

## Leader's Guide

### Session 3: Galatians 3

**Describe a time when you disobeyed an authority (parent, teacher, coach, boss, etc.). What did you do?**

**What happened when you got caught? What were the consequences? How did you act toward that authority figure afterwards?**

Whether or not we realize it, our experiences in life trickle into our Christian walk. We all exist in environments that require us to obey in different ways to please a particular standard or authority (parent, boss, law enforcement, etc.). As a result, we often have the same perspective in our posture toward God, believing that we have to be perfect in order for God to like us. However, as we've discussed in Galatians so far, our salvation doesn't come about as a result of our actions, but by God's grace through faith.

Read

Read Galatians 3.

watch

Show Session 3: *Galatians 3* (11:15 minutes)

Discuss

Up to this point, we've learned a little bit about both the Galatians and Paul's occasion for writing this letter. Before going on, let's take a minute to remind ourselves of some of the basics.

**What are the two major problems Paul wrote to the Galatians about?**

1. The Galatians were adding elements of the Mosaic Law to the gospel.
2. The Galatians were believing those who deceptively degraded Paul's apostleship.

**How did Paul argue for the legitimacy of his apostleship through chapters 1–2?** (By explaining how he received it from the risen Christ and had it later confirmed by the other apostles)

**How does Paul view the difference in his gospel-mission from that of Peter and the other apostles (see 2:7–8)?** (In terms of content, there is no difference. The difference lies in their mission. For Paul, it's to the Gentiles. For Peter, it's to the Jews.)

We left off in chapter 2 with Paul's account of confronting Peter in his hypocrisy and demonstrating how the gospel of Jesus Christ is one that transforms us by faith for a life of fruitful obedience. As we turn our attention to chapter 3, Paul is going to begin appealing to a series of arguments that illustrate the fundamental truth that we are justified, or declared righteous through faith and not our own works.

**What did Kyle describe as Paul's primary concern about the influence of the Judaizers on the new Gentile converts in the Galatian church?** (That they were substituting a checklist of rules for genuine relationship with Jesus Christ)

**How is legalistic religion different from the gospel?** (It puts the emphasis on the outside and is concerned with what others see, which Jesus condemned throughout His ministry; see Matt. 23:5)

Someone read 3:1–5.

**What can we say about the Galatians based on Paul's description in verse 2?** (They had received the Holy Spirit)

PEEK AT THE GREEK

Paul uses two words that are worthy of note when posing his hypothetical question to the Galatians in verse 2. First is *elabete*, which means, "to receive." At times, the term can be used to describe receiving something as a result of personal initiative, but in the context Paul is clearly emphasizing the passive aspect of the receiver. In other words, what the Galatians "received," they did so by no merit of their own. Paul couples this term with the phrase "believing what you heard" or "hearing with faith" (ESV). Much ink has been spilled on this phrase and its meaning, but it mirrors Paul's statement in Romans 10:17 that "faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ." Together, he confronts the Galatians with their spiritual reality—the grace they possess in Christ is not something they earned. Rather, it is a free gift *received* through *believing* what they heard. Both terms emphasize a passive posture on the part of the Galatians, which is true for us today as well. The Spirit within us is not achieved by our merit, but through embracing the free gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Despite having received the Spirit, the Galatians remained immature in terms of their understanding of how to live in light of the gospel. Because of that, they began to adopt the teachings of the Judaizers that additional works were needed beyond belief in the gospel to please God.

**What does it mean to pursue perfection "by means of the flesh"?**

In the context of Galatians, the term “flesh” likely has two connotations worth considering. On the one hand, it almost certainly refers to ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law, like circumcision, which were required during the Old Testament period for right fellowship with God. In a broader sense, the New Testament—and Paul especially—uses the term “flesh” to refer to an internal disposition of dependence on personal accomplishment rather than dependence upon Christ and His finished work. Both are certainly in view here and occasion Paul’s use of such biting language toward his readers.

As Kyle explained in the session, this kind of dependence on self actually comes from a place of pride—thinking too highly of our selves. **How does the gospel free us from pride?** (By transferring our hope from our selves to the finished work of Jesus Christ)

**According to verse 2, what does Paul imply about the role we play in becoming transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ?** (Ours is a passive role in which we “receive” the gift God extends to us through the Holy Spirit. We do not earn the gospel through our works.)

Kyle said, “Paul shows us that the promise and power of the gospel is through the Holy Spirit and it is received by faith.” Foundationally, the gospel is a gift we receive and not something we achieve. That’s the lie Paul is seeking to combat and he turns to two additional lines of argument to further that point in this chapter. Someone read verses 6–14.

**Why do you think Paul brought up the example of Abraham at this point?**

More than likely, Paul turned to Abraham due to the influence of the Judaizers upon the Galatian community. Abraham is a central figure within both Jewish and Christian tradition. He would have been a formative part of the Judaizer’s theology, especially when it came to the observance of circumcision, which began with Abraham.

**How was Abraham made righteous before God?**

Go Deeper

*Learn more about justification of Abraham from the following passages: Gen. 12:1–9; 15:1–6; 17:1–14, 22–27; 22:1–19*

**What did God promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3?** (To make him a great nation that would be a blessing to the whole world)

**Was Abraham counted righteous before or after his circumcision? Before or after the near sacrifice of Isaac?** (In both cases, before)

**What does this tell us about Abraham's righteousness? How does it further Paul's argument in Galatians 3?**

Abraham was counted righteous, not because of his obedience, but because he believed in the promise of God. The promise of worldwide blessing through the lineage of Abraham made it a big deal to be a Jew, but Paul is pointing out that Abraham did not receive this promise by any merit of his own. Rather, he believed by faith and those who believe by faith today are blessed like Abraham.

