jew or Gentile” on fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Make a plan to rectify that way of thinking and share it with a trusted friend or your small-group leader.
- Make a list of Christian traditions and holidays that you observe each year. Pray about your motivations when you celebrate these days. Are they anything like the days/months/seasons/years that the false believers put too much emphasis on in verse 4:10?
- Paul’s relationship with the Galatians dramatically changed over time. Have you ever experienced something similar with another Christian? If so, pray about how that relationship can be reconciled.

- When have you delivered a severe message in a way that wasn't helpful? (Perhaps you sent a text, for instance, instead of getting together in person.) What can you learn from that experience? What might you change in the future?
- Think about a time someone delivered hard truth to you in a loving and gracious way. How did they do that? List three insights from that experience for the next time you have to confront someone.

Hagar and Sarah

Galatians 4:21–31

► Start It Out

Describe a time that an overly familiar Bible story or passage took on new meaning in your life. How did it happen?

► Talk It Out

- Was Paul's question in verse 21 was rhetorical? Why or why not?
- What previous verses in Galatians does the language of "slave" and "free" remind you of?
- What does Paul mean when he says the slave woman's child was born according to the flesh (23)? How does verse 3:3 help us understand this verse?
- Is the divine promise mentioned in verse 23 the same promise mentioned earlier in chapter 3? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Paul uses the story of Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham to illustrate his point?
- Why is Mount Sinai important to the story of Hagar? What happened on Mount Sinai that has to do with slavery?
- How does the "present city of Jerusalem" correspond to slavery (25)?

- What does Paul mean by “the Jerusalem that is above”?
- How does “the Jerusalem that is above” correspond to the freedom Christ gives us from the law?
- What is Paul quoting in verse 27?
- In some Bible versions, verse 27 is broken out from the rest of the text like lines from a poem. Why do you think this is?
- What does “barren woman” have to do with the story of Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham’s two sons?
- Who was the son born according to the flesh? Who was the son born by the power of the Spirit?
- In verse 29, Paul speaks of how Ishmael persecuted Isaac. How could this help us understand how the false believers persecuted the Galatians?
- Sarah urged Abraham to “get rid of the slave woman and her son,” in Genesis 21:10. How is Paul using this to tell the Galatians to act similarly about the law?
- How does the inheritance mentioned in verse 30 correspond with the inheritance mentioned in verse 3:18? How does this help Paul’s argument?
- What does it mean for the Galatians to be the children of Sarah instead of the children of Hagar?

► Live It Out

- It’s possible that Paul uses the story of Ishmael persecuting Isaac to show the Galatians how the false believers (and their focus on the law) persecute their freedom. Can you think of any modern examples of this? If so, share them with a trusted friend or your small-group leader.
- Paul encourages the Galatians to get rid of their reliance on the law (just like Sarah urged Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael). Ponder what you might need to get rid of for the sake of your freedom in Christ. Come up with a plan to carry this out and share it with someone you trust.
- Journal about what it means to be children of the free woman (Galatians 4:31). Pray about this and give thanks to God.



CHAPTER 5

Circumcision

Galatians 5:1–15

► Start It Out

What are some ways that Christians try to set themselves apart from the rest of culture? Discuss whether or not these acts are harmful to the gospel.

Leader's Note: Wearing cross necklaces, having ichthus (fish) emblems on their cars, putting "Jesus lover" in their Twitter profile, etc.

► Talk It Out

- How does verse 1 help conclude the story of Hagar and Sarah in chapter 4?
- Why do you think Paul chooses to bring up the topic of circumcision again this late in the letter?
- Why is Christ of no value to the Galatians if they let themselves be circumcised?
- What does it look like to be obligated to obey the whole law?

- How is it that every man who lets himself be circumcised is obligated to obey the whole law? How does verse 3:10 help us understand this?
- How is circumcision related to the Galatians trying to be justified by the law?
- How might the promise God gave to Abraham help Paul and the Galatians “eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which [they] hope” (verse 5)?
- If Paul claims that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value (verse 6),” why is he so concerned about the Galatians getting circumcised?
- Why do you think Paul brings up “running a good race” again?
- Who is the one who called the Galatians in verse 8?
- What is the point of Paul’s “yeast” analogy in verse 9?
- What other Bible passage(s) uses yeast as an analogy?
- Why do you think Paul is so confident in verse 10?
- What do you think the penalty will be for the one throwing the Galatians into confusion (verse 10)?
- Verse 11 implies that the Galatians think Paul preaches circumcision. How do you think they got that idea?
- Who would be offended by the cross (verse 11)? How does this help Paul’s case of not being an advocator for circumcision?
- What does verse 12 mean?
- Verse 12 seems rather extreme. How does this help us understand how passionate Paul is about protecting the Galatians?
- Why do you think Paul instructs the Galatians not to use their freedom to indulge the flesh (13)?
- Based on verse 13, is it possible that the Galatians were too liberal with their freedom in Christ (to the point of acting sinful)? Is it possible that the false believers used an idea like this to advocate for the law?
- How is the entire law fulfilled by keeping one command?
- Why does Paul choose “Love your neighbor as yourself” as the one fulfilling command of the law?

