

SLOW FOOD BIBLE STUDIES: GALATIANS (36 studies)

Galatians is generally agreed to be one of the earliest letters of Paul, if not the first. Its polemical tone and extended Old Testament allusions should not deter us from tackling it; the difficulty of fitting its time-scheme into that of *Acts* suggests that we do not need to solve all the problems before we start. What is beyond doubt is that Paul is tackling a fundamental heresy that tends to afflict the church in every age, which is that you need to add something to the grace of God in order to find freedom in Christ. His passion for the gospel of Christ, his deep gratitude for his own conversion, and in particular his concentration on justification by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, challenge us as much as they challenged teachers like Martin Luther.

Commentaries and other works: John Stott *Only One Way: the message of Galatians* (IVP 1968); Moisés Silva *Galatians* (IVP New Bible Commentary 4th ed 1994); Tom Wright *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (SPCK 2002); David Wenham *Paul and Jesus: the true story* (SPCK 2002); Timothy Keller *Galatians for you* (The Good Book Company 2013.) An extended paraphrase (*Slow Paul: thinking through Galatians*) may be found on the TISCA website (www.tisca.org.uk).

1:1-2 Who are the recipients of this letter and why should they sit up and take notice?

Acts 13:33; 14:21-27; 26:15-16

1:3-5 What kind of God do we believe in? *Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22; 2 Pet 1:2-4*

1:6-10 Will I risk unpopularity if I rubbish some of the 'other gospels' that find favour with the people I may meet today? *2 Tim 1:8-14; 2:22-26; 4:3-4*

1:11-14 In view of Paul's admissions here, is religious zeal something to be avoided at all costs?

Jn 2:17; Rom 10:2; Gal 4:17-18; Phil 3:6; Rev 3:15-21

1:18-24 Why is Paul so concerned to give us this detailed account? If I am called to give my testimony, what should I emphasise? *Jer 1:5; Jn 9:25; 1 Tim 1:12-14.* *There is no agreement about how these verses fit into Luke's account in Acts 9:19b-30. Wenham Paul and Jesus 20-25 offers one way of harmonising them.*

2:1-5 If I share in the ministry of God's word, am I a good team player or do I tend to go out on a limb?

Lk 19:20-23; Acts 4:32-33; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 13:17

2:6-10 If God has no favourites, does the work he has given me matter to him as much as anybody else's?

Mt 25:14-23; Lk 22: 24-27; 2 Tim 1:6-7

2:11-13 Is my attitude to others hypocritical? *1 Cor 4:6- 7; Jas 2:1-13*

2:14-18 Have I got the gospel wrong? Do I add human performance to God's grace?

Ps 143:2; Rom 6:12-14; Gal 5:22-23

2:19-20 How have I become a new person by accepting Christ? What is now the mainspring of my life?

Isa 53:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 1:27; Heb 12:1-2

2:21 Do I really think and act as though God's grace is free? *2 Tim 1:9-10; Tit 2:11-14; 3:5-7*

3:1-5 What do I understand by 'receiving the Spirit'? Is this a one-off experience? *Acts 2:38; Gal 5:16; Eph 1:13*

3:6-9 In what sense did Abraham hear the gospel? What does that mean for me all these years later?

Gen 15:6; Rom 4:13-25

3:10-12 What is the passmark in God's 'law examination'? What if I've failed to reach it?

Lev 18:1-5; Hab 2:4; Mt 5:17-20, 48; Rom 7:7-12

3:13-14 How much does this explanation of the cross mean (a) to me (b) to the people I am going to meet today? *Mk 10:45; Jn 12:32; Col 2:14*

3:15-18 Are God's promises conditional upon my observing his requirements?

Rom 3:21-31; 4:1-5, 13-16; Heb 10:19-23

3:19-22 If I think I can qualify for 'the inheritance' (eternal life with God) by keeping his commandments, how saintly and loving has my life been over the past week? *Mt 7:12; Rom 7:9-10; Jas 1:26-27; Jas 2:8-13*

3:23-25 'Not until the law has driven us to despair of ourselves will we ever believe in Jesus' (John Stott). Do I still secretly think that my principled life has won God's approval? *Job 9:20; Lk 16:15; Lk 18:9-14; 1 Cor 4:4, 7*

3:26-29 Is my attitude to other Christian churches or groups consistent with the new status we all have in Christ? *Acts 10:28, 15:8-9; Rom 12:10, 15:5-7*

4:1-5 What has Christ's coming into this world achieved as far as I am concerned? *Lk 19:10; Heb 2:9-18*

4:6-7 Does my prayer life reflect the confidence in the Threefold God that we are promised here?

1 Thes 5:16-19; Rom 8:15-17; Eph 2:18

4:8-15 Do I undervalue the teaching and personal examples I received when I first became a Christian?

2 Tim 1:13, 2:2, 3:10; Heb 13:7

4:16-20 When someone I have been responsible for pastorally has started to go off the rails, do I just shrug my shoulders and do nothing about it? *1 Sam 12:23; Lk 22:31-32; 1 Thess 3:5*

4:21-31 Is the gospel I proclaim and live by an earthly one or a heavenly one? *Jn 1:12, 3:6, 6:63*

5:1-4 If I am trying to be a better Christian, is it by religious self-effort or the freedom and grace of Christ?

Dt 33:12; Zech 9:11-12; Phil 3:3-9

5:5-6 How can I live for Christ today? *Jn 14:16-17; Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 1:13-14*

5:7-12 As Paul sums up the message of the letter so far, he uses some blunt language about his opponents. How confrontational should we be in defending the truth of the Christian gospel?

Mt 23: 13-15; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Heb 12:14-15; Jas 3:13-17

5:13-15 Is loving other people something that can be commanded or taught? *Rom 13:8; Eph 5:2; 1 Jn 3:16-18*

5:16-18 As a Christian, am I free to do anything I like? *Rom 6:1-4; 15-18; 8:12-13*

5:19-21 'The sinful nature is that within us which wants us to be our own saviour and lord' (Keller). Discuss.

1 Sam 15:22; Lk 6:46; 1 Cor 12:3b

5:22-23 A meditation on the 'fruit of the Spirit' could take several days! Which of these qualities do I find myself desiring most? Why is the Spirit apparently so slow to produce them in me?

Eph 5:10; 1 Th 5:21-24; 2 Tim 1:7

5:25-6:1 If I think I am living a Spirit-filled life, does my attitude to other believers provide evidence of this?

Rom 12:3-10; Phil 2:20-21; 1 Th 2:6-8

6:2-6 How far are we meant to be responsible for others' spiritual health?

Job 2:11-13; Rom 15:1-7; 1 Th 5:12-15

6:7-10 What kind of harvest am I sowing? *Hos 7:7, 10:12; Rom 8:5-8; 2 Cor 9:6; Jas 1:13-15*

6:11-16 What really matters to me? Is it, for example, that people should have a good impression of me?

Lk 16:15; Phil 3:7-11; 1 Tim 1:12-17

6:17-18 and Review 'So we have Christ through his apostles to teach us, Christ through his cross to save us and Christ through his Spirit to sanctify us' (John Stott's summary of the message of Galatians). Which of these themes has made the most impact upon me as a result of working through this letter?