

Aug. 31/Sept. 1, 2002

Study Questions

Free Indeed: A Study in the Epistle of Galatians

The Danger of a Different Gospel

Galatians 1:1-10

Opening Discussion

1. Brainstorm together and try to come up with a written definition of legalism. We will come back to this definition throughout our study of Galatians, so write it down and save it where you can refer to it along the way.
2. In question #1 you defined legalism. Now define the results of legalism. What effect does it have on our Christian walk? Our peace? Our relationship with God? Our unity?
3. What has been your experience with legalism?
4. Are you legalistic? Explain your answer.

Bible Study

1. Read Galatians 1:1-10 together as a group.

The Bible was written to be read orally. Until the invention of the printing press, it was not possible to put a Bible in every person's hand. Therefore, the Bible was written with the intention of public reading.

The first century audience would not have read the letter, but would have primarily had the letter read to them. They were skilled listeners. Therefore, it is always good to read the text aloud in your group to hear how certain things are emphasized that may be missed in a silent reading.

In modern books when we want something emphasized we underline, **bold type**, *italicize*, (parenthesize) etc. In an oral culture they used repetition, word pictures, sentence structure, etc. to draw attention to certain themes. To hear and understand the text the way the first readers would have heard and understood the text is very important.

2. The first readers would have been very familiar with the traditional opening to a letter such as this. The writer identifies himself, the recipient is identified, and a word of greeting is offered. In all of Paul's letters he then opens with a word of thanksgiving for the church and a word of encouragement. That is, in every letter *except* Galatians. What does this tell us about the tone of this letter?

How concerned is Paul about what is happening to the Galatians?

3. How does Paul identify himself in 1:1?

Why is this important?

Is there anything in Paul's New Testament letters that can be dismissed as simply Paul's opinion? Why or why not?

4. Read II Timothy 3:16,17 and II Peter 1:20,21. How do these verses line up with your answer to the preceding question?

Is all of the Bible authoritative?

What does this mean to us in practical terms?

5. In verse 3, “Grace” and “Peace” may seem like the standard opening. But why would these terms be especially significant in a letter addressing legalism?

6. Verse 4 is unusually detailed for the opening remarks of a letter such as this. Why do you suppose Paul is putting this truth on the table right from the beginning?

Does this give us a hint about what Paul is concerned with in this letter? What might that be?

7. In verse 6, Paul states that the Galatians are “deserting” Him who called them. The word translated “deserting” is a military word that means to defect, to change camps. What is the basis by which Paul says they are deserting, and who or what are they deserting?

8. In verse 7, Paul accuses the false teachers of “distorting” the Gospel. The word translated “distort” is used two other times in the New Testament. In both Acts 2:20 and James 4:9 it’s translated “turned.” Read these two passages. Together with Galatians 1:7, what does the word “distorting” mean?

What does it take to “distort” the Gospel of grace?

9. How serious is this distortion according to 1:8,9?

10. According to 1:7, what is the consequence of distorting the Gospel?

Compare the consequence to Paul’s opening statement in 1:3. The true Gospel leads to what, while a distorted Gospel leads to what, according to Paul?

Application

1. Define the Gospel of Christ. What would be a distortion of the Gospel of Christ?
2. If you have believed the true Gospel of grace, your life should be characterized by grace and peace. Is it? Why or why not?
3. We live in a culture that values relativism and denies absolutes. When this “present evil age” infects our thinking, we begin to get careless about truth that God defines as absolute. How passionately have you defended the true Gospel of Christ? Remember, the distortion of the Gospel is typically not denying the facts of the Gospel, but rather adding human works to the finished work of Christ on the cross—which eradicates the concept of grace. How much wiggle room is there in your thinking in defining the Gospel of Christ? How much wiggle room did Paul allow with the Galatians?