

GALATIANS

verse by verse



GALATIANS ***verse by verse***

Bible Study Guide

From the leadership development ministry of

FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH MISSIONS

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Table of Contents

GALATIANS *verse by verse*

	Page
Introduction	2
Lesson 1	3
Lesson 2	15
Lesson 3	29
Lesson 4	47
Lesson 5	57
Lesson 6	69

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Revision 1

GALATIANS

Verse By Verse

INTRODUCTION

Slavery comes in many forms. Historically, slaves were men and women forced to serve their conquerors or captors. But there are other ways to become enslaved. Some men and women, are enslaved by destructive habits, and struggle under the control of drugs or alcohol. Others are trapped in destructive relationships, while there are those who are captured in financial strangleholds; keep in mind that all who do not abide in their God-given position in Christ are slaves to sin.



As a highly educated world traveler, Paul had seen and known many slaves; men and women enslaved by powerful governments, powerful leaders, and powerful personalities. In fact, Paul himself had been a slave to religious zealotry and legalism. But Paul also knew what it meant to be free, to know true liberty in Christ. And since meeting his Liberator on the road to Damascus, Paul had spent his life spreading the news of that freedom.

Having seen both sides, nothing bothered Paul more than watching Christians return to bondage, which is what he had learned about his friends in Galatia: Men and women, who had found freedom in Christ, and now were being pressured and persuaded to return to the slavery of religious rules and regulations. Paul's response was; don't desert Christ (1:6), don't be foolish (3:1), don't be cursed (3:10), don't be a prisoner (3:23), and don't be a slave (4:8); instead, be free (4:31), be free (5:1), BE FREE (5:13).



Paul's letter to the Galatians has been called the charter of Christian freedom. In it Paul proclaims the reality of believers' liberty in Christ; freedom from the law and the power of sin, and freedom to present ourselves to God and live out the Christ-life.



LESSON 1

GALATIANS 1

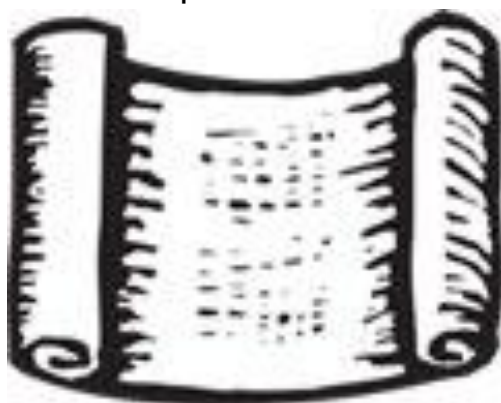
Introduction/1:1-5

The year was probably A.D. 49. Paul and Barnabas had just completed their first missionary journey (**Acts 13:2-14:29**). In their travels they had met with both wholehearted approval and deep-seated resistance.

Upon arriving back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas “gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (**Acts 14:27**). Shortly after their return to Antioch, some Jewish Christians arrived from Judea. These Judeans claimed that the Antioch church and its missionaries were diluting Christianity to make it more appealing to Gentiles, and they challenged Paul’s authority as an apostle. They disagreed with Paul’s teaching that Gentiles did not have to follow the religious laws that the Jews had obeyed for centuries.

Some of Paul’s accusers went to the Galatian churches and insisted that the Gentile converts be circumcised and follow all the Jewish laws and customs in order to be saved.

Paul’s response was this letter to the Galatian churches. In it, he explained that following the Old Testament laws (the old Jewish legal system) would not bring salvation. A person is saved only by grace through faith. Most likely, Paul wrote this letter about A.D. 49, shortly before the meeting of the Jerusalem council, which settled the law-versus-grace controversy (**Acts 15**). By this time, Paul himself had been a Christian for about fifteen years.



1:1 *“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)”*

Paul was born into a Jewish family from the tribe of Benjamin. He was raised as a Pharisee (**Philippians 3:5**), grew up in Tarsus, and was educated under a well-known teacher, Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3**). However, he was also a Roman citizen, a privilege he used to great advantage at times (**Acts 22:27-29**).

Paul was called to be an apostle (one sent on a mission) by Jesus Christ and God the Father. Paul was not one of the original twelve disciples (later called apostles), but Jesus had specifically called him on the road to Damascus to preach the gospel to the

Gentiles as well as to the Jews (**Acts 9:3-19**). The apostles' mission was to be God's representatives; they were messengers who were directly under the authority of Jesus Christ. They had authority to set up and oversee churches and discipline when necessary. Paul presented his credentials as an apostle at the beginning of this letter because his authority was being questioned in the churches in Galatia.

No human had commissioned Paul; no human authority had called him; instead, Jesus Christ himself had spoken to Paul (**Acts 9:4-5**). Thus Paul added, *who raised him from the dead*; Paul was not called during Jesus' ministry on earth; rather, he was called after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. He wrote that Jesus appeared "*last of all...to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am...*" (**I Corinthians 15:8-10**).

Paul explained his apostleship in these words, not to separate himself from the original Twelve, but to show that his apostleship was as genuine as theirs.

1:2: "And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:"

Paul's fellow workers in Antioch joined him in sending greetings to the Galatian believers, for all of them together were brothers or "members of God's family." These coworkers in Antioch, a sizable group, included Barnabas, Titus, Timothy, and some of the men listed in **Acts 13:1 (Acts 19:29; 20:4)**.

1:3: "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Paul used grace and peace in all his salutations, wishing his readers the benefits of both. "Grace" was the Greek greeting, as "peace" was the Jewish greeting. The word "grace" reminded Paul's readers of God's kindness in offering salvation and favor to undeserving people. Not only does God mercifully withhold the judgment and punishment that we so clearly deserve, he grants, instead, the most awesome gift of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. Grace cannot be earned; it is free and undeserved favor on us by Christ. As long as we insist on finding or making our own way, we do not discover God's grace; it finds us (**Romans 5:1-11**).

"Peace" was a familiar word often used in salutations of letters even by unbelievers. Paul used it to remind the readers of Christ's offer of peace to his disciples as they lived out their faith in an evil world (**John 14:27**). If "grace" summarizes God's gift to us, then "Peace" summarizes the personal results of that gift (**John 14:27; 16:33**).



The Bible speaks of three kinds of peace; “Peace with God” (**Romans 5:1**). Here we have “peace from God,” and in **Philippians 4:7** and **Colossians 3:15** we have the ultimate “peace of God.”

True peace comes only from a right relationship with God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As in verse 1, the connecting of “God” and “Jesus” reveals their oneness (**John 10:30**).

1:4: “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:”



Christ died for our sins, in our place, so we would not have to suffer the punishment we deserve (**I Peter 2:24**). Paul wasted no time in laying the groundwork for his message to the Galatians. If they were to accept any other “gospel” as an answer to sin, including the one offered by the Judaizers, they would be denying the value and effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice. So, having claimed his authority to speak, Paul briefly summarized the gospel that he had given them in person.

The result of Jesus’ gift of Himself was to deliver/rescue us from the present evil age. Christ not only gave himself for our sins (paid the penalty for our sins); he also daily delivers us from sin’s dominion (**Romans 6:14**), and then one day will deliver us out of this present evil world. Paul wanted the Galatians to know that they had exchanged their freedom in Christ for slavery under a system based on human effort.

“According to the will of our God and Father.” The Christian life is a relationship and God’s will is to bring people to himself (**I Timothy 2:4**). Thus, God made a way of salvation; the ultimate sacrifice of Himself, to die on the cross, taking the penalty for humanity’s sins. People can only be saved through Christ. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).** God is the Father, he is also our God and Father. All who believe are adopted into God’s family, becoming heirs with Christ (**Romans 8:17**).

1:5: “To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Paul closed his introduction to this letter. In these first five verses, Paul touched on what would be the intent of his letter: his authority as an apostle, and the fact that salvation is not by works but by grace through faith in Christ alone.

CARING CONFRONTATION/1:6-10

Paul was amazed at how easily the believers in the Galatian churches had given up the good news of grace in Christ for the bad news that they had been taught by the Judaizers. Paul was warning Galatian Christians about turning from the truth to lies.

1:6: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.”

The news that the apostle had received about the Galatians left him stunned. In most of his letters, Paul would follow his greeting with a prayer of thanks for his readers based on what he had recently heard about them. Paul thanked God for the Romans and commended them for their well-known faith (**Romans 1:8**); he thanked God for the Corinthians (despite the moral lapses that he denounced in his letter, **I Corinthians 1:4-9**); he thanked God for the Ephesians (**Ephesians 1:15-16**), the Philippians (**Philippians 1:3-10**), the Colossians (**Colossians 1:3**), and the Thessalonians (**I Thessalonians 1:2-3**).

However, no words of thanks occur in this letter; instead, Paul expressed astonishment at the Galatians’ spiritual condition. The expression “I marvel” (*thaumazo*) conveys a rebuke similar to our expression, “I can hardly believe what I am hearing about you!” Paul found it difficult to comprehend that believers were casting aside grace and placing themselves back under the bondage of the law.



The false teachers, Judaizers, taught that to be saved, Gentile believers had to follow Jewish laws and customs, especially the rite of circumcision. Faith in Christ was not enough. Note that they included in their teachings the need for faith in Christ for salvation, but they also taught that additional requirements had to be met before true salvation could occur. Their message was “faith plus works.” This infuriated Paul because the Judaizers’ message undermined the truth of the gospel that salvation is a gift, not a wage we earn for works. Jesus Christ has made the gift of salvation available to all people and faith in Christ is the only requirement for salvation.

1:7: “Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Paul’s sarcastic words in verse 5, “a different gospel,” needed further clarification, so he pointed out that the Judaizers’ teaching was no gospel at all. There is only one way given to man by God to be forgiven of sin; that is through believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. No other person, method, or ritual can give eternal life. In a free society,

people have the right to their religious opinions, but this doesn't guarantee that their ideas are right. God does not accept man-made religion as a substitute for faith in Jesus Christ. He has provided just one way; Jesus Christ (**John 14:6**).

The people who were confusing the Galatian believers were zealous Jewish Christians who believed that the Old Testament practices, such as circumcision and dietary restrictions, were required of all believers. Because these teachers wanted to turn the Gentile Christians into Jews, they were called "Judaizers."

The effect these "teachers" had on young Christians held chilling similarities with Jesus' description of the Pharisees: ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are"*** (**Matthew 23:15**). Whatever the Judaizers' intentions, their efforts led to confusion. They were loading down people with the requirements of the "law" instead of encouraging them to live by grace.

When Paul made the statement that others wanted to pervert the gospel of Christ, he was concerned that nothing get in the way of the simple truth of his message: salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Any other teaching is a perversion of the truth. The term "pervert" (*metastrepsei*) implies making something the opposite of what it was originally.

1:8: *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."*

Paul denounced the Judaizers' perversion of the gospel of Christ. Using strong language to deal with this life or death issue, Paul said that even if an angel from heaven were to come preaching another message, that angel should be eternally condemned. Most likely, Paul was referring to the emissaries of Satan.



In **2 Corinthians 11:14-15**, Paul warned that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. Here he invoked a curse (*anathema*) on any angel who spreads a false gospel; a fitting response to an emissary of hell. Paul extended that curse to include himself and any of the apostles (we) if they should pervert the gospel. For in the case of both apostles or angels a true communication of the unchanging truth from God was the ultimate test of their rightful authority. If the truth is changed, the teacher is false, regardless of his or her qualifications, accomplishments, or experience.

1:9: *"As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."*

Paul knew that some would come to distort the gospel, and so he had warned the new converts. Indeed Jesus himself had warned his disciples that false teachers would come, attempting to lead people away from the truth (**Matthew 24:11; Mark 13:22-23**).



In verse 8, Paul condemned anyone who preached a gospel “other than the one we preached to you”; here, he condemned anyone who preached a gospel “*other than what you received.*” In both cases, the gospel is the same.

1:10: “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

Undoubtedly the Judaizers had accused Paul of compromise, saying that he taught freedom from the Jewish law to the Gentiles in order to meet their approval and thus win as many converts as possible. Paul’s purpose was always to do the will of God.

Much church growth philosophy centers on a “market” approach, discovering what people want and need. But we must have our motives clearly understood. If our desire is to please people, our packaging of the gospel may take priority over the content.

Paul’s use of the word “*yet*” offers us a glimpse into his inner self and his past life as a Pharisee. Paul understood that by living a strict, self-righteous, law-abiding, judgmental, and appearance-focused life of a Pharisee, his goal had really been to please people. Religious and pious people may receive much praise for their supposed character and good words. Christians are rarely accorded such praise. Thus if Paul were still pleasing people, he would not be a servant of Christ. As there is no compromise with the truth, there is no compromise for the Christian with the “present evil age” (1:4). The life of serving Christ does not put people in the limelight, offer great material rewards, or promise worldly security. Thus, if Paul wanted to please people, he could have chosen many other routes or stayed a Jewish Pharisee. Instead, Paul’s conversion changed his life so completely that his only goal was to do the will of God and be pleasing unto Him (6:12-14; **I Thessalonians 2:4**). A servant can have only one master.

PAUL RECEIVED THE GOSPEL FROM GOD/1:11-24

Having pointed to the uniqueness of the gospel in the last paragraph, here Paul turned his attention to his authority as an apostle. Why should the Galatians have listened to Paul instead of the Judaizers? Paul answered this question by furnishing his credentials: His message was received directly from Christ (1:12); he had been a zealous Jew (1:13-14); he had had a special conversion experience (1:15-16; **Acts**

9:1-9); he had been confirmed and accepted in his ministry by the other apostles (1:18-19; 2:1-9). Paul also presented his credentials to the Corinthian and Philippian churches (**2 Corinthians 11-12**; **Philippians 3:4-9**).

1:11: ***“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.”***

In verse 1, Paul had introduced himself as “sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father”. He had launched into a defense against those who would refuse to recognize his authority as an apostle. Paul wanted the Galatian believers to know beyond any doubt that he was an apostle; called separately from the Twelve and received as an equal by the Twelve.

Now he stated that the gospel which Paul proclaimed was the true gospel, not for false gospel, as he had discussed in verses 6-9. The gospel Paul taught was not of human origin; that is, it was not a belief or doctrine handed down to him through tradition.

1:12: ***“For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”***

The gospel itself was not of “human origin” (1:11), and Paul did not receive it from a human source. The Judaizers, refusing to acknowledge Paul as an apostle, most likely claimed that Paul owed his salvation and gospel knowledge to Peter and James in Jerusalem, and that he had to turn to them for approval and support of his teaching. But, as Paul would point out, he had become a believer before he ever met these leaders in the Christian church. Paul had heard Stephen’s defense (**Acts 7:1-8:1**), but that did not constitute his entire knowledge of the gospel.

The phrase, “revelation of Jesus Christ” referred to a revelation by Christ to Paul “spelling out the gospel message.”

1:13: ***“For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:”***

To further support his apostolic claim, Paul showed how radically Christ had transformed him from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of the church. Paul’s previous way of life in Judaism included being one of the most religious Jews of his day,



scrupulously keeping the law and relentlessly persecuting the church of God. The Greek word for *persecuted* here is the same word used in **Acts 9:4**, when Jesus asked him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Not only did Paul persecute the Christian church, he also sought to destroy it. So adamant was he for upholding the traditions of his faith, so convinced was he that Christianity was a false religion deviating from Judaism, that he wanted to see it annihilated (**Acts 7:57-8:1; 9:1-2; 26:9-11**). Yet to persecute God’s church was to persecute God himself; the God Paul claimed to love and serve.