- Why do you think Paul uses a command from the law to further his advocacy for justification and freedom in Christ?

► Live It Out

- Consider the examples you came up with in the Start It Up question. What are some more helpful ways that Christians can set themselves apart?
- The false believers spread lies about Paul. What do you do when you hear gossip or rumors? How healthy is your reaction? How might God want you to respond?
- Verse 13 brings up the idea of using freedom to indulge the flesh. Journal about any ways you might be prone to use your freedom this way. If appropriate, get together and share this with a trusted friend or your small-group leader. Brainstorm ways to avoid “indulging the flesh” in the future without becoming legalistic or law-focused.

The Spirit

Galatians 5:16–26

► Start It Out

Who do you know that lives out the fruit of the Spirit on a daily basis?

► Talk It Out

- How will walking by the Spirit prevent the Galatians from gratifying desires of the flesh (verse 16)?
- In what ways are the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit contrary to one another? Why was it important for the Galatians to know this?
- The NIV has an alternate textual note in verse 5:17: “so that you do not do what you want” instead of “so that you are not to do whatever you want.” How could this difference change our interpretation of the verse?

- What do you think the Galatians are unable to do because of the battle between flesh and Spirit (verse 17)?
- How might the law perpetuate the battle between flesh and Spirit? How does faith in Christ help us be led by the Spirit and not the flesh?
- Why do you think sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery are listed first in Paul's "acts of the flesh" list?
- Why do you think idolatry and witchcraft are grouped together in Paul's list?
- What does Paul mean by "witchcraft"? How might our modern understanding of "witchcraft" be different than the understanding Paul and the Galatians had?
- What does the inclusion of "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy" tell us about verses 14–15?
- What does it mean to inherit the kingdom of God (verse 21)?
- In verse 19, Paul claims that the acts of the flesh are obvious. He makes no such claim about the fruit of the Spirit. Are the fruit of the Spirit less obvious than the acts of the flesh? Why or why not?
- Why is the word "fruit" used in "fruit of the Spirit"?
- Why is there no law against the fruit of the Spirit?
- How do Galatians 2:20 and 5:24 relate?
- How can the Galatians keep "in step with the Spirit" (verse 25)?
- Why was Paul concerned with the Galatians becoming conceited, provoking and envying each other (verse 26)?
- How does Paul's writing in the whole of chapter 5 help advance his argument against the law and for justification and freedom in Christ?

► Live It Out

- In verses 19–21, Paul lists several obvious acts of the flesh (or sins). Brainstorm acts of the flesh that aren't as obvious or don't appear on Paul's list. Consider why these acts seem less obvious than the ones Paul listed. Discern whether or not that makes them any less important.

- In verses 19–21, Paul groups certain “acts of the flesh” with others: Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; Ideology and witchcraft; Fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; Drunkenness and orgies. Discern the theme of each pairing, and brainstorm additional modern-day “acts of the flesh” that fit into these themes (for example: you may not be prone to orgies, but both drunkenness and orgies are acts of unchecked self-indulgence. Perhaps a modern-day equivalent to this is binge-watching Netflix shows). Consider ways to avoid these modern-day “acts of the flesh.”
- Pick out seven aspects of the fruit of the Spirit and assign a different one to each day in your upcoming week. Attempt to live out each for the full day. Journal about your experience at the end of each day.



CHAPTER 6

Doing Good

Galatians 6:1–10

► Start It Out

Share one Bible verse that encourages you. Why does it encourage you?

► Talk It Out

- What does it look like to be caught in sin (verse 1)?
- What sins do you think the Galatians were caught in?
- How would living by the Spirit help the Galatians gently restore people in sin? How does the fruit of the Spirit help with this?
- Why do the Galatians need to be careful when attempting to gently restore someone? How could they be tempted?
- What do you think Paul had in mind when he urged the Galatians to “carry each other’s burdens”?
- How does carrying the burdens of others fulfill the law of Christ?
- Why is it significant that Paul uses the phrase “law of Christ” in verse 2?
- Why would the Galatians think they were something when they weren’t (verse 3)?

