

STUDY GUIDE

CHURCH NAME
BOOK OF GALATIANS
FREE BY GRACE
GALATIANS 1:1-24
05/21/2017



MAIN POINT

God's grace is not based on how we try to please Him but solely on His character and His work in Christ.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How do you typically react to change? Do you thrive on change, or does it make you nervous? What does this say about your personality?

What is the biggest life change you've experienced recently? What do you remember most about that experience? How did you handle the change?

Change is inevitable. In our jobs, families, relationships, church, and country, change swirls all around us. For many people change is far from welcome. The way that we respond to changes shapes our lives going forward. Today we will see that Paul experienced dramatic life changes as his story went from being one of the most feared enemies of Christianity, to one of its most prolific voices. We'll also be introduced to how that change came to be: by grace, not works.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:1-5.

Why was Paul writing to "churches" and not a "church"? What does that tell you about his message?

What does Paul's introduction say about his identity? With what authority was he writing?

Paul identified himself as an apostle, an authoritative position and calling of God. He identified himself as an apostle because of his understanding that it was only through God's power and authority that he could accomplish the purposes of God. No other aspect of Paul's life was as significant as who he was because of Jesus.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:6-9.

How do you think the Galatian believers felt when they read this section? How would you respond if someone was "astonished" that you had drifted in your faith?

Why did Paul hate false gospels? What makes them so dangerous?

Paul was shocked that these Christians were so quickly and easily turning away from the One who called them in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—a gospel of an all-together different sort. Judging by the false teachings that Paul refuted, we can surmise that they were Judaizers—strict Jews who professed to be Christians. These false teachers had infiltrated the Galatian churches soon after Paul and Barnabas had left the area. Paul brought two charges against them. First, they were throwing the Galatians into confusion. In other words, they were agitators stirring up trouble. The cause of this agitation involved Paul’s second charge. The false teachers’ intent (they were trying) was to pervert the gospel of Christ.

HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:10.

Is personal ambition bad? Why or why not? How should your identity in Christ affect your ambition? Do you have any ambitions in your life that do not fit with your identity in Christ?

How would you describe Paul’s ambition? How is his ambition different from the ambition of the world?

What does it mean for you to be a slave of Christ? Why is slavery to Christ an identity that sets you free?

Paul’s ambition was not for personal gain but for God’s gain. He had an audience of one, God. Too often ambition seeks to impress a large audience. Paul shifted ambition to pleasing God alone. Paul’s identity as a slave, a servant of God, clarified his ambition. It wasn’t an ambition for himself but for God.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:11-17.

Why did Paul make a distinction between the gospel he preached and man’s gospel? Describe these two gospels and their differences.

What happened to Paul when he received Christ? How did his life change?

Paul made the distinction between the two gospels because there were teachers in Galatia accusing him of trying to please men. Paul was making it clear he only preached the gospel that he received directly from Jesus Christ. Paul transformed from a persecutor of the church to a missionary to the Gentiles. We see Jesus as the source of Paul’s transformation in Acts 9.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What in your past makes it hard for you to feel worthy of serving God? How does the gospel impact those feelings?

How has your past prepared you to minister to people today?

How can you use your story to serve in the church? How can your past successes and failures help you glorify and serve God?

Who in our community can you connect with because of your story? What are some ways you can be intentional with people this week?

PRAY

Pray that our identity in Christ would drive us to live for Him. Pray that God would give us a holy ambition for His name and His cause. Pray that the church would continually serve and focus on God and stay far from false gospels.

COMMENTARY

GALATIANS 1:1-24

1:1 Paul referred to himself as an apostle to assert that his authority for speaking to the problems in the Galatian churches came from God, not men.

1:2 Paul referred to all the brothers who are with me to show that he was hardly alone in the views he expressed in this letter. The phrase the churches of Galatia indicates this letter was to be read in multiple congregations, as was Revelation (Rev 1:4,11).

1:3 Grace begins and ends every one of Paul's NT letters. Peace (Gk eirene) translates the traditional Hebrew greeting shalom.

