

Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



October 2015 Galatians Discussion Guide

October Dates to Note:

MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO Galatians:

- Monday, October 5, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-86, Minneapolis Campus

BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Read Galatians.

- a. We suggest you read through "Galatians: Theme and Purpose" on page 4 and "Who or What Is . . . ?" on page 5 before you begin your reading.
- b. Use the "To Guide Your Reading" section on pages 6 - 8 to help you think through what you read, paying particular attention to the questions in boldface.

2. If possible, attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction to Galatians.

3. Read and recite this month's memory verse often! It is:

For Freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. – Galatians 5:1

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a "message" just for you!

AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Welcome

Welcome to the October meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

Opening Prayer

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer or pray the following together:

Dear Lord, Thank you for the opportunity to explore the riches of your Word together. Open our hearts and minds as we share our thoughts and questions so that we may grow in understanding of your Word, be deepened in our faith, know more clearly your will, and find joy in our Christian community. In your name we pray, Amen.

This Month’s Memory Verse

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

For Freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. – Galatians 5:1

Getting Under Way

Galatians has been called the “Magna Carta of Christian Liberty” because of its importance to the biblical foundations of the Reformation, which we celebrate this month. One thing Paul argues in Galatians is that the gospel sets us free. What is one way you have felt freed by the gospel?

Setting the Scene

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor’s introduction to Galatians to share what they learned.

Discuss Together

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 – 8. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that particularly struck members of your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

Following your discussion, go to “For Next Month” on the next page for reminders about your next meeting and closing prayer.

FOR NEXT MONTH

Our next meeting will be in November:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

November's Reading Assignment: Job

November's Memory Verse:

I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.
– Job 19:25

Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:

Monday, November 2, 7:00 p.m., Gronseth Fellowship Hall, West Campus

CLOSING PRAYER

Gather requests for prayers, encouraging both things for which God's help and guidance is needed and things for which people are grateful. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

Dear Lord, Thank you for the gracious gift of salvation we know only because of your great love for us. Thank you for the freedom of the gospel and the Spirit's ongoing work in our lives. Help us to live in ways that bear fruit and give honor to your blessed name. We ask, too, for your presence and strength in the lives of those gathered here and those whom they love. In your name we pray, *Amen.*

FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Ponder

The early Christians went in two directions. Some, like the people in Galatia, became obsessed with legalism. Others took their Christian freedom too far: They refused to follow anyone's rules. Which is the greater danger in your circles of relationships?

Galatians Theme & Purpose

Few of Paul's letters have had as much impact on the Christian world as Galatians, which as a cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation has been called the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty." Paul's Letter to the Romans generally is considered his greatest work. Galatians is where we turn to find a uniquely concise summary of the apostle's theological understanding of how we come to faith.

The letter was occasioned by reports of conflicts among Galatian Christians over whether or not it was necessary to be circumcised to be a true and saved member of the faith. Hearing this, Paul is concerned almost to the point of outrage at this perversion of the gospel. To propose such requirements of law quite simply forsook the good news of the freedom of the gospel—that we are saved only by God's call through faith in Christ Jesus and by the power of the Spirit's leading.

Unlike most of his letters, Paul begins this one by defending himself as an authentic apostle. He does this by recalling how Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, turning him from someone who persecuted Christ's followers into a bold preacher of the truth of the gospel to the Gentiles. This encounter was important because the term *apostle* implied that one's call to teach the gospel came directly from God. Lest anyone still doubt his ability to call himself an apostle, Paul adds that even the leaders of the church in Jerusalem accepted and endorsed his authority. He also shares how at Antioch, he had remained firm to true teaching even while others, including Peter and Barnabas, had wavered.

Galatians is one of the most intense of Paul's letters, and it is important to appreciate its tightly woven argument regarding the true nature of the gospel—that we are justified only through faith in Christ Jesus. Regarding the specific issue at hand, Paul argues that circumcision is of no importance (5:4). What matters is faith in Christ Jesus (2:16, 20; 3:8-26) through which we become a new creation (6:14-15). Paul is not arguing that the law is bad—only that works of law cannot save us.

To require laws such as the need to be circumcised is a return to slavery, Paul notes, whereas the gospel means freedom. Saved from sin and assured of salvation, we now are free to live in service to God and others, guided by the Spirit to bear fruit for the benefit of all.

Paul achieves his goal in writing whenever readers truly hear the good news that God has called each one of them by the grace of Christ Jesus. All are justified and made right with God by faith in Christ and not by doing the works of the law. That we are children of God according to God's promise in Christ is not just wishful thinking; it is the promise that in the cross of Christ we truly are a new creation—freed, transformed, and empowered by the Spirit's leading for loving service of the neighbor.

Content on this page draws in part from www.enterthebible.org's summary and overview of Galatians, written by Dr. James Boyce, Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Greek at Luther Seminary, and is used with permission.

Who or What Is . . . ?

