

This study guide can be used for individual Bible Study, small group curriculum, or family studies.

Small Group Leaders Note:

The purpose of this study guide is to draw you and your group into conversation and discussion of God’s Word and its application to our lives. The questions are posed in a specific order and each of the questions has a specific purpose. As you are familiar with the purpose of each question, this will help guide the flow of the discussion.

A high-level view of the five basic questions and their functions:

1. Introduction (*lean in*). The goal of this first question is to get everyone in the group to “lean in” and get involved. It is normally easy to answer, fun and creates a sense of energy—so much so that you’ll see group members sometimes physically lean in as they engage in the discussion.
2. Observation (*look down*). This is an observation question. It is designed to help group members “look down” and see the relevant details and facts in the Bible passage being studied. This question establishes a solid foundation for the rest of the study. Regardless how much time someone has spent studying God’s word in their lives, everyone in the group can get involved simply by taking an observant look at what the passage says.
3. Evaluation (*look up*). What do we learn about God from this passage? This is the ultimate goal of every Bible study—to get a clearer picture of the God we worship, so that we can serve and love Him better.
4. Understanding (*look out*). This question helps group members “look out” and see the principles of the Bible passage through the lens of the world today. It builds a bridge between the facts of the passage and our understanding of it as it relates to our lives and culture.
5. Application (*look in*). Here is where group members begin to “look in” and see what God might be nudging them to change in their lives. During this part of the study, group members move from “knowing” to “doing” what God’s word says. It’s the final step of all Bible study: life change—of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Adapted from the Liquid Curriculum series

Galatians
Sermon Series
Discussion/Study Questions

Week one introduction:

Just like with every other book of the Bible, there is a rich and multi-faceted historical and theological context in which the book of Galatians was written. Understanding this context will help us understand the issues Paul is wrestling with in this powerful letter, as well as the message God has for us today.

One of the most confusing and hotly debated issues the early church dealt with after the coming of Messiah had to do with the identity of the family of God. They were basically having an “identity crisis.” The reason this had become a crisis is that with the coming of Messiah and the dawning of a new age, the age of the “New Covenant,” the make-up of who was part of the family of God had now changed, and it took time for the early believers to understand this.

We can see this issue come to a head in Acts 15. Paul’s first missionary journey to the Gentile world forced this issue to be grappled with. So many Gentiles were coming to faith in Messiah, the early church needed to clarify just how these Gentile believers fit within the newly reconstituted family of God.

As we survey the book of Acts, we see this issue being carefully, systematically, and progressively addressed by the Holy Spirit. Changing the mindset of the early church would understandably take some time. In Acts 8, we see Peter and John, envoys representing the leadership of the early church, travelling up to Samaria to, in a sense, verify and legitimize the salvation experience of the Samaritans and ultimately welcome them into the family of God.

Then, a couple of chapters later, in Acts 10-11 we see Peter, (who had come a long way but was still not quite yet fully convinced), get an object lesson from God on this issue in the form of a sheet full of unclean animals. In Acts 10 we see Peter become fully persuaded that Gentiles are fellow heirs of the Gospel, and in Acts 11, he then explains it to the leadership of the church. The church is starting to get it.

When we ultimately get to Acts 15, the issue had become so contentious and the opposition so fierce, that the first all-church council had to be convened to settle this issue once and for all. Did Gentiles have to become Jews first to be able to be a part of the family of God? We’ll see that Paul comments on this very Acts 15 gathering in Galatians chap 2.

But why was this issue so important to them? A little historical background will help us navigate these waters a little more smoothly. As we progress over the next few weeks, we will explore

some of this history and theology that lies behind what Paul is arguing for in the book of Galatians. And then we will propose a fully fleshed out and detailed argument for the book of Galatians, based on that discussion. For a preview of that argument, jump down to the introduction to week 7.

Week one: January 12 – Gal 1:1-5

1. When something is really important to you, how do you communicate it (yelling, quiet but firm, call a family meeting, break the ice with humor)? In other words, when you are passionate about something how do you typically express it?
2. Why do you think Paul asserts his apostolic authority right from the beginning in Galatians? Why might some people question his credentials? What gives Paul the right to be heard? (see also Gal 1:11)
3. Why do you think Paul inserts a mention of the core message of the gospel here in the beginning greeting of the letter (v.4)? What might Paul be laying the foundation for (see Gal 1:6)? How does this message help us better understand who God is?
4. Paul seems to go to great lengths, right in the introduction to Galatians, to focus our eyes on God, and what Christ has done for us. What other things do you see Christians base their identity on, other than on Jesus Christ? In other words, what do we compare ourselves to? Where do we find our value?
5. What voices (influences) do you find yourself listening to most and being motivated by? What voices do you need to listen to more frequently? What voices do you need to tune out?

