

# Galatians

## Unbound, Unchained, Unbroken

### Week 5 | Galatians 3:1–14

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

*Have you checked out on the audio version of the Engage God Daily yet? Find it at [bit.ly/EngageGodDaily](http://bit.ly/EngageGodDaily)*

Imagine reading the following news story. After a pleasant day of sailing, a sudden storm capsized a local couple's boat, leaving them floating helplessly in the middle of Galveston Bay. Fortunately, another boat heard their distress call and came to the rescue. Exhausted and badly shaken, the couple climbed aboard. After hours in the water, they were grateful to be safe, warm, and dry, and best of all headed for land.

That should be the end of the story, but the reporter goes on. As the rescue boat got nearer to shore, the couple grabbed life vests and jumped back into the water. While they appreciated the help of their rescuers, they decided to swim the rest of the way on their own. They refused to get back in the boat, and as the wind picked up again, and the waves got bigger, the life vests couldn't keep them afloat, and they eventually drowned. They couldn't save themselves.

Imagine the reaction to this story. Everyone would wonder why this couple would do such a thing. It makes no sense. They were safe and secure in the hands of their rescuers. Tragedy had been averted. Why would they jump back into danger and try to make it the rest of the way on their own?

While not a perfect analogy, this story helps us understand Paul's frustration with the Galatian believers in the passage that we will focus on this week. Why would they abandon their Savior to try and save themselves? Are we sometimes guilty of trying to do the same?

## Day 1

Recall that Paul is countering a group of missionaries who came to the region of Galatia sometime after Paul. While Paul had proclaimed the gospel that he had received from God, these teachers insisted that Gentile converts had to follow at least some customs of the Jewish law in order to be right with God and gain entrance into the covenant community. These opponents had even managed to pressure Peter into distancing himself from Gentiles. He

refused to dine with them and also joined with them in forcing Gentiles to be circumcised and follow the dietary restrictions found in the Jewish law.

Last week, we saw how Paul confronted the apostle Peter, accusing him of “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (Galatians 2:14). Because of his authority and position in the early church, Peter was leading people astray and creating a hierarchy that was completely unacceptable. In Christ, all people are welcome to come to God’s table, and no ethnic group is superior to another.

We are entering into the section of Paul’s letter to the Galatians that scholars consider the most theological. Having used his own experiences to convince them of the truth of his message, Paul now transitions into explaining why, according to scripture, his opponents are wrong.

As you read, notice Paul’s strategy. He will ask a series of rhetorical questions. Why do you think this is effective?

Paul will also anchor his argument to one of Israel’s greatest heroes, Abraham, and insist that it has always been faith, not law-keeping, that made someone acceptable to God. See if you can trace Paul’s argument.

## Read

### Galatians 3:1–14

***3** You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. **2** I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? **3** Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? **4** Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? **5** So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? **6** So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

***7** Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.*

***8** Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” **9** So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

***10** For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” **11** Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” **12** The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” **13** 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 pole.” <sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

- What is the effect of the questions Paul is asking? What conclusion is he trying to lead the Galatians to?
- What do you know about Abraham? You may want to read [Genesis 15](#) to prepare for this week. (Note that Abraham was first known as Abram until God changed his name.)

## Respond

Believers in Jesus receive the Holy Spirit after believing the gospel message and committing themselves to Jesus and his way of life. For Paul, turning to the law after experiencing the Holy Spirit would be like jumping back into the water after a rescue boat had saved you. God had provided the very rescue that every person needs through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Faith in God and his promises has always been the way people were made right with God. While God had revealed and executed his plan by sending Jesus, he hadn’t changed it. Faith always saved.

So what are you putting your faith in these days? While we may say Jesus Christ, often we are trusting in all kinds of other things to rescue us from sin and suffering. Are we jumping out of the boat to try and swim on our own? Or as Paul says in 3:3 (according to the old King James Bible) “Having begun with the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?”

There are plenty of things in the world that are helpful in dealing with hurts, hang-ups and hard times. But they are not the object of our faith — Jesus is. Because when our human efforts fail, and they always will, and we are left in the open water too exhausted to keep swimming, our only hope is God. But then, he’s always been our only hope. Only God can bear the weight of our needs and expectations. Only he can transform. Do you believe that? He is faithful and will never let us down.

This week, pray that the Spirit will increase your faith, so you stay in the boat.

