

Galatians

Unbound, Unchained, Unbroken

Week 4 | Galatians 2:11–21

Lisa Scheffler, author

Welcome back for Week 4 of Galatians! We're getting some positive feedback on the audio version of the EGD. You can check it out at bit.ly/EngageGodDaily

A table can become the heart of a home. It can be the place where people gather for morning coffee, quick meals, lengthy dinners, or holiday feasts. It can be a place where old friends catch up and new friends are made. From it you might hear the roar of laughter or the quiet murmurs of serious discussion. In a home where all are welcomed and conversation flows freely, what happens at the table can shape the lives of those who are seated around it.

The table is a symbol of family, community, and faithful presence. It's a symbol of our deep desire to be known and be loved. Throughout Scripture, we see it as a place where God dwells with and provides for his people, and where his people come together. Ideally, it's a place of peace where there is harmony, love, good-will, and reconciliation between the people who gather around it.

In a fallen world, you can be judged for dining with the “wrong” people. This was certainly the case in the first century where status-seeking Greeks and law-keeping Jews refused to sit at a table with those deemed unworthy. But that wasn't the way of Jesus. Jesus ate with the religious elite and with the outcasts of society. His gospel was for all people, and welcoming people different from you to the table was expected for his followers. Table fellowship between Gentiles and Jews was a outward sign of how God was redeeming and reconciling the world through Christ.

So far we've seen that at the core of Paul's frustration with the Galatian Christians is that they've been convinced to add on the gospel. By doing so, they are no longer relying on Christ to reconcile people to God and people to one another. They've been persuaded that they need to add works of the law. They've bought the lie that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't enough to overcome sin and division to create the covenant community of God. In their minds, something more was needed before everyone could come to the table.

Paul took the gospel and its implications so seriously that he publicly challenged the Apostle Peter over this matter. This week we'll consider the conflict between the apostles and what their disagreement means for us and how we should think about who we invite to our tables.

Day 1

In his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul defended his gospel against his opponents. Paul preached the sufficiency of Christ, while his opponents preached Jesus + the law. They believed that in order to become right with God and enter into his covenant community, Gentile believers needed to observe circumcision, dietary laws, and holy days.

In other letters, Paul told Christians not to divide over these issues. For example, if Jewish Christians wanted to abstain from certain foods, Gentile Christians needed to accommodate them (see Romans 14–15). But the situation in Galatians is different. This wasn't an issue of finding unity in the midst of differences; Paul's opponents were adding requirements to the gospel. They were excluding Gentile believers and ultimately nullifying the work of Christ.

In the passage we studied last week, we learned that Paul journeyed to Jerusalem and discussed his mission to reach the Gentiles with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, James, Peter, and John. They agreed that God was behind Paul's mission and decided that Paul would continue proclaiming the gospel to Gentiles, while Peter would focus on the Jews. Yet, here in the passage we'll read today, we see Paul confronting Peter.

Pay attention to the conflict between Peter (called Cephas in this passage) and Paul. Why is Paul so upset? What reasons does he give to support his understanding of the gospel and condemn the one preached by his opponents?

Read

Galatians 2:11–21

¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

¹⁵ "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

¹⁹“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

- What did Paul accuse Peter of? Why do you think Paul found Peter’s actions serious enough that he called him out publicly?
- According to Paul, what justifies a person before God? What does that mean to you?

Respond

In this passage we see two titans of our faith in conflict over the gospel. Then and now, disagreements arise, even among committed followers of Christ. One of our goals this week will be to think through when and why a confrontation might be necessary, and how to go about it in a way that strengthens Christ’s body, and doesn’t tear it apart.

Based on your initial read-through of the passage, what kind of issues that we see today might rise to the level of gospel-importance? Are there any issues over which you think Christians are too contentious and ready to fight? Right now, how do you discern the difference?

Ultimately, we want to land with Paul in understanding how important it is to welcome all kinds of people to our tables to have meaningful conversations and experience Christ through us. So, praise God for his big, open table and your seat at it! Invite him to speak to you through his Word this week, and ask him to give you a heart for all kinds of people.

Day 2

Lisa Scheffler, author

If you’re a social media user, does this happen to you? Something pops up in your feed from a fellow Christian that seems so frustratingly wrong, you feel compelled to respond. Maybe you even take the time to type something out. Then your finger hovers over the “reply” button. Should you post your comment? Of course, depending on your personality, you might be too quick to fire off responses, or maybe you never say anything at all. What is the right approach?

You may not spend any time on social media but still struggle with when to speak and when to stay quiet. Maybe you’ve heard a sermon, read an article, or saw a Christian with some influence act in a way that you believe is not “in line with the truth of the gospel.” What do you do?

