

Message Discussion Guide

OUR CURSE, HIS CROSS

The Church at Brook Hills . Dr. David Platt . March 23, 2008 . Galatians 3:13

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Begin by asking your group if anyone has ever had a "near death" experience (car accident, sickness, etc.). Have those people talk about what went through their minds and hearts during this time.

If no one has had such an experience, ask the group if they have ever been with someone as they moved from life to death. If so, ask that person to describe what they saw going on (the words shared, the emotions demonstrated, etc.).

If no one has had any of these experiences, have the group reflect on the video clip shown in the service about the man who was in the hospital bed dying of cancer. Have the group talk about the fact that this man wanted real answers to one of life's hardest questions (Being right before God/FORGIVENESS). The man in the video made it clear that this was not the time for New Age philosophy, speculation, nice fluffy words with no substance, etc...

Tell everyone that this small group time will be devoted to wrestling with and finding the answer from God's word for life's most important question: How can I be made right (be FORGIVEN) before God? Be sure to let them know that even if their eyes have been opened to the truth of God's forgiveness in Christ, they will daily come in contact with those who are still blinded. God wants them to be able to give an answer for the hope that He has given them to those who may have no hope.

Option 2

Begin by asking your group how often they hear people saying there are multiple ways to God and multiple ways of being made right before him (FORGIVENESS).

Have people in the group share some experiences they have had in:

- Conversations
- Overhearing conversations
- T.V.
- Radio
- In the work place
- Among family members
- In a high school / college classroom

Ask your group if they have ever thought deeply about whether or not this idea of there being multiple ways to God was true. Ask your group if they have ever wondered what the eternal consequences were if those who say there are many ways to God are wrong.

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Review the Message . . .

Review the context: The Epistle (letter) to the Galatian churches was written by Paul for the purpose of encouraging the Galatian Christians to hold firm to what he had taught them. Paul had started these churches on his first missionary journey and visited them again on his second and third journeys. In Paul's absence, false-teachers who claimed to follow Christ but still held tightly to Judaism had begun teaching these new believers that in addition to trusting in Christ they must also observe the law associated with Jewish tradition in order to be forgiven. These false-teachers refused to accept Paul's teaching, feeling that they better understood the message of Christ. They insisted that non-Jewish believers were not and could not be true Christians until they submitted to the Jewish rite of circumcision and committed to keeping the Law of Moses. The naïve Galatian believers accepted these teachings with the same eagerness with which they had accepted Paul's true proclamation of the Gospel. The central message of Galatians is that a right relationship / FORGIVENESS with God is based on trusting in Christ alone, not by trying to work one's way to salvation through obedience to the Law. Paul was once and for all settling the issue of how believers should relate to the Law of Moses in terms of salvation. There could be no confusion to the Galatians anymore about the Gospel Paul had preached regardless of what these Jewish "believers" taught them.

In our contemporary culture, there are many seeking a relationship with God, or with a god of their own making. As in the 1st century, that relationship is often defined by a person's own actions and deeds. We are taught to work hard for the things we want in life—to graduate high school with honors, to get into the best colleges, to pursue a career path that leads to a life of wealth and comfort, to support our families in such a way that provides them with 'better than we had it', to retire in good standing and comfort, etc. All of these things can be good and honorable goals and we often must work hard to achieve them. However, the issue of our FORGIVENESS—our being made right with God—is a different matter entirely. We are tempted to ask, "so what does God want from me?" The answer is humbling. God does not want or need anything from us, for He knows that we cannot give Him what He requires—a perfect and holy life lived for His glory alone. Jesus Christ, the Son of God (God the Son), already lived the perfect and holy life God requires. He took on our curse, the wrath of God and death, and God raised Him up from the dead, so that we might be FORGIVEN and have eternal life.

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Our Curse, His Cross

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Galatians 3:13

Three simple, difficult, life-altering, eternal truths from this verse...

1. We are under the _____ curse _____ of God's law.

- Have someone in the group describe the last time they were caught in a really bad storm. They will use terms like: rain, wet, soaked, lightning, thunder, flood, darkness, hale, wind, blowing, etc. Ask the group: How does this storm metaphor help us to get our minds around the fact that we are under the curse of God (storm) because of our sin (disobedience to His perfect law)?
- In his message, David referred to Galatians 3:10, where Paul references this curse which Moses made clear in Deuteronomy 27: 26. Read the Deuteronomy verse and answer this question, "If God knew that we were not going to be able to keep the Law, why do you think He set up a curse if we failed to keep it?"
 - We are _____ guilty _____ before Him.
 - What are some responses from our culture to the truth that we are guilty before God? How do many rationalize their way out of the guilt we all face?
 - What are some appropriate biblical responses to those who claim that not everyone stands guilty before God—that there are many good people in the world? (See Romans 3:10-18)
 - We are _____ condemned _____ by Him.
 - Some may deceive themselves into thinking that the curse of the Law is different than being condemned or "cursed" personally by God. What is the connection between God's Law and God's character?
 - Read John 3:16-21. Notice the connection between these verses and Romans 3:10-18.
 - We are _____ separated _____ from Him.
 - Does God measure the seriousness of our sin against different types of sin or the seriousness of another's sin, or does He measure it against His own infinite holiness?
 - What are the implications / results of offending an infinitely holy God with just one sin?
 - Read Galatians 3:10. How many drops of rain does it take for one to be wet? How many laws must one break in order to become "cursed" under the Law (i.e. cursed by and separated from God)?
 - Our _____ pride _____ is set against Him.
 - Is it easy to accept that God's wrath is set against ALL of humanity (the seemingly good and the obviously bad)? Why or why not?
 - What is pride? Is it arrogance, or rebellion, or both?
 - How does a greater understanding of God's infinite holiness help to shrink our pride?
 - Our hearts are _____ hard _____ toward Him.
 - Ignoring God and the things of God are ways of hardening our hearts toward Him. What are some ways we harden our hearts that are not so obvious? (Leader's note: lead your group to