1:14: “And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.”



The word *Judaism* refers not only to nationality but also to religion. To be fully Jewish, a person must have descended from Abraham. In addition, a faithful Jew adhered to the Jewish laws. Before his conversion, Paul had been even more zealous for the traditions than the Judaizers themselves. Paul used a fierce word, “zealous” (*zelotes*), to describe himself. It was a term reserved for those who often violently observed the laws of God. Paul’s single-minded persecution of Christians was consistent with his zealous life. He had advanced beyond many Jews of his own age in religious knowledge and practice. In **Acts 22:3** Paul says, “Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.” Paul’s intense study under one of the most respected teachers of his day helped to establish his credentials. Paul wrote about himself, “***Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless***” (**Philippians 3:5-6; Acts 22:3-13; 26:4-18**). Paul had been sincere in his zeal, but wrong.

1:15: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace,”

What changed Paul’s life from persecutor of the Church to preacher of the faith? God’s unmerited favor (grace). Paul did not expect it, did not deserve it (in fact, he described himself as the last person worthy to receive anything from God, **I Timothy 1:15**), and did not seek it but rather fought against it. Paul’s conversion happened only by God’s grace.

God had set Paul apart from birth. The phrase literally says, “He, having separated me from my mother’s womb.” Paul realized that God’s designs on his life clearly began before his birth. Similarly, Jeremiah was divinely informed that God had called him

even before he was born to do special work (**Jeremiah 1:5**). Paul's words bring to mind **Psalms 139:13-16**.

The understanding that Paul and all believers are "set apart" before birth by God is referred to as the doctrine of election. This was a key part of Paul's theology (**Roman 8:29-30; 9:11-29; Ephesians 1:4-5**).

Believers may wonder why or how they could be chosen while others might be rejected. God is sovereign and, no one has any claim on his mercy. Instead of focusing on God choosing some and rejecting others, we should stand in awe at God's offer of grace to any of us. What may seem to us to be an inconsistency on God's part actually reveals our the fact that we really don't know God.

1:16: "to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood",

Paul reproduced the life of Christ. Paul's phrase "in me" (*en emoi*) corresponds with 2:20 and 4:6, where he explained the inward reality of the Christian experience. Christ takes up residence "in us" conditionally while we live "in him" (3:26-28) positionally. The inward revelation in Paul became a revelation of Jesus to others through Paul's life, his message, and his letters. At salvation God took us out of Adam and placed us into Christ positionally. Our new position is in Christ. As we, by faith, rest in our position, the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ in us conditionally. This further explains the doctrine of election: we are created for a purpose. The little phrase *so that* carries great weight. Paul was saved to have a relationship with God and to live out God's purpose for his life. Paul understood exactly what that purpose was to be: ***I might preach him among the Gentiles.*** God guided Paul's ministry, thus Paul wasn't doing anything that God hadn't already planned and given him the power and desire to do. At the time of Paul's conversion, God said, ***"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel,"*** and then added, ***"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name"*** (**Acts 9:15-16; Ephesians 2:10**).



"Heathens" or "Gentiles" (*ethnesin*) were non-Jews, whether in nationality or a religion. In Paul's day, Jews thought of all Gentiles as heathens. Jews avoided Gentiles, believing that contact with Gentiles brought spiritual corruption. Although Gentiles could become Jews in religion by undergoing circumcision and by following Jewish laws and customs (they were called "proselytes"), they were never fully accepted.

Many Jewish Christians had difficulty understanding that the gospel enabled both Jews and Gentiles to have equal standing before God.

However, God planned to save both Jews and Gentiles. He had revealed this plan through Old Testament prophets (**Genesis 12:3**), and he had fulfilled it through Jesus Christ; he was proclaiming it to the Gentiles through Paul (**Acts 13:46; Romans 11:13; 15:16; Ephesians 3:8; I Timothy 2:7**).

“I did not confer with any human being.” The word *confer* (*prosanethemen*) could also be translated “consult.” Paul’s personal encounter with Jesus was so compelling that no further confirmation was required. Paul did not seek out anyone of authority in order to discuss doctrine, theology, the Old Testament Scriptures, or the specifics of the gospel message.

1:17: “Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.”

As if to answer any unspoken objections, Paul explained, “No, I did not go to Jerusalem to talk to the apostles, as the Judaizers are claiming.” The twelve apostles were apostles before Paul became an apostle, but beyond that, there was no difference between them. When he finally did go to Jerusalem to meet with the church leaders, he went as an equal. The other apostles recognized him as such.

Although the book of Acts doesn’t mention this retreat into Arabia by Paul, here Paul explained that he went away from all human contact for several years apparently to spend time alone with God. Paul needed time to rethink his former position against Christianity in light of the truth of the gospel that had been revealed to him. Paul’s point in explaining this itinerary was to show that he formed his theology, not from consulting with any other believers, but alone, with God’s guidance.

The region of Arabia probably means the vast desert area northeast and southeast of the city of Damascus. The consensus of opinion is that Paul took time away to consolidate the changes God had brought into his life. Then Paul picked up his life where it was interrupted, but his agenda was radically revised. There were Christians in Damascus (Paul had originally been on his way there to arrest them; **Acts 9:1-2**), but now he went there to be one among them.

1:18: “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.”

Paul’s visit to Jerusalem was his first as a Christian. This was where the church began, and this was where some of the apostles lived and worked, specifically Peter, whom Paul went to see. By referring to this actual event, the Judaizers may have felt that they had proved their point; Paul did go to Jerusalem. However, Paul further

explained that his visit was to get acquainted with Peter, not to get instruction from Peter nor to be commissioned by him.

1:19: “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.”

To further dispute the Judaizers' claim that Paul needed the twelve apostles' instructions and approval, Paul pointed out that although he spent fifteen days getting acquainted with Peter, he saw none of the other apostles. Paul planned a meeting with Peter, but there was no general apostolic meeting to confirm Paul, no official gathering to approve this new convert and missionary. Instead, Paul talked only with Peter and James, the Lord's brother. This was not James the apostle (one of the Twelve) whom Herod put to death (**Acts 12:2**); it was James, Jesus' younger half brother. During Jesus' ministry on earth, James did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared personally to James (**I Corinthians 15:7**), and James believed. He became the leader of the Jerusalem church.

1:20: “Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.”

Assuring his readers before God of the truth of his words, Paul made clear that any assumption on anyone's part that he was taught and/or commissioned by the twelve apostles was not so.

1:21: “Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;”

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem caused real problems. His preaching stirred up much opposition. Many of the believers were hesitant to accept his roadside conversion. Those who did accept Paul were committed to keeping him alive, and urged him to leave after only fifteen days. His departure eventually took him to his home town of Tarsus in Cilicia (**Acts 9:30; 22:3**). These small details serve to emphasize Paul's claim of direct authority from Jesus apart from the authority of those in Jerusalem. In the remote areas Paul had no opportunity to receive instruction from the apostles or have his ministry overseen by them.

1:22: “And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:”

Because of his visit and ministry in Jerusalem, Paul was known to the Christians there at this time, but he was unknown outside the city limits.

There were identifiable groups of believers meeting in towns throughout Judea. Paul referred to them with a phrase of honor, *the churches...that are in Christ*. He used the same expression in **I Thessalonians 2:14**, referring to the same group of churches.

1:23: “But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.”

Paul was unknown to the churches in Judea, yet they recognized the message he preached (1:24). Paul was making the point that his authority and ministry were recognized by people who had never even seen him; yet the Galatians had met him, listened to him, and believed his message, only to come to a point where they doubted him.

1:24: “And they glorified God in me.”

This was Paul’s final blow to the Judaizers: The Jewish Christians in Judea were rejoicing and glorifying God because of Paul; his conversion, his message, his ministry.

LESSON 2 GALATIANS 2

The Apostles Accepted Paul/2:1-10

Paul had not finished establishing his authority, which he would use to call the Galatians back to freedom in Christ. He was amazed at how easily the new believers had been led into a different form of the slavery from which they had so recently been released. Patiently, Paul built a case to prove that the doubts the Galatians had about him had been planted by those Judaizers who had less claim to authority than Paul did.



To defend himself against the Judaizers' charges, the apostle pointed to his fourteen years of independent ministry between his first two visits to Jerusalem following his conversion. He functioned directly under Jesus' authority during that time, not under the official body at Jerusalem. He helped the Galatians understand the complex relationship existing between himself and the apostles in Jerusalem. So when Paul wrote about his visit to the mother church, he showed both his independence from the other apostles' authority and his respect for them.

2:1 ***“Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.”***

Paul continued the itinerary from 1:21 and explained that he “went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia”; afterward he went up again to Jerusalem.

The book of Acts records five visits to Jerusalem by Paul: (1) the visit to get acquainted with Peter (around A.D. 35, **Acts 9:26-30**; **Galatians 1:18-20**); (2) the visit to deliver a gift to the Jerusalem church for famine relief (around A.D. 44, **Acts 11:27-30**); (3) the visit to attend the Jerusalem council (around A.D. 40/50, **Acts 15:1-30**); (4) the visit at the end of the second missionary journey (around A.D. 52, **Acts 18:22**); and (5) the visit that resulted in his being imprisoned and sent to Rome (around A.D. 57, **Acts 21:15-23:35**).

The visit to Jerusalem mentioned here in Galatians 2:1 is most likely the second visit, when he delivered the famine relief gift to the Jerusalem church.

The phrase *fourteen years* most likely is dated, not from the last mention of his itinerary (that is, from his time in Syria and Cilicia), but rather from his conversion. The first and fourteenth years were partial years.



was writing.

Barnabas and Titus were two of Paul's close friends. According to the book of Acts, Barnabas recognized Paul's sincerity as a truly converted former persecutor and introduced Paul to the apostles. Barnabas was well known to the Galatian Christians to whom Paul

Titus, a Greek, was one of Paul's most trusted and dependable coworkers. Paul called him "a true son" (**Titus 1:4**), so he was probably one of Paul's converts. This trip to Jerusalem with Paul became the first of many journeys for Titus, who would later become a true right-hand man to Paul. Exactly why Paul brought Titus along to Jerusalem is unclear. Possibly because Titus was a pure Gentile convert, he was presented as a "test case" to the church leaders (2:3-5).

2:2: "And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain."

God told Paul, through a revelation, to speak with the church leaders in Jerusalem about the message he was preaching to the Gentiles so they would know and understand what he was doing. Paul's point here was that his visit to Jerusalem was not because the apostles had summoned him or because he had felt a need to talk to the apostles about his ministry among the Gentiles. Rather, he had gone in response to a revelation from God, telling him to go.

One reason Paul wrote this letter was to combat the false teaching of the Judaizers who were trying to undermine Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul did not go to Jerusalem at the call of the apostles, and he did not go to discuss the gospel he preached or to get it approved. Instead, Paul went to "set" it before them for their acceptance. In 1:16, Paul had written that he did not "confer" or "consult" with any human being in order to be approved before beginning to preach. Here, he says that he "communicated," "set" that gospel before the church leaders. Paul knew he didn't need approval because the gospel had been revealed to him by God himself. The essence of the "gospel" Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles was that God's salvation is offered to all people regardless of race, sex, nationality, wealth, social standing, educational level, etc. All types of people can be forgiven by trusting in Christ (**Romans 10:8-13; Galatians 3:28**).

"But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain." Paul discussed the gospel he was preaching among the Gentiles in a private meeting with those who appeared to be leaders.

Peter, John, and James apparently had emerged as the central leadership team in the church. James was Jesus' half brother who became a believer after the Resurrection (**I Corinthians 15:7**) and then headed the Jerusalem church. Peter and John had been Jesus' disciples and were recognized apostles. The phrases "seemed to be leaders," "supposed to be acknowledged leaders" (2:6), and "reputed to be pillars" (2:9) display a slight note of sarcasm from Paul. This does not mean that Paul rejected their authority; rather, these expressions show that Paul was probably ridiculing others (possibly Judaizers) for esteeming Peter, John, and James too highly.

Paul had no doubts about the message Christ had given him, but he appeared before the other apostles as an equal expecting their wholehearted support.

2:3: "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:"



Paul's message preached among the Gentiles was tested in the treatment of the young Greek convert whom Paul brought along to Jerusalem; Titus. Paul's message to the Gentiles was that God accepted anyone who believes, regardless of race or religious background. The presence of Titus gave the entire church an opportunity to live out what they believed. The gospel applied to Titus without requiring his circumcision was a major loss for the Judaizers, for it showed that the Jerusalem church had accepted Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

The Judaizers' teaching is summed up in **Acts 15:1**: "*Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.*" Circumcision was a big issue for the Jews because the custom dated back to the days of Abraham and their birth as a nation. More than any other practice, circumcision separated God's people from their pagan neighbors. In Abraham's day, this was essential for developing the pure worship of the one true God.

The apostles did not demand that Titus be circumcised, though he was a Greek and thus a Gentile. Instead, the apostles agreed with Paul that circumcision was an unnecessary rite for Gentile converts. Several years later, Paul did circumcise Timothy, another Greek Christian (**Acts 16:3**). Unlike Titus, however, Timothy was half Jewish.

2:4: "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:"

Titus, a converted Gentile, was brought as a test case, and ended up being the example Paul needed. Paul held firmly to his belief that Titus did not need to be circumcised. Here Paul called the Judaizers *false brothers*. However, these Judaizers were merely acting as brothers; they were not believers in Christ's gospel of grace. Thus they were "false" brothers (**2 Corinthians 11:26**). We do not know how this private meeting was convened. Paul's descriptive words for the group clearly indicate that more were present than the apostles. These "false brothers" were infiltrating the church and pretending to be a part, while in reality they had other goals in mind which became obvious to Paul: (1)spying on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and (2)bringing believers back under the old Jewish legal system; back under the bondage of the Law.

2:5: *"To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."*

Paul sought to protect the truth that the gospel is for all people who accept it by faith alone. Titus represented the Galatians. If Paul had allowed him to be circumcised, nothing would have prevented the Judaizers from making the same demand of the Galatians. But Paul was convinced that circumcision, a rite he himself had undergone, was not part of the essential truth of the gospel. And adding any other stipulations or requirements to the essential truth would make the whole into a lie.

2:6: *"But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:"*

He wanted to make it clear that both his gospel and his apostleship were of supernatural origin. Because God shows no partiality between him and the recognized apostles, then neither should anyone else (**Ephesians 6:9**).

"Those men added nothing to my message." In other words, the apostles did not correct Paul's message or try to add anything to it (such as the need for circumcision). Instead they accepted Paul as an equal and accepted his message to the Gentiles as "gospel truth."

2:7: *"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;"*

What the apostles "saw" that caused them to understand is unclear. Perhaps the presence, character, and witness of Titus were convincing evidence.

Not only did the apostles accept Paul's message, they recognized the supernatural origin of his message and ministry; that Paul had been entrusted by God with the task

of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. This meant, not that Paul was exclusively entrusted with this mission (Philip spoke to the Samaritans and to an Ethiopian eunuch; **Acts 8**; Peter spoke with Cornelius; **Acts 10**; and Paul continued to speak to the Jews in the cities he visited), but that Paul was spearheading this ministry and that it was his main focus.

Both Paul and Peter preached the same gospel. Though their audiences were vastly different, the message did not, could not, and would not ever change. The gospel that remains unchanged today is that salvation is by God's grace alone for all who believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again to make payment for our sins.

