



## Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM • FAITH OVER FLESH • GALATIANS 3:1-9 •

### MAIN POINT

Our redemption in Christ comes by grace through faith, and that same faith sustains us every day.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Think back over all of your accomplishments or successes for the last 5-10 years. Which would you say is your greatest? Why that one?**

**Over that same time period, which has been your greatest disappointment? Why?**

There is something very satisfying with taking pride in our work, just as there is something very deflating when our efforts disappoint others and even us. It is no wonder we have such a hard time accepting that our relationship with God isn't performance-based. The gospel is this: we are saved solely by grace through faith, and we can't do anything to earn or lose that salvation. It's because of Christ's accomplishments, not our own, that we can be right with God, something Paul makes abundantly clear in our study today.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:1-5.

**Why is Paul's question in verse 2 so crucial? How would you state his question in your own words?**

**What influences lead you to believe that God only accepts you by your actions? What are some of the self-improvement tasks you attempt in your day-to-day relationship with God?**

**What does a balance between observing the law and resting in faith look like?**

**How do you feel about yourself and your spirituality when you try to impress God with your works? How does that compare to how you feel when you rest in faith?**

**Paul wasn't taking issue with the religious works the people were performing but with the motives behind their works. What was wrong with the Galatian believers' motives?**

The believers in the Galatian church desired to follow Jesus well. But we learn from Paul's letter that many had fallen into a trap that tempts us all—legalism. Legalism is the belief that we must fulfill certain requirements in order to gain God's favor. Even though we know we're saved by grace through faith, we still try to make ourselves better in an effort to earn God's love.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 3:6-9.

In verses 6-9, Paul supported his argument against works-based salvation by reminding the Galatian church that Abraham was saved by his faith (see Genesis 15:6).

**Who are the true children of Abraham? Who is eligible to be one? Why is this good news for us?**

**Why is it so easy for us to forget the role of faith in our relationship with God?**

We are tempted to live by works because focusing on specific rules and lists can give us a sense of identity. It also provides a tangible way to measure how "spiritual" we are. But ultimately, this mind-set leads to a false sense of strength that makes us think we can earn our way into God's good graces, when really He alone determines that. We receive life, identity, and strength through God's Spirit. The new life comes through Christ's payment on the cross and is transferred to us because we believe in Him. Instead of sinners needing redemption, we become ambassadors for God's kingdom, empowered by the Spirit's strength.

# APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Describe your experience of becoming a believer in Christ. How is your story a reminder of the importance of faith and grace?**

**Based on what we've studied this week, are spiritual works important? Why or why not? In what act of obedience and faithfulness do you need to improve?**

**Does serving in the church ever become a "work"? Why? How can our small group faithfully serve one another without it becoming a work?**

**What are appropriate motives for obeying God's laws and practicing spiritual disciplines?**

# PRAYER

Thank God for sending Christ on our behalf, freeing us from bondage to the law. Thank God for giving us the law, which shows us what righteousness and holy living look like and gives us a goal to strive for. Thank God for the Holy Spirit's daily presence in our lives to guide, convict, and comfort us as we seek to live by faith. And thank God for the opportunity to share the gospel with others who may be trying to earn their salvation.

# COMMENTARY

| GALATIANS 3:1-9

3:1. Using a tough love approach, Paul described the Galatians as "foolish" for allowing themselves to be deceived by the "faith plus" crowd, the false teachers who were demanding that Gentiles be circumcised and observe the law of Moses in order to be saved. In describing the Galatians as foolish, Paul did not mean that they were lacking in intellectual ability, but rather, in spiritual discernment. However, instead of being sharp and vigilant, the Galatians were careless and lazy. It was as if someone had charmed or bewitched them into believing false teachings. The Greek term translated "bewitched" means "to cast a spell" or "to hold spellbound by irresistible power." The form of the Greek verb translated "crucified" stresses the finality of what happened on the cross.

Jesus was crucified once and for all. The work of redemption was completed through His death and resurrection, and never needs to be supplemented.

3:2. The gift of the Holy Spirit is powerful evidence of our salvation (Rom. 8:16) and God's guarantee of eternal glory (Eph. 1:13- 14). Therefore, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the reality of the new birth are inseparable. Paul reminded believers in Galatia that they had received the Holy Spirit, but wondered if they had forgotten the basis on which they received Him. Had they received the Spirit by faith or by keeping the law? Paul knew, as did the Galatians, that they had received eternal life as a gift—not by human efforts or merit. The transformation from death to life was enacted by divine power. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can transform a spiritually dead person into a person who is spiritually alive and knows the living God. Therefore, Paul questioned how his readers could have personally experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit solely on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, yet later allow themselves to be persuaded that something more was required.

3:3. At the time of their conversions, the Galatian Christians depended solely on the Spirit's power to bring them into a right relationship with the living God. They had received the Holy Spirit as a gift, not as a reward. Any higher kind of life the false teachers may have been promoting was really a step backwards, given that because they were rejecting God's grace and relying on human effort.

3:4. Paul might have been thinking that these Galatian believers could reduce the degree of persecution they experienced for their faith by accepting circumcision, since that ritual act would have given the appearance that they were proselytes to Judaism. If so, Paul would then have been questioning the Galatians' logic in turning to a ritual that could have spared them from persecution in the first place. Although Paul evidently viewed the situation in the Galatian churches as desperate, it was not hopeless.

3:5. For God to "give . . . His Spirit" is an act of incredible grace. The Greek verb translated "give" means "to provide or furnish something at one's own expense." The term was used to denote the actions of financial underwriters of Greek plays. The noun translated "miracles" literally means "power." God's miracles demonstrate His power. The Galatian believers had received the Spirit and experienced God's miraculous power through faith.

3:6. In proving his argument for justification by faith, Paul moved from an argument based on the Galatians' experiences to an argument based on the teachings of Scripture. The first argument Paul used from Scripture was the example of Abraham. Paul reminded the Galatians that Abraham's acceptance by God was rooted in his faith alone. Paul pointed to Abraham's experience to prove that salvation is and always has been by faith.

3:7. The Judaizers were teaching that in order to share in the blessings promised to Abraham, the Galatians must submit to the sign of the covenant made with Abraham—circumcision. Paul countered that false teaching by emphasizing that believers become rightly related to God the same way Abraham did—not through circumcision, but through faith. Thus, Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised. All that was required was their faith in Jesus Christ.

3:8-9. The true children of Abraham are those who have been declared righteous by faith. Abraham was “a man of faith.” By faith, this patriarch entered into a right relationship with God and received God’s blessings. On the basis of faith, we, too, enter into a right relationship with God and experience the blessings of knowing Him.