

Galatians

Unbound, Unchained, Unbroken

Week 13 | Galatians 6:11–18

Lisa Scheffler, author

You can listen to an audio version of the Engage God Daily at bit.ly/EngageGodDaily.

Well, friends, this is it! Our final week of Galatians. What an amazing journey through this letter. We've encountered a passionate Paul who has used every argument at his disposal to correct the Galatian house churches and get them back in sync with the glorious truth of the gospel.

Paul's conclusion is going to give us the opportunity to reflect on what we've learned through this letter. My prayer is that you've gained a greater understanding of what Jesus' sacrifice and victory over sin and death means for you and how you are called to live as a member of his eternal family. You are so loved by the Creator of the universe that he went to unfathomable lengths to save you. Remarkably, nothing but your faith in Christ is needed to reconcile you with God.

This week, as we wrap up our study, let's rejoice in what God has done!

Day 1

Do you ever do this? Sometimes when I get close to the end of an article or email, I find myself skimming. I guess I assume that all the important things have been covered, and all that's left is the perfunctory wrapping up.

Let's not make that mistake with the end of Galatians! Paul's endings are not typical, he has more to share! He emphasizes his main points here in the final verses and gives us his most direct interpretation of what his opponents were doing and why. He also reminds us of God's promise to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Scot McKnight gives us a helpful outline for Paul's ending. It includes (1) a signature (6:11), (2) a concluding summary that contains both a final indictment of his opponents (6:12–13)

and an expression of what he, in contrast, is doing (vv. 14–17), and (3) “a grace benediction” (v. 18).¹

As you read Paul’s closing, make note of Paul’s tone. How would you describe it? Do you learn any new information about Paul’s opponents?

Read

Galatians 6:11–18 (NIV)

¹¹ See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

¹² Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

- Why do you think Paul concludes his letter this way? What main points does he emphasize?

Respond

As Paul prepares to sign off, he sums up the situation in Galatia, but also lifts their gaze beyond the strife and division these churches were facing. That, after all, is his goal. Paul wants to see them embrace the true gospel and recognize the wonders that God has, is, and will do in Christ and by the Spirit.

NT. Wright says of this passage, “Paul opens up, here in this last segment of the letter, a God’s-eye view of reality which lifts our minds and hearts out beyond Galatia, out beyond the

¹ Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 298–299.

sordid details of campaigns and plots in the primitive church, and out into the rich and wide-ranging purposes of the God of love for the whole cosmos.”²

Can you see what Wright is talking about here? At ground level, it would seem the Galatian controversy was all about circumcision and whether or not Paul was a trustworthy ambassador of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In reality, it was about so much more.

Did the Galatians really understand the vast implications of what Jesus had done — how he had granted them right standing with God by faith alone? Did they know the incredible freedom of life in the Spirit apart from the law? Were they prepared for the way Jesus changed everything, including their relationship with each other, and with the entire world?

Do we understand these things? Or like the Galatians, are we so fixated on the controversies and cares right in front of us that we fail to lift our eyes to the amazing grace and goodness of God that is available to us right now? Are we too blinded by self-focus, and self-righteousness to see the beautiful family of spiritual brothers and sisters that God has given us? Let’s ponder and pray over that this week and ask the Spirit to open our eyes.

Day 2

Lisa Scheffler, author

Listen at bit.ly/EngageGodDaily

There are people in the world who like to believe the best of everyone. These are the idealists. No one is really bad, just misunderstood. With a little love and compassion, everyone will eventually make the right choice.

There are also the cynics. These are the people who believe it’s a survival-of-the-fittest, dog-eat-dog world, and you’re not paranoid if they really are out to get you. They assume that everyone always has a selfish, ulterior motive for even the good things they do.

The gospel gives us a much more realistic view of people. As God’s image-bearers, everyone has value, worth and by God’s grace, has the potential to do good. Everyone is redeemable, but because of humanity’s fallenness, people also have the capacity to do great evil. As Tim Keller puts it, people are so sinful that Jesus had to die to save them, but so loved that he did so willingly.