1:4 Along with the resurrection, Christ's redemptive death is the heart of the gospel message (1Co 15:1-4). Paul emphasized both the death and resurrection of Christ at the beginning of Galatians (Gal 1:1) to begin to counteract the message they had recently heard which claimed salvation came through "the works of the law" (2:16). Rescue us from this present evil age looks ahead to being freed from "slavery" to "the elemental forces of the world" through Christ (4:3-4), and previews the "new creation" wording in 6:15.

1:5 A key issue between the competing views of the gospel (salvation by grace vs. salvation by works) has to do with who gets the glory. Works-salvation provides a basis for a person to "boast" (6:13; Eph 2:9), while appreciation for the undeserved grace of God prompts the believer to give God alone the glory forever.

1:6-7 Verse 6 is abrupt. Paul was amazed at the Galatians' defection from the gospel of grace. To reject the gospel message is the same as rejecting God. After Paul left Galatia, the Galatians thought they had heard and responded to a different gospel that was better, but it was actually no true gospel.

1:8-9 The purity of the gospel is so important that even the apostles or an angel should be cursed eternally (Gk anathema) if they tampered with it.

1:10 The words win... people and please people previews Peter temporarily "deviating from the truth of the gospel" (2:14) to please a delegation from Jerusalem (2:12).

1:11-12 Paul did not say when his direct revelation from Jesus Christ came, but "reveal His Son in me" in verse 16 may imply that it was related to his conversion on the Damascus road (Ac 9:1-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-18).

1:13-14 Paul communicated three things to his readers: (1) he had advanced much farther in Judaism than those who had distorted the gospel, (2) he was far more zealous for the Jewish traditions than these false teachers, and (3) ironically, Paul's zeal and advancement in Judaism led him to persecute the church before his conversion.

1:15 The phrase God, who... set me apart and called me sounds like Isa 49:1, which refers to the messianic Servant, and Jer 1:5, which refers to the prophet Jeremiah. Paul knew that his callings to salvation and apostleship were both undeserved (Rm 1:5).

1:16-17 On reveal His Son in me, see note at verses 11-12. On Paul's calling to preach Christ among the Gentiles, see Ac 9:15; 26:17-18; Rm 1:5; 16:26. After his conversion (Ac 9:3-9), Paul did not feel any compulsion to travel immediately from Damascus to Jerusalem to consult with the authorities on the gospel. He went to Arabia (see Ac 9:23-25; 2Co 11:32-33), then back to Damascus.

1:18 Because of how time was computed in Paul's time, it cannot be known whether the three years in this verse speaks of three full calendar years or one full year plus portions of two additional years. It is also not known whether the three years is figured after: (1) Paul's conversion (vv. 15-16), (2) his departure for Arabia (v. 17), or (3) his return from Arabia to Damascus (v. 17). His trip to Jerusalem was to get to know the apostle Peter (the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic Cephas, meaning "stone"; Mt 16:18). If there were differences between Paul and Peter over the gospel message, they would have come out during this visit.

1:19 James, the brother of Jesus (Mt 13:55; Jms 1:1), is nowhere else listed as one of the 12 apostles (i.e., the 11, without Judas Iscariot, who was replaced by Matthias; Ac 1:23-26). But since he was in the upper room before Pentecost (Ac 1:13-14)

and was the senior pastoral figure in the church at Jerusalem (see Ac 15:13; 21:18), James was considered to be virtually an “apostle.”

1:20 If anyone in Galatia doubted that Paul had previously had a harmonious discussion about his gospel message with Peter, and possibly with James, he solemnly affirmed in this verse that it was true.

1:22 That Paul was personally unknown to the Judean churches agrees with the silence about him in Acts from when he went to Tarsus (Ac 9:30) until Barnabas went there to bring him to be involved in the church in Syrian Antioch (Ac 11:25-26).

1:23-24 Since the Judean churches glorified God because Paul was preaching the faith he once tried to destroy, it is clear that they did not disagree with the gospel as he preached it.