Knowing how to respond to these kinds of situations takes wisdom, discernment, and most of all love. After all, we're family, and God's family is literally forever. Paul himself insisted upon unity: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Yet here in Galatians, Paul described a time that he publicly confronted Peter. Unity can't be found if truth is not present.

Today we'll consider what was so important that Paul called out a fellow apostle.

Read

Galatians 2:11–14

¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

- What were the circumstances in Antioch that led to Paul confronting Peter?
- Based on what we've studied so far in Galatians, what do you think Paul meant when he said that Peter and the other Jews were "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel"?

Reflect

As we've seen so far in Galatians, distorting the gospel is serious. Recall that Paul went so far as to say that anyone, even an angel or Paul himself, who preached a different gospel should be under God's curse (Galatians 1:8). So when Peter, who had previously embraced Gentiles as brothers and sisters in Christ, separated himself from them because of pressure from some in Jerusalem, Paul was compelled to confront him publicly. Why publicly? Because he was leading others, including Barnabas astray (verse 13).

What Peter was doing was contrary to the gospel. It's faith in Christ, not following the customs of the law that bring righteousness and turn strangers into siblings. By refusing to eat with Gentiles, and joining with the circumcision group in forcing Gentile converts to adopt the customs of the law, Peter was bringing confusion and division to the church and undoing the work Paul had been called to do.

Because it was common for the Lord's Supper to be part of a larger, shared meal, Peter was likely keeping the church from taking the bread and the cup together, as one. He was being a hypocrite by proclaiming that Jesus was the long awaited Savior and Lord sent to *all* people,

but then insisting that Gentiles follow Jewish customs before they could sit and dine at his table.

Either faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to bring people into the family of God, or it wasn't. Treating Jewish Christians as redeemed and reconciled, but Gentile Christians as close-but-not-quite-there semi-converts was unacceptable. It would be like adopting a child into a family, but not really accepting them until they looked, thought, and acted exactly like your other children. Are they really your child if you don't treat them as such?

That's not how God treats his family. He loves and welcomes all who come to him through Christ. And God doesn't allow some of his children to treat others as second-class citizens of the Kingdom of God. As Paul wrote just a few lines earlier, God does not show favoritism (Galatians 2:6).

Because he was one of Jesus' closest disciples and a leader in the early church, Peter's behavior and speech influenced others. After all, that's what it means to be a leader. But, in addition, he joined with Paul's opponents in forcing the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs. As commentator Scot McKnight points out, "Peter, in effect, was destroying the gospel of Jesus Christ by demanding that the converts at Galatia become Jews. In such a situation, there was no gospel because the work of Christ had been eliminated (v. 21)."¹

So what can we learn about Christian confrontation from this interaction? Notice that this was not a mere difference of opinion. Paul said Peter "stood condemned," meaning that Peter was wrong in God's eyes, not just Paul's. What's more, the stakes were high. People were being led away from the true gospel by Peter's actions. His thinking had gotten twisted, and he was behaving in ways that misrepresented God's offer of salvation through Christ and showed favoritism to one group over another. Others were following Peter's lead, so his public actions merited a public response, rather than a private conversation.

There are some lessons here we can learn as we seek a unity based in truth and love in the family of God. If we encounter some public teaching or behavior that might influence others away from the gospel, we need to prayerfully consider how to proceed. Before we make our objections to someone public, let's consider whether it merits a public confrontation. Is this a person of influence that others will follow? Is it a gospel-issue or a difference of opinion that Christians of good faith can have? Will it lead people astray, or is it an expression of Christianity that we can agree to disagree on?

Yet, on the flip side, if we do encounter someone who is leading people away from the gospel, or acting in a way that misrepresents God's welcoming acceptance of all who trust in Christ, let's not shrink away from speaking the truth as long as we are doing so out of love for God and others. If people are being told that they need something other than Jesus to be right with God, or they must meet some standard before we will welcome them into his family, we

¹ Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 107.

correct the error. It's not about "winning" or being right, but ultimately, it's about love — love for the person spreading the error, and love for the people being influenced.

Out of fear of others, Peter was setting a much smaller table than God desired. By his actions, he was restricting who could come, sit, and enjoy God's presence and provision. But God's table is big and he offers a seat to people from every tongue, tribe, and nation on earth. May our tables here on earth do the same.

Respond

Have you ever had a conflict with another believer because you felt like they were misrepresenting Jesus or the gospel? What did you do? Do you think it was a godly response? Is there a time that you wish you had said something but didn't? Ask the Spirit for greater discernment.