## Day 2

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

To be a Christian there are things you need to know and believe. Yet our faith is far more than an intellectual discipline. Christianity is about experiencing God through Jesus, and by the Spirit.

Talking about experience makes some people nervous. Aren’t experiences too varied and too subjective to be reliable? They’d prefer to stick to the historical facts and sound doctrine found in the Bible. Yet, the Bible is also full of stories where ordinary people experience God. After

all, Jesus came not only so we would have right beliefs, but so that we could have a right relationship with God.

In the beginning of the letter, Paul recounted his own experience with the risen Christ. Notice how he now calls on the Galatian Christians to remember their experience with God. How did they receive his Spirit?

## Read

### Galatians 3:1–5

***3** You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. **2** I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? **3** Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? **4** Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? **5** So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?*

- Depending on their answer, why might the question asked in verse 2 be a “slam dunk” for Paul’s argument?

## Reflect

What makes someone a Christian? Is it what they believe? How they act? Whether they follow certain rules? Paul helps us answer that question, because for Paul, receiving the Spirit is the identifying characteristic of the Christian. As Scot McKnight says, “To be a Christian is to be indwelt by the Spirit, and to be indwelt by the Spirit is to be a Christian.”<sup>1</sup>

After the Spirit fell on the believers at Pentecost, the gospel’s spread was marked by powerful displays of the Spirit. It would seem that Paul’s initial preaching of the gospel at Galatia was a memorable and powerful experience. He will talk again about this experience a little later in the letter when he says, “you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Jesus Christ himself” (4:14). In verses 1–5, Paul wants them to recall the amazing experience of the Spirit when they first heard the gospel and committed themselves to Christ. Because if they do, he’s hoping they’ll see how ridiculous his opponents’ argument is. Why turn to the law now? It would be like being given the power to fly, but after using it once, you decide to just stand on the ground and flap your arms really hard.

Paul wants them to see how ridiculous it would be to begin one way and then try to finish another way (verse 3). The contrast Paul makes is between the Spirit and the flesh. What Paul has in mind with the word “flesh” is a life that is not based solely on Christ’s work and the

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 138.

power of the Holy Spirit. To live in the “flesh” is to ignore the Spirit. This is a concept that comes up frequently in Paul’s letters. The Spirit and the flesh are two different domains under which a person chooses to live.<sup>2</sup> To Paul it was pure foolishness to abandon the Spirit and live according to the flesh.

Our faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord doesn’t just bring us into a relationship with God, it sustains that relationship. We never stop trusting in God’s grace and faithfulness. We never stop needing the Spirit to help us pray, give us comfort and endurance, reveal our sin, and guide us in the ways of Jesus. It’s by the Spirit that a Christian lives. Paul will give us more concrete examples as the letter goes on, but for now, let’s attune ourselves to the Spirit’s leading and invite his presence.

## Respond

We need the Spirit every moment. He is our Comforter and Sustainer. He guides us and gives us strength and endurance. He convicts us of our sin, so we can seek forgiveness. He empowers our repentance. Yet, how often, having begun our relationship with God through Christ and by the Spirit, do we choose to ignore the Spirit in our daily lives.

Spend some time in prayer. Ask the Spirit to remove your spiritual blinders so you can see and participate in God’s work in the world. Ask for wisdom, comfort, and guidance.

Have you ever talked to another believer about how they experience the Spirit in their daily life? Sometimes these discussions can stay too abstract. Have a meaningful conversation where you get practical in encouraging one another to walk in the Spirit.

## Day 3

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

What is a promise worth? It depends on who is making the promise. Are they trustworthy? If they don’t keep their word, then their promise was worth nothing. Can they actually do what they promise? I could promise you a million dollars, but I couldn’t keep that promise!

From their inception, the Jewish people had always relied on the promises of God. God could never go back on his word; his faithfulness and ability were beyond question. So Paul is going to take the Galatian Christians way back to their origins and covenant that God first made with their ancestor, Abraham to show them that faith in Christ is what truly saves.

## Read

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<sup>2</sup> McKnight, 141.

## Galatians 3:6–9

<sup>6</sup> So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

<sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

<sup>8</sup> Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” <sup>9</sup> So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

- What has always been the means by which people were justified?

## Reflect

The early chapters of the Bible’s first book contain tale after tale of humanity’s rebellion and sin. The consequences were clear. Because humanity turned its back on the Creator and people went their own way, human relationships were marked by suspicion, fear, resentment, and violence. Now you might think that God would have given up on humanity to wipe the slate clean. Happily, that’s not how God operates. He loves his creation and wants to restore it. He loves people and wants to be reconciled to them. And he had a plan to do both.