Going deeper:

1. What does it mean that God has rescued us from this present evil age (v.4)? What does that mean for our daily struggle with sin?
2. What is the core message of the gospel? How would you relate this message to someone in 60 seconds or less?

Week two introduction:

So why was this issue of the identity of the family of God so important to the early church? A little historical background will help us navigate these waters a little more smoothly.

When God set apart the Jews as His people in the Old Testament, He prescribed various means by which His people could be distinguished from the nations around them (the *goyim* or the *ethne*--Lev 20:26). This is what God meant by His call for them to be “holy” –or “set apart.” The primary thing that identified His people and set them apart from the nations around them was the sign of circumcision.

Obviously, we cannot see the state of someone’s heart, all we can see are the externals. So what was used to identify different groups of people are called “identity markers.” These are outward, external, easy-to-identify labels which help us to distinguish who belongs to which group. Societies have always had these kinds of identity markers.

In addition to circumcision, there were also various other means of distinguishing the Jews from others as well. These included dietary laws, Sabbath keeping, and various purity practices. All of these identity markers that set apart national, ethnic Israel as the people of God, were subsumed under the overarching rubric known as “The Law”. It was obeying the Law that served as the identifying feature, which delineated or demarcated who was and who was not a part of the people of God.

Those who were a part of God’s family looked and acted in a certain way, so as to display His holiness and set themselves apart as distinct from the surrounding nations who did not know God. Following the instructions given in the Law enabled them to keep themselves holy—in both senses as “separate” as well as “pure.”

In the New Testament we see the phrase “works of the Law” referring to Israel doing the things which express Jewish identity. Through our Protestant sensitivities, we sometimes confuse “works of the Law” with “works-righteousness,” and think the issue Paul is grappling with in Galatians has to do with the idea that the Jews in the Old Testament were simply trying to earn their salvation with all their effort to follow the 613 Old Testament commandments. The Protestant Reformation was indeed a reaction to this very phenomenon in the Roman Catholic Church, and so we sometimes mistakenly import that Reformation reading into what we see in Galatians and elsewhere.

But for those who understood its true purpose, *The Law* was not a way for them to *make themselves right* before God. It was simply a response in gratitude for what they had been given, and a response in obedience to God’s revealed will for how they were to live. Following the Law, displaying these “identity markers,” gave evidence that one was a worshipper of God.

The idea of “identity markers” really should not be that foreign to us. We have our own identity markers today—many of them having to do with net worth and status (the car you drive, the

labels on your clothes, the neighborhoods we live in, the schools we attend)—these things all say something about us in our culture—and in many cases determine who we want to be associated with. The same was true back then. You knew someone was a Jew by how they acted. This is what is meant by “identity markers.” And we’ll see as we go, that this is at the heart of what Paul is wrestling with in Galatians.

Week two: January 19 – Gal 1:6-12

1. Who is someone who has influenced you and pulled you further away from God? Who is someone who has pulled you closer to God? What did these situations look like? What did you learn from them?
2. What does Paul accuse those in Galatia of doing? How do you think this message would have been received? Why do you think Paul would take such a harsh tone? What two options is Paul setting before his readers in vv. 6-9?
3. What do we learn about God and how He operates from this passage?
4. What are the lies the world tells us that those around you are most receptive to and susceptible to believing? Why do you think this is?
5. When are you most susceptible to turning away from the truth? What influences in your life help combat this? What is your battle plan for waging this war?

Going deeper:

1. Read 2 Cor 11:14-15; Matt 7:15-20; Matt 24:23-25. Why must believers always be on guard? What do these attacks look like? From where do these attacks come?
2. In light of the previous question, read John 16:13; Ps 119:11; Prov 11:14. How are we to combat these attacks?

Week three introduction:

So, we see that “identity markers” were the way God’s people were distinguished from those around them, as a “set-apart” people. Yet, as time progressed, Israel’s sense of “set-apartness” grew into a sense of privilege and exclusivity. As always happens, the fallen-ness of mankind rears its ugly head. Israel had ostensibly forgotten that they were *set apart* in order to be a light unto the nations; to draw all nations to the glory of the One who called them. Instead, to a great extent, they ended up doing what the Law had prescribed in order to display, or even flaunt that *set-apart status* rather than to live truly holy lives.

This sense of privilege and pride prevented them from fulfilling the role God had intended them to fulfill. The identity marker became more important to them than what it identified. They became obsessed with the identity marker itself.