Because he held to a biblical view of humanity, Paul could be honest about his opponents. He didn’t feel the need to sugar-coat their motives because they claim the name of Jesus, but speaks plainly about what they have done and why.

² Tom Wright, [Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 82.

Read

Galatians 6:11-13

¹¹ *See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!*

¹² *Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.* ¹³ *Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh.*

- What are some of his opponent's motivations do you see Paul calling out here?

Reflect

In the first century, it was common to have a secretary, called an amanuensis, who actually wrote the letter. It's hard for our twenty-first century brains to imagine, but writing was a specialized task, and an amanuensis was trained to write quickly, neatly, and in limited space.

Up until this point in the letter, Paul has relied on his amanuensis, but as he comes to the end, takes up the pen himself. Scholars differ on why Paul makes calls out the size of his writing but a reasonable theory is that Paul's "large letters" are an ancient style of our "boldfacing" or "italicizing."³

We've already seen Paul come down hard on his opponents (1:9 and 5:12), but this is the first time he's spoken directly to their motives. It isn't a particularly pretty picture, but it is a truthful one. Paul is convinced that they aren't teaching their version of the gospel in good faith, but for superficial and prideful reasons that reveal their cowardice.

Walter Hansen summarizes the three motives he detects behind their mission to the Galatian churches.⁴

- First, he says they were motivated by an obsession with a superficial, outward uniformity (6:12a). "Their emphasis on circumcision proved that they were concerned only about making everybody look the same *outwardly* (literally 'in the flesh')."
- Secondly, they were concerned for their own personal safety (6:12b). Jewish Christians were afraid of persecution from other Jews because of their association with Gentiles. So, if they were seen forcing Gentile Christians to become Jewish converts who lived as faithful Jews by getting circumcised and observing sabbath and dietary restrictions, then they were more likely to score points with their zealous Jewish friends. "For then

³ Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 299.

⁴ G. Walter Hansen, [Galatians](#), The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Ga 6:12–13.

it would be obvious that what really mattered to them was not their belief in a crucified Messiah, but identification with the Jewish nation.”

- Finally, they were motivated by pride in their national identity (6:13). They were not really interested in helping the Galatian Christians in their spiritual growth. Their singular focus on the external, ritualistic symbols of Judaism showed this. What they were really interested in was being able to boast to fellow Jews, “Look at all the Gentiles we have circumcised and brought into the Jewish nation,” They wanted to maintain “their own national identity as zealous Jews.

What Paul found intolerable is that his opponents were leading the Galatians away from the gospel and burdening them with something Jesus died to set them free from. Because Paul’s opponents were driven by their superficial, nationalistic pride, they were breaking the central command of the law: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

What’s more, these opponents weren’t helping the Galatians Christians, they were using them. They were denying the power of the Holy Spirit, and coercing people into conforming to the Jewish identity, rather than trusting the Spirit to conform them to the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Respond

By exposing the motives of his Jewish opponents, Paul invites us to take a look at our own. Are we more concerned with the outward signs of modern, American Christianity than with true, spiritual transformation?

In dealing with others within the church, are we more motivated by fear or love? Are we trying to impress people with our community’s Christian “goodness”? Do we trust the Holy Spirit to do his work, or are we coercing people into following our rules and customs?

Are we interested in seeing people conform to the image of Christ, or to our notion of what a “good Christian” looks like?

Take time to think through these issues and pray over your responses.

Day 3

Lisa Scheffler, author

One thing my dear friend Shelley has encouraged me to pray in good times and bad is, “Father, what is your invitation to me in this moment?” In essence, how does he want me to learn, grow, and experience his presence in everyday life?

Well, this week, I’ve had the opportunity to pray that over and over, because I’m physically sick. As I’ve tried to power through and “get stuff done,” my body has said “nope.” So, I’ve

been supremely frustrated with my mortal body. I've resented the pain and weakness. But I'm trying to remember to ask God what his invitation is to me is in this moment.

In addition to being reminded that we (as Shelley always phrases it) are finite human beings with limited capacity relying completely on God's goodness and grace, I've also been encouraged in a fresh way by our passage from Galatians.