Peter was responding to pressure from those around him to alter his speech and behavior. Are you ever pressured to do the same? How do you handle that? Pray about your response.

How can you welcome people who are different from you to your table? Ask the Spirit to provide you with opportunities.

Day 3

Lisa Scheffler, author

A new student walks into the cafeteria, lunch tray in hand. His or her eyes dart back and forth across the room searching for a seat. Every table represents a rung of the high school hierarchy. Jocks in one corner, science nerds in another. The theatre kids sit near the stage (naturally) and there's always a "reject" table. Where to sit? It's a monumental decision for our new student because the stakes are high. Where you sit will determine your clique, and that determines who you are. Or at least, that's the way this scene is depicted in most television shows and movies.

Even if they are relying on stereotypes, these shows are tapping into something as old as society itself — the fear of guilt by association. Will people judge us based on who we are seen hanging around?

For generations the Jewish people had been afraid of guilt by Gentile association. Now, after Jesus' death and resurrection, true fellowship between Jews and Gentiles was not just possible, but expected. Many Jewish Christians were struggling with this change.

Notice how Paul challenges the Galatians by reminding them of something they should already know.

Read

Galatians 2:15–18

¹⁵ “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

- According to these verses how is everybody justified (made right) with God? Is there any difference between Jew and Gentile?

Reflect

The Jewish people were always reliant on God’s covenant faithfulness and mercy to justify them, or give them right standing, before God. Yes, they had been given the Mosaic law, but they also been given the sacrificial system, because they wouldn’t be able to keep the law. Then, of course, the Son of God came to be the ultimate sacrifice for all humanity, because no one could keep God’s law. The law had its place and time. It was meant to teach Israel who God is and who his people should be. As Paul will later describe, it acted as a guardian, but it was never designed to save anyone.

The Jews in Paul’s day had come to see the law in an unhealthy way. To them the gift of the law was evidence of their privileged status before God. Circumcision, food laws, and holy days became boundary and identity markers, setting them apart from the “sinners” who surrounded them. But these “works of the law” never justified them before God. Only faith made someone right with God. And the object of that faith had been revealed — Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, and Lord.

Jewish Christians were worried that without the law, how would pagan Gentiles learn the ways of God? Wouldn’t their influence on Jewish Christians be corrupting? Wouldn’t the Jewish Christians suffer from guilt by association?

Paul insists that they are missing the point. For Paul, the flip side of law wasn’t lawlessness, it was faith. Paul will spend a great deal of time on the Spirit later in the letter, but spoiler alert, he trusted in the transforming power of the Spirit to root out sin in all those who are in Christ.

Paul reminded the Jewish Christians that now their identity must be found in Jesus Christ, not their ethnic identity, and not their adherence to the Mosaic law. Their thoughts and behavior will ultimately conform to Christ as well, but not by the power of the law, but by the power of the Spirit. It is our faith in Christ that makes us right with God and our continued

faith that helps us see the rightness and beauty in living according to the ways of Jesus, not in the ways of sin.

Paul's mission was to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles and to tear down the barriers between Jew and Gentile. In Christ, ethnic Jews had no greater standing before God than other ethnicities. To add anything to faith in Christ would mean rebuilding what Paul had already destroyed.

God had done something wonderful — he'd created a new covenant family where anyone who trusts in Christ has a place at the table. No ethnicity or nationality is favored by God over another. We can't earn that seat with our ethnic heritage or family tree, and there is no work we can do to make us worthy. There is nothing we can add to what Jesus has already done, because he has done it all. That is a reason to praise him.

Respond

Why do you think it's important that we recognize that only faith can justify us? That every ethnicity has equal standing before God and he shows no favoritism? How should that affect our thoughts and actions?

Reflect on your place at God's table. What does it mean to you that you have been welcomed into God's family just as you are. Spend some time praising God!

Day 4

Lisa Scheffler, author

A crucified Messiah was difficult for the Jews of Paul's day to accept. If you were looking for someone to restore God's Kingdom, defeat the forces of sin, evil, and death, and make all things right, you might excused for wondering how Jesus, a crucified carpenter from Galilee could be the one.

That's why the resurrection changed everything!

If the tomb had remained closed, no one would have believed Jesus was the Messiah. But a risen Lord? Who was victorious over sin, evil, and death? You give your life to him. From death, God brought life, not just for Jesus in the tomb, but for anyone who believes. This new life starts from the moment we trust in Jesus and commit to following him.

In our final few verses for this week, we see Paul applying the pattern of the cross and the resurrection to those living a new life of faith in the Son of God.

Read

Galatians 2:19–21

¹⁹ “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

- What do you think it means that “Christ lives in me”?