2:8 ***“(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)”***

This verse repeats the thought of verse 7. The focus here is on the enabler; God. The apostles realized that as God was at work in the ministry of Peter among the Jews, so God was at work in Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. In each situation they were able to identify God/Holy Spirit as the agent, giving great success to both men in their parallel ministries. It's interesting to note that Paul was carrying on the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles that had been started by Peter. Peter had first received the vision of the Gentiles mission, and the Holy Spirit had authenticated it (**Acts 12:2**).

2:9: ***“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”***

The men mentioned were James, half brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, and two of Jesus' original disciples and part of his inner circle of three; Peter and John. The James of the original twelve disciples had been executed by Herod (**Acts 12:2**).

The important point is that these three noted leaders gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; their approval, blessing, and encouragement in their ministry among the Gentiles. Their joy in God's guidance to two special leaders who preached the same gospel, their rejoicing in God's gracious plan to include the Gentiles, and their excitement over the growth of the church was another blow to the Judaizers. Paul knew that his words had not persuaded the other apostles to recognize his ministry. The convincing had been done by God when they recognized the grace given to him.

“They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.” Paul and Barnabas were sent on their way to continue their ministry among the Gentiles, while

the apostles in Jerusalem and Judea would continue their ministry to the Jews. This referred to each group's main focus; it was not exclusive. The apostles ministered to many Gentiles; Paul and his team always spoke to Jews, as well.

2:10: “Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.”

Although the “right hand of fellowship” had been given by the apostles to Paul and Barnabas, the entire issue had not been handled because the Judaizers had not been silenced. It would take the council of Jerusalem to block the efforts to bring the gospel back under the law. In the meantime, there was a great need for unity at the grass roots level between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

The apostles realized that one immediate and practical way to bridge the gap would be to care for the poor. Keep in mind that at this time, the Jerusalem church was very poor. Besides the effects of a severe famine (**Acts 11:28**), there were a series of famines between A.D. 30 and 50 that made food prices rise. Palestine was a poor country, and Jerusalem was an overcrowded city filled with poor people. Add to this the fact that many of the early converts were immediately disowned by their families and became instantly destitute. Thus the bulk of the Jerusalem church was made up of people in the cycle of poverty.

Paul assured them that he was indeed willing to help the poor, and he never forgot this. On his missionary journeys (especially the third journey), Paul gathered funds to help the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem (**Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9**).

PAUL PUBLICLY OPPOSED PETER/2:11-21

In Antioch, Paul had faced another conflict over his authority. At that time, he openly opposed the actions of the apostle Peter himself.

Peter had arrived in Antioch and had been warmly welcomed by the church. He, Paul, Barnabas, and the rest of the leadership fellowshiped, taught, and ate together regularly. Though not described in detail, the days must have been eventful and exciting. Then a delegation arrived from Jerusalem, and almost immediately Peter's treatment of the Gentile Christians changed. He kept his distance from them. He began to treat them, in fact, just the same as the Judaizers had treated them. The rejection must have stung the Gentile believers in Antioch.

Others, including Barnabas, followed Peter's example. But Paul confronted them. He challenged the inconsistency, even though it was endorsed by a leading apostle. He

made it clear that neither he nor Peter were free to cast aside the gospel for fear of what others might think.

2:11: “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.”

This Antioch was in Syria and was a major trade center in the ancient world. Heavily populated by Greeks, it eventually became a strong Christian center. In Antioch the believers were first called Christians (**Acts 11:26**). Antioch in Syria became the headquarters for the Gentile church and was Paul’s base of operations.

Paul opposed Peter to his face. He began his account with the climax of the event. In verses 1-10 Paul had illustrated his unity and cooperation with the other apostles. This one begins with a claim that he was even willing to challenge another apostle. Peter was caught in a glaring inconsistency that might have gone tragically unresolved if not for Paul’s boldness.

Although the apostles were to be held in high authority, they were still humans, capable of mistakes, errors in judgment, even hypocrisy. No Christian leader should ever be above correction. No person, no matter what he achieves or how long he serves, should be exempt from rebuke and guidance.



2:12: “For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.”

When Peter arrived in Antioch, he saw that Jewish and Gentile Christians enjoyed fellowship at mealtimes without concern over Jewish dietary laws. Peter accepted these practices; he himself had received a vision from God about food laws and Gentiles in the new world of the gospel. Acts 10 records Peter’s vision of a large sheet falling to the earth, filled with all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds; many of them on the Jewish forbidden food list. “Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’ The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’” (**Acts 10:13-15**).

Peter understood from this vision that he should not look upon the Gentiles as inferior people whom God would not redeem. After Peter had this vision, a Gentile Roman officer named Cornelius sent for him to come and share the gospel with him and his household. Peter did so and Cornelius and his household became believers. The Holy Spirit came upon them, they were baptized, and “they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days” (**Acts 10:48**). While he stayed with Cornelius and his family,

Peter probably did not adhere to the Jewish dietary laws; it would have been difficult and may have insulted these new believers who were his gracious hosts.

Thus, when Peter arrived in Antioch, he already knew that God had broken down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, and he understood the true meaning of Christian freedom. So he ate with the Gentiles.

But all that was before certain men came from James. These men were living under the Law and most likely not sent by James. The wording here means they came “from James’s group,” that is, from the Jerusalem church. But James later firmly denied sending them. In the letter sent back to the Gentile Christians in Antioch after the Jerusalem council, James wrote, *“We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said” (Acts 15:24).*

“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.” Peter surely knew these men, as they came from the Jerusalem church, and he was influenced by their presence to the point that he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles with whom he had been eating and fellowshiping.

The question arises, why was someone of Peter’s stature afraid of those who belonged to this group in the Jerusalem church? That question probably cannot be answered any more than we could answer why he denied Jesus. At times, Peter would act courageously: when he gave the incredible speech at Pentecost (**Acts 2:14-41**); when he and John stood before the Sanhedrin and refused to follow the command to stop preaching the gospel (**Acts 4:1-20**); when he had to defend to the other apostles his own actions after his visit to Cornelius’s home (**Acts 11:1-18**). Yet at times, he would seem very weak. Scripture records for us the courage and failings of so many of God’s people. Peter demonstrated the conflict between Spirit and flesh that Paul would discuss in 5:13-26. When Peter was motivated and led by the Holy Spirit, he was wise and courageous. When he was influenced and controlled by the flesh he was fearful and hypocritical.

2:13: *“And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.”*

As Peter’s flesh controlled his actions/behavior, the other Jews who lived in Antioch went along with his hypocrisy. They, too, gradually stopped joining with the Gentiles in eating and fellowshiping.

Paul mentioned Barnabas separately, probably because Paul was especially surprised that Barnabas would be led astray by their hypocrisy. Barnabas was Paul’s traveling

companion; together they preached the gospel to the Gentiles, proclaiming Jews' and Gentiles' oneness with Christ. Barnabas should have known better, yet, like Peter he failed to stand fast in the faith.

Paul boldly called this "hypocrisy." A hypocrite says one thing but does another. Peter, Barnabas, and the Jewish believers knew that God accepted everyone equally, that salvation was available to all, that there should be no separation in the body of Christ. Yet their actions implied the opposite. If Paul had opted for peace and allowed these actions to go un-rebuked, the Christian church very possibly would have divided. But this was not God's plan, nor was it consistent with "the truth of the gospel," as Paul would explain in the next verse.

2:14: *"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"*

Paul's concern was over the truth of the gospel. This truth was that Jesus Christ had died and had risen again to offer salvation to all people; Jews and Gentiles alike. Both groups, by grace through faith, are equally acceptable to God; thus, they must be equally acceptable to each other. Jewish believers separating themselves implied that they were superior because of their race, traditions, or law keeping.

Paul did not oppose Peter in order to elevate himself. Paul recounted this story in this letter to the Galatians to show that he was a full apostle and could speak authoritatively, even in opposition to another apostle if the truth of the gospel were at stake.

"I said to Peter 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?'" Paul spoke to Peter publicly, in front of the Jewish believers, the Gentile believers, the circumcision group, and Barnabas. Those who want to attribute other motives to Paul might ask why he didn't go to Peter privately. Wouldn't that have been more "peace loving"? more "Christian"? But Peter's actions had caused others to stumble; because of his authority as an apostle, many were observing his life and were confused. A private solution to this problem was not an option. Peter's action was public, with public consequences; thus the rebuke had to be public.

Was Paul acting inconsistently and unbiblically with his treatment of Peter? Some who attack the way Paul handled the issue back up their case by using **Galatians 6:1**, where Paul urges gentle restoration in dealing with conflict. They raise the possibility that Paul was violating Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 18:15-17** regarding the private handling of conflict.

The Bible doesn't say whether or not Paul met with Peter privately; perhaps he did. Paul also wrote, "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning" (**I Timothy 5:20**). Paul's public confrontation was respectful, forthright, and honest.

While Peter's change in policy about having meals with Gentiles was harmful, the change in the policy for the Lord's Supper must have been disastrous. If this group was divided over the sharing of common meals, it is inconceivable that they would be able to assemble together for the Lord's Supper.

2:15: "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,"

Both Paul and Peter were Jews by birth, thus Paul's phrase *Gentile sinners* was said ironically because this was the scornful name Jews applied to Gentiles. Peter's actions had conveyed a self righteous attitude in line with the teaching that Gentiles were still "sinners" unless they became Jewish. But both Peter and Paul knew this was not true.

2:16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

All people stand as condemned sinners before God: God-fearing, law-keeping Jews, and "Gentile sinners" alike. But all may have hope through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's appeal is similar to Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Jesus said, "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering" (**Luke 11:52**).

Here in **Galatians 2:16**, Paul gives us three significant terms: (1) Justified; (2) Words of the law; (3) Faith in [of] Christ Jesus.

The word *justified* is a legal word, literally meaning "to declare righteous" (the opposite being "to condemn"). The person who is justified can claim that his condition before God is "just as if he had never sinned."

Justification, as used in Scripture, always begins with God alone, acting in grace. God justifies people despite their guilt, pardons them, and then makes them his children and heirs.

To be declared righteous could never happen as a result of the works of (or by obeying) the law; which is the second term Paul introduced to the Galatians. Paul directs the force of his argument toward those who would mistakenly hope to “work” or observe the law in order to merit or earn God’s approval. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (**Matthew 9:13**). Those who were righteous in their own eyes did not think they needed Christ; those who saw their true status as sinners could find their hope in him.

Paul, Peter, and the Jewish believers understood that trying to follow and obey all of God’s laws (let alone all the laws the Pharisees heaped on them) could not give salvation. This came “through faith in Jesus Christ” alone. “Saving faith” is believing and accepting that Jesus came, died on the cross to take the punishment our sins deserved, and rose again. This faith opens the way to a relationship with God the Father, and the promise of eternity with him.

“Even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” The third phrase introduced in this verse by Paul is *faith in [of] Christ*. This phrase occurs seven times in the New Testament: twice in 2:16, and once in 3:22; **Romans 3:22, 26; Ephesians 3:12; and Philippians 3:9**. Scholars differ over an issue of Greek grammar. If “faith of Jesus Christ” is objective, then it means faith *in* Jesus Christ. If “faith of Jesus Christ” is subjective, then it means the faith or faithfulness *of* Jesus Christ. The Old Testament word for “faith” is a Hebrew term *emuna*, which can mean either the faithfulness of God or a person’s response.

To emphasize his point, Paul quoted from **Psalms 143:2**, “Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.” No one is righteous, nor can they become righteous by doing good deeds and by obeying the law. This was not a new idea, the doctrine of justification by faith goes back to Abraham who, “believed the Lord, and [God] credited it to him as righteousness” (**Genesis 15:6**).

2:17: “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.”

The freedom that the Gentiles had, led them to break some of the old Jewish legal restrictions and thus, in the eyes of the Judaizers, this was “sin.”

On the other hand, if Jewish believers became justified in Christ, gained freedom from the law, and then committed a sin, does all this mean that Christ promotes sin?

Paul’s reply is very strong; “God forbid” or “absolutely not!” Christ does not promote sin. Obviously those who have been justified; Christians, can and do sin, for that

unfortunately, is part of our human nature (Paul details his own struggle with sin in Romans 7). However, when God truly gets hold of a life, nothing remains the same. As it says in **2 Corinthians 5:17**: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold all things are become new.” At the end of this letter, Paul wrote, “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (**Galatians 6:15**). What this means is at salvation, we were taken out of Adam and given a new position in Christ. Positionally the old sin nature no longer has power over us; we are new creations in Christ.

2:18: “For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”

Justification/salvation by faith destroyed the Jewish “merit system” with all its laws and good deeds that attempted to gain favor with God. To rebuild that, to be justified by faith and then return to that old Jewish legal system as a basis for one’s relationship with God, would imply that Christ’s death was not sufficient. Paul saw the situation in Antioch with Peter as a clear illustration of the unnecessary burden that some wanted to place on Gentile believers. Peter, through his act of pulling away from fellowship with the Gentiles, was giving law a place of authority that it no longer held.

Justified people will sin, but they are ever so slowly growing in the grace and knowledge of Him and into a deeper relationship with Christ. The real sinner is the one who is justified and then returns to the law. Ironically, that person is actually a lawbreaker. People under the law are more precisely described as lawbreakers than as law-keepers! The law cannot give salvation because no one can keep it perfectly. The best the law can do is reveal our sinfulness and how much we need the Savior and his gracious offer of justification by faith.

2:19: “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”

The law itself could not save because no one can keep its perfect standards. The law thus cannot give eternal life; instead, it offers only failure and death. So what is its usefulness? The law was a necessary instrument to show people the ultimate futility of trying to live up to God’s standard on their own. The Law was not meant for man to keep, but rather for man to break so that he could see his need for a Savior. Christ took upon himself that death penalty; the death we deserved for being lawbreakers. His action freed us from the jurisdiction of Moses’ law. When Paul understood that the law was completely incapable of giving salvation, and when he embraced the one who could give salvation, he knew he could never go back to the law. Paul felt this so intensely that he expressed it in terms of death, *I died to the law*. Paul went from a law-centered life to a Christ-centered life.

Paul knew he must die to the Law (to the bondage of the Law) before he could live for God.

2:20: “am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Notice all the “I’s” in this verse. **I** am crucified with Christ.” That “I” is the old me; “Nevertheless **I** live.” That “I” is the new me. “Yet not **I**,” that’s the old me. “But Christ lives in me,” that’s the new me.

The apostle Paul captured the wonder believers experience as the realization dawns that we are no longer living “our” lives, but Christ now lives his life in and through us.

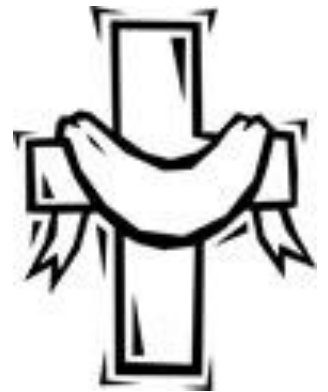
Being crucified with Christ happens at conversion and is a once-for-all transaction that has ongoing results. As Christians we must daily, by faith, take up the truth (count on it) that we are crucified with Christ (**Luke 9:23**).

All believers actually participate in Christ’s death and resurrection because of the spiritual union that believers have with the Lord (**Romans 6:4-8; Colossians 2:12-14, 20; 3:1-4**).

This verse, **Galatians 2:20** holds in its simplicity the incomprehensible depth of each believer’s union with Christ. Union with Christ means that believers share his death, burial and resurrection. Paul would later write to the Romans: **“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”** (Romans 6:3-5)

Mystical? Yes. Difficult to understand? Humanly speaking, certainly. True? Paul’s point is this: although mystical, this resurrection life is not beyond anyone’s reach, for the key to living it is by faith.