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realize that often relying on our own efforts and seeking acceptance by God by obedience to the Law are ways of hardening our hearts to the grace/FORGIVENESS God offers)

- Our lives are _____ **hopeless** _____ without Him.
- What does it mean to truly have no hope? What do people in our culture often hope for that in the end leaves them hopeless? How should we respond to those who have no hope?

2. Christ came under the _____ **cross** _____ of God's judgment.

- Paul points to the fact that Christ was cursed for us. He refers to Deuteronomy 21: 22-23 to show how this is true. Read it and discuss this question, "If Christ had always kept the Law, did He deserve God's blessings or curse? Why then was He cursed by hanging on a tree?"
- Why was God's judgment (wrath) poured out on Christ at the cross? Why is that good news for us?
- You may want to have an umbrella with you as a visual. Ask your group how an umbrella can keep you from the effects of a nasty storm. Ask your group how this symbol of an umbrella represents what Christ did for us on the cross.
 - He _____ **covered** _____ our guilt.
 - Why is Christ's covering of our sin by His death on the cross acceptable to God as a payment for sin? (See 1 Peter 2:24 & 3:18)
 - He _____ **endured** _____ our condemnation.
 - Redemption is not a difficult concept to grasp, but it is often a difficult one to accept. Why is it often difficult for us to accept when someone pays for a meal, or a debt, or sacrificially offers to serve us?
 - Read Isaiah 53:5-6. What is the price of our redemption/FORGIVENESS from the "curse" of sin? Is this easy for you to accept?
 - He _____ **suffered** _____ our separation.
 - The pain of abandonment and aloneness are among the harshest of miseries in this life. Christ experienced this pain evidenced by His cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" Why did God "forsake" Christ in the darkest moment of His life? How is Jesus' separation from God on the cross different from humanity's separation from God in sin and blindness?
 - His _____ **humility** _____ overcame our pride.
 - How does Jesus role as Creator (John 1) when contrasted with His role as suffering servant (Isaiah 53) strike against our pride and self-reliance?
 - Read Philippians 2:5-11. In what way(s) have you seen your own pride keep you from sharing the Gospel (i.e. Christ's humiliation) with others?
 - His _____ **gentleness** _____ overcame our hardness.
 - How do you respond when others criticize / persecute you for your opinions / beliefs? Do you reflect Christ's gentleness and perseverance or the hardness and antagonism of a sinful heart?
 - Read Isaiah 53:7. What does Isaiah prophesy would be Jesus response (and was in fact His response) to the criticism and persecution He would receive?

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- His death overcame our hopelessness.
- What is the ultimate cause of hopelessness? of fear? In what way does the cross of Christ speak to this cause?

3. We now stand within the grasp of God's grace.

Everyone in the world knows it is raining and that the storm is a bad one. But each person's response varies. Some get soaked, some try to run from the storm, and some embrace the umbrella and are completely covered. Ask your group to describe the ways they have seen others getting soaked (ignoring the curse), trying to run from the storm (working to overcome the curse), and taking up the umbrella (embracing the fact that there is a storm/curse and running to the cross).

- Three options:
 - We can ignore the curse.
 - What are some ways that people try to ignore the fact that we live in a fallen world (sleep, party, remain in ignorance, stay busy, etc...).
 - What things do people do to keep from thinking about the realities of living under the curse apart from Christ?
 - We can work to overcome the curse.
 - What do some of the major world religions and philosophies of life say we can do to be made right before God (give money, go to a certain place, religious duty, empty self, etc...).
 - In what way does pride fuel unsaved people to try to earn their own salvation?
 - We can embrace the curse and run to the cross.
 - What is the major sin that keeps people from embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior? (Pride / Unbelief)
 - What can we do to help those who are ignoring the curse or are seeking to overcome the curse, experience God's grace?

Conclusion: We don't need to fear death or the wrath and judgment of God. What we celebrate on Easter (The Resurrection of Jesus Christ) teaches us that God has accepted Jesus as the substitute for our sins. By raising Jesus from the dead God declares that Jesus is Lord, and that all those who place their trust in Him have moved from death to life and will spend eternity with Him. JESUS is our ONLY HOPE, TRUST in Him ALONE for your salvation. Praise God!