



Gospel matters

GALATIANS

by Timothy Keller

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The good book guide to Galatians

US Edition

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Series Consultants: Tim Chester, Tim Thornborough,
Anne Woodcock, Carl Laferton

The Good Book Company

Tel: (US): 866 244 2165

Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880

Tel (int): + (44) 208 942 0880

Email: admin@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites

N America: www.thegoodbook.com

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



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introduction: good book guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, moms and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- 🗂 **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗨 **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



why study Galatians?

Which gospel are you relying on?

In Galatia in AD50, the church faced a choice between two “gospels”—two ways of living, of thinking, of viewing how to be right with God.

On the one side were the teachers who told these young Christians that their performance mattered. Of course they needed to trust Christ and His death; and then, if they wanted truly to be acceptable to God, they needed to get circumcised and get on with keeping God’s laws. Their efforts were what counted.

On the other side was Paul, the church-planting missionary who had founded the Galatian church a few years before. He said they were “foolish” and “bewitched” (3 v 1). He claimed the gospel they were turning to was actually “no gospel at all” (1 v 7).

And he told them that the only performance that mattered was Christ’s: His life, death and resurrection. Faith in Him, Paul argued, was all that anyone needed to be truly acceptable to God. Their efforts counted for nothing—and relying on them would bring them under God’s “curse” (3 v 10). Which “gospel” they followed mattered.

The choice between the gospel of Christ-alone and the false gospel of Christ-plus is still one which Christians face today. Christ-plus may not look the same in our cultures as it did in Galatia. But it’s still an attractive message, a flattering view, and a subtle reversal of the true gospel... and so it’s still deadly.

As Paul wrote to the Galatian church, he knew that to lose your grip on the true gospel is to desert and lose Christ Himself, and to lose the salvation and blessing and freedom He gives. The gospel matters. Paul knew that everything was at stake.

It still is. In these seven studies taking you through the book of Galatians, Paul will present us with a gospel that is wonderful, liberating, and true. He’ll show us that our problems in the Christian life come when we lose or forget or fail to live by this gospel.

And he will ask us repeatedly: which gospel are *you* relying on?





BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does Galatians fit into the whole story of God's word?

GALATIANS

cAD50

AD48 — Paul's first missionary journey takes him through southern Galatia

cAD50 — Paul writes his letter to the Galatians, possibly from Syria or Corinth (Greece)



1

Galatians 1 v 1-9

GOSPEL REVERSED

talkabout

1. What makes you surprised or disappointed?

investigate

 Read Galatians 1 v 1-9

2. As Paul begins this letter, what does his mood seem to be?

DICTIONARY

Grace (v 3):
unmerited favor.

Gospel (v 6):
announcement (often
of good news).

Pervert (v 7):
reverse, twist.

- What reasons do these verses give for his frame of mind?

3. How does Paul describe himself in verse 1? What does verse 1 tell us about what he means by this word?



explore more

optional

- ▶ Read Romans 1 v 8-10; 1 Corinthians 1 v 4-7; Ephesians 1 v 15-17; Philipians 1 v 3-8; Colossians 1 v 3-6

What do all these have in common that the beginning of Galatians is lacking?

How do you think Paul would have wanted the Galatian Christians to respond to this omission?

How does this change how we read the letter to the Galatians?

4. Verses 1-5 contain the core of Paul's "gospel", or announcement. So from these verses, what is "the gospel"?

- Why does this gospel bring people "grace and peace from God" (v 3), do you think?

- Who gets the glory and praise for the gospel? Why is this fair?



apply

5. Verse 5 is the motivation for everything Paul does. How is this a challenge to us?





getting personal

If someone asked you what the gospel is, what would you say? Why not write down your explanation of the gospel sometime today, and use verses 1-5 to help you shape and sharpen it.

Who will you ask God to give you an opportunity to share the gospel with this week?



investigate

We've seen that Paul is "astonished" that the Galatian church is "turning to a different gospel" (v 6).

6. **Read Galatians 3 v 1-5.** How do some teachers in Galatia seem to have been changing the gospel message?

7. What does Paul say about any change to the gospel message (1 v 6-7)?

- Why is this the case, do you think?

8. What is Paul's attitude to those who "pervert" the gospel (v 8-9)?



- Think about what we've seen the real gospel is; gives us; and results in for God. Do you think Paul's language here is justified? Why / why not?

9. When did the Galatians hear the real "gospel of Christ" (v 8)? How does verse 1 give us confidence that this gospel is the true gospel?

 **apply**

10. How do people today add to the gospel message?

11. Why do we sometimes not react to false gospels in the same way as Paul did?

 **getting personal**

The gospel message cannot be changed without being lost. It's like a vacuum—as soon as you let air into a vacuum, it is no vacuum at all.

In what ways are you tempted to add to the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, our rescuer and ruler?

How much do you care when you hear someone changing the gospel message? Is your attitude like Paul's? Why / why not?



12. Why is the real gospel wonderful?!



pray

Thank God for:

- appointing apostles to preach and defend the gospel.
- Paul's commitment to and passion for gospel truth.
- the gospel. Thank God for rescuing His people from their sins through the death of His Son, and raising Him from the dead to prove forgiveness is available.

Ask God:

- to deepen your love and passion for the gospel.
- to help you to recognize false, reversed gospels; and to have the wisdom to know how to respond.
- for opportunities to share the true gospel with others this week.