Paul no longer focused his life on trying to please God by obeying laws; instead, with Christ in him, *the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*. Believers’ lives are still lived “in the flesh” (in their bodies prone to sin) while they remain on earth. But with Christ within, positionally, they are new creations, living life “by His faith.”



2:21: *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”*

Paul returned to his argument against legalistic, false teaching begun in chapter 1. Paul’s message of salvation by faith (without works of the law) did not nullify or set aside the grace of God which is what the Judaizers’ teaching did; they “put aside” or “nullified” God’s grace. If people must follow laws in order to earn their salvation or if righteousness could be gained through the law, then the logical conclusion is that Christ died for nothing. Christ did not need to die if we could have obtained salvation by obeying the law.

LESSON 3
GALATIANS 3:1-4:7
THE LAW AND FAITH/3:1-14

Paul spoke of his ministry with his Galatian friends. He remembered how clearly he had shared the message and how openly they had responded. How could they have run aground so quickly?

3:1: “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?”

It’s interesting to note that in 1:11 Paul had called the believers in Galatia “brothers and sisters;” however, in this verse, he called them *foolish Galatians*. The Greek word for foolish does not mean that they were mentally deficient; rather *anoetos* suggests the behavior of people who are intelligent yet are not using that intelligence to perceive the truth (the same Greek word is used in **Luke 24:25; Romans 1:14; I Timothy 6:9; Titus 3:3**). The Galatians had shifted from believing in the finished work of Christ alone to believing that they must, through their own effort, live a holy and righteous life. Such illogical thinking implied that Christ’s death only pertained to salvation. This was inconsistent, contradictor, nonsensical; all summed up in the word “foolish.”

Paul’s question, “who has bewitched (tricked) you?” did not mean he wanted to know who had taught the false doctrine; the emphasis was on the word *bewitched*. The Galatian believers had become fascinated by the false teachers’ arguments, how else could this nonsense be explained? He was questioning, not their intelligence, but their lack of discernment. They were being fooled by arguments that they should have been able to refute.



“It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!” At first reading one might think these people were present at the crucifixion of Jesus. While that was not the case, Paul’s preaching of Christ crucified was as clear as if it had been posted on a huge billboard; it could not be missed or misunderstood.

The tense of the verb *crucified* is perfect passive, meaning a past action with a continuing effect or result. Christ had been crucified and Paul had clearly explained the significance of that crucifixion to the Galatians. Yet they were missing the ongoing benefits of it; namely that it alone brings salvation to anyone who believes and that the mercy and love Christ displayed there affects every believer, every day of his or her

life. By turning their eyes from the cross to the law, they were confusing the very simple facts of the Christian faith.

3:2: “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

To correct the Galatians’ confused thinking, Paul returned to the basics. Four simple questions in the following verses will reveal their foolishness. Paul’s first question was most basic, for it focused on how their Christian life had begun. So he asked, “Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?” The Galatian believers, mostly Gentile in background, didn’t even have or know the law, so the answer was painfully obvious. Their salvation began by faith. Law keeping had nothing to do with it.

Paul mentioned as an indisputable fact that the Galatians had received the Spirit. The apostle could point to their receiving the Spirit at the time of their conversion as proof that God had accepted them based solely on their acceptance of the gospel message. They had believed what they had heard, and the evidence had been plain in their lives. God’s Spirit had been within them long before the Judaizers had entered the scene. Paul pointed out the error of their thinking by contrasting two explanations for the presence of the Spirit in the Galatians. Had God’s indwelling come as a result of strenuous legal efforts or by a simple believing response?

The phrase “works of the law” refers to the old Jewish legalistic system that the Judaizers used to try to win God’s favor by observing the law. Paul’s point was unmistakable: Long before the Galatians could even think of meeting God’s standard, God had accepted them on His terms. Those terms were simply “believing what [they] heard.” The Galatians had listened and believed the gospel. At that point, he emphasized, the Spirit was given.

3:3: “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

Paul had heard that those in Galatia were attempting to trade freedom in Christ for slavery to tradition. He was astounded! How could anyone trade the Spirit for circumcision and Jewish food laws?

“Are you now made perfect by the flesh? Are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” Paul said, “it is utterly foolish to think you begin your Christian life with the Spirit and then are made perfect (grow to Christian maturity) by human effort.”

Paul stressed that just as the Galatian believers had begun their



Christian lives by being influenced and controlled by the Spirit, so they should grow in the same way. The Galatians had taken a step backward when they had placed themselves back under the Jewish laws.

The Judaizers had led the Galatians to believe that keeping the law would help their spiritual growth and maturity. But Paul's point was that faith in the deeper truths of God's Word is all that is needed, both for salvation and for each believer's everyday growth toward maturity. Grace is what makes Christianity so unique. Every religion in the world demands that people earn whatever reward they are offered; not so with Christianity. Christianity is not a religion, but rather a relationship, and eternal life comes through faith alone. When we attempt to earn what God has already given, we treat Christ's death as though it has no value. Trying to grow on our own strength will actually stunt our growth. To grow into Christian maturity, to be "made perfect," we must grow in faith and rely on the Holy Spirit (**Philippians 1:6; Galatians 5:25**).

3:4: *"Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain."*

Paul's next question asked the Galatians to apply their past experience to their immediate situation.

Paul and Barnabas certainly had faced great suffering as they preached in the region of Galatia on the first missionary journey. In Antioch of Pisidia, the Jews talked abusively to them (**Acts 13:45**) and caused them to be expelled from the region (**Acts 13:50**). In Iconium the Jews again caused trouble, first talking against them, then even plotting to stone them so that they had to flee the city (**Acts 14:2, 5-6**). In Lystra, Paul was stoned and left for dead (**Acts 14:19-20**). After preaching in Derbe (**Acts 14:21**), Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps through those same cities, "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith" through many hardships (**Acts 14:22**). It may be that the new believers in each of these cities had been treated the same. Thus Paul's question here: "If you were willing to suffer so much for your newfound faith at the hands of the Jews, why would you now turn back to obeying the Jewish laws? All your suffering (and ours) was in vain if the new teaching you are following is true." If the Galatians turned to the Judaizers, they would empty their suffering of all meaning. They would be saying, "The Jews were right to persecute us"!

3:5: *"He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"*

Paul had yet another question. By asking these questions, Paul hoped to get the Galatians focusing on Christ as the foundation of their faith. While this seems to repeat Paul's first question (3:2), there are key differences. Paul's question in verse 2 focused on the Galatians' point of view (receiving): "Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?" This question restates the

question in verse 2, but it reflects God's point of view (giving): "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" Verse 2 is in the past tense, reminding the Galatians of their initial response of salvation and what happened because of that response. This verse, however, is in the present tense, focusing on what God continued to do for the Galatians. He "gives" his Spirit and "works" miracles among them every day.

Paul expected the Galatians to agree that all of the evidence of God's work in their lives had flowed from their faith in Christ rather than as a result of their effort. His argument presented the question to the Galatians (and us): Would you rather enjoy the results of your own efforts to please God or revel in the results of God's Spirit working in you by faith?

3:6: *"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*

Chapter 3:6-14 answers the questions Paul posed in chapter 3:1-5. What had happened to the Galatian believers was like what had happened hundreds of years earlier to others who had served God. Paul mentioned Abraham as an example.

Paul asked the Galatians to consider Abraham in a whole new light. Abraham did not have Moses' law, for Moses would not come along until hundreds of years later! The covenant of circumcision was given to Abraham (**Genesis 17**). This happened after the words quoted in this verse, **Genesis 15:6**, where Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Paul was arguing that Abraham's faith had precedence over legal circumcision. The Judaizers argued for good works in order to be saved and grow spiritually; Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation, was considered righteous, not by works, but because he "believed God." Therefore, the revelation of God's grace came before Abraham's specific act of obedience in circumcision (**Romans 4:9-13; 16**).

We don't deserve to be credited with righteousness, but God reckons, or gives to us freely his own righteousness (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). Abraham did not have Moses' law, nor did he have the cross of Christ, the gospel, or salvation as offered in the New Testament. But he was God's servant, acceptable to God and considered righteous because he believed what he knew of God. God gives righteousness to those who believe; it is his provision for justifying sinners. When God declares us righteous, we have been made right with him. Just as when in a court of law the judge pronounces the accused innocent, we are declared righteous by God's act on our behalf. Abraham was not made right with God by works of the law, nor by circumcision (for God hadn't told him about circumcision yet), but simply by his faith.

3:7: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.”

Jews, including these Judaizers, were extremely proud of their lineage traced back to Abraham. At the heart of Jewish salvation theology was the concept of being a “descendant of Abraham.” The Jews believed that they were automatically the people of God because of their heritage. But from Abraham’s own example, Paul showed that true descendants of Abraham were not part of a national heritage or keepers of the ancient custom of circumcision. As Abraham was saved by faith, so each person is saved by faith. As Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith in God, so both Jews and Gentiles who believe are declared righteous because of their faith in Christ.

3:8: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

Although Paul had made his point, he added a further devastating application of the Old Testament against the Judaizers’ false teaching: Not only are Gentiles and Jews saved by faith, but this had been God’s plan from the very beginning!

It was God who planned from the beginning to justify the Gentiles by faith, and it was God who preached or declared that to Abraham.

But Abraham lived hundreds of years before Christ. How could the gospel have been preached to him? Abraham was considered a prophet, and through these promises to him God must have revealed some of his incredible plans for the future. The essence of the gospel is salvation by faith to all who believe. Thus Abraham heard the gospel through the promises he received. Christ would be born into the Jewish race; the nation that would begin with Abraham and his miracle baby, Isaac. God’s promise to Abraham encompassed God’s plan for the ages; “all the nations” would be blessed in Abraham because his descendant, Christ Jesus, would bring salvation to all who believe.

Thus, God would justify the Gentiles, not by works of the law, not by circumcision, but by faith. Salvation is the ultimate blessing, a gift simply to be believed and received. All believers in every age and from every nation share Abraham’s blessing.

3:9: “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”

Faith did not begin in the New Testament; rather, it has been the foundational ingredient for all believers from the beginning. God’s relationship with his children has always been based on faith. Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, exemplified faith in God, even though his faith faltered at times. Hebrews 11 identifies four specific times in Abraham’s life when he responded in faith under trial (**Hebrews 11:8-19**).

Abraham clearly stands out among those before and after him who lived by faith. Those of us who believe in God, in Christ, and in the salvation we have been so graciously offered, are indeed blessed with Abraham, for we, too, receive a relationship with God.

Another point to note: While it is true that “all nations” would be blessed, there is a qualifier; only the people in those nations who believe would receive the blessing of salvation. Only to this degree is the blessing extended to all people. Those who do not believe but rely on works will not be “blessed with Abraham,” as Paul will clarify in 3:10.

The question arises: Was Paul reading some kind of remote idea into the Old Testament by claiming that the Gentiles had always had a part in God’s plan, or can his claim be substantiated from Scripture? One of the most eye-opening studies of the Old Testament occurs in reference to the Gentiles. God clearly refers to the non-Jews as an essential part of his plan. The entire books of Jonah and Ruth provide key examples. (**Deuteronomy 32:43; Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; 117:1; Isaiah 11:10; Romans 15:9-12**) Once a reader begins to approach the Old Testament with the Gentiles in mind, the frequency of their inclusion in the text is quite remarkable.

3:10: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

Having shown that justification by faith is true according to the Scriptures, Paul here made the opposite point, that justification by the law is false according to the Scriptures. Paul quoted **Deuteronomy 27:26** to prove that, contrary to what the Judaizers claimed, obeying the law cannot justify and save; *all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse because no one can obey the law perfectly and because breaking even one commandment brings a person under condemnation.* The law demands perfection; an impossibility for sinful humans.

The law cannot save; neither can it reverse the condemnation (**Romans 3:20-24**). But Christ took the curse of the law entirely upon himself when he hung on the cross (**Deuteronomy 21:23**). He did this so we wouldn’t have to bear our own punishment. The only condition is that we accept Christ’s death on our behalf by faith as the means to be saved (**Colossians 1:20-23**). There are only two ways to approach God. The first is to come through Christ, humbly realizing our complete inability to do anything on our own to merit God’s favor. The only other alternative is to come on the basis of our works; our merits and achievements. Unfortunately, that approach leads to judgment, ultimately resulting in condemnation.

3:11: “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

Trying to be justified, declared righteous, before God by the law doesn't work. Sinful humans cannot attain the perfection demanded by the law. The law could not save, but faith could. Paul pointed to Habakkuk's declaration in **Habakkuk 2:4**, "***The righteous will live by faith,***" to show that by trusting God; believing in his provision for our sins and living each day dependent upon him, we can break his cycle of failure.

Righteousness by faith was not a new idea; it is found in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Even though Paul was proclaiming the gospel to Gentiles, he continued to hold up its connection with the plan and promise God had begun with the Jews. "The righteous" refers, not to those who are keeping the law, but to those who by faith, are declared righteous and are in a right relationship with God.

3:12: "*And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.*"

Some might then ask, "Maybe both faith and law are needed for salvation?" but here Paul explained that faith and law are mutually exclusive: When we have faith, we do not need the law. The law, by its very nature, excludes faith. While Paul knew the real but limited value of the law, he made clear that it had no value for salvation. Quoting again from the law (**Leviticus 18:5**), Paul supported his statement "*Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.*" The law itself says that only perfect performance of the law can gain approval from God; one can "live" by the law only by doing "the works of the law." The problem is, no one can do the law perfectly; it is humanly impossible. To "live" by doing the works of the law may be an objective, but one that can never be fully accomplished on our own. Obviously, the law cannot save us. Is the human condition hopeless? No, for another has fulfilled the law's requirements for us.

3:13: "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*"

All people are cursed by the law, as illustrated in the previous verses. Because the law sets forth requirements that are impossible to fulfill, it sets us up for failure; we are under its curse. Yet there is hope. Christ has redeemed us.

Christ redeemed "us" (that is, all people who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles) by buying us out of slavery to sin and to the law. But his generosity came with the high price of His life. "*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect*" (**1 Peter 1:18-19**) See also **Matthew 20:28; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; 1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 5:9.**

The law demanded obedience as well as heavy consequences for disobedience. Given our inevitable failure to meet the demands of the law perfectly, the law serves as

a curse. Because the law expresses perfect justice, it includes no remedy for those who fail to meet its demands. Unless we receive help, we have no hope. We cannot redeem ourselves; we need a redeemer.

But how did Christ become a curse for us? Paul answered the question by yet another Old Testament quotation: *“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:23)*. The quotation meant not that Christ was cursed by God because he was hanged; rather, He willingly allowed himself to become cursed for all humanity, and thus endured the Crucifixion. At the Cross, the curse of the law was transferred from sinful humanity to the sinless Son of God.

3:14: *“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”*

Christ redeemed us (bought us with a price) from the curse of the law (3:13) in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles. This “blessing” refers to justification by faith and is offered to Gentiles as well as to Abraham’s descendants, the Jews.



We find significant insights in God’s dealing with Abraham, who himself, was a Gentile.

“By faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” Then “we” (Jews and Gentiles together), having been justified by faith, will by faith receive the promised Holy Spirit. If all persons are eligible to benefit from Christ, then the Holy Spirit, God’s deposit, must also be available to all (**Ephesians 1:13-14**).