So, when the New Covenant arrived, Jews who came to faith in Messiah were not prepared for the fact that a huge shift was happening. The Law was no longer going to serve as the identity marker of the people of God. This came as quite a shock to them. This was all they had ever known.

It was not as though this extreme concern about staying separate and distinct evolved in a void. When we look at how this developed historically, it becomes understandable. Looking back through Israel’s history there was one specific event that scarred them and haunted them like no other. It was when the temple was destroyed and the nation itself was carried off into captivity—with no hope of return. This “Babylonian Captivity” was the defining moment in their history.

When the Jews were allowed to return to the land following the Babylonian captivity, they knew they could never let this happen again. They would do whatever it took to prevent this. They clearly understood it was their sin that had caused the captivity. The message of the prophets in this time was very clear. It was their idolatry brought on by the influence of marrying foreign women that caused their downfall. Thus, the number one thing they were told by the prophets was to keep their race separate, distinct and pure—and not let other nations come in and pollute their minds and draw them into worshipping other gods. So, keeping themselves separate from the other nations and maintaining their national identity as the people of God became a point of obsession with them. And what did this separateness look like—Identity Markers!

Week three: January 26 – Gal 1:11-24

1. What news have you received that changed your life more than any other (other than the good news of the gospel)?
2. Read verse 14 and notice how passionate Paul was for his people, the Jews (see also Rom 9:1-3, where Paul states that he would be willing to give up his salvation for his people). In light of this, what ministry does God call Paul to (v.16)? How do you think that made Paul feel to now be called to the Gentiles, and not to the Jews? What does this say about how God answers our prayers sometimes in ways we don't expect?
3. In Gal 1:17 we read about how Paul, immediately upon receiving the good news, and after his radical conversion, in perhaps the tradition of the Jewish prophets (and Jesus Himself), spent time away in the desert to be prepared by God for service. What role does "desert time" play in our own preparation for service to God? What role has desert time (or suffering) played in your Christian walk? What do we learn about God, and His view of suffering, through this idea?
4. The good news of the gospel clearly changed Paul's life. He had done things he intensely regretted, but he did not let his past define him. He mourned over the fact that he persecuted the church, but he understood the radical change God made in him. How do you see others around you letting their past define them, and perhaps prevent them from moving forward?
5. How has the gospel changed your life? What does this look like on a practical, day-to-day basis—in your decisions, priorities, etc.?

Going deeper:

1. In 1:11-17 Paul is arguing for the supernatural origin of his message, in that it was supernaturally revealed, and that it was supernaturally confirmed in the radical change in Paul's life. In light of what Paul asserts in vv.6-7, why is it important for Paul to explain the origin of his message? How does this bolster the point he makes in v.10?

2. Read Acts 9:1-9. How was Paul changed by this encounter? What do you think it would have been like to go from breathing violent threats against the gospel to being willing to die in service of it?

Week four introduction:

Identity markers, and keeping themselves separate from outsiders became a point of passion for Jews in the time of the early church. So, when Paul shows up on the scene indicating that all these fleshly, external identity markers (for which many Jews had literally died) are no longer essential, the people would naturally have assumed that their national distinctiveness was simply under attack again, and they would have vigorously resisted this attack. These folks became known as the “Judaizers.”

Paul’s message was that just as circumcision and the Law had defined and demarcated the boundaries of who comprised the people of God under the Mosaic covenant; it would now be the gift of the indwelling Spirit that serves this purpose under the New Covenant. This radical change from an outward, fleshly sign of belonging, to an inward, spiritual sign of belonging is what was so difficult for the Jews to understand. This difficulty was what made the Judaizing offer of Paul’s opponents so appealing. The outward signs were all they ever had known.

What they did not yet understand was that a new era was dawning in salvation history. God was transitioning His people from one age to the next—from the era of the flesh to the era of the Spirit.

Prior to the coming of Messiah, if someone wanted to become a member of the family of God, they had to become Jewish. They were called “proselytes” and they had to go through a series of rituals to actually become Jewish—including circumcision. Why? So that they could display those external Identity Markers.

Because of this, the church in Paul’s time (largely made up of Jews who came to faith in Messiah) was having difficulty seeing how Gentiles could be viewed as part of the family of God, when in the past, the identity marker of that family was the Law and specifically, circumcision. In fact, Paul makes a big deal about this issue in Ephesians, and calls it a “mystery (Eph 3:3-6).” He explains that this “mystery” was the question of how Gentiles could be fellow heirs along with Jews (3:6). This was a shocking idea to them.

This post-Pentecost time was a time of traumatic clarification and even re-definition, of the identity of the people of God. The early church predominantly was made up of Jews who had come to faith in Messiah. But this began to change. More and more Gentiles were coming to faith and becoming a part of their fellowship.