Genesis 15 describes the covenant God made with Abraham, promising this great family, a land of their own, and that through him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Paul’s point here is that through Christ, the Gentile believers have become part of that family. Their acceptance into the family of God through Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the nations of the earth through Abraham’s line.

What Paul also notes is that when God spoke to Abraham, a pagan Gentile, and called him to leave his father’s home and go to a new land, Abraham trusted God and went. When God told Abraham that he and his wife Sarah would have a child in their old age, even though they’d never conceived before, he believed God and waited. Abraham trusted in God’s goodness, faithfulness, and power. Abraham trusted God, and acted accordingly.

That doesn’t mean that his faith *earned* his membership in God’s covenant; God freely bound himself to Abraham and his descendants. But Abraham does respond to God in faith, and his faith made him right with God. That’s what makes anyone right with God. Always has and always will.

Like a lot of us, Abraham and Sarah had times when their faith in God was as strong and sure as the mountains of their future homeland. They not only believed God, they acted like it. But other times, their faith shifted like the loose sands of the desert. They doubted God and even tried to help his plan along, instead of waiting and trusting. You might guess, that didn’t turn out well.

Yet, God is faithful even when his people aren’t. And eventually, Jesus Christ would come through the line of Abraham. He is the ever-faithful one, the fulfillment of God’s covenant

promises. The one who never rebelled and showed us what it means to live as a child of God and a citizen of his kingdom. The one who gave himself to save us all.

## Respond

How has your faith grown over the course of your life, since you trusted in Christ? Can you relate to Abraham and Sarah who had times of great faith and times of great doubt? As you think about your walk with God, what has strengthened your faith? Take some time to praise God for how he has worked in your life. Ask him for even greater faith as you continue your journey with him.

After reflecting some on your own story, are there parts that you could share with someone else, Christian or non-Christian, that might encourage them in their faith? Encourage them through bouts of anxiety? Or struggles with addiction? Let's have more and more meaningful conversations where people can experience Christ through us.

## Day 4

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

If you were blindly following someone off the edge of a cliff, you'd want someone else to try and stop you. You probably wouldn't even be upset if they screamed your name or grabbed you and jerked you back. After all, they would be saving your life.

Paul has been a little rough on the Galatians. He's called them foolish and said that those they've been listening to deserve God's curse. He's not taking it easy on them, but for Paul the stakes were just too high not to be direct. He felt like he needed to grab the Galatian Christians and pull them back from the edge.

Yet Paul is not just waving his arms and yelling "stop!" By the power of the Spirit, he is carefully walking the Galatian believers through an argument that will not only draw them away from false teaching, but draw them closer to God and to greater faith in Jesus.

## Read

### Galatians 3:10–14

*<sup>10</sup> For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." <sup>11</sup> Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." <sup>12</sup> The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." <sup>13</sup> 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 pole." <sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order*

*that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

- How is Paul continuing the train of thought he began in the passage we read yesterday, [Galatians 3:7–9](#)? Think about how Abraham was justified and what was “credited to him as righteousness.”

## Reflect

The Jews took pride in their heritage. They considered themselves children of Abraham, and therefore, heirs of all the promises God had made to their forefather. To be included into God’s covenant community, you had to be a descendant of Abraham who accepted the sign of covenant, circumcision, and who lived according to the law of Moses. Or you had to be a convert to Judaism who did the same.

Yet, and this is key, Abraham himself was uncircumcised when God bound himself to this covenant agreement. Circumcision couldn’t be a requirement to be right with God, because then Abraham wouldn’t have been righteous. What’s more, the law hadn’t even come yet. Therefore, it had to be Abraham’s faith that justified him, not circumcision, or works of the law.

Paul is addressing a misconception that his opponents were promoting. For many Jews across the centuries, the sign of circumcision became more important than what it represented. But it wasn’t circumcision that made you part of God’s family. Also, following the Mosaic law sometimes became more important than the one who created it. But it wasn’t adherence to the law that made you right with God either. God bound himself to his people, and the goodness, grace, and faithfulness of God sustained the covenant through all of Israel’s sin and rebellion. It was faith in God and his promises that made you a part of the covenant community, fueled your obedience, and tethered you to God’s people.

