

# GALATIANS

# 3

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## *In Favor of Grace*

### BACKGROUND FROM THE AUTHOR

This section of Galatians is rich in ideas. The discussion could profitably go in many directions. One of the most prominent topics could well be the rooting of Christianity in Judaism. Paul is not arguing that Judaism is unimportant; that it should simply be ignored in the face of a new “religion.” He is showing, rather, how from its beginning Judaism was to be used by God to bring “all the families of the earth” into a relationship with God. He is contending that the Gentiles were always destined by God to become part of God’s holy people. He sees in the coming of Christ the fulfillment of all God’s promises to Israel and the inauguration of the reign of God over all God’s people. The argument, then, that Paul is having with the opposition, is not a brawl between two separate religions; it is an intramural argument—an argument within Judaism.

The split between Judaism and Christianity was due to many causes. The declaration by rabbis at the Council of Jamnia in 98 AD that the Christians were not a sect of Judaism was only one reason for the split.

It may also be helpful to compare Paul’s ideas with those of Jesus. Paul presents the gospel as straight, unvarnished theology using the logical arguments familiar to his Gentile audience as well as references to Scripture—which for Paul are authoritative.

Jesus presents the gospel by the way he lives life and by the stories that he tells. So it may be difficult for some to see just how Paul and Jesus are on the same topic. The gospels do not refer

to Jews using terms such as “justification.” Paul does not tell stories or make many references to Jesus’ earthly life.

Jesus’ parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23–34) is one text we will look at in order to see similarities in Paul’s theology and Jesus’ theology. It is important to note that the debt the unforgiving servant owed the king was absolutely unpayable. It was equivalent to any one person being told he must pay the national debt. There is no hope of his paying the debt no matter what he does. In his foolishness, he does not comprehend his situation: “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” So those who think they can have a right relationship with God by their keeping of the law—“I will pay you”—are deluding themselves. In fact it is only by God’s grace that this is possible: “And out of pity for him the lord of that slave released him ...” Keeping the law cannot even the books. Although Jesus is going further with his story—using God’s grace as the example of our treatment of each other, Paul and Jesus here make the same point about grace. This is true for the other gospel texts to be looked at in today’s session. Allow participants to draw their own meaning from the texts (reminding them about “exegesis” and “eisegesis”). Where do they see connections in the theology?

Another important topic in this session is the Holy Spirit and especially the Spirit’s work of creating and indwelling the church. This is how Paul can refer to the church as the “Body of Christ.” Just as the Spirit dwelt wholly in Jesus during his lifetime (symbolized in Jesus’ baptism), so now that same Spirit dwells in the church, giving it both life and the power to carry out its mission in the world. The Spirit is not given to individuals in isolation, but to the community as it strives to live in Christ and become the Body of Christ together.

With all these important topics, and more, don’t let the class get bogged down in unimportant details. Keep them “on task,” looking at the topics that present themselves and noting carefully what these things mean for them as they too are part of the Body of Christ. This study is not primarily ancient Middle-Eastern history; it is Scripture—read in order to be incorporated into life!

## SESSION PLANS

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### Learning Objectives

It is intended that this session will enable participants to:

1. State at least two of Paul's objections to the Galatians' interest in works righteousness.
2. Define the Holy Spirit, especially as the Spirit relates to the church.
3. See the similarities in the teachings of Paul and Jesus.

### Resources You May Need

- Copies of Worksheets 3A and 3B
- Baptismal liturgy from your church
- Hymnals

### Leadership Strategy

#### SETTING THE STAGE

■ Project opening slide #21 to signal that the session is starting if you are using the slide presentation.

1. Open the session with prayer using your own prayer or the prayer below. ■ Project slide #22 or provide the words. Lead the prayer or have a member who is prepared do so. Include prayers for others.

#### **Prayer of John Chrysostom**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered in his name, you will be in the midst of them.

Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

– *Greek, 5th century*

2. Have each table divide themselves into two groups: Pro-Grace and Pro-Law. Have the Pro-Grace team find all the arguments they can in favor of grace over the law. They should skim today's reading and Scriptures while one person jots down the arguments. They should expand

on those thoughts, adding their own reasons. One member should be prepared to give some of their Pro-Grace arguments to the whole group.

Have the Pro-Law people look over the Resource Book chapter for today, noting the rabbi's disagreement with Paul's thinking. They will need to do more independent thinking to come up with their list of arguments as to why keeping the law is the path to God. Some Old Testament texts that praise Torah and give reasons for keeping it are: Psalm 119:1–9 and various other verses, Deuteronomy 10:12, Joshua 1:7–8, 1 Kings 2:3, Proverbs 28:9, Hosea 4:6. Have one person prepare and give some of the arguments to the whole group.