This caused theological turmoil and begat this identity crisis. This crisis forced the apostle Paul to clarify an accurate understanding of the makeup of the people of God under the New covenant.

THIS was the issue that caused so much trouble in the early church. How could these Gentiles be equal members of the family of God if they didn’t look like us or act like us? Well, it was because the identity marker changed, that’s how.

Week four: February 2 – Gal 2:1-10

1. What type of person are you? Do you normally “go with the flow” or “do your own thing”? Examples?
2. Paul is now revealing a bit more of what he introduced back in 1:7-9—namely, exposing the non-gospel the Judaizers were preaching. What does Paul say is the primary issue at hand (in 2:3)? Why do you think it was so hard for the Jewish believers in Messiah to give up circumcision and the works of the Law as the identity markers of the family of God?
3. What do Christians “look like” today? In what ways do we make similar distinctions as the early church, about who is and who is not acceptable to us, based on external appearance or behavior? How do drinking, smoking, music tastes, tattoos, etc., play into this discussion? What do you think God feels about this?
4. What is something the culture around you promotes as good, that you, as a Christian, resist, or even oppose?
5. How is “remembering the poor” related to the gospel message (2:10)? Why was it so important to the leaders of the church, and to Paul? How important is it to you? How does Gal 2:10 challenge/encourage you?

Going deeper:

1. What did the leaders of the early church recognize about Paul (v.9)? How is this further proof of the superiority of Paul’s message over that of the Judaizers?
2. We saw how Paul’s gospel was proven to be superior (to that of the Judaizers) by the supernatural nature of its origin (1:11-17). How is Paul next arguing his gospel to be the true gospel by the reaction of the leadership at Jerusalem (1:18-24 & 2:1-10)? What is their reaction to his ministry?

Week five introduction:

This brings us to the occasion for the Galatian letter. Why were the Galatians even tempted to go back to their old understanding of what God was doing? Why were they having trouble with the message that Paul was preaching? It's because there was this group, called the Judaizers, who were coming in and telling the people that this was the same attack the Jews always had to fight off. They were saying that God wanted His people to be separate and distinct, and what that looked like were external identity markers ... in other words, "the works of the Law." These Judaizers were fighting against this new message by Paul, what he called "the gospel." The Judaizers wanted the people to continue on with the way things had always been.

So, all that to say, Paul's railing against the Law and reliance upon "the works of the Law" in Galatians is not an attack upon Israel, or an undermining of the fact that the Jews were the chosen people of God, or an argument that the Jews had forfeited anything—nor was it an attack on the idea that the Mosaic Law contained some sort of works-righteousness. It is an attack against the anachronistic (outdated or old-fashioned) thinking that living a Jewish lifestyle is what still defined being a member of the family of God.

Paul's message is that when Messiah came and instituted the New Covenant by the sending of the Holy Spirit, the makeup of the people of God had now changed. The family of God was no longer a distinct, singular people called out from among the nations. It was now comprised of people called out from many nations. The people of God were no longer one nation, a theocracy, ruled by God through the Mosaic covenant. They were now many peoples from many different nations comprising this new organism called the church, the bride of Christ. This change of identity required a new kind of law (the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus).

The law (the instructions for how to live lives pleasing to God) was no longer going to be an external prompting to obedience written on tablets of stone. Now, in the New Covenant era, the law was going to be an internal prompting to obedience written on our hearts. The church did not replace Israel as the people of God. The promises God made to Israel will still be fulfilled with national Israel. Yes, Israel is still the apple of God's eye. And yes they are still members of the family of God (those that trust in Messiah). But a new group (believing Gentiles) has been grafted into that family as well.

Week five: February 9 – Gal 2:11-21

1. When was a time you discovered you were clearly wrong in a situation? How did you handle it? Looking back, would you handle it any differently now?
2. Read Gal 2:12 & 2:14. What is Peter doing that prompts Paul to confront him so forcefully? Why is what Peter is doing wrong?
3. In light of what God showed Peter in Acts 10-11, why do you think Peter would backtrack like this and give in to this pressure? What does this say about accountability in the church—and what does this say about God that His scriptures would record such an event?
4. What various “identity markers” do we have as a society today that dictate how we treat different groups?
5. Where have you been guilty of “double-standards?” What have you done about it? What will you do about it?

Going deeper:

1. Gal 2:20 is such a familiar passage, we can sometimes overlook the context in which it is given. Read the context and discuss how this context informs what this famous verse is saying.
2. In 2:20, in the Christian life, what actually dies and what is resurrected? What does/ought this look like in our life? Do you feel like your life is characterized by Christ living in you, influencing your thoughts and actions, or do you find yourself living and acting and deciding on your own?