For Paul, the Old Testament stretched into and through the ministry of Jesus Christ and His Church. In his letter to the Galatians, he declared it as having foresight into what would come about following Christ's resurrection. **According to verse 8, what did the Scripture foresee?** (That salvation would be extended to all—even Gentiles—and that God would declare righteous those who believe in Him by faith, like Abraham)

Paul turned to the Old Testament as evidence of the present reality that we are justified by faith alone. **How should this fact influence the way you think about the Old Testament? Are there ways in which you've neglected a serious study of the Old Testament?**

**What does Paul say makes someone a true child of Abraham?** (Not ethnicity, but faith that is sealed by the Holy Spirit; vv. 7, 9, 14)

**How do we receive the promised Holy Spirit?**

In verses 10–14, Paul clarifies that if we fail in one aspect of the Law, we are bound to all of it and cursed for our disobedience. Since we have all failed and fallen short, Christ became the curse of the Law on our behalf so that by faith in Him we could be redeemed and received the promised Holy Spirit.

**What do these truths mean in terms of our works of obedience?** (They do not negate their importance to a faithful life, but clarify that they in no way achieve our salvation.)

This is a critical point for us to understand today as well. God has not acted inconsistently throughout history. He did not accomplish His redemptive purposes one way in the Old Testament only to try a new method in the New Testament. Abraham illustrates this truth perfectly. Abraham was not justified for leaving his homeland, accepting circumcision, strictly following the law, or willingly offering up his son as

a sacrifice. Scripture makes it clear that Abraham was justified because he *believed* in God (Gen. 15:6)—just like the Galatians and just like those who have believed in Jesus Christ today.

Someone read verses 15–29.

#### PEEK AT THE GREEK

The book of Galatians contains some of Paul’s harshest language. Yet, in verse 15 he refers to the Galatians with the term *adelphoi*. Literally, this word translates to “brothers,” but it is used commonly in both biblical and non-biblical literature as a kind of greeting referring to both genders. Thus, it can be read as “brothers and sisters.” More importantly, it is a term of endearment used by close friends and relatives. Paul employs it 11 times total in his letter (1:2, 11, 19; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). Despite his frustration with these young believers, Paul displays his love for them by referring to them as his “brothers and sisters.” We would do well to extend a similar affection toward those who are struggling in their faith, as a reflection of Christ’s love for us.

In this final section of chapter 3, Paul begins to directly compare and contrast the promise of God to Abraham with the Mosaic Law in order to show the superiority of the promise to the Law. As we’ve said before, the Judaizers were trying to convince the Galatian community that obedience to the Law was a required addition to faith in Christ for salvation.

#### **What is the “promise” Paul is referring to?**

Let’s follow his train of thought in this passage. The specific promise is the one he quotes from the Abrahamic covenant in verse 8—“In you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). He referred to this as a foreshadowing of what would ultimately be fulfilled through the coming of Jesus Christ (v. 14) through whom we are justified by faith (vv. 16, 22). In other words, the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who is our salvation by faith.

#### **What are the four reasons Paul gives in this passage that make the promise superior to the Law?**

1. The promise was ratified 430 years before the Law was given, which means the Law cannot change it (vv. 15, 17).
2. The promise is eternal whereas the Law was temporarily binding (v. 19).
3. The promise came directly from God whereas the Law was handed down through angels and an intermediary—Moses (v. 19).
4. The promise grants us adoption into the family of God by faith, whereas the Law was given to reveal our inability to earn our adoption through obedience (vv. 19, 22, 25–26, 29).

Each of these demonstrates the superiority of the promise to the Law. Even more, each illustrates the central truth that our justification is a fruit of faith and not works.

**As you think back on your life before Christ, what are some ways you were working for a kind of salvation? In what ways did you experience the kind of imprisonment Paul describes in verse 22?**

**How did God begin to show you the fruitlessness of your ways?**

**What are some practical changes that have occurred in your life since embracing the freedom of the gospel?**

Kyle reminded us that we still have a tendency to return to our imprisonment after being set free. In many ways, that is the struggle of the Christian life—learning to live in the freedom we have been given rather than returning to the comforts of our chains.

**Where do you struggle with freedom today? In what ways are you tempted to return to the imprisonment of your life before Christ?**

**How should the hope of verses 25–29 influence your temptation? In what ways could you intentionally focus on anchoring yourself in the truth that you are a child of God this week?**

last word

Despite having been set free in Christ, we often find our former prison more comfortable and familiar. But that doesn't change the fact that it's still a prison. The truth of the gospel is that through faith in Christ, you are now a child of God and belong to a new household.

The Christian life will always be filled with struggle and temptation, but through faith in Christ, God becomes our Father and He is willing and ready to offer grace in times of need. Wherever you find yourself today—whether in a place of doubt or a place of confidence—rest in the security of that truth.

Live it out

**Pray:** Ask God to teach you what it means to be free in Him this week. If you encounter legalism in your life, present it to God in prayer.

**Study:** Learn more about Abraham's journey of faith in Genesis 12, 15–16, 21–22. Follow up your study by reading Hebrews 11:8–19.

**Create:** Make something to remind yourself of your freedom in Christ. Display your creation in a place you'll notice often.

**Memorize:** Commit Galatians 3:26–28 to memory this week to remember how Jesus unifies all believers as children of God.

**List:** Make a list of the ways you've experienced freedom in Christ since becoming a Christian. Spend time thanking God for setting you free.