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE/3:15-22

3:15: *“Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.”*

Paul anticipated a question the Judaizers might raise at this point and summarily answered it. While the Judaizers might go so far as to agree with Paul that Abraham was justified by his faith, they would then add that the coming of the law changed the basis for gaining salvation. Paul wanted to clarify that nothing would change the promise that God made to Abraham.

Paul turned to an example from daily life. Citing a human contract, a person’s will; he noted that once a person’s will is ratified, it cannot be changed by anyone. It cannot be added to, nor can any part of it be annulled (or removed). If that is the case with

human contracts, how much more is it true of divine contracts? God's promises always stand, no matter what changes occur. He always keeps his promises.

3:16: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

The promises that Abraham received from God were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

Now, if the promises were meant for Abraham and his many descendants (to all his seeds), then it might appear that the promises had already been fulfilled, and that the law had come as a new phase in God's dealing with his people. But the promises had been given to the “Seed”; that is, Abraham's most famous descendant, who came many years after both Abraham and the law. The law has an important function, but salvation by grace through faith was God's promise from the beginning of time.

Further, the promise was not fulfilled prior to the giving of the law, nor by the giving of the law. Instead, it was fulfilled when Christ came as Abraham's “Seed.”

3:17: “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.”

Moses received the law and gave it to God's people 430 years later. This number comes from **Exodus 12:40**, which says that Israel's captivity in Egypt lasted 430 years. **Genesis 15:13**, however, has 400 years for the period of slavery.

While there is debate about the exact period of time, the point is not the number of years, but rather that the law came “later” than God's promise to Abraham. For four centuries God had been blessing Abraham and his descendants on the basis of their faith, not by the Mosaic law, for there was no law. When the law was given, it did not set aside the covenant previously established by God; neither did it do away with the promise.

Therefore, the Judaizers were wrong. The promise of justification by faith is still in effect; the law does not set that aside or annul it.

3:18: “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.”

There is yet another reason why salvation cannot be through law, or through faith plus law. The words *law* and *promise* are opposites, and like oil and water, they cannot be combined. *Inheritance* here refers to believers' enjoyment of what they receive through the promise: salvation, eternal life, and removal of the curse. Thus, if our

salvation and enjoyment of God's grace depends on obeying the law, then it cannot depend on a promise, for it cannot be both ways.

God in His grace gave it to Abraham. Grace means "undeserved and unearned favor." God gave the promise because he loved Abraham, not because Abraham deserved it.

3:19: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."

In the previous verses, Paul made four distinct observations about the law:

1. The law could not give the Holy Spirit (3:1-5).
2. The law could not give righteousness (3:6-9).
3. The law could not justify; it could only condemn (3:10-12).
4. The law could not change the fact that righteousness always comes by faith in God's promises (3:15-18).

Paul's opponents, and especially the Judaizers, could still be expected to raise the questions "Why did God give the law?" and "What purpose then does the law serve?" Paul explained the true purpose behind God's giving of the law and its place in the plan of salvation.

The law points out people's sins and shows them that it is impossible to please God by trying to obey all his laws. It was given to reveal transgressions, causing people to realize their sinfulness and their need of a Savior. God's intent was that by spotlighting sin, the law would drive us toward Christ (3:23). Elsewhere Paul wrote, "Where there is no law there is no transgression" (**Romans 4:15**). The phrase, "it was added" implied that the law was joined to God's promise because it came into effect after the promise made to Abraham.

The little word *till* indicates that the law was meant as a temporary measure, and certainly not as the permanent and final means of salvation. The law was in place until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made. When Jesus Christ ("the Seed") came, the law was finally fulfilled. (**Matthew 5:17-20**).

God's promise to Abraham was based on Abraham's faith. Faith does not annul the law; the purpose of the law is to reveal how sinful we are, and our need for a Savior.

To show the inherent inferiority of the law, Paul explained that while God personally gave the promises to Abraham, the law was put into effect through angels and by a mediator. This was not a new idea made up by Paul; it was already a Jewish belief. Although it is not mentioned in Exodus, Jews believed that the Ten Commandments

had been given to Moses by angels. Stephen, in his speech before his death, said, "You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels...have not obeyed it" (**Acts 7:53**). The writer of Hebrews called the law "the message spoken by angels" (**Hebrews 2:2**). The "mediator" was undoubtedly Moses, who acted as the mediator between God and His people (**Exodus 19:1-20:21; Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17-18**).

3:20: "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."

To have a mediator obviously means that more than one party is involved. A mediator works between two or more parties to aid in communication, effect an agreement, or to settle a dispute. It is implied in 3:19 that Moses was the mediator, who communicated between God and Israel. God (through angels) mediated the law to Moses, who then gave it to the people. The law could be compared to a contract, which is valid only as long as both sides keep their part of the agreement. While God kept His part, the people of Israel could not keep theirs.

However, when God gave the promises to Abraham, he did so directly, without any mediator. The promises were given and would be kept by God, regardless of the actions of people. Thus, the promise is superior to the law because the promise is from God alone, meant for eternity, and would not be broken. The law and its mediator, Moses, were temporary arrangements until such time when he would relate directly with his creatures.

"God is one" refers to the unity of His person; He is one being, and that truth is the theological foundation for both Jews and Christians.



The phrase "God is one" was part of the great Hebrew creed (**Deuteronomy 6:4**), basic to their belief about God.

God revealed the doctrine of the Trinity to the one people on earth most passionately convinced of the oneness of God.

3:21: "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law."

Having answered the question "What purpose then does the law serve?" (3:19), Paul raised another question that might have been troubling his listeners: "Are the law and God's promises in conflict?" Paul answered with an emphatic *Absolutely not!* Both the promises and the law were given by God; both are important, but for different reasons.

God offered eternal life through the promises. Paul's use of the phrase *could have given life* refers to spiritual life as illustrated by such other passages as **John 6:63; I Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 3:6**. The law's purpose was never to give that kind of life (as explained in 3:19). If a law could have been given that people could obey perfectly, then the law would have given life and righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

3:22: "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

Sin affects all of humanity (**Romans 3:10-18; Psalm 5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; 140:3; Isaiah 59:7-8**). What must be understood, is that the Scriptures speak with one voice when describing the human condition; we are all sinners.

Describing what the scripture accomplishes, Paul used the term *sunekleisen* (under, made prisoner, confined) to indicate our imprisonment to the power of sin. All people are born sinners and are prisoner without parole, prisoners on death row. Through Scripture we discovered that we could not earn a right relationship with God by our good works. But just like a ray of light shining into a dark prison cell, a ray of hope shone for us. The law showed us our hopelessness, caused us to look elsewhere for hope, and directed us to the Savior, Jesus Christ. We missed the promises by trying to keep the law, but we can receive the promise by believing.

SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH/3:23-4:7

While maintaining that the law was useful, Paul pointed out what a severe taskmaster it could be for those who failed to learn about grace received through faith.



3:23: "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed."

This faith refers to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and to our response of faith in Jesus Christ. Clearly, Paul was not claiming that the capacity to believe had originated with the arrival of Christianity; people have managed to "believe" many things. They have also managed very often to be wrong in what they believed. Faith, as spoken of in the Scriptures, does not refer to some human power that, when used to its greatest capacity, gives us merit with God no matter what the object of that faith. The central point of the gospel is not belief, but who we believe in. The system proves true or false in its foundational statement: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (**I Corinthians 15:17**).



We were held prisoners by the law means that the law held people in bondage. Not only was the whole world “a prisoner of sin” (3:22), but the law also held people as prisoners. In a sense, it helped keep us out of trouble and away from the evil into which our natures might otherwise have led, until faith in Christ would be revealed.

3:24: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”

The Greek word *paidagogos* is difficult to translate into English, but educational terms like *pedagogue* (tutor or basic instructor) and *pedagogics* (the science of teaching) have been derived from it. In Greek culture, a “pedagogue” was a slave who had the important responsibility for the children in a family. A wealthy family might have one pedagogue for each child. This slave disciplined the child, conducted the child to and from school, cared for the child, taught the child manners, and gave the child moral training. He reviewed “homework” but was not a teacher as such. The pedagogue’s role was temporary; he or she was responsible for the child until the child reached adult age (probably age sixteen).

The picture of the law serving as a “pedagogue” shows that the law was a temporary measure meant to “lead us to Christ”.

What was the ultimate purpose of the law? Paul repeated it in the last phrase, *that we might be justified by faith*. The law, through imprisonment and discipline, taught us (though negatively) that justification with God really is through faith alone. The law had its usefulness in pointing out the wrong and providing constant reproof.

3:25: “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”

The supervision of the law is like the supervision given by the pedagogue to the young child (3:24). Once the child came of age, he or she no longer needed the preparatory services of the pedagogue. After Christ arrived, offering salvation by faith alone, people no longer needed the supervision of the law. The law teaches the need for salvation; God’s grace offers us that salvation.

The law is still useful today. In it God still reveals man’s sinfulness and his need for a savior. The law still serves as a demanding instructor to those who have not yet believed. But no one can be saved by keeping that law; now that faith has come, we must trust in Christ.

Paul had already addressed this issue in 2:20-21. In that scripture, he had made clear that faith had its most basic work in our being “crucified with Christ,” but then Paul

immediately pursues faith's ongoing task: "The life I live in the body, I live by the faith of the Son of God" (2:20). This living by faith will be the theme of much of the remainder of this letter.

3:26: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

The change to from *we* to *you* shows Paul's return to focusing on the Galatian believers. They did not need to be children under the care of the pedagogue (the law); instead, they are all children of God. They received this status in Christ Jesus and through faith. Those who are truly God's children have been justified by faith in Christ and receive a new relationship with God; that of adopted children.

The phrase "in Christ Jesus" is found eight times in Galatians. Paul used the expression in every one of his letters to churches. He found it just as easy to say, "Christ lives in me" (2:20). "In Christ" and Christ "in us" convey two aspects of our family relationship. Our position is no longer in Adam, but "in Christ." Our constantly changing condition is Christ "in us." Our position (in Christ) is unchangeable. Our condition (Christ in us) is variable. Faith in our position will affect our condition, but our condition will never affect our position.

3:27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

This is a positional truth. At salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell believers and to baptize or place the believer into Christ positionally (**Romans 6:3-4**), and reproduce the life of Christ (**Romans 8:28-29**) in them conditionally. **Ephesians 4:22-24** explains the process. Put off the old man (**Romans 6:6**); renew the mind (**John 16:13-14**); put on the new man (**2 Corinthians 3:18**).

3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the first part of this verse, discrimination and barriers are eliminated. In the second part, unity is established. While it is true that in the body of Christ, Jews, Greeks (meaning Gentiles), slaves, free people, men, and women do still have individual identities, Paul exalts their unity in Christ Jesus. All labels become secondary among those who share Jesus in common.

Some Jewish males would greet each new day by praying, "Lord, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." The prejudice toward all three categories was real and strong. A Jew who believes in Christ is no different from a Gentile who believes. Unity in Christ transcends racial distinctions. Next is the barrier of social status. Slaves and free persons treat each other like brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. To take it even further, there really is no gender distinction. Both male and female alike are acceptable in the body of Christ.

The barriers broken down in this verse may not seem so radical to our day, but they were astounding in ancient Roman culture. This made Christianity unique and attractive; it valued each individual, yet it provided a unified body. All believers are one in Christ Jesus. All are equally valuable to God. Differences arise in giftedness, in function, in abilities, but all are one in Christ (There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. **(Ephesians 2:15)**).

3:29: “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Besides becoming God's children and “one in Christ”, believers (those who are Christ's) also become Abraham's seed. Abraham was the main one in Jewish minds regarding salvation. Jews believed that they were automatically God's people because they were “Abraham's seed.” Paul concluded that Abraham's spiritual children are those who respond to God in faith as Abraham had done. The only difference is that our response is to Christ as Savior. Because we have responded, we are heirs according to the promise. The original promise (3:16), though given to the Seed (Christ), was fulfilled in the believers, who are “in Christ.”

By responding to Christ in faith, we have followed in the ancient way of Abraham, who was justified by faith.

4:1: “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;”

Paul pointed out that while the son and heir was still a minor (not yet of age), he really was no better off than a slave, for he had no rights and little freedom. Although he was the future owner of an estate and a fortune, while he was young, he had no claim to it, nor any right to make decisions regarding it. In the eyes of the Roman law, the young heir was no different from a slave.

Paul's application of the illustration reveals that when we were under the law, we were no better off than slaves. Though the law regards the child as the master/owner of the estate, his present experience resembles that of the servants.

4:2: “But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.”

In this analogy Paul focused on the legal rights and status of the son. The law performed its function of “keeping us out of trouble” and disciplining us during our “immaturity” until God offered us “maturity” through our acceptance of salvation by grace. Paul's words imply that the time of this “coming of age” differed for every son. In Rome, the father set the time for his son's coming of age and adulthood. So, too, God set the time for terminating our guardianship under the law and making us his children and heirs by faith.

Paul was dumbfounded that the Galatians were behaving like a child who had inherited an estate but still insisted on remaining in a dependent servant role.

4:3: “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:”

Paul alluded to slavery in order to show that before Christ came and died for sins, people were in bondage to whatever law or religion they chose to follow. Thinking they could be saved by their deeds, they became enslaved to trying and failing to follow even the basics. Applying the illustration directly to the Galatian believers, Paul pointed out that when they were immature spiritually, they were like slaves.

Paul’s point was that trying to reach God through any religion or any worldly plan brings failure. He compared religious rituals to slavery because they promote a standard that people can never achieve. But, with the proclamation of the gospel, grace by faith in Christ replaced those worldly religious practices.

4:4: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,”

Everyone was enslaved under the “basic principles of the world,” but when the fullness of time had come, God sent Jesus to earth. God knew it was the right time, the “fulness.” The Greek civilization provided a language that had spread across much of the known world as the main language for all people. The Romans had brought peace throughout their empire and built a system of roads that made land travel quicker and safer than ever before. The Jews were eagerly awaiting their Messiah. Into this world came Jesus.

Ultimately, the term “fulness of time” refers more clearly to the time of Christ’s arrival. Guided by a sovereign God, historical events worked in harmony to prepare for the pre-decided moment of Jesus’ arrival on earth. God chose the exact time (**Psalm 102:13; Mark 1:15; Ephesians 1:10**).

The reference to Jesus as “sent” indicates his preexistence as well as his endorsement by God in the overall plan of salvation. This act of divine sending is mentioned forty-one times in the Gospel of John (**John 3:16-17; 17:18; Romans 8:3-4; I John 4:9-10**).

“God sent forth His Son,” a reference to Jesus’ deity. Jesus was born of a woman; he was God yet also human (**Genesis 3:15; Luke 1:26-38; John 1:1, 14**). Paul balanced his amazing claims about Jesus’ divine nature with his reminder of Jesus’ human character. *Born under the law*, Jesus was a human; thus he was voluntarily subject to the structured universe that he had created (**John 1:3-5**) and that had been marred by human rebellion. More significantly, Jesus lived as a Jew, subject to God’s revealed law. Thus, Jesus could be the perfect sacrifice because, although fully human, he never sinned.

4:5: “To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Jesus was Himself born “under the law” (4:4) so that by his living and dying he could accomplish two purposes: (1) to redeem those under the law, and (2) to allow those “redeemed” people to receive the full rights of sons.