Week six introduction:

If we are going to understand this passage in Galatians chapter three, which makes mention of the promise of the Holy Spirit, we must look back into the Old Testament to see what the hope and expectation was of the Jewish believer in the time of Paul regarding this promise. When Paul asked if his Galatian readers had received the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith, we need to know what they were thinking when they heard this question.

When we look back to Jeremiah 31:31-34 we see that God promised His people that there would be a time in the future when He would replace the Mosaic covenant (the Law He gave to Moses), a covenant which helped them understand what God expected of them in living as God's people in the midst of pagans surrounding them. God told them in Jer 31 that He would someday replace this covenant with a New covenant, which would serve the same purpose as the old covenant. It would lay out the instructions for how God wanted His people to behave, after the Messiah paid the penalty for sin, and after the Gentiles were grafted into His family alongside the Jews.

We also read in Ezek. 36:22-32 that an incredibly important part of this New Covenant will be that God will pour out His Spirit on His people. Because sin will have been paid for (on the cross), God, the Holy Spirit, will now dwell not just with His people, but within His people. This is the hope and expectation Paul's readers would have had and is the understanding that would have guided their reading of Paul's letter to them.

Paul wants them to understand that the role of "Identity Markers" was never to place them in the family of God. These identity markers were always and only to be outward identifiers of an inward reality. What placed them in the family of God was, and always will be, faith. Just like so many groups today, who desire to mistakenly insert some sort of effort into what is simply a free gift, the purpose of the "works of the Law" was never to be meritorious for anything. "Identity Markers" were the issue that the Galatians were struggling with, and Paul reaffirms that salvation has always been by faith, to help them understand the role of Identity Markers in their lives.

How Paul uses the phrase "the works of the Law" was very specific. The "works of the Law" served as the identifier of who was and who was not a member of the family of God, prior to the cross. And the indwelling Spirit (and the resultant fruit of the Spirit) now serves to identify to a watching world who belongs to the family of God after the cross. The Judaizers were trying to continue on with the old way, the old Identity Markers. But that undercuts the heart of the gospel—namely, that the Messiah they had so long waited for, actually came, and was the ultimate sin sacrifice the Mosaic sacrificial system pointed toward. And because sin was now paid for, God now dwells with His people in a new way. Paul is pleading with his people not to look back to the era of the flesh for how they should live, but to press on into the era of the Spirit.

Week six: February 16 – Gal 3:1-14

1. Why do you think it is so hard for some people to receive gifts? Who is someone you know who prefers to always pay his/her own way, or will go way out of his way to reciprocate when someone does something nice for him/her?
2. On what basis did God declare Abraham righteous? What does it mean to be declared righteous before God?
3. Galatians chapter three discusses the way the Holy Spirit comes into our lives. But once He is present (with us and in us), what is His role?
4. Why do you think it is so easy for some people in the church to misunderstand the truth that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? What is the natural draw or tendency that hinders us from embracing this idea? How does this misunderstanding manifest itself in how they live and how they interact with the church?
5. What does having the Spirit of God dwelling within you mean in your life? How does it impact how you make decisions? Why do you think it is so easy to forget this and take it for granted? Take some time this week to pray through this truth and see what God might want to speak to you.

Going deeper:

1. Read Genesis chapter 15. How was Abraham justified before God (v.6)? Now re-read Gal 3:6-9. How does Paul expand this argument for how one is justified before God? Who does Paul include? What does Paul call the believing Gentiles (v.7)?
2. In the ancient near east, the way they would solemnize or ratify a deal or an agreement, would be to cut various animals in half. Then both parties to the agreement would walk, arm in arm, between the pieces. What they were saying was, “may this happen to you or me if we break the details of the covenant we are making.” They were “cutting” a deal. In Gen 15 who ends up passing between the animals? What does this say about

who is required to keep the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant? Why is this important, and how does it apply to you and me (Gal 3:7 & 14)?

Week seven introduction:

This brings us to the primary issue the book of Galatians is all about. Paul's overall argument in Galatians, his purpose for writing the letter, revolves around the acceptance of Gentiles into the family of God without them having to first become Jews. The question is, "must Gentiles adopt the identity markers of Israel to be children of Abraham, or is there a new way of identifying the people of God?"

The overarching purpose of Galatians can be summarized by saying that Paul was arguing that the Galatians should accept the Gospel he had preached to them over and against the message of the Judaizers, because his Gospel was the true Gospel (Gal 1 & 2).

