DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide



Paul's Letter to the Galatians

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Galatians 1:1 through 6:18

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

BACKGROUND

The exact geographic location of the Galatian churches remains uncertain. In Paul the Apostle's time, the Romans gave this name to an area in north central Asia Minor that came into their possession around 25 B.C., which they made into a province. In broader traditional usage, Galatia referred to a small southeastern portion of that province encompassing such cities as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Most likely the letter was addressed to the churches in these locations which Paul had founded on his first missionary journey, as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts.

Bible scholars estimate that Paul wrote this letter around A.D. 53-55. Like many of the New Testament letters authored by Paul, this epistle was written as a corrective message to churches going through challenging times after being founded under his authority, teaching, and tender care. It addressed the first major doctrinal controversy that plagued the Early Church in its formative years—a contention regarding whether Gentile believers had to adhere to requirements of the Mosaic Law, specifically the rite of circumcision. Apparently a group of teachers from Jerusalem had come and undermined Paul's teaching. Their faulty teaching that the Gospel required adherence to the old Law brought great bondage rather than the freedom offered by the Gospel of justification through faith in Christ. Of the epistle's six chapters, the first four and a half primarily concern this issue, and the remaining chapter and a half focus on how the Gospel should be lived out in daily life.

While the main theme of the letter is a defense of the doctrine of justification by faith and warnings against reverting to the requirements of Jewish legalism, Paul first established his authority as an Apostle. Other highlights include a charge to stand firm in Christian liberty, a comparison of the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit, and a warning that what is spiritually planted, either to the flesh or the Spirit, will grow into a crop with eternal consequences.

OPENER

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. After his opening salutation, Paul asserted that the Galatian believers had removed themselves from what they had been taught to "another gospel." The Greek word translated "removed" in Galatians 1:6 implies changing sides or turning away. The verb tense used shows that this was taking place as Paul wrote, so this was an attempt at halting these believers' movement away from the true Gospel. In verses 6-9, how did he make clear the seriousness of what they were doing?

Paul expressed amazement that the Galatians were deserting what they had been taught (verse 6). He asserted that "another gospel" was not a gospel at all, but a source of trouble and a perversion or twisting of the truth (verse 7). Finally, he invoked a curse from God upon anyone who preached something other than what the Galatians had received from him in the beginning (verses 8-9). Point out to your group that the word "accursed" is translated from the Greek word anathema*, indicating something God has commanded to be destroyed. This strong language revealed Paul's concern that the Galatians were headed toward apostasy.*

Amplify your discussion by explaining that the Galatian churches apparently had been influenced by teachers who claimed that Gentile believers needed to fulfill the ceremonial requirements of the Law in order to be considered true believers and a part of the covenant people of God. Later in this epistle, Paul categorized those who embraced such false teaching as "foolish" and "bewitched" (Galatians 3:1). These sharp words revealed his indignation over the Galatians' defection, as he likely was recalling the openness and enthusiasm with which they had initially received his message of justification through faith.

2. Paul stated in Galatians 2:19 that he had died to the Law, meaning that he no longer tried to justify himself by keeping the Law, and thus was free from its dominion. The following verse, Galatians 2:20, introduces one of the Apostle's most significant theological concepts. How would you explain what it means to be "crucified with Christ" and yet continue to live?

Class discussion should bring out that when a believer yields himself to Christ and allows his sin nature to be put to death, he is "crucified with Christ"—he enters into Christ's death. Dying to self, the believer becomes relationally one with Christ and dead to sin.

Point out to your group that the verb tense of the original Greek word translated "crucified" is very instructive—it denotes not only a decisive crisis experience, but also a continued state of being. While we believe and teach an instantaneous experience of sanctification, the connection with Christ must be maintained and the believer must continue to grow

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spiritually. Romans 6:2-6 is a good supporting Scripture to use in this discussion.

3. In the first two chapters of this epistle, Paul defended the authority of his message. In chapter 3, he addressed the spiritual error that was overtaking the Galatians: the false belief that obedience to the Mosaic Law was necessary for justification. Based on Galatians 3:19-25, how would you summarize the purpose for which the Law was given? What role did Paul point to in verse 24 to illustrate this purpose?

Your group should conclude that the Law was "added because of transgressions"—its purpose was to reveal sin and show man the impossibility of pleasing God through obedience to its requirements alone. In response to the second question, Paul stated in verse 24 that the Law was a "schoolmaster" (tutor or custodian) to bring the Jewish people to Christ, who fulfilled the Law. The Apostle noted that once individuals came to Christ in faith, they no longer had to live under the requirements of the Law, just as the child who reached adulthood no longer had to follow the directives of the tutor.

You may wish to point out to your group that the word translated "schoolmaster" is the Greek word paidagogos*, which literally means "child leader." In Paul's day, this was a servant entrusted with the supervision of a child of the family. It was the servant's duty to accompany his charge everywhere, make sure the child was kept safe, prevent the child's association with unsuitable companions, and teach manners and moral lessons. When a child came of age, he was no longer under the control of the paidagogos.*

4. In chapter 4, Paul continued his explanation of spiritual liberty by describing the difference between slaves and sons. He reminded the Galatians that they had been promoted from servitude to sonship, and expressed his deep concern about their choice to return to enslavement. Near the end of chapter 4, Paul used the Old Testament account of Abraham's two sons as an allegory or teaching tool. What basic contrast was Paul pointing out by his series of comparisons in verses 21-31?

Paul's allegory showed the contrast between the bondage of strict adherence to the Law (the legalistic teaching that was affecting the Galatians) and the freedom of faith (the Gospel that he had preached to them.)