To “redeem” means “to buy back” (3:13). “Redemption” was the price paid to gain freedom for a slave (**Leviticus 25:47-54**). Through his life, Jesus demonstrated his unique eligibility to be our Redeemer. Through his death, Jesus paid the price to release us from slavery to sin. His death set people free from bondage to any law or religious system (4:3); offering, instead, salvation by faith alone.

Redemption had an ongoing purpose: “That we might receive the full rights of sons.” Until Christ redeemed us, we could never have been acceptable to God. Even our good works or religious rituals could bring us no closer to a relationship with him. But when Christ “bought us back.” He gave us freedom from the slavery we faced before and brought us into a new relationship with God the Father. Our new position in Christ goes beyond mere acceptance by God. So close is that relationship that Paul called it *huiiothesian* (sonship) or “adoption as children” When a person becomes a Christian, he or she leaves the slavery of trying to please God through works and gains all the privileges and responsibilities of a child in God’s family.

4:6: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

Focusing again on the Galatians, Paul added *you are sons*, that is, God’s children, part of God’s family. Despite their doubts and confusion at that time, God still regarded the Galatian believers as his children. How could the Galatian believers claim this? Because God sent the Spirit of his Son into their hearts. As God had sent the Son, so he had sent the Spirit (Paul used the same Greek word for “sent,” *exapes-teilen*, in 4:4). God sent his Son to bring redemption (4:4-5); God sent his Spirit to mark us with his seal as “the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people” (**Ephesians 1:14**). The Spirit cannot be earned or obtained, as if he were the result or reward of some system of works or discipline. Instead, God sends the Holy Spirit as a gift. It is through the Spirit that Christ can live in believers’ hearts: ***“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Romans 8:9-11***

Believers have an intimate relationship with God. *Abba* is an Aramaic word for “father.” It was a very familiar, endearing term used by a child when addressing his or her father at home, perhaps like the English, *Daddy*. Christ used this word in his prayer in **Mark 14:36**. Before, when we were enslaved to the “principles”, we had no access to God. But now, as God’s adopted children, we can approach him with love and trust. Notice that it is the Holy Spirit, not we, who calls out *Abba*, Father. The Spirit cries out to the *Abba* on our behalf (**Romans 8:26-27**), and we cry to the *Abba* with the Spirit (**Romans 8:15**). As God’s adopted children, we share with Jesus all rights to God’s resources. As God’s heirs, we can claim what he has provided for us; our full identity as his children.

4:7: “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

To conclude his argument, Paul explained briefly that each Galatian believer was no longer a slave to any law or religious ritual or even to Satan. Instead, each person had entered into God’s family, being adopted as a child. Belonging to God as His child also means being an heir; a joint heir with Jesus. Everything that He is and everything that He has is ours. Paul wrote to the Romans, ***“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:15-17)***

LESSON 4
GALATIANS 4:8-5:1
PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE GALATIANS/4:8-20

What do Christians mean when they claim to “know God”? The Scriptures speak confidently of our ability to know God intimately. In Jeremiah chapter 9 we read: **“Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)**

Jesus later underscored this statement in Jeremiah when he prayed: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

In light of these facts, Paul turned to the Galatians and their lack of relationship with God. Though they had met God, their present course of action (living by the law) amounted to a sad rejection of God's grace.

4:8: “Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.”

As in 3:23 and 4:1, Paul again makes mention of the former enslaved condition of the Galatians.

Whether these beings were demonic powers, Greek or Roman idols, or the “principles” (as explained in 4:3 and 4:9), the people's ignorance of God made them slaves of something less than God. There is only one God; to worship anything else means false worship and slavery. As Paul explained in 4:1-7, anyone who has not yet discovered freedom in Christ remains a slave.

4:9: “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?”

The Galatian believers had been enslaved, but then Paul introduced them to God. They came to know God. The Greek word for “know” used here (*ginosko*) refers to knowing intimately and on a personal level. They had gotten to know God personally, to know His character and to understand his grace and love toward them. Yet Paul, not wishing to make it sound as if the Galatians had done some work or gotten to know God on their own merit, clarified his thought by saying “*or rather are known by God.*” God initiates the “knowing”; we know him only because he first knew us.

Those who have never believed in the one true God remain in slavery to sin. Paul has already established that. And while that was true of the Galatians at one time, Paul was astonished that after getting to know God personally, the Galatians would return to the very conditions that had held them in bondage. Why, after meeting God, would the Galatians turn back to those weak and miserable principles? (4:3) Whether “principles” referred to the Jewish law or to pagan rituals, Paul declared them to be weak, powerless, unable to save or set free; miserable, bankrupt, and unable to offer an inheritance.

The “weak and miserable principles” that lured the Galatians away from freedom in Christ continue to entice us. They take many forms, but their essential character remains unchanged; they offer what they cannot provide. Even when disguised by religious language and formality, this leads to continued slavery. The “gospel” of religious busyness and the mindless keeping of endless rules rob us of our freedom in Christ and keep us enslaved.

Certainly the Galatians had no intention of returning to slavery; indeed, as they had listened to the false teachers, they had not realized that this was what was happening.

4:10: “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.”

As an example of law keeping that the Galatians had been attempting, Paul mentioned their observance of special holidays. The “days” referred to keeping the Jewish Sabbath or other specified dates in the Jewish calendar. The observance of “months” would be the new moon celebrations of the Jews. “Seasons” would refer to the festivals that lasted several days. For the Jews this could be the three main feasts: Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. “Years” of celebration for the Jews were the Year of Jubilee and Sabbath years.

Paul did not condemn the celebration of the Jewish events; for he himself kept the Sabbath and still traveled to Jerusalem for certain festivals (**Colossians 2:16**). The God-honoring festivals were not bad in themselves; but when used as a way to earn salvation or “gain merit” with God, they became nothing more than slavery.

4:11: “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.”

If the Galatians continued in their law-centered approach to Christianity, setting aside God’s grace in order to obey rules, customs, and rituals (or if they allowed their pagan roots to invade their newfound faith), then Paul feared that all his work among them and his suffering on their behalf (3:4) would be in vain. Paul was not saying that the Galatians would lose their salvation but that their turning away from the truth would render them unfruitful and their faith “dead,” as if Paul had never visited them at all.

4:12: “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.”

After his lengthy theological discussion, Paul's true personal concern for the Galatians resurfaced, for he again called them brothers/friends (1:11; 3:15). Paul may have been appealing to the Galatians in this way: "Become as I am (regarding my Christian faith and freedom from the law), for I also have become as you are (I brought the gospel to you without requiring anything of you; such as becoming Jewish first)." Paul's attitude toward evangelism was always to meet people where they were and then to present them with the gospel: ***"For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some."*** (1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

"Ye have not injured me at all." This phrase actually ties in with the following verses where Paul reminisced about how the Galatians had received him on his first visit to them (**Acts 13-14**). They had done him no wrong, even receiving him in his physical weakness.

4:13: "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first."

Many attempts have been made to identify the illness to which Paul referred here. Some commentators suggest that Paul's illness was some sort of handicap, perhaps an eye disorder (inferred from the reference to eyes in 4:15). Others think that Paul may have contracted some form of malaria on the coast after landing in Perga in Pamphylia (**Acts 13:13**). Or he may have had epilepsy, so he and his traveling companions had come to Galatia so Paul could recuperate. Still others point to the physical abuse and beating Paul had received in Lystra and the resulting care of the believers as his wounds had healed (**Acts 14:19**). Whether this "illness" was the same as Paul's "thorn in the flesh" referred to in **2 Corinthians 12:7** is also unknown. Whatever the illness, it did not completely incapacitate Paul, for while in Galatia, he had preached the gospel to the Galatians.

While it would be interesting to identify this illness, we can know for certain from Paul's words that he remembered the illness as the cause of his encounter with the Galatians. Their relationship with each other had not begun with Paul as a confident herald of the gospel but rather as a weak person in need of help.

4:14: "And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus."

The Galatians could have refused Paul any reception because his illness was a trial to them. Apparently his need had been a genuine imposition; he was in their debt. Perhaps Paul's appearance had made him difficult to look at, or his weakness had made him an extra burden on those who cared for him.

To the Galatians' credit, they welcomed the ill Paul with open arms, ready to care for him and to listen to his words. Paul compared their reception to how they may have received someone more obviously powerful; such as an angel of God or even Christ Jesus Himself. Paul was not equating himself with Christ or an angel, but he was applauding the Galatians' hospitality.

4:15: "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me."

The Galatians had received Paul with open arms, had cared for him, had heard and accepted his message, and had been joyful that he had come and preached among them.

So Paul asked, *What has happened to all your joy?* The Galatians loved and respected Paul greatly. Paul knew they would have given him their eyes if they could have. This may be a reference specifying Paul's particular illness, or it may be a figure of speech meaning that the Galatians would have given their most precious possessions to Paul out of love and respect for him. When Paul was among them, the Galatians did Paul no wrong (4:12); but in his absence, their joy had ebbed away and they were regarding Paul as if he were an enemy (4:16).

4:16: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

He who had been the object of affection and respect was being treated like an enemy. Why? The Galatians were suddenly rejecting Paul and instead were turning to new teachers and in confronting the wavering faith of the Galatians, Paul was placing himself and his relationship with them in jeopardy.

The Galatians needed to realize that they were in real danger of believing a lie rather than the truth of the gospel.

4:17: "They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them."

While Paul had spoken only the truth from pure motives (to bring the Galatians to salvation), the Judaizers had less than honorable motives. *Those people* refers to the false teachers who were claiming to be religious authorities and experts in Judaism and Christianity. Appealing to the believers' desire to do what was right, they drew quite a following.

Paul pointed out, however, that the false teachers had selfish motives. They were zealous but for the wrong reasons and the wrong cause. Zeal can be positive, but in the wrong hands it can cause much damage. The false teachers' only desire was to win the people over to their side; and at the same time alienate the people from Paul, and thus from Christ. Their zeal was misdirected; it was not for God, but only to support their own cause.

Paul knew that once the Galatians became committed to the false teachers, the roles would be reversed and the Galatians would be forced to pay attention to and even provide money and lodging for them. They would be in bondage to the false teachers and all their wrong teachings.

Jesus' response to this kind of zeal was uncompromising: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (**Matthew 23:15**).

Paul had no such motives. He did not preach a message that would make people feel good; he spoke the truth. He did acquire followers (**I Corinthians 11:1**), but he did not create a following. Paul's goal was simply to bring the message of the gospel to as many as possible and to lead them to a deeper relationship with Christ. Paul's disciples belonged not to him but to Christ.

4:18: "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you."

Paul acknowledged that zeal is good, provided the purpose is good. Paul himself passionately preached the gospel. He worried that his Galatian friends were becoming zealous over the lie that human moral and ethical efforts can satisfy God's perfect standard.

The false teachers were zealous to win over the Galatians in order that the Galatians would be zealous in support of them. This was not a good use of zeal. Instead, Paul wished that the Galatians could again have the zeal they once had for Christ, and that they could keep that zeal alive always and not just when Paul was with them.

4:19: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,"



While the false teachers simply sought a larger following, Paul saw these believers as his spiritual children. Obviously his motives differed from those of the false teachers, for he loved the Galatians as a mother loves her children.

Paul's goals would always be the same: "until Christ is formed in you." Paul wanted each of his children to reach spiritual maturity in the faith. They would do so by having the life of Christ reproduced in them. "Formed in you" refers to a mother carrying an embryo until it is developed enough to be born. God desires for Christ to live in and through each believer. As Paul wrote in 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Becoming conformed to the image of Christ (**Romans 8:29**) is not man imitating Christ, but rather Christ reproducing Himself in a man.

4:20: "I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you."

As with any confusion or misunderstanding, talking face-to-face accomplishes more than written correspondence. If he could go and be with them, Paul's tone might be different because he could ask questions and get answers; he could read faces; he could find out exactly how far the heresy had gone and why. In other words, Paul could discover what was behind it all. Instead, Paul wrote this one-sided letter to express how perplexed he was over the Galatians.



ABRAHAM'S TWO CHILDREN/4:21-5:1

The final paragraph of Galatians 4 records an extended allegory by Paul. He chose Hagar and Sarah, Abraham's wives-in-conflict, to illustrate the conflict between law and grace.

4:21: "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?"

Under the influence of the false teachers (the Judaizers), the Galatians wanted to submit to the Jewish law. Paul, completely "perplexed" by this (4:20), wanted to turn them back to accepting salvation by grace alone. He confronted them directly by saying, "Do you really know what the law says? You want so badly to submit to it, yet do you even understand it?" The Galatian believers, most of them not from a Jewish background and thus with little more than an elementary understanding of the Jewish law, may have been confused about the law.

4:22: "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman."

The story, originally recorded in Genesis 16 and 21:1-21, was summarized by Paul as a fundamental spiritual lesson demonstrated by Abraham, his two sons, and his two wives. Abraham had more than two sons, but Isaac and Ishmael were his first two and are the ones important to this illustration. In ancient times, a mother's status affected

the status of her children. Paul reminded his readers that Abraham had two types of sons; one born of a slave woman and one born of a free woman. Paul wanted the Galatians to consider which type of descendant these Judaizers were more like and then decide which they themselves desired to be like.

4:23: “But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.”

Besides the contrast in the status of mothers, the two boys were different in another important way. Abraham’s son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; as a result of the normal birth process. Abraham was very old (in his eighties), but no particular miracle was involved in Ishmael’s birth to Hagar. In fact, Ishmael’s birth was engineered by Abraham and Sarah to attempt to “make the promise come true” by their own fleshly plans and efforts, rather than waiting on God’s promise.

However, Abraham’s son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. When Abraham was ninety-nine years old and Sarah was ninety years old (**Genesis 17:1, 17**), God appeared to Abraham and promised, “As for Sarah your wife...I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her...Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac” (**Genesis 17:15-16, 19**). Not only was Isaac’s birth the result of a promise, it was also truly miraculous because of Abraham’s and Sarah’s advanced ages.

4:24: “Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.”

Paul’s words that this is an allegory do not deny the truth of the Genesis account. He meant that the facts in the original story could be applied in an allegorical way. Paul was pointing to a great spiritual truth illustrated by this story, namely, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

The two women, Hagar and Sarah, represent two covenants. The two well-known covenants were made with Abraham and with Moses. The one covenant with Moses had begun at Mount Sinai with the giving of the law (Exodus 19:20). Hagar was a slave (Genesis 16:1); thus, her children would be slaves, for a child’s status equaled the status of his or her mother.

Paul didn’t say it, but the readers could infer that the other woman represented the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:15-17), the covenant of promise; children of a free woman are free. This covenant of promise looked toward a new covenant, ushered in by Christ. This had already arrived, but the Jews did not accept it.

4:25: “For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.”

Not only do the two women and their children represent two covenants, they also represent two Jerusalems. Hagar represents the old covenant given at Mount Sinai. She also represents the present city of Jerusalem which was enslaved to Rome and filled with people enslaved to the old Jewish legal system (the Law). As Hagar was in slavery, so her children (the Jews) who remain under the old covenant from Mount Sinai would also remain in slavery. Sarah represents the other Jerusalem (4:26), the promise of faith and freedom. Paul’s words must have shocked the Judaizers. The Judaizers scorned the idea that they needed to be set free (**John 8:33**). Paul was making the same point to the Galatians as well as to the Judaizers.

4:26: “But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

Sarah stands for the Jerusalem that is above, was mother of the promised miracle-child, Isaac, and corresponds to the covenant of Abraham (inferred in 4:24). This covenant promised a future “new covenant” that would begin at the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. God promised that through Abraham “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Through Abraham’s family tree, Jesus Christ was born to save humanity.

