

Study: Galatians 4: 8-20

Leaders Note:

1:1-2:21 Paul has argued for his authority as an apostle & the truth of his gospel

2:15-21 Transition discussing the vital question of who belongs to the family of Abraham. Argues that right standing with God comes by faith rather than works of law.

3:1-5 The Spirit, which is the mark of being a Christian, has been given to them by faith rather than by their observance of the works of law

3:6-9 Believers are children of Abraham and enjoy the blessing of Abraham, for they share the faith of Abraham.

3:10-14 Those who attempt to be righteous by works of law will be cursed, but blessing of Abraham and promise of the Spirit belong to those who put their trust in Christ who removed the curse of the law by taking it upon himself

3:15-25 Law of Moses is temporary, and it is subsidiary to covenant with Abraham

3:26-4:7 Now God's sons & heirs by union with Christ

4:8-20 Conclusion of long argument that began in 3:15, but here Paul applies what he has taught to the Galatians.

Pray for your time together in God's Word.

Read to the Group: Paul seems to become much more pastoral in this section as he addresses the Galatians on a more personal level. He highlights his observations of where they are being led astray, reminds them of their past belief and interactions with him, and uses his relationship with them to point them back to Christ.

Read Galatians 4:8-10

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

¹² Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. ¹³ You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ¹⁴ and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶ Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷ They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. ¹⁸ It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, ¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! ²⁰ I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Questions for Discussion:

Ask the Group: What do you think is our cultural baseline philosophy for being right with God or being “spiritually okay”?

Possible Answer: The baseline philosophy could be the basic belief that good people or actions should receive good things or results. That is, justice can be consistently defined across cultures as rewarding good behavior with valuable or positive consequences and punishing the bad behavior with undesirable and negative consequences. Therefore, to be ‘spiritually ok’ one must solely do good works for God and therefore receive good things from him in return.

Slavery

Key themes – “slavery.” Before believers knew God – i.e. before they were converted – were enslaved to false gods. 3:22 Believers imprisoned under sin, 3:22 held captive under the law, 4:3 enslaved to elements of the world. 4:5 now freed from bondage, 4:7 no longer slaves. Rom 6:6, 17, 19-20; Eph 2:1-3.

If anything but Jesus is a requirement for being happy or worthy, that thing will become our slave master.

Ask the Group: What does it mean to have God “know you” in the Bible? V.9

Possible Answers: Knowing God – not abstract, but personal (4:6). Still, the emphasis in the verse is noted as it cannot rest on the Galatians knowing God, hence the qualification. God’s knowledge refers to his choosing of someone. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word “yada” is used (Gen 18:19 knew Abraham, Amos 3:2 knew Israel, Jer 1:5 knew Jeremiah before he was born). In the New Testament, we see this concept carried out in various passages also. We love him because he first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). Conversion described in terms of knowing God (cf. Eph 6:24). Being known by God is therefore being one of God’s chosen.

Ask the Group: What implication does this have for the Galatians? What does it mean for you?

Possible Answers: God does the saving in act in all of his children. He gives us even our faith to believe in him as he “knows us”/chose us. We then should cooperate with his Holy Spirit and believe and reciprocate his love.

Ask the Group: “Turn back to” in many areas of the Bible refers to conversion. What kind of religion are the Galatians in danger of converting to now? What are the implications of this?

Possible Answers: Vs. 9 explains that the Galatians, by turning back to “weak and worthless elementary principles,” are in fact, becoming slaves once more. The tangible turning back to these “elementary principles” is explained in vs. 10 as observing “days and months and seasons and years.” Therefore it seems that the Galatians are becoming slaves again to the law, which brings a curse. (3:10) When we turn back to following rules for credit and striving to earn merit with God instead of obeying our Lord out of joy, we must remember that it is to a curse that we are clinging.

Ask the Group: Do you consider yourself closer to the Lord by observing certain holidays (Christmas, Easter)?

- What do you think is a right view of these days?

Possible Answers: "Holy days of obligation" in Catholic church. Rom 14:5 & Col 2:16 – Same concern for observing certain days & feasts.

Ask the Group: Is there any significance to the fact that the Galatians' temptation is toward weak and worthless things? Why would anyone be tempted by something that is weak and worthless?

- How do you see your own temptations?

Possible Answers: The spiritual reality of sin is difficult to see. We often feel that we are in control when we sin. Paul says here, however, that the Galatians will become "slaves" to that which they choose to turn to. Although it often seems that sin can provide success, power, comfort, etc. Paul labels sin as "weak and worthless" compared to what God can provide. It is only in the context of a Holy God who gives us the power for righteousness that we have an appropriate view of sin and temptation. Romans 7:15-20.

Ask the Group: What is it that the Galatians are doing that makes Paul say that his teaching may have been all in vain? V.11

Possible Answers: The inconstancy of the Galatians makes Paul uncertain about their spiritual state & speculates all his work may have been futile/in vain (cf. 3:4). If they strayed, they were accursed (1:8-9), cut off from Christ (5:2-4).

Ask the Group: Reread vs. 12. Are there people you would like to be like? What about them would you like to emulate?

- Why is Paul (a Jew) telling Galatians (Gentiles) to live as he does?
- Are we able to say, "be like me"?

Possible Answers: Paul is the example of someone who lived the letter of the law to extreme (ended in him killing Christians). v.12 has the first imperative in Galatians calling them to action. Ironical that Paul (Jewish) tells Gentiles to live as he does so that they are not enslaved to the law. To be like Paul means the Galatians will face suffering, resistance from false teachers (3:4; 4:29). As Christians often hesitant to say, "Be like me." But if Christ has changed us, we should call upon people to imitate us (Eph 4:32-5:2). Am I living in a way that I'm a godly influence on others?

Ask the Group: How is Paul's Christ-like character seen in this section?

- What are the characteristics of healthy gospel relationships seen in the passage?

Vv.12-14, 19-20

Possible Answers: He became culturally flexible – I became like you. V.12. There was encouragement to become transparent – become like me. At times there may need to be suffering so that others may grow v. 19. Also see that there was first a relationship, then there was stronger words of correction.

There is a modeling of what God has done for each believer. See 1 Jn 4:19 We love because he first loved us - Paul is loving them before he expects any relationship in return.

Ask the Group: What is the contrast between how Paul approached the Galatians verses how the false teachers approached the Galatians?

- What is the ultimate motivation or desired outcome for Paul and for the false teachers?

Possible Answers: "weakness of the flesh." Apparently suffered from sickness, rather than being persecuted. Maybe from being flogged, beaten, stoned. Paul came in need of care and the false teachers, likely, fully self-sufficient. Paul came preaching Jesus + nothing = everything. False teachers came preaching Jesus + what we tell you to do = a way to being superior to others.

Ask the Group: What does it mean for Christ to be formed in you? V.19

Possible Answers: For Christ, his full truth and every characteristic, to be fully formed in the Galatians means that they will understand and fully accept Jesus and all that he did and does for them. It means that they will abandon all else and allow Christ to be their God, choosing to idolize him, and strip away everything else that they may have leaned on for happiness, comfort, or purpose.

Ask the Group: What is our community application of this passage?

Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.