

GALATIANS

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# FREE FOR ALL



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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PHILLIP D. JENSEN  
AND KEL RICHARDS



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*Free for All*

Second edition

© Matthias Media 2010

First published 1994

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

PO Box 225

Kingsford NSW 2032

Australia

Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61-2-9663-1478

Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61-2-9663-3265

Email: [info@matthiasmedia.com.au](mailto:info@matthiasmedia.com.au)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com.au](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au)

Matthias Media (USA)

Telephone: 724 964 8152; international: +1-724-964-8152

Facsimile: 724 964 8166; international: +1-724-964-8166

Email: [sales@matthiasmedia.com](mailto:sales@matthiasmedia.com)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com](http://www.matthiasmedia.com)

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ISBN 978 1 921441 69 1

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Cover design and typesetting by Matthias Media.

Series concept design by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd.

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## » HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

### 1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God’s word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

## 2. The format

Each study contains five main components:

- short sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- an ‘Implications’ section that helps you think about what these passages mean for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

## 3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

## 4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

## 5. Bible translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *Free for All*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.



» STUDY 1

# DAMNED ANGELS AND GOSPEL TWISTERS

[GALATIANS 1:1-10]

1. People often think that we can never be certain about the answers to religious questions such as "Who is God?" Why is this, do you think?
2. What answers do people give to the question, "What is a Christian?"
3. How would you answer that question?

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## What is a Christian?

IS THE ANSWER JUST A MATTER OF opinion? Our world today thinks that this question—and many others like it—is just a matter of opinion.

The world today is more lost than ever on the subject of what can and can't be known. There is a great lack of confidence about what is certain, as more and more things fall into the category of 'relative'.

Today no-one is right—except the

person who says “no-one is right”: he is always right!

Every point of view is tolerated today, except the view that says there is right and wrong, true and false.

But in Galatians we will discover that God says that following Jesus Christ is not just a matter of opinion. There is a right, there is a wrong—there is true, there is false—about Christianity.

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### Read Galatians 1:8-9.

4. What tone does Paul adopt when discussing the preachers of a “gospel contrary to the one we preached”?

5. Why can't there be more than one gospel? Why is it such a serious issue?

6. What clues do you find here to the problems in the Galatian church?

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## The problem of confusion

PAUL HAD PREACHED THE gospel in **Galatia**, and founded churches there. He is writing to these churches because something has happened—troublers have come among them: “there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (v. 7).

Who were these troublers? They were people who were confusing what it means to be a Christian.

As we shall see later in Galatians, they were attacking Paul and the gospel by insisting on obedience to the Jewish law, as symbolized in **circumcision**.

But these Galatians were Gentiles (non-Jews) and they were uncircumcised—they had never taken the law upon themselves. Can these non-Jews become Christians without becoming Jews first? That is the question the ‘troublers’ were using to confuse the Galatians.

At first glance, this question has nothing much to do with us. But in these studies we shall find the same type of mistake being made today that the ‘troublers’ made back in the first century.

## Paul's unusual greeting

Every culture has standard forms of greetings to use in letters. For example, today we might write:

Dear Aunt Agatha,

Thank you for the Christmas present—an elephant's foot umbrella stand is just what I have always wanted.

Yours sincerely,  
Frank

The first century had a standard form for letters that went like this:

- i. The writer's name
- ii. The people to whom he was writing
- iii. Greetings!

You can see this standard form throughout the New Testament. However, the Christian form was slightly differ-

## Galatia

Galatia is Turkey, roughly speaking. The exact geographical boundaries wobble around a bit, but what Paul called Galatia is, more or less, part of modern Turkey.

## Circumcision

For the Jew in the Old Testament (from Genesis 17 onwards), circumcision (the surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis) was the sign of being ‘under contract’ with God, the contract that gave rise to the law. It was the symbol of accepting the Old Testament law as the system that ruled your life. This is stated in Galatians 5:3: “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law”.