It was superior to the message of the Judaizers in that his Gospel was confirmed by the supernatural manner in which it was revealed to him; as well as being confirmed by the leadership at Jerusalem. Next, his Gospel alone was able to place them in the family of God, as evidenced by the working of the Spirit through faith, by the work of Christ, and by the specific nature and purpose of the Law itself (Gal 3 & 4).

Then, lastly, his Gospel was superior in that it demonstrated that the power of the Spirit was effective in delivering them from the dominance of sin, as opposed to life in the flesh—under Torah. In other words, the character of life under the control of the Spirit will reflect the loving kind of life the heart of the Law pointed to, but was unable to produce, because of the hardness of our hearts (Gal 5 & 6).

When we see how crucial identity markers were for Israel in the New Testament, we can understand the source of much of the strife described in Paul's writings. Then we can also see how this new identity marker of the indwelling Spirit now unites the people of God.

Week seven: February 23 – Gal 3:15-29

1. What was the biggest prize you ever won, or inheritance you ever received?
2. Which came first: the promise God gave to Abraham, or the Law God gave to Moses (v.17)? What is the inheritance mentioned in v.18? To whom is the actual blessing promised in the Abrahamic blessing (v.16)? Understanding all of this, what does Gal 3:8 mean?
3. Read Gen 12:1-3; Gal 3:8; Gal 3:29. What is the promise God made to Abraham? Back then, what did it look like it would include? But what do we now know that this promise

includes? Describe how this is the foundational promise of salvation God makes to the world? How are we Gentiles connected to Abraham?

4. When it comes to salvation Paul says external distinctions don't matter (Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, v.28). What external distinctions do we still make, regardless of this admonition? What people or groups do we still treat differently? Why do you think that is?
5. How would you help an unbelieving friend understand that following the rules and being a good person is not what brings you into a relationship with God?

Going deeper:

1. When we understand that the promised blessing God gave to Abraham is the initial, foundational, unbreakable promise of salvation to the world; and then that the Law was given to help Israel appropriate that blessing by giving them instructions for how to enter into that covenant promise; then we can see more clearly how the new covenant is simply the replacement for the Mosaic covenant and that it gives us Gentiles the same benefits the Law gave to Israel. How did obeying the Law help preserve the people of Israel for their inheritance? How does obeying the Law of the Spirit of Life help preserve us for our inheritance?
2. How does the Law lead us to Christ (v.24)?

Week eight introduction:

What Paul is really focusing in on in the book of Galatians is often commonly misunderstood as a plea for the Christians in Galatia not to go back to the Law of Moses to seek justification (how we are saved), as it appeared they were being urged to do. But the argument is not that they should not go back, but that they should not go forward without Messiah.

The Judaizers were trying to compel them to be circumcised because that was the identity marker of the people of God that they were used to. It was the identity marker of the people of God under the Mosaic covenant. But what Paul argues is that the indwelling Spirit is the identity marker of the people of God under the New covenant. If they now seek to be identified with the Mosaic Law by being circumcised, they are rejecting the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and that His death had changed anything.

So you can get a sense for why Paul was so passionate about what he is communicating in Galatians. If the Galatians accept the teachings of the Judaizers, they are rejecting the true Gospel and rejecting Messiah and what He accomplished.

Week eight: March 1 – Gal 4:1-20

1. What was the first thing you did when you turned 18 (or 21) that made you feel grown up, or independent?
2. Read Gal 4:6-7. What does it mean to be an heir (in general)? What does it mean to be an heir of God? Read Roman 8:15-17; 1 Pet 1:3-4; Heb 1:2. What does it mean to be a co-heir with Christ?
3. What does it mean to be a son or a daughter (of earthly parents)? What does it mean to be a son or daughter of God? How does this affect the way you view yourself? If you are a parent, how did your view of God as your Father change, once you had a child of your own?
4. What lies do you see the youth of today being exposed to? What specific lies are the most dangerous? Based on God's Word, what should we expect from culture (the world)?
5. What was your Christian life like when you first became a believer (joy, peace, passion, etc.)? How is it different now? Read Gal 4:8-9. What old habits do you sometimes slip back into from earlier in your Christian walk? What is your plan for trying to avoid this?

Going deeper:

1. Read Gal 4:16. What truth is Paul telling his readers that they do not want to hear?
What risks do we face when speaking the truth of the gospel?
2. Based on how you view your relationship with God, do you live more like a child/heir or like a slave? What ought it look like to live like a child of God? What might you do this week to remind yourself that you are a child of God?