You see, in some ways, Galatians has been about bodies. Though it's uncomfortable to talk about, circumcision alters the body. The Jewish Sabbath and dietary restrictions dictate to the body — what it consumes, how and when it should rest. In this passage, Paul even mentions the marks he has on his own body. Paul is not doing abstract philosophy here in this letter. His instructions will affect real, human bodies. Which is why, as I've struggled with illness, I've been encouraged by his words.

See if you can figure out why:

Read

Galatians 6:14-17

¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

- Compare Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” to 5:15. What do you notice?

Reflect

Notice the fascinating contrast to which commentator NT Wright draws our attention: “The ‘agitators’ have been keen to mark the bodies of the Galatians with the sign that says they belong to the ethnic family of Abraham. Paul declares that the only marks that matter on his body are the wounds he has suffered as a result of his allegiance to Jesus (verse 17). If it’s bodily marks you want, it is the signs of the cross, not of the circumciser’s knife, that matter; and the signs of the cross are the marks of persecution, the ‘wounds of Jesus’.”⁵

Paul reminds us that our physical bodies’ condition should be understood in the context of our lives being marked by the cross. No matter whether we’re healthy or sick, physically vibrant or

⁵ Tom Wright, [*Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 81.

dealing with physical limitations, our attention can be directed toward living in a Christlike, cross-shaped way that shows sacrificial love.

Our “boast,” the focus of our lives, should be in Jesus Christ. And one way to do that is by remembering that “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” NT Wright goes on to explain what this means: “Not only has the Messiah been crucified. Not only have Christians been crucified with him (2:19–20; 5:24). The world itself has been crucified. Calvary was the turning-point of history. The cosmos has had sentence of death passed on it—so that God’s new world, God’s new creation, can be born out of the old. This new creation began with Jesus himself at his resurrection, continues with the spirit-given new life which wells up in all those who belong to the Messiah.”⁶

When we realize that we are part of a new creation, a new order of things, we are free to love God and love others. That’s how faith expresses itself (5:6). Christ sets us free to serve one another humbly in love (5:13).

We are part of Christ’s new creation that begins in part now. Paul opens our eyes to see that following Christ is never just an individual pursuit. We must broaden our view to see the new creation as something we experience together. Scot McKnight gives this insight: “What Paul is doing here is contrasting two systems, the circumcision system of Moses and the uncircumcision system of the Gentile world. He insists it does not matter whether you are Jew or Gentile; what matters now is that there is no national circle into which one must enter to join the people of God. What matters is that you are part of God’s new people, God’s new creation, God’s new humanity.”⁷

Rather than grouping up into rival camps such as “circumcision team” and the “uncircumcision team,” God opens our eyes to see our unity in his new creation. No matter who we are humanly, we all come to the same cross. We are saved by the same body and blood of the one Jesus Christ, who came for all of us.

Respond

N.T. Wright sums up the message of Paul’s conclusion with a provocative question:

“How then can anyone who has glimpsed Jesus as the crucified Messiah want to cling to the values, the identity-markers, the way of life of the world that has already been pronounced dead on the cross? What matters is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision—neither the marks in the flesh of the Jew nor the absence of such marks in the Gentile. What matters is

⁶ Wright, 82.

⁷ Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 301–302.

that God has unleashed upon the world his own new creation, and through the gospel of Jesus invites all to share equally in its blessings, its new life, its promises for the future.”⁸

How can you more and more share Paul’s perspective and find encouragement in your daily life because of the new creation to come.

Have you given too much attention to the condition of our physical body compared to the attention you give to living in a Christlike way? If so, how?

How does being part of the new creation impact how you see other Christians who are different from you?

What might it look like for you to only “boast” in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Day 4

Lisa Scheffler, author

Do you have a special email signature that attaches to all your messages? Mine isn’t very original, it’s “Blessings, Lisa.” Some people have signatures with a little more meaning. One of my friends signs off, “in His adventure” and another “joyfully serving Christ.” Bruce has been signing his recent emails with “in Christ’s joy.” Each of those email signatures fit their individual personalities very well.

We’ve now arrived at the very last verse in Galatians. We might assume it’s just a perfunctory closing — a short prayer to wrap things up. But let’s look more closely. Paul varied his final lines in all his letters, so let’s see how he’s signing his letter to the Galatian churches.

