

Free For All

Galatians



**8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

Free For All

Galatians

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&

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How to make the most of these studies

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city.

The studies will take you through Paul’s letter to the Galatians, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall halfway between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions.

We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate a lot of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the teaching material, with your own ideas, with other people in discussion, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study focuses on a slice of Galatians, and contains teaching material to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot down questions and comments as you read.

Interspersed throughout the teaching are three types of ‘interaction’, each with its own symbol:



For starters

Questions to help you think about society and your own experience, in a way that tunes you in to the issues being raised by the Bible passage.



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries, and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

3. Suggestions for individual study

- Before you begin, pray that God will open your eyes to what he is saying in Galatians and give you the strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *For starters*, *Investigate* and *Think it through* sections. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get the mental muscles working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learned.

4. Suggestions for group study

- It is *vital* that group members work through the study before the group meets (so everyone will need their own copy of this study guide).
- Spend most of the group time discussing the ‘interactive’ sections—*For starters*, *Investigate*, and *Think it through*.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end.
- We haven’t included an ‘answer guide’ to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move—we want to give you a guided tour of Galatians, not a lecture.

(If you would like some additional input, there is a series of tapes available that expound Galatians. For details see page 73.)

5. Getting started

Before you launch into the first study, it’s worth taking time to read right through Galatians. It’s not very long, and will take you less than half an hour.

Write down a sentence that sums up the main message you got from reading Galatians.

When you have completed these interactive Bible studies, do this exercise again and compare the results to see what sort of journey of discovery God has led you through.

1

Galatians 1:1-10

Damned angels & gospel twisters



For starters

1. People often think that we can never be certain about the answers to religious questions such as 'Who is God?'. Why is this, do you think?
2. What answers do people give to the question: 'What is a Christian?'
3. How would you answer that question?

What is a Christian?

Is the answer just a matter of opinion? Our world today thinks that this question—and many others like it—is just a matter of opinion.

The world today is more lost than ever on the subject of what can and can't be known. There is a great lack of confidence about what is certain, as more and more things fall into the category of 'relative'.

Today no-one is right—except the person who says 'no-one is right': he is always right!

Every point of view is tolerated today, except the view that says there is right and wrong, true and false.

But in Galatians we will discover that God says that following Jesus Christ is not just a matter of opinion. There is a right, there is a wrong—there is true, there is false—about Christianity.



Investigate

Read Galatians 1:8-9.

1. What tone does Paul adopt when discussing the preachers of a “different gospel”?

2. Why can't there be more than one gospel? Why is it such a serious issue?

3. What clues do you find here to the problems in the Galatian church?

1. The problem of confusion

Galatia is Turkey, roughly speaking. The exact geographical boundaries wobble around a bit, but what Paul called Galatia is, more or less, part of modern Turkey.

Paul had preached the gospel in Galatia, and founded churches there. He is writing to these churches because something has happened—troublers have come among them: “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ” (v. 7).

Who were these troublers? They were people who were confusing what it means to be a Christian.

As we shall see later in Galatians, they were attacking Paul and the gospel by insisting on obedience to the Jewish law, as symbolised in circumcision.

For the Jew in the Old Testament (from Genesis 17 onwards), circumcision (the surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis) was the sign of being ‘under contract’ with God, the contract that gave rise to the law. Circumcision was the symbol of accepting the Old Testament law as the system that ruled your life. This is stated in Galatians 5:3: “Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law”.

But these Galatians were Gentiles (non-Jews) and they were uncircumcised—they had never taken the law upon themselves. Can these non-Jews become Christians without becoming Jews first? That is the question the ‘troublers’ were using to confuse the Galatians.

At first glance, this question has nothing much to do with us. But in these studies we shall find the same type of mistake being made today that the ‘troublers’ made back in the first century.

2. Paul's unusual greeting

Every culture has standard forms of greetings to use in letters. For example, today we might write:

Dear Aunt Agatha,

Thank you for the Christmas present—an elephant's foot umbrella stand is just what I have always wanted.

Yours sincerely,
Frank

The first century had a standard form for letters that went like this:

- i. The writer's name
- ii. The people to whom he was writing
- iii. Greetings!

You can see this standard form throughout the New Testament. However, the Christian form was slightly different—instead of 'Greetings!', Christians would write 'Grace and peace to you!'.

Paul also had his own standard letter form. It generally went like this:

- i. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ
- ii. To the church in ...
- iii. Grace and peace to you
- iv. I always thank God for you because of ...
- v. And I am praying for you ...



Investigate

Read Galatians 1:1-10.

1. In what ways does Paul's greeting differ from his standard greeting (above)?

2. What does Paul say about what it means for him to be an apostle (v. 1)?

3. What does Paul say about the source of “grace and peace”?

4. Paul is astonished that the Galatians are deserting the gospel of Christ (v.6).
What do we learn about the gospel of Christ in this passage (vv.1-10)?

3. What is the gospel?

The giving

The key word here is grace (verses 3 and 6), and it means ‘generosity’. It is the opposite to something we have earned, something we do for ourselves.

If at the end of a week’s work your boss gives you a week’s pay, that is not generosity; it is just what you have earned—what you deserve or merit because of what you have done. But if you don’t

turn up for work and the boss still hands you a packet of money—that is grace. That is surprising (astonishing!) generosity, and is entirely unearned.

Grace and merit are opposites. You cannot get something both by grace and by merit at the same time. It is either one or the other. You either earn something or you are given it.

And grace—astonishing generosity—is what we get from Jesus. Paul wants to drive home that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (v.4).

The Galatians are turning away from God who has called them through this astonishing generosity—this self giving—of Jesus Christ (vv. 6-7).

The deserting

“I am astonished”, writes Paul in verse 6, “that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel”.

Verses 7, 8 and 9 then tell us some amazing things about the character of the gospel that makes the idea that ‘all religious truth is just a matter of opinion’ absolute nonsense.

In these verses, the point is that there is only one true gospel—the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. But, there are also ‘gospel twisters’—people who try to pervert (or twist) the gospel of grace.

And Paul makes another point: the authority of the gospel rests in the gospel message itself—not in the preacher of the gospel, however impressive that preacher might be. Don’t even trust an angelic preacher, says Paul, only trust the one true gospel of grace.

So, if an angel (or an apostle!) tries to sell you a different gospel, says Paul, don’t buy it!



Investigate

1. What reasons does Paul give for being so insistent on the gospel of grace?
2. Which words (that Paul uses) convey the importance that Paul attaches to the gospel of grace?
3. When this letter was read for the first time, what did verses 1-10 tell the Galatian Christians about themselves?

4. Drawing the line

There is only one gospel—the gospel of the grace, the self-giving, of Jesus. There is no other gospel. It is either this or nothing.

“That’s intolerant!” comes the protest.

Yes! God is intolerant about untruth.

Is it tolerant to say that the earth is both flat and round? There are some issues where ‘tolerance’ amounts to foolishness, and the truth of the gospel is one of them.

If Jesus Christ is God—then Krishna isn’t. And Allah isn’t.