Class discussion should bring out that the two mothers of Abraham's sons represented two covenants (contracts that established the rules for the relationship between God and man). The old covenant, which originated at Mt. Sinai, was characterized by slavery (illustrated by Hagar); the new covenant, coming from the "Jerusalem which is above" (verse 26), was characterized by liberty (illustrated by Sarah).

Ishmael was born "after the flesh" according to the normal means of human conception; Isaac's miraculous birth established him as the child of promise. The bondwoman and her son (representing those depending on the works of the Law) would inherit nothing; the heir of the free woman (representing those delivered from the requirements of the Law through faith in Christ) would inherit all things.

Point out that Paul's conclusion is summarized in verse 30: the Galatians were admonished to "cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." In essence, he was saying that the practice of the Law and the justification that comes through faith in Jesus Christ cannot coexist together as guiding principles for the Christian life. Under the new dispensation, adherence to the Law must be set aside. Paul ended his illustration in verse 31 by stating that "we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

5. Toward the end of his letter, Paul took the concept of justification by faith and applied it to everyday life. He stated that the real test of a relationship with Christ was not the old covenant sign of circumcision, nor did uncircumcision have any merit. What had true value in God's sight was faith that was worked out in the life by love (see Galatians 5:6). List some ways that faith in Christ can be evidenced (or worked out) through love for others.

Your group will come up with a variety of suggestions, which could be compiled into a list. Some thoughts that could be brought out are mentioned in other writings of Paul: we are called to serve one another, edify one another, submit to one another, be kindly affectioned to one another, forgive one another, etc. Conclude by reinforcing the point that while these "works" will be the natural result when the heart is truly filled with love for God, Paul was not suggesting that doing this would earn salvation.

6. In verses 19-21 of chapter 5, Paul presented a list of behaviors that he identified as "works of the flesh." Which activities on this list pertain to relationships between individuals?

The first four works of the flesh—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness—refer to sensual practices and thus pertain to relationships between individuals. The next two—idolatry and witchcraft—relate to religious practices. The next eight works of the flesh also clearly deal with relationships between individuals—hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, and envyings.

Some definitions may help your group to better understand this passage. Point out to your students that the word "hatred" could be translated enmity and denotes hostility. "Variance" means strife or contention. "Emulations" refers to jealousy and a desire to

surpass others. "Seditions" could be translated divisions or dissensions, and "heresies" refers to factions or dissenting groups. "Envyings" indicates ill will or bitterness that would deprive others of good things.

The phrase "and such like" in verse 21 indicates that Paul could have listed many other works of the flesh, but these were enough to make the point that these evils would not be in the lives of those who walked in the Spirit.

7. In contrast to the works of the flesh, verses 22-23 of chapter 5 list the fruit of the Spirit—the evidence that is apparent in the lives of those who are controlled by the Spirit. The first three (love, joy, and peace) are inner characteristics reflecting a person's relationship with God. The next three (longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness) are qualities related to a believer's dealings with others. The final three (faith, meekness, and temperance) are inner attitudes. What are some specific ways these godly attributes can be exemplified in our lives?

This is a broad question, and your students' responses will likely be numerous and varied. Some examples might be that we can demonstrate peace even in the midst of stressful circumstances. We exemplify longsuffering when we are patient in times of suffering or persecution. We can respond in meekness when falsely accused.

The point should be made that while godly actions (or works) will be the natural result of yielding our lives to God, they are something we do. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit cannot be created by our own efforts; it is produced by a power we do not possess.

8. Paul's dual list of works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-24 is bracketed before and after by the clear commands, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (verse 16) and "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (verse 25). How would you describe what it means to walk in the Spirit?

Class discussion of this question should bring out that to "walk in the Spirit" means that as believers we must have hearts that are sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and exercise our wills to live and act in obedience to Him. Such a walk will lead believers in a way of life that culminates in eternity with Christ.

Follow up by directing your group's attention to the second part of verse 16, which says that one who walks in the Spirit "shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Explain to your class that the word lust *in this passage means "strong desire" and does not necessarily have a moral inference; it merely refers to any human desire. A person who is being led by the Spirit may be tempted, but he does not long for sinful things because the Spirit and carnal desires are absolutely opposed to one another.*

9. The Apostle closed this epistle by writing the final verses himself, rather than dictating them to a scribe (Galatians 6:11). He noted that those who were insisting upon circumcision were doing so in order to avoid the stigma associated with the Cross of Christ, and "that they may glory in your flesh" (or take pride in their own supposed religious superiority). In contrast, what did the Apostle say that he was determined to glory in, and why do you think he stated this so forcefully at the close of his epistle? Galatians 6:14-15

Paul stated that he was determined to "glory" (to exalt or boast) in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

As your group discusses why the Apostle stated this so forcefully, they should conclude that to Paul, the Cross represented not only the sacrificial death of Christ, but also his own personal deliverance. He could say, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world," because the world—which to Paul was his Jewish heritage and pharisaical righteousness rooted in his practice of the Law—had no more power over him. It was dead as far as he was concerned. For that reason, the Cross was a joyous and exultant reminder to the Apostle of his freedom from bondage. Now he only cared about glorying in the Cross of his Lord Jesus Christ.

The Cross and the Blood of Jesus are the only hope of salvation for us as well. There is a stigma to following Jesus in our day, but we need to remember how vitally important it is to cling to the truth of the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

Paul challenged Galatian believers to stand firmly within the "good news" of spiritual freedom purchased by Jesus Christ on Calvary, and not to revert to the old requirements of the Law. He insisted that justification was not obtained by any human effort, but by a simple response of faith to God's unspeakable gift of grace in Christ. That justification is still available today.