Apostle. Based on a Greek word meaning, “One who is sent forth.” At one time, the term applied only to those who were appointed by Jesus himself, and was limited to the twelve disciples. There are, however, four lists of the apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; and Acts 1:13), no two of which perfectly coincide. Traditionally, the twelve are identified as Simon Peter; Andrew, his brother; James, the son of Zebedee, called also “the greater;” John, his brother; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew, or Levi; Simon the Canaanite; Lebbeus, surnamed Thaddeus, also called Judas or Jude; James, “the less,” the son of Alphaeus; and Judas Iscariot. The last betrayed Jesus, then hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-8), and Matthias was chosen in his place (Acts 1:15-26).

The term *apostle* is simply not that clear-cut. Paul argues that he qualifies for the title because Jesus appeared as a light from heaven on the road to Damascus and appointed him as such. In the early church, the term extended to others who were considered to have a divine mission or calling, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14); Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6); Apollos and Cephas (1 Corinthians 4:9), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 6:7). In Hebrews 3:1, the term is used for Jesus himself.

Atonement. Christ’s saving act through which we obtain the freedom of forgiveness, salvation, and life eternal.

Christ Jesus. The word *Christ* means “Messiah” or “anointed/chosen one,” and is used as a title. Perhaps because the name Jesus was not uncommon in biblical times, Paul often uses the title *Christ* with his name, differentiating him from others and identifying who he truly is.

Galatia. Galatia was located in the central region of modern-day Turkey. Paul founded the church in Galatia when sickness detained him there during his second missionary journey in about A.D. 51.

Justification by faith. This is a major theme, emphasized strongly at Galatians 2:15-21 and stands at the heart of our Lutheran Confessions*. Justification by faith means that one is justified (set in a right relationship) with God purely on the basis of one's trust (or faith) in the promises of God, and not by anything we ourselves can do or “works of the law.”

Paul. A Pharisee, and thus a strict adherent of Mosaic law, Paul at one time persecuted Christians, but converted to Christianity after Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Before Acts 13, he is referred to as Saul, but after Acts 13:9, he is always called Paul. Ministering primarily to the Gentiles, Paul became one of the early church’s greatest missionaries, establishing churches in an area that stretched from Judea to Asia Minor to what is now southern/Mediterranean Europe, including Sicily, and Rome. His writings reveal a man deeply shaped by the Jewish Scriptures as well as Greek culture. A former resident of Rome, he understood the urban world of the Roman Empire and enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizenship.

Redemption. To have been “bought back,” especially from slavery, just as Christ through his death and resurrection has redeemed us from sin and death.

*...*We receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith...* . The Augsburg Confession, Article IV.

To Guide Your Reading

Use the following questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection.

Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest you consider at your small group meeting. Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest and concern to the group. Let the Spirit lead!

WEEK 1 – GALATIANS 1:1 – 2:21

1. Paul opens this book by defending himself. What seem to be the issues?
2. In 2:11-21, Paul tells about confronting Peter. What had changed in Peter that caused Paul such distress? Would you handle the situation in the same way as Paul? Why or why not?
3. **Paul declares that he already has been crucified (Gal 2:19). As believers, we also have been crucified. How would you explain what that means to a non-believer?**
4. Paul's personal testimony climaxes in Galatians 2:15-21, in his summary of the heart of the gospel: that we are justified, or made right, by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Read through this section slowly. What words or phrases strike you as particularly meaningful and/or memorable and why?
5. The apostles were not simply zealous to preserve the gospel. They also felt called to proclaim the gospel. What step(s) can you take this week to bring the good news to someone?

WEEK 2 – GALATIANS 3:1 – 4:31

1. Paul's letter to the Galatians is key to the Lutheran understanding of the relationship between law and gospel. How does a clear understanding of the purpose of God's law help us understand our need for Christ? (3:19-25)
2. Paul is very clear that we are not saved by works of the law but by grace through faith. This causes many people to question just how important "good works" are in faith. "If Christ already has saved me," they ask, "why not do as I please?" Some would answer by saying that good works are "faith active in love." Why is this *not* a sufficient answer?
3. **In 3:28, Paul lists several broad ways in which we group or define people. What are some others you would list? How might such groupings function as barriers between people? If we are, as Paul notes, all one in Christ Jesus (3:28), then how should we deal with those who are different from ourselves?**
4. Throughout chapters 3 and 4, Paul uses inheritance analogies to describe how we become "heirs" to the gift of faith and salvation. In what ways is thinking of yourself as an heir to Christ's last will and testament a helpful analogy—or why isn't it?

WEEK 3 – GALATIANS 5:1 – 6:18

1. To illustrate the nature of Christian freedom (5:2-15) and how it might be misused, Paul compares the Galatians to runners in a race and to a batch of dough. What other comparisons can you think of that would illustrate this? What is the difference between the two concepts of freedom described in verses 5:13-14?
2. **After reading 5:16-26, how would you explain what it means to “live in the Spirit” (v 16) and “be guided by the Spirit” (v 25)? In what ways is fruit (vv 22-23) a helpful description of the Spirit’s work in us? Can you think of another word or phrase beside “fruit” for identifying signs of the Spirit?**
3. In 6:1-10, Paul encourages his readers to bear one another’s burdens. Are there burdens you or others you know are carrying and for which you would like the group to pray? What are some things you or others could do to help lift the burden?
4. What do you understand Paul to mean when he says “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”?
5. **Paul teaches that God has set you free! Free from what and free for what?**

To end your discussion time, go to “For Next Month” on page 3.