

Discussion Questions

This Beautiful Mess -- Galatians 1:1-10

Introduction

Imagine it's 1965, just one year after the Civil Rights Act that outlawed all forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or nationality. You are an architect who has been hired to design a new community center in your city for the purpose of promoting unity. You work tirelessly until the plans are just right.

After submitting the plans to the builder, you move to a different part of the country to do the same thing. Soon after, you are told that the builder has taken the liberty of changing the design. No longer is there one building for all. Instead, the building is divided so that one side is for only for blacks, the other for whites.

Some people are relieved. They knew the original design would create tension. Others were confused about what was happening. But the builder assured everyone that you, the one who made the original plans, really didn't have permission to make the design. The builder claimed he was the one sent from the real authorities.

This story is similar to the dilemma Paul faced when he received word that there were Jews in the Galatian church teaching that Gentiles had to become Jewish in order to be a part of the church family. Paul responds with an incredible letter validating his authority is from God and clarifying the meaning of the Gospel, Jesus' message.

(adapted from N.T. Wright's *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*)

Options for Ice Breaker Question(s)

1. Would you consider yourself more trusting or less trusting of religious leaders? Why?
2. How do you decide whether you can trust what a pastor or religious leader teaches?

Read and Discuss

Read Galatians 1:1-4.

1. Paul's opponents had convinced the Galatians that Paul was not like the apostles that had walked with Jesus while he was alive. Rather than being an authority, they were saying Paul was just a second-hand apostle. What does Paul stress about his apostleship?
2. Paul describes the message of Jesus (gospel) in verse 3-5. Describe in your own words what this is.

Read Galatians 1:5-10.

1. What caused Paul to be "astonished" by the Galatian church?
2. **Read Background Info:** The common Jewish belief was that the Messiah would come to be Lord and ruler of the entire world. Paul argues that this happened in Jesus, and that is working towards the purpose of uniting the world as one family in him. But Paul's opponents insisted

that if Gentiles wanted to be part of the family, they had to become Jews and practice the two aspects of Moses' Law that separated Jews from Gentiles – circumcision and food laws.

3. What are some behaviors or beliefs that you have witnessed causing separation in the Body of Christ?
4. Why do you think it is often appealing for Christ-followers to require certain beliefs or behaviors to be part of the "inner circle"? In other words, why is it so hard to emphasize faith in Christ alone as the basis for a faith-community?

Application and Prayer

1. What do I need God to do **in me** or **through me** as a result of today's discussion?
2. Who do I need to pray for as a result of today's discussion?
3. Pray together