

# Grace - over - Guilt



## Session 1: Background to Galatians & the Law

### ..... OPENING .....

Consider using one or more of the following questions to start discussion:

- What has God been teaching you through our first couple weeks in Galatians?
- What do you want to see happen in the life of our church through this study in Galatians?
- How are you being personally challenged through our study in Galatians?

### ..... DISCUSSION .....

#### *Understanding Paul & Understanding Ourselves*

1. “There is no way to understand Paul’s theology or mission apart from the fundamental fact that stands at the center of his life: on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus and Jesus of Nazareth came face-to-face. After that event neither Saul nor the Christian church was ever the same again.”<sup>i</sup>
  - How does your identity as a Christian shape your life? Could someone make sense of your life (your decisions, your values, your activities, your budget, your relationships) without understanding your faith in Jesus Christ?
  - Consider taking time this summer to share your conversion story with the group of how you came to know Jesus or share a testimony of how your life has changed as you have followed Jesus?
  - How are you impacting others in our church and community so that they see Jesus and come to know him?
2. One of the reasons Paul responds so strongly to the Judaizers may be found in Paul’s personal history. Some have suggested that Paul may have been a missionary for Judaism, trying to encourage others to be circumcised prior to his conversion to Christ.<sup>ii</sup> In other words, Paul’s past life is creeping into these churches that he cares about so deeply.
  - What are some ways that you may see your life before Christ creep back into your life after Christ?

- How do you respond when past sins, struggles, or false beliefs rear their ugly head again in your own life?

### *The Law – What is the Issue in Galatians?*

3. “Paul’s major struggle in Galatians was with certain Jewish-Christian missionaries who...insisted, however, that in order for Gentiles to become Christians they first of all had to become Jews.”<sup>iii</sup>
  - How are we tempted at times to add extra requirements to those who want to follow Christ?
  - How are we tempted to create additional boundary markers that define who is an “insider” in our church?
  - What is the danger in creating such systems?
  - Why might these systems draw us away from a complete reliance on what Christ has done?
4. Steven Brown, a pastor shared this story: “I’ll never forget the words of a note from a young woman who left the church I pastored years ago. “Steve,” she wrote, “I’m leaving and I didn’t want you to hear it from someone else. I just can’t do it anymore. I’ve tried but I’m not good enough.”<sup>iv</sup>
  - How do we at MBC perhaps unintentionally communicate to people that, “You have to be good enough” in order to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - How can we be intentional in offering people grace that brings life and freedom in Christ?
5. One way to frame the struggle in Galatians is between law and grace. Daniel Bush writes, “If the battle between law and grace is lost in the church, the church will become just another religious, self-righteous institution trying to sell goods that nobody can use.”<sup>v</sup>
  - What would it look like to lose this battle in the church?
  - What does it look like to win this battle in the church?
6. One of the startling and shocking arguments Paul lays out in Galatians is that the law is a tyrant.<sup>vi</sup>
  - Why would this idea have been offensive to Jewish Christians?
  - How is operating in legalism, allowing yourself to live under tyranny?
  - What “religious traditions” do we have that function as a kind of law, that we use as a weapon in our relationship with other Christians?
7. When Paul criticizes the law he is not saying we should cut out the first 39 books of our Bible, or even the first five books of the Bible, or even Leviticus (which to be fair would

make reading through the Bible in a year a lot easier!). Rather, Paul is warning Christians against using obedience to the law as a way of earning salvation or earning their way into being a part of God's people.<sup>vii</sup>

- Why is it tempting to use obedience as a way of earning our standing before God?
- What can happen to our assurance as believers if our identity is built on our work, rather than on what Christ has done for us?
- How does this temptation to have confidence in yourself appear in your own life?

### *What's at Stake in our Study of Galatians*

8. There are two equally deadly mistakes we can make in our relationship with the Bible as Christians. The first is inaction which occurs when we assume that the end goal of study is simply the acquisition of more biblical and theological knowledge. While learning and theological formation is certainly a worthy and admirable goal, we should always bring our study back to the Great Commandment and ask how it helps us love God and love others. The second mistake is to ignore study and jump straight into action. This can cause us to focus on good things rather than the best things. Reading and reflecting on Galatians can help us avoid both of these mistakes. One writer puts it this way:

Paul's Galatians is, in fact, like a lion turned loose in the arena of Christians. It challenges, intimidates, encourages, and focuses our attention on what is really essential as little else can. How we deal with the issues it raises and the teachings it presents will in large measure determine how we think as Christians and how we live as Christ's own.<sup>viii</sup>

- *What happens to our Christian living when we begin to understand what God did or who God is in a new way?*
- *Which is harder for you to emphasize in your own life, teaching, study and doctrine or action? Another way of asking this question is asking whether you emphasize truth or grace more in your Christian life?*
- *Why do we need each other in order to remain balanced individually and as a community?*

### ..... CLOSING .....

- What is one takeaway you have from this week's discussion?

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<sup>i</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians* New American Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994): 32.

<sup>ii</sup> George, *Galatians*, 25.

<sup>iii</sup> George, *Galatians*, 36.

<sup>iv</sup> Daniel Bush & Noel Due, *Live in Liberty: The Spiritual Message of Galatians*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015): xxi.

<sup>v</sup> Bush & Due, *Live in Liberty*, xxi.

<sup>vi</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* Anchor Bible Commentary, (New York: Doubleday, 2007): 31-32.

<sup>vii</sup> Martyn, *Galatians* Anchor Bible Commentary, 38.

<sup>viii</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), lvii. Timothy George puts the matter this way: “Because of who God is and what he has done (history) we must believe what he has said (theology) in order to live as he commands (ethics).” See George, *Galatians*, 66.