

Church & Kingdom | Galatians

Mark Allen | 11.1.26

Small Group Guide

Series: Church and Kingdom

Overview

This week's message walked through the book of Galatians, a letter written by Paul to a region of churches struggling with a dangerous addition to the gospel. False teachers were insisting that faith in Christ was not enough -- that salvation required keeping the Old Testament law. Paul's response is clear and urgent: righteousness comes by faith alone, and the Christian life is meant to be lived out by that same faith, bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Key Verse

Galatians 3:11 -- The righteous shall live by faith.

This verse, originally from Habakkuk 2:4, serves as the backbone of the entire letter. Paul's focus in Galatians is specifically on the phrase "shall live by" -- meaning that the righteousness God has declared over us through Christ is meant to be walked out daily, not earned through works.

Key Takeaways

1. Salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. Paul's entire argument in Galatians chapters 1 through 4 is that God gave himself for our sins. No one can be declared righteous by keeping the law. Justification -- being declared righteous before God -- comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. You cannot maintain by works what you did not earn by works. If works could not save you, they cannot keep you saved. The grace that brought you in is the same grace that sustains you. Believing otherwise leads to spiritual bondage, not freedom.

3. The Christian life requires active pursuit. Galatians chapters 5 and 6 shift from the premise of salvation to the pursuit of godly living. The fruit of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control -- does not appear automatically. It is cultivated through daily submission to the Holy Spirit and intentional practice.

4. The church is a place to practice before we play. The body of Christ is where we learn to love, bear burdens, and restore one another gently. What we practice together prepares us to live faithfully in the world.

5. Restoring others requires humility and gentleness. Galatians 6:1 calls those who are spiritually mature to restore fallen brothers and sisters with gentleness, while remaining watchful over their own hearts.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Use this to get the group talking before diving into deeper content.

- When you drove or walked in this morning, was there anything on your mind that made it hard to focus on worship or the message? Share briefly.

Section 1: The Gospel Under Attack (Galatians 1-2)

1. Paul says in Galatians 1:6 that the Galatians were deserting the grace of Christ for a different gospel -- one that is, in his words, really not good news at all. In what ways do people today -- inside or outside the church -- add requirements to the gospel that go beyond faith in Christ?

2. Paul defends his calling extensively in chapters 1 and 2 because false teachers were undermining his authority to protect their false message. Have you ever had someone question your faith or spiritual authority in a way that was meant to distract you from the truth? How did you respond?

3. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says that the life he now lives in the flesh, he lives by faith in the Son of God. What does it look like practically to live your everyday life -- work, relationships, decisions -- by faith rather than by personal effort or self-reliance?

Section 2: Declared Righteous (Galatians 3-4)

4. Paul asks the Galatians in Galatians 3:2 whether they received the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith. How would you answer that question about your own salvation experience? Was there a moment when you recognized that your efforts were not enough?

5. Pastor Mark pointed out that many people, if asked why God should let them into heaven, would say something like "I am a pretty good person." Why is that answer insufficient according to what Paul teaches in Galatians? How would you explain the gospel to someone who holds that view?

6. Paul warns in Galatians 4:9-10 about turning back to observing religious rules and rituals as a means of earning favor with God. Are there any religious habits or practices in your own life that have quietly shifted from expressions of love for God into attempts to earn his approval? How can you tell the difference?

Section 3: Living It Out (Galatians 5-6)

7. Pastor Mark described the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21 and invited each person to honestly identify which ones show up in their own life. Without requiring anyone to share publicly, take a moment of personal reflection. Then discuss as a group: why is honest self-examination so difficult, and what makes it spiritually necessary?

8. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control -- was described in the sermon as something that must be practiced, not simply received passively. Which fruit do you find most natural? Which requires the most intentional effort from you?

9. Galatians 6:1-2 calls spiritually mature believers to restore those who have fallen, gently and with awareness of their own vulnerability to temptation. What does that kind of restoration look like in a real relationship? What does it not look like?

10. Pastor Mark described the church as a place to practice before we go back into the world. In what specific ways can this small group serve as a place of practice for you this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to apply before your group meets again.

1. Examine your gospel. Write down in your own words what you believe about how a person is saved. Then ask yourself honestly: have you added anything to faith in Christ? Bring your reflections to share with the group next week.

2. Identify your practice. Pick one fruit of the Spirit that you know requires more intentional effort in your life. Commit to one specific, concrete action this week that puts that fruit into practice -- not to earn anything, but to grow.

3. Bear a burden. Identify someone in your life -- in the church or outside it -- who is carrying something heavy. Reach out this week. Do not offer advice unless asked. Simply show up, listen, and pray with them.

4. Confess and receive grace. If the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5 brought something to mind, take time this week to bring that honestly before God. First John 1:9 reminds us that when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

5. Memorize the key verse. Commit Galatians 3:11 to memory this week. Reflect on what it means that the righteous shall live by faith -- not just enter by faith, but live by it every day.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying specifically over these areas:

- Gratitude for salvation that rests entirely on what Christ has done
- Honest confession of areas where the works of the flesh have taken hold
- A request for the Holy Spirit to produce his fruit in each member of the group
- Wisdom and gentleness to restore and walk alongside those who are struggling

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Looking Ahead

Next week the series continues through additional New Testament books. Come prepared to explore how the themes of church and kingdom unfold across the rest of the New Testament.

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