Week nine introduction:

In the last of our chapter introductions, it is important to highlight a crucial issue from this passage. In this very different section of Galatians Paul does something very interesting. He creates an allegory to make a point. Now it is important to see that Paul is not telling us that we should read the Old Testament in this way, in other words, with an *allegorical method* of interpreting scripture. He is simply making up an analogy to make a point.

Some theological traditions use this allegorical method of interpreting scripture when reading certain passages or about certain topics in the Old Testament. To “allegorize” a passage means to look for a deeper, spiritual meaning behind passages of Scripture. While the Bible does make use of various literary devices, the idea that there is a deeper meaning behind all passages is actually a very dangerous way to read Scripture—because you can end up making Scripture say just about anything you want it to say.

It is important to read Scripture in a straightforward and literal way. This is known as a “literal hermeneutic.” Hermeneutics is the art and science of Biblical interpretation.

What makes this passage in Galatians chapter four so unique is that this is the only time Paul uses such a literary technique to make his point.

Paul is saying in this section that just like Isaac, these new Gentile believers are sons according to promise--the promise being the Abrahamic covenant by which both Jews and Gentiles are brought into the family of God. What Paul contrasts in this allegory he creates are the children of the flesh vs. the children of the promise.

The initial referents in his allegory are Hagar and Sarah (flesh vs. promise). The contemporary referents are “present Jerusalem”, who has rejected Messiah and who is still dwelling ‘in the flesh’, and which corresponds to Mt. Sinai (the symbol for the flesh era); and the Jerusalem above (the symbol of the promise).

Paul goes on to argue that just like Isaac, who was the child of the promise, you Galatians are also brought into the family of God through the promise. You do not need to enter the family of God through the Law (circumcision), because circumcision is of the flesh era, and that was never the means of entering the family of God anyway. You Galatians, (he is arguing), enter the family of God through the promise—just like Isaac did.

The contrast in this section is between the present Jerusalem (present in Paul’s time), who does not recognize Messiah and who is still in the era of the flesh; with the Jerusalem from above, to which Isaac is associated through promise. It is a contrast between the present unbelieving Israel, the Israel of the flesh--and the present faithful remnant of Israel who do believe—the children of promise.

The point of the allegory is that the Galatians are related to the family of God through the promise, just like Isaac, and just like the Jerusalem from above. To try and become related to

the family of God through the Law now, after the era of the Law has passed, and after Messiah has come and instituted a new era, would be foolish because the present Jerusalem is not related to the family of God; it is the faithful, believing remnant, the Jerusalem from above that is a part of the family.

Week nine: March 8 – Gal 4:21-5:1

1. What is your favorite Old Testament story? Share however much of it you can remember?
2. Read through Genesis chapter 16 together. What did Sarah do wrong? What did Abraham do wrong? What can we learn from their negative examples?
3. Read Galatians 3:8. According to the second half of the verse, what is the gospel? Jumping back to the first half of the verse, how does that gospel affect the Gentile believers? In other words, what monumental theological reality does the Abrahamic blessing include? Why is this such incredible news for Gentiles (read Gal 3:7, 9)? What else does the Abrahamic blessing include (Gal 3:14)? What do we learn about the heart of God through this?
4. What kinds of things are people around you enslaved to today?
5. The Galatians were entrenched in a battle between slavery and freedom. Read Galatians 5:1. What battles are you fighting today—battles which want to continue to enslave you? How is God calling you to stand for freedom in your own life?

Going deeper:

1. Read Genesis 21:1-21. How are the unbelieving Jews in Paul's time, similar to Hagar and Ishmael? How are the Galatians and the believing Jews in Paul's time similar to Sarah and Isaac?
2. Read Romans 4:13, 16, 18. What else do we learn about the promise to Abraham? What did it include? What other truths can you glean from verse 16?

Week ten: March 15 – Gal 5:2-15

1. How do you define freedom? How often do you think about the freedoms we have in this country, in contrast with most of the rest of the world? Do you think you take your freedoms for granted? Why or why not?
2. Why is circumcision no longer of value for the worshipper of God, after the coming of the New Covenant? What role did circumcision play in the life of the Old Testament believer? What role does the indwelling Holy Spirit play in the life of the believer after the coming of Christ?
3. Again, rather than commenting on our propensity to lean towards legalism, what Paul is contrasting in this section is the freedom we now have not to keep the law in order to demonstrate that we are part of the family of God. We are free to follow the Law of Christ written on our hearts. Read Gal 5:13-14; 6:2. Contrast this with Gal 5:3 and describe the freedom we have in Christ? What does following the law of Christ look like in our lives? How do we see God's heart for His people in this idea?
4. What do you see as more motivating for those around you; the carrot or the stick? Why do you think some people are more motivated by promise of reward? Or why do you think others are more motivated by threat of punishment? What motivates you more?
5. Rather than thinking we will be tempted to abuse our freedom, Paul instructs us to use that freedom to serve one another. How might you use your freedom to serve someone else this week?

