

## STUDY GUIDE

**CHURCH NAME**  
**BOOK OF GALATIANS**  
**FREE IN CHRIST**  
**GALATIANS 3:1-25**  
06/14/2017



### MAIN POINT

God's law shows us the futility of the flesh, then Jesus shows us the price of freedom.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Do you keep a task list or a to-do list to manage all that you have to do each day? What do you use?**

**Do you feel a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment as you scratch off or check off each task you've completed? If so, why is that feeling so satisfying? If not, why are you keeping a task list to begin with?**

We live in a culture that highly values productivity. Task management systems, be they notepads and pencils or apps for our smart phone, are abundant, giving every person virtually no excuse outside of themselves for not being productive. Few things bring more satisfaction at the end of our day than a long list of tasks completed with excellence. It's no wonder that we often translate this experience over to our relationship with God. We view God as the great Taskmaster who is pleased with our accomplishments, when in reality He is already completely satisfied with one accomplishment: the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. Life in the flesh is futile because Jesus has purchased our freedom.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:1-5.**

**Why is Paul's question in verse 2 so crucial? How would you state his question in your own words?**

**What influences lead you to believe that God only accepts you by your actions? What are some of the self-improvement tasks you attempt in your day-to-day relationship with God?**

**Paul wasn't taking issue with the religious works the people were performing but with the motive behind their works. What was wrong with the Galatian believers' motive?**

**What are appropriate motives for obeying God's laws and practicing spiritual disciplines?**

The believers in the Galatian church desired to follow Jesus well, but many had fallen into a trap that tempts us all—legalism. Legalism is the belief that we must fulfill certain requirements in order to gain God's favor. Even though we know we're saved by grace through faith, we still try to make ourselves better in an effort to earn God's love. The Galatian church was being influenced by false teachers known as Judaizers, who taught that people had to keep the Jewish Old Testament laws even after becoming Christians. Their teaching negated Christ's work on the cross, when He became the perfect, final sacrifice for our sins.

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**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:10-14.**

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As Paul continued his warning, he illustrated the dire circumstances of people living as slaves to works and the law. Quoting the Old Testament, Paul reminded us we're cursed. Because of sin, we deserve eternal death. Our cursed nature is evident in the brokenness of this world and our inability to fulfill God's entire law.

**What evidence do you see in yourself of your cursed nature? What evidence do you see in the world?**

**How did Jesus become a curse for us (v. 13)? What purpose did that fulfill?**

The sin in our lives curses us and keeps us separated from God. But Paul pointed out that when Jesus came to earth as a human and died on the cross, He took sin's curse off of us and put it on Himself. Sin is such an assault on God and His creation that it demands punishment. Luckily for us, we don't have to bear that weight. The choice is, will we pursue a relationship with God through our own efforts or through the death and resurrection of Jesus?

**What punishment does your sinful nature deserve? Why can't works set you free from sin's curse?**

**What effect does Jesus' work on the cross have on your life? Do you think it's possible for it to have a greater effect? Why or why not?**

Trusting in self-improvement is so tempting because focusing on specific rules, works, and lists can give us a sense of identity. It also provides a tangible way to measure how "spiritual" we are. But ultimately, this mind-set leads to a false sense of strength that makes us think we can earn our way into God's good graces, when really He alone determines that. We receive life, identity, and strength through God's Spirit. The new life comes through Christ's payment on the cross and is transferred to us because we believe in Him. Instead of sinners needing redemption, we become ambassadors for God's kingdom, empowered by the Spirit's strength.

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**HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:19-26.**

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**For what reason did Paul say the law exists?**

**Look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. How do we break these most basic "rules" of life every day?**

**What is revealed about our lives when we look at the standard set by the law? How does that make you feel about yourself? How does God intend for you to feel?**

The purpose of the law was to show our desperate need for God. The law sets the standard for righteousness and highlights our sinfulness and need of a Savior.

**What does God's intervention through Christ reveal about His feelings for us?**

## Now that Christ has come to fulfill the law, what role does it play in our lives?

Our inability to fulfill the law proves we need a mediator between us and God, which is what Jesus' death on the cross was all about. By embracing faith as the basis for our relationship with God, we move from attempting to please Him and earn His love to being adopted children blanketed in Christ's righteousness. Paul wrote that we are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 26). By faith, we become Christians saved by God's grace, and by faith we live as Christians, furthering His kingdom and spreading the gospel.

### APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Based on what we've studied this week, are spiritual works important? Why or why not? In what act of obedience and faithfulness do you need to improve?**

**Why is it more difficult for most of us to trust God in faith than to try to reach Him by works? What can we do to increase our trust?**

**What can you do this week to start living in light of the gospel of grace instead of your own works?**

### PRAY

Thank God for sending Christ on our behalf, freeing us from bondage to the law. Thank God for giving us the law, which shows us what righteousness and holy living look like and gives us a goal to strive for. Thank God for the Holy Spirit's daily presence in our lives to guide, convict, and comfort us as we seek to live by faith.

### COMMENTARY

#### GALATIANS 3:1-25

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The issue of whether Christians are to live by legalism or by faith has always troubled churches. When the apostle Paul faced it, he bluntly established the case for faith and grace. Chapter 3 makes three important points. First, it emphasizes that Christianity begins with faith. Verses 1-3 addressed believers who seemingly had forgotten this beginning. Paul wasn't concerned about hurting people's feelings, but he was deeply concerned about everyone's understanding of salvation. Twice he referred to the Galatians as foolish and once he accused them of being hypnotized. To be foolish literally means "to be unthinking" and can describe a deficit in understanding or judgment. That the Galatians could be so deficient was not very flattering! To be hypnotized is "to be subject to an evil spell" or "to be fascinated" and can refer to being misled on purpose.