---

ent—instead of “Greetings!”, Christians would write “Grace to you and peace!”

Paul also had his own standard letter form. It generally went like this:

i. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ

ii. To the church in ...

iii. Grace and peace to you

iv. I always thank God for you because of ...

v. And I am praying for you ...

---

**Read Galatians 1:1–10.**

7. In what ways does Paul's greeting differ from his standard greeting (above)?

8. What does Paul say about what it means for him to be an apostle (v. 1)?

9. What does Paul say about the source of grace and peace?

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10. Paul is astonished that the Galatians are deserting the gospel of Christ (v. 6). What do we learn about the gospel of Christ in this passage (vv. 1-10)?

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## What is the gospel?

### The giving

THE KEY WORD HERE IS GRACE (vv. 3, 6), and it means ‘generosity’. It is the opposite to something we have earned, something we do for ourselves.

If at the end of a week’s work your boss gives you a week’s pay, that is not generosity; it is just what you have earned—what you deserve or merit because of what you have done. But if you don’t turn up for work and the boss still hands you a packet of money—that is grace. That is surprising (astounding!) generosity, and is entirely unearned.

Grace and merit are opposites. You cannot get something both by grace and by merit at the same time. It is either one or the other. You either earn something or you are given it.

And grace—astounding generosity—is what we get from Jesus. Paul wants to drive home that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (v. 4).

The Galatians are turning away from God who has called them through this astonishing generosity—this self-giving—of Jesus Christ (vv. 6-7).

### The deserting

“I am astonished”, writes Paul in verse 6, “that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel”.

Verses 7, 8 and 9 then tell us some amazing things about the character of the gospel that makes the idea that ‘all religious truth is just a matter of opinion’ absolute nonsense.

In these verses, the point is that there is only one true gospel—the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. But, there are also ‘gospel twisters’—people who try to pervert (or twist) the gospel of grace.

And Paul makes another point: the authority of the gospel rests in the gospel message itself—not in the preacher of the gospel, however impressive that preacher might be. Don’t even trust an angelic preacher, says Paul, only trust the one true gospel of grace.

So, if an angel (or an apostle!) tries to sell you a different gospel, says Paul, don’t buy it!

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**Re-read Galatians 1:1–10.**

11. What reasons does Paul give for being so insistent on the gospel of grace?
12. Which words (that Paul uses) convey the importance that Paul attaches to the gospel of grace?
13. When this letter was read for the first time, what did verses 1–10 tell the Galatian Christians about themselves?

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**Drawing the line**

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL—THE gospel of the grace, the self-giving, of Jesus. There is no other gospel. It is either this or nothing.

“That’s intolerant!” comes the protest.

Yes! God is intolerant about untruth.

Is it tolerant to say that the earth is both flat and round? There are some issues where ‘tolerance’ amounts to fool-

ishness, and the truth of the gospel is one of them.

If Jesus Christ is God—then Krishna isn’t. And Allah isn’t.

That’s exactly the same as saying that if the world is round, then it isn’t flat.

In Galatians, God is telling us that there is no other gospel. There is no other way back home. It is this or nothing.

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## » Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- How would you answer the person who says, “Religion is just a matter of opinion—people should believe whatever is true for them”?
  
- How does Paul’s ‘drawing the line’ (vv. 8–9) affect the way we share the gospel with our friends from other religious backgrounds?
  
- What guidelines does Galatians 1:1–10 give us for exposing counterfeits of Christianity? What characteristics does it give us of the true gospel?

- 
- How faithful have you been to the one true gospel? (In your conversations with non-Christians, have you been tempted to make it more palatable? Have you been tempted to trim the gospel to make it more attractive to your listeners? What experiences have you had with people who have tried to pervert the gospel?)

### » Give thanks and pray

- Give thanks for God's word in Galatians and ask that he would change you through it.
- Give thanks that he has given us the one true gospel—the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to help you proclaim this gospel in your life.