

Paul's letter to the Galatians

Talk outlines and questions for further thought.



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Why Galatians?

To many Paul's letter to the Galatians can read like an obscure debate about the value of faith and good works in religion. But at the heart of the letter are questions that still deeply concern us, such as: Why do we believe anything at all? What rational basis is required to justify our views of the world or any faith commitment? How do I judge myself and how do other people judge me? Which voices of right and wrong do I listen to and why?

In this short booklet are outlines of talks based on each passage along with questions for further thought.

Galatians 1 *Why do we believe anything?*

Why do we believe anything?

The message of grace and peace

The danger is leaving grace

by adding to Christ

Is Paul and his message valid?

1. What do you believe is important in life and why do you believe it?
2. How does our culture deal with differing convictions about what is ultimately true?
3. What reasons does Paul give for believing his message?
4. Why is the gospel of grace both liberating and offensive?

Galatians 2:1-21 *Does anything I do matter?*

Conflict and racism in the church!

Is Paul speaking the truth about God?

- Paul stands with Peter (1-10)
- Paul stands against Peter (11-21)

So, does anything I do matter?

1. Here are some examples of alternative gospels today; 'it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are loving and good', 'there is a right and a wrong way to worship and live - the rules must be kept', 'The intensity and passion in our experience of God is what should define us as a church' Who is left behind by these alternative gospels?
2. List examples of gospel truth being ignored for the sake of institutional unity or gospel unity being broken for cultural or religious reasons.
3. How would you explain justification by faith alone to someone who had never been to church?

Galatians 3:1-14 *What voices to we listen to?*

To try to justify ourselves is:

to deny Christ (1)

to deny our experience (2-5)

to deny Biblical teaching on faith (6-9)

to deny Biblical teaching on law (10-12)

to deny ourselves the blessing of God (13-14)

What voices do we listen to?

1. Share with others what brought you to Christ?
2. What key experiences have strengthened your faith over the years? How have you endured or failed in times of trial?
3. Paul shows that his teaching is based on more than experience. What else is your trust in Christ based upon?
4. Abraham was not perfect but he responded to God with faith. In what areas of your life is God currently asking you to respond to him with faith?

Galatians 3:15-29 *Why are we at war with ourselves?*

An example from life

- The promise first
- Then the law

Why the law?

The promise and the law

We are all sons

Our personal war

1. Many of us have had the experience of being given a series of do's and don'ts to act on, and the experience of trust where we are given freedom to act within the bounds of our conscience. Which experience helps most in developing our own values? Can you relate this to Paul's argument here?
2. What difference would it make for you to practice the presence of Christ as if you were clothed in him? How is this different to obeying the laws and rules that you normally operate by?
3. How are the barriers that exist where we live broken down in our church? How can you help this?

Galatians 5:1-26 *Why is freedom so complex?*

For freedom Christ freed us

so we wait for the righteousness for which we hope

and we obey the law in love not fear

as Christ is formed in us

Consider and discuss these four types of people:

1. Law-obeying, law relying – Under the law and sure, at least externally, they are keeping it. However, their inward uncertainty makes them less than gracious, sensitive to criticism and insecure.
2. Law-disobeying, law relying – Have a religious conscious but carry a great deal of guilt. Tend to be more humble but suffer from low esteem and often fear church.
3. Law disobeying, not law-relying – Probably intellectually secular or vaguely spiritual. They insist that they live by their own moral standards. Can be happy and tolerant with a strong liberal strain of self-righteousness about what they see as unnecessary legalism.
4. Law-obeying, not law-relying – a mature Christian position. The law of God, their own or others standards cannot complete them and they are free from the guilt and compulsion of these laws. They chose to obey God's law from love of God, others and their own self-respect of who they are as heirs of God. They can afford to be more tolerant than 3, more sympathetic than 1 and more confident than 2 – but they still battle with the over-desires of the flesh and the Spirit of God within them.