While Hagar represents the “present city of Jerusalem” in its state of slavery (4:25), Sarah represents “the Jerusalem that is above.” Jewish thought contained the idea that there was a heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem was just a copy (**Psalms 87:1-3; Isaiah 54:10-14; Ezekiel 40-48**). Paul used the concept she is our mother to show that faith, not adherence to the law, is the source of our salvation. Paul was stacking the major persons (Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Hagar), events (covenants), and sites (Mount Sinai, Jerusalem) of Old Testament history to portray the two tracks of humanity: one under legal slavery, the other under freedom established through faith. By including himself and the Galatians in the *us* Paul was offering the Galatians the opportunity to claim that they were descendants of Abraham through faith, and that they possessed citizenship in the spiritual Jerusalem. For Gentiles to be included in this way would be as miraculous as the birth of Isaac.

4:27: “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.”

Paul quoted from Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 54:1). Isaiah’s words had comforted the Jewish exiles years later in Babylon, proclaiming that they would not only be restored, but that their future blessings would be greater than any in the past. To be barren (childless) in ancient days meant great shame and disgrace for a woman. Families

depended on children for survival, especially when the parents became elderly. Israel had been unfruitful, like a childless woman, but God would give great blessings and would change their mourning into rejoicing.

Sarah, who had been barren, was blessed with Isaac. Her child was a gracious gift, not the result of work. Because God had promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, she ultimately would have many more spiritual children.

4:28: “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.”

If the Galatians hadn't understood his point yet, Paul spelled it out here. *You, my friends*, the Galatians who had become Christians under Paul's ministry, fit into the analogy as children of the promise, like Isaac. Just as Isaac's birth was a miracle of God, so Christianity, offering people the opportunity to be born again, is a miracle of God (**John 3:3**). Just as Isaac's mother was free. So Isaac was free; so Christianity offers true freedom because it depends not on our actions but on God's unchangeable promises to us. Paul drove home his point to the Galatian believers: “As children of the promise, you never need to be enslaved to the Jewish laws. You are like Isaac!”

4:29: “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.”

If believers are like Isaac, then their experiences will compare to his. Ishmael is the son born in the fleshly, carnal way; Isaac is the son born by the power of the Spirit. Paul reminded his readers of the story in Genesis 21. Ishmael the older half brother had teased or mocked his younger half brother Isaac. Paul called this persecution. Paul explained that it is the same now. The persecution of the older brother on the younger continues to play itself out between the nations that had descended from them (Israel and Edom, **Psalms 83:1-6**), and on into the persecution of those under the law (the Jews) toward those freed from the law (those “born by the power of the Spirit,” the Christians). Paul constantly faced persecution from the Jews on his missionary journeys as he preached to both Jews and Gentiles (**Acts 9:23; 13:45-50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5; 18:6; 21:27-31**). His most relentless opponents were the Judaizers, who wanted to kill Paul (**Acts 23:12-15**). Jesus had taught that believers would face persecution (**Matthew 5:10-12**). Also consider Paul's words in **2 Timothy 3:12**.

4:30: “Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”

The first question is: What happened when Ishmael persecuted Isaac? In **Genesis 21:9-10**, Sarah saw this happen and went to Abraham, and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. The second question refers to the application: So what

happens to Ishmael (the Jews) and Isaac (Christians) today? Paul's answer: Judaism and Christianity cannot coexist as paths to the same goal any more than Ishmael and Isaac could share Abraham's inheritance. Perhaps most ironic was Paul's bold clarification of this old story. The Jews had long believed that this verse described God's rejection of the Gentiles. But Paul turned the tables: "You had it wrong. Jews and Gentiles are included together in God's inheritance when they become believers, or 'Isaacs.'" Those who reject grace lose their share in the inheritance, whether unbelieving Jews or unrepentant Gentiles. Those are the 'Ishmaels.'" Those in slavery to the law will never share God's inheritance with those who have experienced freedom in Christ and salvation by faith alone.

At last Paul made the point that he had not made earlier in the letter. The Galatians should send away the Judaizers. As Hagar and Ishmael were cast out, so must these false teachers be put out from among them.

4:31: "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

With one final point as if to end the argument without question, he repeated that we (that is Paul and the Galatian believers, and indeed all believers of all time, including we who live today) are children not of slavery but of freedom.

5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

We have freedom from slavery to the power of sin or to the well meaning but unable-to-save Jewish law. But the freedom came at great price. In order for us to enjoy ultimate freedom, someone had to set us free, and that someone was Christ Jesus (**John 8:32, 36**). To turn back to the law and try to earn what Christ has already given basically rejects his sacrifice.

Paul's statement to the Galatians who wanted to return to legalism was to keep on standing firm in your God-given, blood purchased freedom, refusing to submit again to a yoke of slavery to the law (**Acts 15:10**). The Jews of Paul's day spoke of "taking the yoke of the law upon oneself"; to them this was a noble effort, the essence of their religion. Undoubtedly the Judaizers had used this sort of language to convince the Galatians to follow the Jewish law. So Paul took the very same wording and expressed it in the negative; "Do not submit to the yoke of the law, for it is slavery."

LESSON 5
GALATIANS 5:2-26
LIVING IN THE FREEDOM OF CHRIST/5:2-15

Paul's application of the Genesis account of Sarah and Hagar exposed the real danger facing the Galatians; they were on the brink of losing their freedom in Christ. Early in the letter, Paul identified those who had stirred up trouble in Jerusalem when he had gone there to explain his message to the Gentiles. He described them as those who had "infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves" (**Galatians 2:4**). What the Judaizers had attempted to do in Jerusalem, they also attempted in Galatia. Paul expressed dismay at the report that though the Galatians had been growing in their faith, they were being influenced by those trying to destroy God's work of grace in them. Paul had two objectives: (1) exposing what would actually happen if the Galatians returned to the "yoke of slavery," and (2) confronting the Judaizers with the fruitlessness of their system.

Paul's words convey both frustration and exultation. He spoke as someone running a brilliant race, who strains from his own exertion while joyfully urging on fellow runners who are about to give up.

5:2: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."

The Judaizers taught that the gospel needed the Jewish law system to make it perfect. Their goal was to mix Judaism and Christianity to produce a self-serving "improvement." But God's way was different; salvation through Christ by grace alone. We can't mix and match works and grace. God has an exclusive arrangement. The Galatians were about to be circumcised as a requirement to "complete" their salvation. But Paul explained that by that very act they would be making Christ's sacrifice by his death of no benefit. A free gift cannot be earned. Following the law would mean that they were discarding Christ's death on the cross.

Paul's appeal went beyond his apostolic authority. When he said, "I Paul say unto you" that circumcision can't make us right with God and secure the blessings of Abraham, he was referring to his firsthand experience. Paul knew the futility of following the law as the way to obtain salvation. He was about as Jewish as anyone could get; "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (**Philippians 3:4-6**). But Paul knew that circumcision could not give salvation. He appealed to the Galatians not to try to obey the Jewish laws. If they could not save Paul, they could not save the Galatians.

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ” (**Philippians 3:7-9**).

5:3: “For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.”

If the Galatian men were to allow themselves to be circumcised, they would be admitting that Christ’s death was not sufficient to save them. Choosing circumcision would cause them to lose the value of the free gift of salvation given through Christ. It also would have another devastating effect. It would mean choosing law keeping (legalism) which would mean that one would be obliged to obey the entire law.

Paul might well have repeated his question from 4:21, “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?” Did the Galatians have any idea what their decision to obey all the Jewish laws would entail? chances are, the Judaizers had not spelled that out, yet. They may have told the Galatians about some of the food laws (2:12) and about the festivals and holy days (4:10). But to any Jew, circumcision was the first act of obedience to a law that would, from then on, rule every area of his life. Did the Galatians understand that “whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (**James 2:10; Deuteronomy 27:26**)? By becoming circumcised, the Galatians were submitting themselves to an entire system; one that enslaved them and doomed them to failure.

5:4: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

Those who try to be justified by the law are alienated (separated, estranged) from Christ. God allows no middle ground; it is Christ plus nothing. Anyone deciding to be justified by law moves outside of Christ’s sphere, severing any relationship with him. Christ cannot save those who persist in saving themselves.

Following the path of legalism means leaving the path of grace, for the two paths cannot converge. In fact, they take us in opposite directions. If we insist on taking our own “way,” we have stepped off “the Way.” The choice can be illustrated in the following verses: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (**Proverbs 14:12**). In contrast, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (**John 14:6**).

Thus Paul’s words *you have fallen away from grace* should not be taken out of context to mean that salvation can be lost. Grace did not mean salvation, but refers to the means of salvation. To decide on legalism as the way of salvation is to set aside grace.

5:5: “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

In this short verse Paul gave his doctrine of justification by faith. It is by faith (in Christ and his faithfulness, and not in the strength of our believing) that..**we** (meaning himself and all believers, even the wavering Galatians)...**eagerly await** (we don't work for righteousness; we wait for God to grow his righteousness in us)...**through the Spirit** (not through anything we can do or have in us and enables us to patiently wait)...**the righteousness** (Christlikeness completely in glory)...**for which we hope** (“hope” meaning a confident expectation in a certain event that has not yet occurred).

The words *faith* and *Spirit* provide the keys to this verse, for these words separate the Judaizers' approach to God from the Christian approach to God. The Judaizers' emphasis on circumcision showed that they were trying to gain salvation “in the flesh.” But Paul pointed out that Christian faith comes “through the Spirit.”

5:6: “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”

Notice how Paul built his arguments. In 5:2 and here he clearly made the point that circumcision had no benefit for salvation. In 5:4 he stressed the point that seeking justification by any other way than by faith in Christ was falling away from grace. Then he added the other side: Being uncircumcised was not a barrier to salvation.

If Paul clearly told the Gentile Galatian believers not to be circumcised, what would he say to the Jews, who were already circumcised? Paul gave advice to them in **I Corinthians 7:17-20**. “Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him...Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.”

Thus, to both believing Jews and Gentiles (in Christ), Paul made the point that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value for salvation (3:28; 6:15; **Colossians 3:11**). Paul's conviction rested on the importance of all it means to be “in Christ”. The expression “in Christ” speaks of our position and reveals the focus of our faith; it also shows that all of God's benefits come to us in Christ. Our salvation and the life we live after conversion are rooted in Christ. We have a personal relationship with him; we are clothed with his righteousness, filled with his Spirit, and placed into the body of believers “in Christ.”

So what does matter? Paul didn't hesitate to answer the implied question: *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

And love, as Paul wrote elsewhere, “is the fulfillment of the law” (**Romans 13:10**). Love is the primary fruit of the Spirit (5:22). Faith is the root, and love is the fruit; it is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (**Romans 5:5**).

5:7: “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?”

Returning to his focus on the Galatian believers (*you*), Paul compared life for the Christian to a race; to be run well, by the rules, and without stopping or turning back no matter what the obstacles. But always, the opportunity to participate in the race required faith in Christ.

The Galatians were running well. They had accepted the gospel of salvation. Not only had they believed, but they were living out their faith; they had received God’s Word and had begun to apply the truth. But despite their good start, someone had cut in front of them. Paul pictured a racer illegally cutting ahead of another, thus causing that other racer to stumble, lose his pace, go out of bounds, or even fall.

Although Paul asked *who*, he already knew the answer; Paul knew that the problem was the Judaizers (5:10).

5:8: “This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.”

This “persuasion” referred to the whole system of salvation by works. Paul did not identify this false teaching as specifically coming from the Judaizers. It was more important that the Galatians would realize that it *did not come from Him who calls you*. It was God who had called the Galatians (1:6), but he had called them to salvation by his grace, not by their works (**Romans 9:11; I Thessalonians 2:12; 5:24**).

5:9: “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

Here Paul changed his analogy. Yeast is put into bread to make it rise, and it takes only a little to affect a whole batch of dough. Jesus used yeast as an example of how a small amount of evil can affect a large group of people (**Matthew 16:5-12**). Even if only a small group of Galatian believers was at risk when Paul wrote this letter, he knew that if he didn’t get the Galatians back “on track” with the truth, the entire Galatian church would be in trouble.

5:10: “I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.”

In spite of his obvious concern over the Galatian believers and the dangerous situation they faced, Paul believed that they would come to their senses. His confidence was based in the Lord. Paul knew that as long as the Galatians were abiding in Christ, he could be confident about the outcome of this difficult situation.

What was Paul certain about? That they would return to their first faith.

In addition, Paul also was confident that those causing all this confusion among the Galatian believers would receive their due, and would pay the penalty for their wrong teaching.

At about the same time Paul was writing this letter to the Galatians, James was writing his letter. James had this to say about teachers: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (**James 3:1**). Jesus had even stronger words for false teachers: “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (**Matthew 18:6**).

5:11: “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.”

Paul’s question could be paraphrased: “If I am promoting circumcision, which everyone knows I do not...” If Paul were preaching that people needed to be circumcised in order to be saved, then why were the Judaizers still persecuting him?

To human nature, and especially to Jews brought up to love and revere their law, the concept of needing someone else’s death in order to be saved was “offensive.” Paul had already referred to Christ’s death as the greatest fulfillment of the Old Testament curse: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (3:13). The very thought of describing the Messiah as an executed convict disgusted them. But the impact of Christ’s cross on their pride was the greatest stumbling block. As Paul described to the Corinthians, “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (**I Corinthians 1:23**). Paul had witnessed the rejection of the gospel by both Gentiles and Jews, each for different reasons. To the Gentiles, the message often seemed like nonsense; to the Jews, the implications were offensive.

5:12: “I would they were even cut off which trouble you.”

Paul again is referring to the false teachers, the Judaizers, who were preaching that the believers needed to be circumcised. In effect, Paul said that if the false teachers were

so concerned about zeal for the law, maybe they shouldn't stop at circumcision but go all the way and castrate themselves (**Philippians 3:2**). According to their own logic, wouldn't this make them even holier? Pagan priests of the prominent cult of the goddess Cybele in Asia were eunuchs, castrated as a part of a sacred ritual. By making this statement Paul placed circumcision as no better than the pagan rituals of cutting parts of the body.

5:13: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”

When Paul ministered among the Galatians, he did not give his converts a new set of rules to obey (as the Judaizers had done), for that would have made them slaves to the law. Instead, the Galatians were called to freedom. Paul was the messenger, but they “were called” by God Himself. The apostle wanted them to “stand firm,” to run their race in that very freedom that only Christ can give.

This verse includes an important shift in emphasis. Paul had expressed his harsh wishes to the Judaizers in 5:12. Then he turned to a practical concern he had for the Galatians. If they stood firm in truth against the false teaching of the Judaizers, they would immediately face a different threat to their freedom. Besides legalism, they must, by faith, avoid giving in to the “flesh” (Greek, *sarx* – translated as “self-indulgence”).

Paul has already used the Greek term *sarx* eight times in this letter to describe physical life (1:16; 2:16, 20 3:3; 4:13, 14, 23, 29). But at this point, he used *sarx* with a different meaning. Translating the word as “sinful nature” or “self-indulgence” reminds us that “flesh” can be an inherent and indwelling source impelling us to sin. The flesh rebels against God and resists his Spirit, producing what Paul called the “works of the flesh” (5:19).

Some of Paul's critics may have condemned his preaching of Christian freedom, saying that it would lead to people living without restraint. Paul had an immediate and forceful answer, explaining that freedom was not to be used as *an opportunity for self-indulgence* (5:16-17, 19, 24). Christian freedom is not meant to be a license (**I Peter 2:16**) for indulging in everything one's sinful nature desires. Keep in mind that Christian freedom will never cause us to return to slavery to sin; for to fulfill fleshly desires is to be enslaved to those desires.