Going deeper:

1. Read Gal 5:14, 6:2 & John 13:34-35. Describe this new law that we are under in the New Covenant. How is it similar to the purpose of the Law in the Old covenant (John 13:35)?
2. Some have described the role of leaven in Scriptural imagery as something that "corrupts by puffing up." That is why leaven is often a "type" or picture of pride in Scripture. How is Paul using leaven in Gal 5:7-9? What type of effect can leaven have in a church? Where have you seen this at work?

Week eleven: March 22 – Gal 5:16-25

1. (outside the realm of physical features) What is one thing you really like about yourself?
What is one thing you would change?
2. Read Gal 3:18. Thinking through the argument Paul has been making all throughout the letter to the Galatians, what is the contrast Paul is making in this section? Is he talking about more than just an internal struggle we all face? What is the era of the flesh characterized by? What is the era of the Spirit characterized by?
3. What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? What is the relationship of the fruit of the Spirit and walking by the Spirit? How do we get to know the heart of God better by walking in the Spirit?
4. Read 1 Peter 4:1-4. What is living in the flesh characterized by? Where have you seen verse 4 happen in your life? What is the role of suffering in helping us to put to death the deeds of the flesh?
5. Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is demonstrated most prominently in your life? Which aspects do you need to work on the most? What is your strategy for fighting this battle (other than just “trying harder”)?

Going deeper:

1. Read Gal 5:24-25. If we have crucified the flesh, why do we still struggle with sin? What has helped you the most to deal with and conquer sin in your life?
2. Read through Galatians chapter five again. What are the key verses? How do these verses really underscore the argument Paul is making and the encouragement he is giving us?

Week twelve: March 29 – Gal 5:26-6:10

1. Were you a trouble-maker or peace-maker as a child? Are you a rule-follower or do you chafe against rules? Examples?
2. Paul is asking in this section, what will a loving Spirit-community produce. What examples do you see Paul giving? What will be the result of sowing to the flesh? How does this support Paul's overall argument in Galatians?
3. Read Gal 6:3-5. When do you most often notice pride creeping into your life? When do you most notice your eyes on yourself rather than on God? How can we actively work to take our eyes off ourselves and consistently put them on God, and His priorities, and see life through His eyes?
4. When dealing with Christian brothers and sisters caught in a trespass, unfortunately, oftentimes Christians have been known to "shoot their own wounded." How have you seen the restoration of a brother handled well? How have you seen it handled not so well?
5. When reflecting on this past year, what do you think you have sown spiritually and what harvest are you expecting? What changes are you looking to make in your desire to sow to the Spirit?

Going deeper:

1. Read Gal 6:2. What is the law of Christ (Romans 8:1-11; Gal 5:14, 16)? How does bearing one another's burdens relate to this (Romans 15:1)? How does Gal 6:2 relate back to Gal 6:1?
2. Read Matt 18:15-20. How does this relate to Gal 6:1? What is the purpose of disciplining a brother in Christ (James 5:19-20)? How does Matt 18:20 relate to the whole paragraph (18:15-20)? Read Deut 19:15. What does Matt 18:20 really refer to? How is Matt 18:20 often misunderstood?

Week thirteen: April 5 – Gal 6:11-18

1. What accomplishments are you most proud of (for you and/or for your kids)?
2. What are the motivations and actions of the Judaizers and how does this compare with the motivations and actions of Paul? How does this lend support for Paul's contention that his gospel is superior to theirs? (Re-read the argument of Galatians in the intro to week 7).
3. Read Galatians 6:17. What is the role suffering played in Paul's life? How does this relate to his argument in Galatians? What is the role of suffering in our own Christian walk? What do we learn about God through how He allows suffering in our lives?
4. How is "pride" viewed in the world today? How is this different than what the Bible teaches us about pride?
5. What does it mean to boast in the cross of Jesus (6:14)? What is the difference between being proud of something and "pride?" Why is it important to consider this?

Going deeper:

1. Having studied Galatians more deeply now, how would you summarize the overall argument Paul is making in Galatians? How has your understanding of Galatians changed?
2. Read Gal 6:14. What does it mean to have the world crucified to you—and for you to be crucified to the world (1 John 2:15-17; Gal 2:20; Mark 8:34-35; Gal 5:24)?

"These resources were very helpful in the creation of this study guide. "SmallGroups.com" and "Serendipity Bible for Groups." For helpful answers to many of your Bible questions, the website GotQuestions.org has often proven to be useful."