But now, Jesus, the Messiah had come. His life, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension completed the work that had to be done to defeat evil and death, and allow sinful humans to dwell with a holy God. What’s more, the Spirit had come to correct, guide, and transform. The law had served its purpose, but was no longer needed. In fact, committing oneself to the law brought curse, not blessing, because the law can’t save. Why? Because it can’t be kept flawlessly. The Jews knew this, that’s why they participated in the sacrificial system and Day of Atonement. So committing to the law now, after Jesus had completed his work and the Spirit had come to do his, made no sense.

Jesus took on the curse that every rebel against God deserved. He redeems anyone who puts their faith in him, Jew or Gentile. He rescues them from slavery to sin and the law, and grants them all the blessings of Abraham, so that they might live by the Spirit, not the flesh.

## Respond

Our faith in Christ saves us, not our ethnic and national identity (what the Jews relied on) not our status or honor among people (as the Romans assumed). It's Jesus on whom we rely. By faith we have a relationship with our heavenly Father are transformed by the power of the Spirit. We have so much to rejoice in! Spend time with your Father today!

## Day 5

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

Happy Friday!

We've made it through another week 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

As we're moving into the more theological section of Galatians, we'll be challenged. Not because it's too hard, but because we're going to have to understand the context to get Paul's message, and then we can consider how we might apply it to our lives today. The Word of God always has something to teach us!

Take another look at [Galatians 3:1-14](#)

- In your own words, what point is Paul trying to make? What is his argument against his opponents?
- What has stayed with you personally as you've studied this passage?

### Connect

*Abraham "believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Galatians 3:6).*

Our Christian faith has always been based in relationship. God created a beautiful garden for the first humans to dwell, but his desire was to live there with them. When their rebellion created distance between God and his people, God bridged that distance. He's never given up on humanity, though we've given him plenty of reasons to.

God's love for us is so powerful and complete, that all he asks of us is that we trust him. There's no checklist of requirements to meet. Our relationship with God is not some cosmic job interview where we have to prove we're worthy. Our Father has done everything that was needed to bring us home to be with him. We only need to have faith that it's true.

But it's hard sometimes, isn't it? Sin and suffering can obscure these profound, but simple truths. Every pain that we feel, and every obstacle that we face can become another veil

dropped in front of us that we have to peer through to see the goodness of God. Our own willful sin can be another shroud. The suffering of others and the injustice in our world can further block our view. If we don't lift those screens, we'll lose sight of the one standing behind them offering us his love. How can we move them out of the way?

We can always close our eyes and remember the cross.

Jesus "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13) Can you imagine? The eternal Son of God, present at the moment of creation, through whom all things were made became the cursed of God to redeem us from the curse we deserved. It's astounding when you stop and ponder it, isn't it? That's how much you loved. That's how much your Creator thinks your worth. And all you have to do is put your faith in him, and it will be credited to you as righteousness. By the Spirit, your obedience will flow from your relationship.

Lift your head, Christian and behold your God. You can trust him. Believe, and then live like it. He's not going to let you down.

## Respond

I'm adding a question to our response time. See what you think. Slow down, pray over these, and ask the Spirit to direct you.

- What do you want me to take away from what I've studied this week? What do you want me to remember and keep present with me?
- What do you want me to do with the truth of your Word? What is the one, next, right step that you want me to take?
- What are you teaching me about you? About who you are and the relationship I have with you? How can I worship and love you based on what you've revealed?

As we study Galatians, we have the opportunity to grow in our faith. The more we understand who God is and what he has done for us, and the more we rely on the Spirit, the more we will trust God, invite him to transform us, and step out in faith to do the work he has set before us.

So what is the Spirit calling you to do as an act of faith? Is there an area of your life where you are relying on unhealthy habits to soothe your fears instead of trusting God? Are you living a life of obedience to God? How could trusting God more enable you to obey him more fully? Are you reaching out to others with the love of Christ in practical ways? Allow the Spirit to lead you to repentance.

Easter is next week! 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...**

We have a special Easter Engage God Daily for you next week! We're going to provide you with a devotional every day from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday that walks you through the final events in Jesus' earthly life. That's eight days of content that can help you focus on Christ as we remember what he has done for us and celebrate the resurrection.

So check your email or the Christ Fellowship App this Sunday for Day 1. This might be a good week to check out our audio version too. We have a special narrator for our Easter guide!  
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