Read

Galatians 6:18

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

- What does Paul emphasize in his closing? Why do you think he did that?

Reflect

⁸ Tom Wright, [*Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 82.

That wonderful word “grace” opened Galatians in verse 3, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father the Lord Jesus Christ.” And now Paul closes the letter with grace.

NT Wright reminds us that grace runs through Galatians as a powerful theme. “The final lines of the letter are a benediction not only on the Galatians but on all of us who read these words. It is all of grace from start to finish: the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah. God, in the Messiah, took the initiative in the plan of salvation; like Paul’s apostleship itself (chapter 1), the gospel does not come from human sources, and membership in the Messiah’s people is not defined by human categories.”

“Grace reaches out and embraces the whole world. The sign of that embrace is not a mark in the flesh, but the presence and joy of the spirit. So it was in the first century; so it is now, in the church and world that still needs the message of Galatians. So it will be until faith is rewarded with sight, patience with the final harvest, and eager hope with fulfilment.”⁹

As the Galatians needed to remember “grace” back then, so do we today. It’s all too easy to become tangled in Christian rule-keeping or distracted by nationalism. I pray that we all grow in the grace of Christ Jesus.

I’ve intentionally kept us to one verse today because I want to recommend a [short video by the Bible Project](#) to you. They do a beautiful job outlining the main themes of the letter. Now that we’ve covered the entire letter of Galatians, let’s look back over its the structure and meaning.

Go ahead and watch it. I’ll wait...

What do you like about the video? Do you notice any differences from the way it was taught here at Christ Fellowship? If so, what?

Who do you know who needs to understand the message of Galatians? Share the video with them, and tell them what you’ve learned.

Respond

At the end of his commentary, Scot McKnight asks a question that probably represents a lot of people. What relevance does Galatians — a letter dealing with a conflict over circumcision and the Mosaic law — have for us now? Who is the target audience today for Galatians?

His answer?

“The target of Galatians today is *anyone who depreciates Jesus Christ as sufficient Savior and minimizes the power of the Holy Spirit as sufficient guide*. Whoever minimizes the

⁹ Tom Wright, [Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 83.

sufficiency of Christ or discounts the power of the Spirit finds the finger of Paul pointing right at him or her.

Do you think his finger is pointing at you? Why or why not? In what ways are you tempted to add to what Christ did, or to minimize the Spirit's power?

How could invite the Spirit's power to be more manifest in your life?

What could you do to remind yourself of Christ's sufficiency?

Day 5

Lisa Scheffler, author

Happy Friday!

Let's reflect on what we've learned this week, and throughout the series, invite the Spirit to transform us and commit to living out his guidance.

Reflect

Take another look at [Galatians 6:11–18](#).

- What are Paul's main points in this passage? How does it sum up some of the big issues in this letter?
- What has stayed with you personally as you've studied this passage?

Connect

I'm listing some key verses from Galatians for you to reflect on and pray over. Also consider discussing some of them a friend who's who's done this study.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Galatians 1:8

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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" Galatians 2:20–21

Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Galatians 3:3

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. Galatians 3:14

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:28–29

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. Galatians 4:6-7

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5:6

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:9-10

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Galatians 6:15

Respond

Now slow down, pray over these prompts, and ask the Spirit to direct you.

Ask the Father:

- What do you want me to take away from what I've studied this week? What are you taking away from the entire book of Galatians? 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?

From our study in Galatians, consider writing down one key insight that you have gained and one important action that you are taking. Share both with a friend or family member. Pray for each other and hold each other accountable.

Whether you've been here since the beginning, or joined us along the way, we're so glad you've studied Galatians with us! May God richly bless you with knowledge of him and the power of the Spirit to love and serve God and others.

Next week

We're starting a new series next week! It's called Fool Proof and we'll be looking at select Proverbs, starting with Proverbs chapter 1, where we will explore what "the fear of the Lord" really means and what difference it makes. With summer arriving, we're going to change up the Engage God Daily a little bit. We think you'll especially enjoy Day 1 of each week!