

## **The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**

### **A video lecture by Dr. David Rhoads**

#### **Introduction to the Course**

This video course is designed to introduce learners to the oral performance and history of the book of Galatians. Using what we know about the life and culture of first century Christians, Dr. David Rhoads shares with the listener information about the history and culture of the people of the ancient world, the letter from Paul to the Galatians and why it is important to try to hear the story in the way that the original recipients of the letter would have heard it. Dr. Rhoads also discusses the implications of Paul's understanding of justification for our world today.

#### **Notes for the Course Facilitator**

As a facilitator for this learning experience you have taken on a very important role in the educational ministry of your faith community. Thank you for helping to build up the body of Christ by helping others to learn more about scripture and faith.

This study guide is created with congregational study groups in mind. There are three video lectures in this course and this guide provides discussion questions and information for each lecture. We envision a three-week session in which your group studies the book of Galatians, with each class lasting 60 minutes. However, this guide can be adapted to the needs of your group and as you see fit for your context.

The general format for each sixty-minute class is as follows:

- Opening (5-10 minutes)
- View Video (20-30 minutes)
- Discussion Questions (20-25 minutes)
- Closing (5-10 minutes)

Below are some considerations to take into account as you plan each weekly session:

- Before each session, view the material for the coming week. Watch the video to familiarize yourself with its contents and consider which discussion questions you would most like to consider. Take into account the time available for your gatherings and the members of the group to determine which questions would be most interesting and relevant.
- Prepare the room that you will be meeting in. Make sure the TV/DVD player is working and the video is cued to the right lecture. Arrange the furniture so that everyone can see the video and engage in conversation with one another. Make the room a welcoming environment for learning.
- Encourage participants to bring their Bible with them for reference and also provide some Bibles for those who do not have one available. Please note, however, that Dr. Rhoads suggests that participants not follow along in their Bible when he dramatizes the book of Galatians in session 2.
- There is a lot of information covered in each lecture. Invite participants to take notes on important concepts and their insights so that they can better engage in

discussions following the video. Provide paper and pencils for learners to take notes.

- Provide copies of the discussion questions handout, as applicable, for each participant.
- Pray for the members of your group, the facilitators, and your time together as you prepare each week.

## **The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**

### **Session 1: An Introduction by David Rhodes**

In this introductory lecture Dr. David Rhodes of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago discusses the oral nature of the writings of the New Testament and explains how the fact that this letter to the Galatians was originally read out loud impacted how listeners heard the message. Dr. Rhoads also discusses the context for this letter and the general ministry of Paul to early Christians.

#### **Learning Goals**

1. To understand the oral nature of the letter to the Galatians.
2. To understand the oral nature of the writings of the New Testament
3. To understand how the oral nature of the letter to the Galatians, as compared with how we read the letter now, affects how a listener responds to the letter.

#### **Opening (10 minutes)**

After welcoming participants to this study and providing time for introductions, spend a few minutes discussing why participants decided to be a part of this class and what they are hoping to learn during this course. Follow the initial discussion with an opening prayer.

#### **View Video Lecture (27:43)**

#### **Discussion (15 minutes)**

1. As described by Dr. Rhodes, what most surprised you about the context in which Paul was writing? In what ways does it differ from our current context? In what ways does it seem to be similar?
2. Dr. Rhodes emphasizes the fact that the letters of Paul would have been read aloud in their entirety to the community. In pairs, or as a group, envision what it would be like to have the letter of the Galatians read out loud in a public setting. What do you imagine the benefits of this way of receiving the letter would have been? What do you imagine to be the difficulties?
3. Dr. Rhodes states that, "We have tended for the last 2000 years to treat these biblical writings counter to how they were originally experienced." He indicates that while the early Christians would have heard each letter in entirety, we break the writings into short sections when we read them aloud. He also notes that we often read scripture privately, while the early Christians would not have had the ability or luxury to do so. What is your response to these observations made by Dr. Rhodes?

#### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Invite each member of the group to share the most surprising or interesting new piece of information they learned in the class today. Then, bring the class to an end by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

**The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**  
**A video lecture by Dr. David Rhoads**

**Session 1**  
**Discussion Question Handout**

1. As described by Dr. Rhodes, what most surprised you about the context in which Paul was writing? In what ways does it differ from our current context? In what ways does it seem to be similar?
  
2. Dr. Rhodes emphasizes the fact that the letters of Paul would have been read aloud in their entirety to the community. In pairs, or as a group, envision what it would be like to have the letter of the Galatians read out loud in a public setting. What do you imagine the benefits of this way of receiving the letter would have been? What do you imagine to be the difficulties?
  
3. Dr. Rhodes states that, "We have tended for the last 2000 years to treat these biblical writings counter to how they were originally experienced." He indicates that while the early Christians would have heard each letter in entirety, we break the writings into short sections when we read them aloud. He also notes that we often read scripture privately, while the early Christians would not have had the ability or luxury to do so. What is your response to these observations made by Dr. Rhodes?

## **The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**

### **Session 2: Paul's Letter**

In this portion of the DVD lecture Dr. David Rhodes performs the letter to the Galatians, attempting to recapture the oral nature of the writings for a modern audience.

#### **Learning Goals**

4. To experience the letter of Galatians read aloud in its entirety.
5. To learn about the opportunities and challenges of oral listening to an entire biblical text as compared with the way we utilize the text in our current day.