- What do you think Paul meant by “each one should test their own actions” (verse 4)? Keeping verse 2 in mind, what should a test like this have revealed to the Galatians?
- Why do you think the Galatians were comparing themselves to others (verse 4)? How would this prevent them from living by the Spirit?
- Why does Paul tell the Galatians to “carry each other’s burdens” in verse 2 and then tell them “each one should carry their own load” in verse 5?
- How could the context of verse 4 help us understand what Paul meant in verse 5?
- What is Paul getting at in verse 6? Who is receiving instruction, and who is the instructor?
- How could the Galatians carry Paul’s burdens if they shared “all good things” with him (verse 6)?
- Why do you think Paul warned the Galatians against being deceived again in verse 7 when he already did in verse 3?
- What do you think Paul meant by “God cannot be mocked” (verse 7)?
- What does the “a man reaps what he sows” analogy mean (verse 7)?
- How could the Galatians sow to please their flesh (verse 8)? What do the “acts of the flesh” in verses 5:19–21 have to do with this?
- How could the Galatians sow to please the Spirit (verse 8)?
- How would too much reliance on the law hinder the Galatians from reaping eternal life?
- Do you think the Galatians were weary of doing good (verse 6:9)? Why or why not?
- When have you experienced being weary of doing good? What kept you going?
- What kind of harvest does Paul mean in verse 9? Will we always see the harvest for our good work?
- Why does Paul encourage the Galatians to do good “especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (verse 10)? What does this tell us about the way the Galatians were treating fellow believers during the time Paul wrote this letter?

► Live It Out

- If you’re weary of doing good, spend some extra time with God this week. Ask him to fill you with vision for his work on earth and strength for continuing on when things are hard.

- Consider the verses shared in the Start It Out activity. How might you surround yourself with encouraging Bible verses when life is difficult?
- Get together with a trusted friend and brainstorm how you can carry each other's burdens. Think practical and make a plan.
- Journal about the kinds of things you sow in your life. Are you sowing to please the Spirit or the flesh?
- Make a chart of the ways you spend your time on an average day. What does the way you spend your time say about what you're sowing? Looking at your chart, what do you want to change about the way you spend your time?

Boast in the Cross

Galatians 6:11–18

► Start It Out

Before this session remind your group to bring the letters they wrote in the first session. Allow everyone to spend some time rereading the words that they wrote to themselves. Afterward, invite group members to share any revelations or insights from their letters.

► Talk It Out

- Do you think Paul actually wrote part of his letter in large words? Which part? Why do you think he did this?
- How might our interpretation of the text be different by not seeing the emphasis provided by Paul's large handwriting?
- Why is it important that Paul wrote the letter with his own hand? Who else would have written it?
- Why are the people in verse 12 trying to compel the Galatians to be circumcised?

- Paul mentions that the circumcision advocates in verse 12 “want to impress people by means of the flesh.” How does Paul’s warning about self-deception in verses 3 and 7 help us understand this?
- How would convincing the Galatians to be circumcised enable the agitators to “avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ” (verse 12)?
- How does verse 5:11 help us understand verse 6:12?
- Why can’t “those who are circumcised keep the law” (verse 13)?
- Why would the circumcision advocates want to boast about the circumcision of the Galatians (verse 13)?
- What’s significant about the phrase “in the flesh” in verse 13?
- How could Paul’s comparative statement about boasting in verse 14 help the Galatians understand the difference between Paul’s instruction and the instruction of the agitators?
- How does verse 2:20 help us understand 6:14?
- “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything” (verse 15) is a repetition of verse 5:6. Why do you think Paul repeats himself?
- How could verse 3:28 help us understand the “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision” statement?
- In 5:6 Paul says, “the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” In verse 15 Paul says, “what counts is the new creation.” Are these two statements different? Why or why not?
- What does Paul mean by “the Israel of God” in verse 6:16?
- What does Israel have to do with Paul’s overall argument regarding the law?
- Do you think Paul is saying that the Galatians (who are Gentiles) are part of “the Israel of God”? Why or why not?
- What do you think “the marks of Jesus” are on Paul’s body (verse 17)?
- How does verse 1:6 make verse 6:18 more significant? How do these concluding words reaffirm the Galatians and the gospel?

► Live It Out

- Consider verse 13. Paul states the only reason the agitators compelled the Galatians to get circumcised was so they could “boast about [their] circumcision in the flesh.” Are there any modern day equivalents to this? Journal about whether or not modern Christians compel others to follow certain rules for the sake of boasting (perhaps to seem more righteous or to avoid persecution from others). Contemplate ways to avoid this kind of thinking.

- Get together with a trusted friend or your small-group leader to discuss the difference between persecution in Paul's day and persecution today. Is persecution something you experience often? Why or why not? Discuss the ways freedom in Christ could help you respond to persecution.
- Write down at least three takeaways from Galatians that you want to remember (verses, ideas, encouragements, reminders, etc.). Keep this list in a visible place: on your bathroom mirror, in your Bible, near your desk, etc. Refer back to it during the coming weeks as you strive to apply what you've learned during this study.

—Justin Marr is a small-group leader and blogs at TheSocialHunger.com.