

Introducing the New Testament
Worksheet for Week 3
Galatians

Our study topic for this week is the book of Galatians, a letter from Paul to the churches in an area of Asia Minor known as Galatia. Read the introduction to the book in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. You'll see that we will read the entire letter. Before tackling the worksheet, you might want to read the entire letter in one sitting, using an easier translation like the New Living Translation. Then begin reading the daily passages in the NRSV or NIV.

Big problems in Galatia!

In the mid-50's AD, some of the churches that Paul founded in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) were under attack and he pulled no punches in responding. As we'll discuss throughout the class, one of the biggest issues that faced the early church was the struggle between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Because Christianity began as a movement within first-century Judaism, many Jews believed that in order to become a Christian, a Gentile¹ must live under the law of Israel. For male converts, this would mean circumcision. For all converts, this would mean keeping the Sabbath, obeying the Jewish dietary laws, and so on. In all his writings, Paul is clear that Christians are marked out only by their faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 4). Paul taught that even the Old Testament heroes, such as Abraham, were reconciled to God by their faith – not by the works of the law. Further, Paul taught that this faith is received by God's grace alone and that it eliminates all traditional distinctions before God – “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:26-29, NRSV) In the early church, Paul's teachings carried the day, in opposition to Peter (see chapter 2)², and were endorsed in about 50AD by an important council of Christian leaders in Jerusalem.

Evidently, false teachers had come to Galatia preaching that both faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to the law of Moses are needed to be reconciled with God. Paul is profoundly disappointed that these churches have succumbed to false teaching (yes, heresy!) and he is very combative in this letter. In contrast to Paul's letters to other churches, there is no general word of thanksgiving for the churches in Galatia. Instead, Paul quickly sets the stage for the rest of the letter – “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” (Gal 1:6-7, NRSV)

If it is faith alone, can we do whatever we want?

Because Paul preached a gospel of faith alone, he was often accused of endorsing an “anything goes!” philosophy. Thus, in Paul's letters, when he talks about our faith and our freedom in Christ, he also usually talks about how we are to live in Christ – “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal 5:13-14, NRSV) Christians are called to resist their sinful nature, and instead, show the fruits of the Spirit³ – “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh⁴ with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.” (Gal 5:22-26)

¹ Anyone who is not Jewish is a Gentile.

² In Acts 15, at the council meeting, Peter supports Paul's position. Still, at a minimum, Paul takes Peter to task for his unwillingness to stand up to the Judaizers (those who want to make circumcision mandatory).

³ Remember – Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit – a person, a “who” ~ not an it!

⁴ “flesh” – a word Paul uses to describe our sinful nature, not our physical bodies. Note also the reference to “crucified.” The cross stands at the center of Paul's theology. Nearly all issues in his letters are understood in the context of the cross.

Bible Readings for Week 3

This week's readings consist of the entire letter to the Galatians. Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in this letter?

<p>Day 1 Galatians 1:1–2:10; Opening & defense of Paul and his legitimacy as an apostle</p>	<p>Day 2 Galatians 2:11–2:21; Trusting in Christ as the totally sufficient way to God's blessing</p>
<p>Day 3 Galatians 3; It is about trust in Christ, not trust in the law!</p>	<p>Day 4 Galatians 4 & 5; (1) The futility of returning to the old & (2) the proper use of Christian freedom</p>
<p>Day 5 Galatians 6; Conduct in the church, the meaning of circumcision, and closing of the letter</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>