To counter the false ideas in Galatia, Paul set forward one truth and two primary, follow-up questions. The truth related to how his preaching had portrayed Jesus Christ, a verb form that presents a contrasting word picture to that of hypnotism. The idea relates to that of an open, public campaign through the use of posters. Specifically, Paul had depicted Christ as crucified. It was as if he'd made them witnesses to the crucifixion through word pictures. He hadn't tried (and wasn't trying) to fascinate or deceive them. He presented the cross-centered truth to them. Although not stated, the apostle obviously believed the Judaizers were at best minimizing and at worst discounting the importance of the cross. How could these believers accept such a suggestion, given Paul's ministry among them? Christ had done all that was necessary for salvation. What else could they add?

The apostle's first question concerned how the Galatians had received the Holy Spirit. This question equated their becoming Christians with their receiving the Spirit and thus appealed to their initial experience of salvation. For Paul, the answer was obvious, and it should have been obvious to the Galatians. They hadn't become Christians by doing good works. They became Christians and received the Spirit by hearing what the apostle preached and responding with faith. The other question concerned the nature of the Christian life and its answer was just as obvious. Do Christians live by faith or by flesh? There's only one correct answer. We can't begin with faith, receive the Spirit, and then finish by the flesh, which could refer to

circumcision and perhaps more. Paul conclusively answered this second question in verse 11, where he quoted Habakkuk 2:4: "The righteous will live by faith."

Having reestablished the validity of his gospel, which includes both salvation by faith and living by faith, Paul moved to a second idea: Christians don't need a religious checklist. He gave four reasons to support this contention, basing each of them on separate quotations from the Old Testament.

First, the law carries within it a curse. In some ways, Deuteronomy 27:26 supports Paul's previous point in verses 1-3. It also reemphasizes verses 8-9, which declare that salvation comes to us by faith just as it did to Abraham. Here, however, it also introduces the idea of curse and pits it as the opposite of blessed in the two previous verses. Salvation can't come by the law because we can't keep the law. We all fall short of perfection. The law inherently brings a curse to any who seek to live by it. It dooms us to sin.

This first reason leads directly to the second one: Since the law brings a curse, it can't save us. Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4 can either describe how people are saved or how they live after being saved. Here the apostle clearly had the first idea in mind and believed this verse proved his point. Only faith brings salvation. Note that the illustration of Abraham in verses 6-8 also supports Paul's point that the law can't save.

The third reason Christians don't need a checklist is the incompatibility of faith and law. This explains why we can't be saved by the law. Faith and the law have different bases, the former being based on God's grace and the latter on human works. This time the Old Testament verse is Leviticus 18:5, "these things" being a reference to approximately 242 commands and 365 injunctions in the law. Christians today need to remember, however, that we are to perform good works. But we're to do so on the basis of our salvation, not in order to receive salvation. For this reason, as Paul showed in verses 1-3, trying to begin with faith and then move to works is impossible, or to use his term, "foolish."

The final reason emphasizes the redemptive work of Christ and its relationship to faith. Verses 13-14 explain what He has done as well as how and why He did it. Jesus Christ redeemed us, which means He bought us or freed us from sin. He did so by becoming a curse on our behalf (see Deuteronomy 21:23) through His death on the cross. Jesus' death accomplished several purposes. One purpose involved including Gentiles in the blessing of Abraham, which refers to salvation by faith. Another purpose points back to an idea mentioned earlier. Like verses 2-3, verse 14 identifies the first benefit of salvation through faith, that of receiving the promised Spirit. Our Lord accomplished these related purposes in His redemptive work for all who trust Him.

The third and final point of this chapter appears in verses 19-26. Here Paul, on the basis of two reasons, encouraged his readers to continue embracing their faith in Christ. First, he explained God's limited purpose in giving the law to His people, then he noted the limited power of the law. Thus, any legalistic approach to Christianity is invalid.

According to Paul, God had two purposes for the law, both of which show it wasn't God's final word for His people. God gave the law because of transgressions. Although this term could mean "because of sin's presence in the world," it more likely means "in order to reveal what is and isn't sin." After that, no one could say, "I didn't know it was a sin" about any behavior.

To what extent was the law valid only until the Seed, until the coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah? Paul's argument here is condensed and his reasoning is not always obvious to us. The following seem to be his main ideas: (1) God had spoken directly to Abraham, promising him innumerable descendants and blessings, and He also spoke directly to His people in sending His Son. (2) God gave the law indirectly, both through angels and by means of a mediator (Moses). (3) Thus, the law had a limited role in God's work and was surpassed by God's promises and the coming of God's Son. (4) These ideas lead directly to the second purpose of the law: God also gave the law to be like a guardian to His people. A guardian was a disciplinarian who guided the moral and social development of a child until the child reached maturity. In the same way, God gave the law to guide His people. The law had this role of guardian only until God sent "His One and Only Son" (John 3:16). Then it had accomplished what God intended.

The reason God gave the law is also bound up in the limitation of its power. The law was temporary because it had no power to give life, or righteousness, and it wasn't intended to do so. We must be careful here, however, not to infer that the law has been cancelled and Christians can ignore it. The law continues to express God's will for His people today. Christians, however, have the Holy Spirit living in them to guide them. He helps us understand God's will today, and frequently He does so with reference to the law.

These reasons led Paul to conclude with one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament. Christ came so we could be justified by faith, and only as a result of faith are we sons of God. Thus faith, not obedience to the law, is the way to salvation. All believers are sons of God. We all have a special relationship with Him, one that is based on and similar to (but not identical with) that of Jesus and His Heavenly Father. This relationship, as verse 28 shows, is open to all people regardless of gender, nationality, or social status.