#### **Opening (5 minutes)**

After welcoming participants to this study, spend a few minutes explaining that today the class will hear the entire letter of Galatians, similar to the way the early Christians first experienced it. As suggested by Dr. Rhodes, remind participants that they will not want to follow along in a Bible with the words of the book, as the early listeners would not have had the written word in front of them. Follow the initial discussion with an opening prayer.

#### **View Video Lecture (29:37)**

#### **Discussion (15 minutes)**

4. Having listened to the entire book of Galatians in one sitting, share with the group one interesting observation about the experience.
5. On the whole, what did you find to be useful about listening to the text in one sitting? In what ways did you find it challenging to listen to a biblical text in its entirety?
6. Given the experience of listening to the entire letter to the Galatians in one setting, do you think there is a need to provide opportunities for faith communities and congregations to hear scripture in its entirety in an oral format? What are ways that this could be done? What are ways that you have seen this done?

#### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Invite each member of the group to share the most surprising or interesting new piece of information they learned in the class today. Then, bring the class to an end by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

**The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**  
**A video lecture by Dr. David Rhoads**

**Session 2**  
**Discussion Question Handout**

1. Having listened to the entire book of Galatians in one sitting, share with the group one interesting observation about the experience.
2. On the whole, what did you find to be useful about listening to the text in one sitting? In what ways did you find it challenging to listen to a biblical text in its entirety?
3. Given the experience of listening to the entire letter to the Galatians in one setting, do you think there is a need to provide opportunities for faith communities and congregations to hear scripture in its entirety in an oral format? What are ways that this could be done? What are ways that you have seen this done?

## **The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**

### **Session 3: Reflections on Paul**

Dr. David Rhoads reflects on Paul's letter to the Galatians, and Paul's theological view of the world. In this portion of the video lecture Dr. Rhoads also discusses the implications of Paul's theological understanding of the world and how it relates to the challenges of our time.

#### **Learning Goals**

6. To understand Paul's understanding of justification and forgiveness.
7. To understand the three implications of Paul's theological view of justification as explained by Dr. Rhoads.

#### **Opening (10 minutes)**

After welcoming participants, share with the class that today the video lecture will focus on Dr. Rhoads reflections on Paul's theological understanding of the world, especially as it applies to the concept of justification. As a way to begin the discussion for the day, invite the class to brainstorm and share what they already know or have heard about the concept of justification. Write what the class shares on a large piece of paper for everyone to see. Follow the initial discussion with an opening prayer.

#### **View Video Lecture (17:40)**

#### **Discussion (22 minutes)**

7. Having already discussed what the participants know about the concept of justification in the opening, take some time to compare Paul's understanding of justification as expressed in this video lecture with the list the class made. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Are you surprised by Paul's understanding of justification as expressed by Dr. Rhoads?
8. Dr. Rhoads suggests that Paul's emphasis was on justification rather than forgiveness. Dr. Rhoads explains that forgiveness assumes that we are in the process of justification, and wherever we fall short, God will then fill in the gaps to bring us up to God's standard. However, justification, as Paul understands it, seeks to respond to God's grace and love, and as a matter of course gets rid of the law. In turn, the task of the one who is justified, if there is any task at all, is to live out God's love in their world. Which concept, forgiveness or justification, as explained in this lecture, are you most drawn to? Which do you see being lived out in your faith community?
9. Dr. Rhoads discusses three implications of Paul's theological understanding of the world and the concept of justification:
  - a. Paul's vision is a world vision
  - b. Justification overcomes all forms of oppression and domination
  - c. Paul's ethic is a situational ethicIn pairs, or as a group, pick one relevant issue to your faith community and discuss how the three implications apply to the selected topic.

\*\*Facilitator's note for question 3: You may decide to select an issue for the group to discuss that is of particular interest to your class. Suggestions for possible topics include the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa, concerns relating to stewardship of the environment, or end of life issues.

**Closing (10 minutes)**

Since this is the final class, use this closing time as a way to debrief the overall course. Invite each member of the group to share the most surprising or interesting new piece of information they learned in the class. Also invite each participant to share how they will use what they have learned in this class in their daily life and ministry in the world. If there is time, you may also want to invite each person to share what other information they would like to learn about Galatians, the oral nature of scripture, or the writings of Paul. Then, bring the class to an end by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.



**The Dramatic Presentation of Paul's Letter to the Galatians**  
**A video lecture by Dr. David Rhoads**

**Session 3**  
**Discussion Question Handout**

1. Having already discussed what the participants know about the concept of justification in the opening, take some time to compare Paul's understanding of justification as expressed in this video lecture with the list the class made. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Are you surprised by Paul's understanding of justification as expressed by Dr. Rhoads?
  
2. Dr. Rhoads suggests that Paul's emphasis was on justification rather than forgiveness. Dr. Rhoads explains that forgiveness assumes that we are in the process of justification, and wherever we fall short, God will then fill in the gaps to bring us up to God's standard. However, justification, as Paul understands it, seeks to respond to God's grace and love, and as a matter of course gets rid of the law. In turn, the task of the one who is justified, if there is any task at all, is to live out God's love in their world. Which concept, forgiveness or justification, as explained in this lecture, are you most drawn to? Which do you see being lived out in your faith community?
  
3. Dr. Rhoads discusses three implications of Paul's theological understanding of the world and the concept of justification:
  - a. Paul's vision is a world vision
  - b. Justification overcomes all forms of oppression and domination
  - c. Paul's ethic is a situational ethicIn pairs, or as a group, pick one relevant issue to your faith community and discuss how the three implications apply to the selected topic.