Bring the whole group together. First hear from all the Pro-law groups. Discuss briefly their arguments. Then hear from the Pro-Grace groups and discuss their arguments. Make sure each team has a chance to give some thoughts from their list.

Ask the group which argument seems to have more sway among the people they know.

**or**

Ask the group to comment on concerns of the efficacy of grace alone. List the points on the board or newsprint using only a word or two to indicate the idea.

In the same way list the points for keeping the law.

Ask: *Why does Paul so vigorously attack salvation by works?*

*What do people have trouble with when trying to do everything the law says?*

*What are some of the attractive points about keeping the law?*

*What are the difficulties people have with the idea of relying on God's grace alone?*

*What keeps people trying to "earn" their way to God?*

### EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

1. Hand out Worksheet 3A, "Paul and the Old Testament." Work in teams of 2 or by tables to complete the worksheet. When time is up, discuss the answers as a group. Ask each team to give one or two of their answers.

**or**

Give a mini-lecture on the Old Testament texts in Galatians 3:6–14. Include comments on Paul's love of the law and its authority.

2. Hand out Worksheet 3B, "Jesus and Paul."  Project slides #23–29 for this exercise as you walk the group using the information and questions from the worksheet.

**or**

Hand out Worksheet 3B, "Jesus and Paul." Divide the texts on the worksheet between 2 groups at each table. See where they can pick out in Jesus' storytelling theological style the same (or related) ideas heard in Galatians.

When time is up, discuss the answers as one group. Give adequate time for this exercise.

3.  Display the four symbols for the Holy Spirit, slides #30–33. Ask if they are familiar with the meanings. Remind them that "wind" is also translated "breath." Which symbol do they associate with the church? Which do they think might be the one that symbolizes the Spirit at work in Paul?

**and/or**

As a group, see if you can formulate a definition of the Holy Spirit. Remind them that as our spirits enliven our bodies, so the Holy Spirit enlivens the body of Christ. What does this tell us about the church's mission and abilities?  Project slides #30-33.

**and/or**

Look at your denomination's ritual for Baptism. What does it say about the Holy Spirit? Then formulate a definition as above and discuss the church's mission and abilities.

### CLOSING

1. Hand out copies of your church's hymnal. Have tables skim through the section on grace and on the Holy Spirit. Ask them to find a hymn and jot down its most meaningful phrases. Have people share as they are willing.

2. Sing one of the hymns and/ or close with prayer.

### **Looking Ahead**

You may ask a volunteer to write a prayer that speaks of grace to use as the closing for the next session.

## **PAUL AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**

In Galatians 3:6–14 Paul quotes the Law, the Old Testament, six times: five from the Pentateuch and once from the prophets. Read these texts and answer the questions for each.

<b>Text</b>	<b>Conclusion Paul draws</b>	<b>Does it say anything about the law?</b>
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Galatians 3:6–7		
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Galatians 3:8–9		
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Galatians 3:10		
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Galatians 3:11		
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Galatians 3:12		
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Galatians 3:13–14		
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Why does Paul make so many references to the Old Testament?





**Read Luke 15:25–30**

Notes:

- In this second half of the Prodigal Son, the older brother representing the obedient son reacts to the father's receiving of the younger, prodigal son.
  - The father in Jesus' parables always represents God.
  - Whenever someone speaks in Jesus' parables it is significant.
  - Middle-Eastern biblical scholars interpret the older son's use of "me" and "my" in verse 29 as his renunciation of his family, including the father.
  - A banquet or a party or feast in Jesus' parables always represents the Kingdom of God.
1. The older son is not happy with his brother's salvation—his entrance into the party. The older son obviously thinks that his brother's works do not begin to compare with his own. Simply put, the younger brother does not deserve to be in the kingdom.

Read verses 28–30. Pick out words and phrases that:

- show the older son's alienation from his brother and the father
  - show the older son's feeling of superiority
  - show any hint of love
2. If the father is God and the older son is the obedient person, how could we put the older son's remark "I never disobeyed your command" into the words that Paul is using in Galatians?
  3. How does that lifetime of obedience serve him in entering the kingdom—coming into a relationship with God?
  4. Look at verses 28, 31 and 32. What words would you use to describe the father's reaction to this older son? What words of Paul's?
  5. What must the older son do in order to come to the party?
  6. How are both sons made able to "come to the party"?