Reflect

Paul announced something that would have been unthinkable before Christ, he died to the law *so that* he might live for God. Christ had fulfilled the law, so a new life in Christ meant the old law became obsolete. Paul needed Peter, and all those who are preaching the Mosaic law, to remember this and act accordingly. Righteousness, or being made right with God, cannot be gained through the law. If it could, then why would Christ have had to die? His sacrifice would have been for nothing. By returning to the law, Jewish Christians were rejecting God’s grace-gift — the very thing that enabled their relationship with God.

Paul was also emphasizing a believer’s identification with Christ by associating Christ’s death and resurrection with those who live by faith in Jesus Christ. We see in John 3, Jesus explained that gaining entrance to his Kingdom would require being born again. Later in Galatians, Paul will tell us that in Christ, we are a new creation. We are no longer slaves to sin, but free to live as God intended. While we will still be affected by sin and suffering while we remain here in our mortal bodies, we have already begun a transformation into what we will be in the age to come.

From death comes new life. It’s what we depict with baptism. Going under the water symbolizes death to our old way of life. The emergence from the water symbolizes our resurrection to new life.

What does this new life look like? Scot McKnight explains it like this:

“Those who have been justified, live justly; those who have been made holy in Christ, live holy lives; those who have experienced God’s love, love others; those who have experienced God’s forgiveness, forgive others; those who have been called from the world, no longer live in the world and call others to be “out with them”; those who have died to the flesh, live in the Spirit.”²

This is what it means to embrace our new life in Jesus — the old ways are gone, and we live by faith in Jesus Christ, the one who loves us and gave himself for each one of us.

² Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 131.

Respond

I kept our reflection on the passage short today and am inviting you to linger over Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Take time to meditate over this verse. Ask the Spirit to guide you as you read it slowly two or three times and reflect on each word.

What does this verse mean to you as one who has placed his or her faith in Christ? What is it to have been crucified with Christ, and yet still live? What would it mean for you to experience his love and sacrifice on your behalf, not just as a fact you acknowledge, but as a child of God who is in relationship with the Father? Ask the Spirit what this verse means to you in your life right now.

Day 5

Lisa Scheffler, author

Happy Friday! We’ve finished another chapter of Galatians. What is God revealing to you through his Word? Spend some time with him today, asking him to guide you to apply what you’ve learned.

Reflect

Take another look at [Galatians 2:11–21](#)

What issue did Paul have with Peter, and what arguments did he use to oppose Peter’s actions? How does this fit into the larger argument he’s been making about the sufficiency of Christ?

What’s your own personal takeaway from what we studied this week?

Connect

Jesus died to bring lost sinners home. His sacrifice for our sins makes us right with God and brings us into his family. Every person is loved enough that Jesus died for them, but also sinful enough that he needed to. How we treat one another should reflect this reality.

Peter allowed himself to be pressured into the old, Jewish posture of rejecting Gentile “sinners” unless they became Jews. Paul couldn’t bear to see the barriers that the gospel was breaking down rebuilt, so he called him out for it. Paul wanted to see all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, background, or class gathered around a table together. God’s big table holds space for us all.

In our modern world, we still struggle with how to come together with our racial, ethnic and class differences. But we must try. In a country that's divided into so many factions, the church can show a different way. We can help break down barriers and uphold the dignity and worth of all people, as we strive to see them from God's perspective, not just our own.

Every person longs to be known and be loved. Deep down, we all long for a place at the table. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, or what other people think about you. You still want to be welcomed, accepted, and loved.

God offers all of that at his table. Your place is set and there is a spot reserved for you. But there are always some open seats. Who can you invite to join you? So many people, right here in our community are struggling with loneliness, anxiety, and addiction. They need to experience the peace that comes from a right relationship with God and others, and the freedom that comes from life in the Spirit.

Each of us can be a faithful presence who prays, listens, cares and walks alongside. We can share the love of Christ with our words and actions, and in doing so, pull out a chair at God's table and invite someone to take a seat next to us.

Respond

Take some time in prayer and ask God two questions:

- What do you want me to take away from what I've studied this week? What do you want me to remember?
- What do you want me to do with that learning? What is the one, next, right step that you want me to take?

Who can you invite to join you at a table? Ask the Spirit to give you an opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with someone over coffee or a meal. Pray to learn from their perspective and that they would experience Christ in you.

Easter is coming up! Who could you invite to join you for Easter services, either in person or online? How could you have a meaningful conversation about the true meaning of Easter?

Coming up next week...

Get ready. We're diving in deep next week! We'll begin walking through the heart of Paul's argument that will lead us to a better understanding of the gospel and how we as Christians should view the Mosaic law.