Paul called the believers to “serve one another in love.” This was freedom at its deepest level, for it gave people the power and desire to submit voluntarily to serve (slavery) one another.

This teaching forms the very heart of Christian living, but it presents a paradox. We are freed from slavery to sin to willingly become slaves to one another. Worldly people don't realize they are enslaved either to sin or to some religious system. Those who are enslaved to sin are not free to live righteously. Paul described another slavery which comes with the freedom given in Christ. Love for others flows outward from what God has done by reproducing Christ in each of us. The Greek word for love (*agape*) refers to selfless, self-giving love. Christian freedom does not leave believers wandering through life aimlessly with no direction or restraints. Instead, they freely desire to live according to God's will and glorify Him through lovingly and joyfully serving others.

5:14: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

In fact, Christian servanthood ultimately does what slavery to the law cannot do; it fulfills the law! Quoting from **Leviticus 19:18**, Paul explained that a single commandment summarizes the entire law. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you'll find yourself fulfilling God's law. Jesus made this same point (**Matthew 22:35-39; Luke 10:25-28**).

The Greek word translated “fulfilled” could also mean “summed up.” Thus Paul's sentence has two meanings: (1) This law sums up all the others, and (2) This law is fulfilled. In fact, the entire law is fulfilled as the Christian community acts in love toward one another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul made it clear through this letter (and others) that the law cannot save anyone. But he did not cast aside the law as worthless. One person completely fulfilled the law, and Christians (when they live out the Christ-life) do indeed resemble Him.

5:15: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

Paul used the present tense to indicate that these problems were occurring as he wrote. Such conflict threatened to tear the church apart. The verbs increase in intensity; *daknete* (biting, or striking like a snake), then *katethiete* (devouring, destroying), leading to the real danger of *anathete* (consuming, annihilating) each other. In direct and horrible contrast to the command to love their neighbors as themselves, the Galatians were destroying one another.

The source of the conflict went back to the false teachers and the confusion they were causing among the believers (5:10). The presence of the conflict supports the theory that factions were developing in the church; some people going with the law-centered teachers, some staying with Paul and the gospel, and some deciding to pursue their every sinful whim based on the “freedom” they had in Christ. Such continued

confusion would ruin their faith, their testimony, and ultimately the church itself. Paul speaks often of the importance of unity in the body.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT/5:16-26

If Christ's summary of the law; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (**Matthew 22:34-40**) provides the goal of the Christian life, then what provides the motivation and strength to do it? Paul's answer: "Walk in the Spirit."

By his extended argument during much of this letter, Paul had refuted those who insisted on a law-centered life. But in 5:13, following his pattern of reserving the final portions of his letters for practical application, Paul turned to the personal, spiritual lives of the Galatians. He had warned them not to follow the teaching of the Judaizers. Here he warned them about following their own fleshly wishes and desires. Slavery was a threat from the outside influence of the false teachers, but it was an equal threat from the inside desires of the flesh. Paul began with the warning in 5:13, "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature" and he immediately contrasted it with the second part of Christ's summary of the law, "Serve one another in love."

In this section, Paul contrasted the characteristics of a life motivated by the sinful nature and a life motivated by the Spirit.

5:16: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

All Christians have within them a terrible potential for evil; the flesh. However, we also have the indwelling Holy Spirit that we received at salvation. The flesh is a self-centered, inward desire to do wrong and wants to influence and control our soul (mind, will and emotions) and ultimately control our behavior and lead us into evil living. The good news of this verse is that if we are acknowledging and depending on the Spirit (walking in the Spirit) to influence and control our thinking, desires and feelings, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

5:17: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Paul reveals in this verse the spiritual battle that rages within every believer; the flesh warring against the spirit and the spirit warring against the flesh. What are they fighting over? As previously stated, our soul (mind, will, and emotions). Paul goes on to explain that the flesh, which has its root and origin in Satan, is always opposing the

spirit. Paul also states that because of this war between the flesh and spirit, we cannot do the things that our new nature in Christ would like.

We shouldn't be surprised that the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit (**I Peter 2:11**). Keep in mind that God's remedy for man's dilemma is found in Romans 6. The "old man/sin nature/power of sin" has been crucified, and as we rest in that truth, the Holy Spirit holds the flesh/power of sin, in the place of death. Also remember that this is a positional truth and when we rest in our position of being crucified with Christ, the Holy Spirit works it out in our condition.

5:18: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."

As we believers rest in our position and the Spirit begins to gain influence and control of our thinking, our desires and our feelings, He then begins to control our behavior (where we go, what we look at, what we say, etc.), and there is no longer a need to live under the slavery of the Law. When the Spirit is leading, we are free from the law.

5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in the time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Adultery: voluntary sexual relations between a married person and a partner other than the spouse.

Fornication: Sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married to one another.

Uncleanness (Impurity; *akatharsia*): Moral uncleanness. Perhaps no sexual act has taken place, but the person exhibits a crudeness regarding sexual matters. An example today would be the excessive use of sexual humor (or what is supposed to be humor).

Lasciviousness (*aselgeia*; licentiousness); Open and excessive indulgence in sexual sins. The person has no sense of shame or restraint.

Idolatry (*eidololatria*); worship of pagan idols. A person creates substitutes for God and then treats them as if they were God.

Witchcraft (*pharmakeia*): Involvement with the powers of evil, at times using drugs and magical potions. With idolatry, a person acts in a submissive role in relation to evil; with witchcraft, the person is an active agent who attempts to manipulate the powers of evil.

The next eight sins pertain to conduct toward people.

Hatred (*eththrai*): A condition of fixed enmity. This may be real, unresolved conflict which produces bitterness toward one another.

Variance: Difference of opinion – dissension (*eris*): Competition, rivalry, bitter conflict; the natural fruit of hatred.

Emulations: Jealous rivalry; striving to excel and surpass others. (*Zelos*) A feeling of resentment that someone else has what another feels he or she deserves.

Wrath (fits of rage; *thumoi*): Outbursts of uncontrolled anger for selfish reasons.

Envy (*phthonoi*): The twisted logic that cries, “Unfair!” about another’s circumstances and expresses the wish, “If I can’t have it they shouldn’t have it either!”

Murder: (self-explanatory)

Drunkenness (*methai*): Excessive use of wine and strong drink.

Revellings (**orgies**; *komoi*): Drunken, carousing “parties,” often filled with sexual promiscuity; were associated with festivals of some pagan gods.

And the like; Paul added an “etc.” to show that the list was by no means complete.

“I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

“*Those who live like this will not inherit*” refers to people who habitually exhibit these characteristics. This does not mean that believers who lapse into any of these sins will lose their salvation, however, people who habitually exhibit these characteristics may not be children of God; thus, they cannot have any part in the inheritance (**I Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5**).

The kingdom of God has two aspects: (1) its presence in human hearts at conversion, and (2) its future coming at the end of the age.

5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Paul's introduction of the word *fruit* is filled with meaning. "Fruit," is singular, indicating that all the fruits exist as a unit (like a bunch of grapes rather than many different pieces of fruit) and all are important to all believers (unlike "spiritual gifts" that are given differently to different people).

As we trust and rest in the finished work of Christ (our position in Christ), the Holy Spirit reproduces the life of Christ and the outcome is the fruit of the Spirit.

Love (*agape*); True biblical love that is shown by Jesus, is a self-sacrificing and unchanging love that is also demonstrated by God who sent his Son for sinners (**Romans 5:5**). If we were to study the characteristics of love in I Corinthians 13:4-7, we would find that there is nothing in love for the one who is doing the loving. The benefit is for the one who is loved.

Joy (*chara*); An inner rejoicing that abides despite outer circumstances. This characteristic has little to do with happiness and can exist in troubled times and deep sorrow.

Peace (*eirene*); An inner quietness and resting trust in God, even in the face of adverse circumstances (**Philippians 4:17**).

Longsuffering (*makrothumia*); Patiently putting up with people who continually irritate. The Holy Spirit's work in us increases our endurance.

Kindness (*chrestotes*); Acting charitably, benevolently toward others, as God did toward us. Kindness takes the initiative in responding to others.

Goodness (*agathosune*); Reaching out to do good to others, even if they don't deserve it. Goodness does not react to evil but absorbs the offense and responds with positive action

Faithfulness (*pistis*); Reliable, trustworthy.

Gentleness (*prautes*); Humbly considerate of others, while remaining submissive to God and His Word.

Self-control (*agkrateia*); Mastery over sinful self-centered desires. Ironically, our sinful desires, which promise self-fulfillment and power, inevitably lead to slavery. When we acknowledge and depend on the Holy Spirit, initially we feel as though we have lost control, but He produces self-control that would be impossible in our own strength.

Against such there is no law. God gave the law to make people aware of their sin, but when folks are walking in the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit is manifested in their lives, the law is fulfilled.

5:24: “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

“And they that are Christ’s,” refers to not only those who have placed their faith in Christ for salvation, but also are walking in the Spirit (influenced and controlled by the Spirit) and are abiding in Christ (trusting, resting and depending upon Him). “Having crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Many Christians are confused because the “old self/flesh” has been crucified (**Romans 6:6**) and has died positionally, but the “flesh” still raises its ugly head and hinders the Spirit (even though its power is broken).

Like a real crucifixion, the death of our sinful human desires is slow and painful...and lifelong. The picture conveyed by this “crucifixion of the flesh” shows us that God has broken the power of sin. This remains a fact even when it may not seem that way to us. We need no longer live under sin’s power or control.

5:25: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

The word *if* could also be translated “since,” for Paul was not expressing doubt as to the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life or in the Galatians. God gives new life; therefore, all believers *live in* (are alive because of) *the Spirit*.

In **Galatians 5:17**, Paul wrote that the flesh wars against the Spirit. What are they fighting over? Influence and control over our souls (mind, will, emotions). So then, believers walk in the flesh if their soul is influenced and controlled by the flesh, or they walk in the Spirit if they are influenced and controlled by the Spirit. Therefore, Paul is saying here, since we have an indwelling Holy Spirit, let’s live our daily lives influenced and controlled by the Spirit.

- To the Colossian Christians Paul wrote, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him” (**Colossians 2:6**). Since believers have been made alive by the Holy Spirit, He ought to direct the course of our lives.

5:26: “Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.”

This verse appears to be a last-minute addition to a section that could have easily ended with verse 25. Paul explained that if the Galatians would “walk in the Spirit,” they could solve any attitude problems in the church. Perhaps even living by the Spirit might be used by some as an occasion for pride.

LESSON 6
GALATIANS 6
WE WILL REAP WHAT WE SOW/6:1-10

6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Paul concluded his letter to the Galatians by affirming the confidence that he had already expressed to them in 5:10. He believed that the Galatians would return to their first love (**Revelation 2:4**), dismiss the Judaizers, and move on through life, walking in the Spirit (5:25).

The phrase “if a man be overtaken in a fault” conveys the idea that the sinning believer was taken captive or blind-sided or overwhelmed.

It is uncertain whether “sin” refers specifically to following the Judaizers or to any sin (such as the works of the flesh described in 5:19-21). But we can assume that Paul’s concern for the Galatians extended far beyond the immediate challenges they were facing from the false teachers.

Paul did not recommend ignoring unrepented sin because, no matter how well hidden, sin will eventually come to light and cause problems in the church. Neither did Paul recommend a public humiliation of the sinner, for that would not achieve the objective of restoring the person to the fellowship. Paul recommended action, but he gave advice as to who should act and how the action should be taken.

Action should be taken only by those who are spiritual. Paul was referring to men and women who walk in the Spirit. Only those mature in the faith (**Hebrews 5:13-14**) should deal with it.

In addition, mature believers must be Holy Spirit led, thereby able to discern when to confront sin (**Matthew 18:15-17**).

Next Paul clarified what the spiritually mature should do for the one caught in sin by using one word: *restore* (*katartizete*). When leaders confront a person overtaken in sin, they should avoid humiliating, punishing, or using the person as a public example. Instead, the leaders’ purpose should be to restore the person to the fellowship of believers (**2 Timothy 2:24-26**). A fallen Christian should be neither neglected or rejected. Instead, spiritually mature believers should help get the person on the right track, encourage repentance and offer assistance if needed, and warmly accept the repentant person back into the church. All church discipline aims at this goal.

Finally Paul explained how to restore in one word: “meek.” Those walking in the Spirit and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit will be meek/gentle. They are humble and patient, realizing that no one is immune to sin. Spiritual leaders are not resentful or judgmental (**2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 3:13**).

Take care that you yourselves are not tempted In situations such as the apostle was describing, those who restore a fallen one could face two temptations: (1) they might be tempted to have spiritual pride, or (2) They might be tripped up by the same temptation faced by the one they are trying to correct. Paul wrote the same advice to the Corinthians, “so if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (**I Corinthians 10:12**).

6:2: “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

As used in this verse, *burdens* refers to an overload that a believer cannot carry alone. It could be a financial overload; it could be burdens of temptation. Paul states that we must help “bear” the loads that others find too heavy to carry alone. **Romans 15:1-3**

6:3: “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

Paul was anxious to warn the Galatians not to tolerate any form of spiritual superiority, no matter how cleverly disguised. It might be good to stop a moment and consider that the best the flesh can ever produce is self righteousness.

Paul used exaggeration (hyperbole) to correct arrogance in those acting self-important.

These conceited people were deceiving no one but themselves. Measured against God’s standards, no one has any standing. Only by Christ’s righteousness imparted to us and by God’s Spirit within us do we become acceptable to God. The true “somebodies” in the church yield the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and these people are not concerned about their position or status.

6:4: “But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.”

While some people may have a proud and self-centered attitude regarding their burden bearing, others may feel as though they can’t “bear burdens.” Both our abilities and motives need healthy, ongoing examination.

Here Paul offered the solution. *Each one should test his own motives/actions.* The Greek word *dokimazo*, translated “test,” could also mean “scrutinize” or “prove.”

Then, says Paul, *he can have rejoicing in himself*. This “rejoicing” is very different from the conceit explained in 6:3. In Greek, *kauchema* literally means “boast, report.” This boasting focuses, not on a person’s own accomplishments, but rather on what God has done in and through his or her life. This rejoicing glorifies God, not oneself. The context determines that Paul gave the same advice that he urged the Romans to practice: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (**Romans 12:3**).



6:5: “For every man shall bear his own burden.” In 6:2, Paul encouraged the believers to bear one another’s burdens. Here, he says that each believer should carry his or her own burden. This is not contradictory. Jesus spoke of this burden in **Matthew 11:30** when he promised, “My burden is light.” Each person carries his own light load. While we must bear our own light load, we also look to help others carry their overloads.

Throughout this scripture Paul maintained a balance between taking responsibility for one’s own life and looking out for the needs of others. He gave the Philippians similar counsel when he wrote: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of other” (**Philippians 2:3-4**).

6:6: “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.”

After describing how the Holy Spirit helps believers in their relationships with others, Paul explained how the Holy Spirit would affect their use of money. (**I Timothy 5:17-18**)

Some commentators hesitate to apply 6:7-9 to the use of money. While these verses also have a broader application, Paul primarily focused on the thought that he had begun in this verse; believers’ responsible use of finances. Bearing each other’s burdens as well as following through on our commitment requires faithfulness in our financial decisions.

Paul’s first admonition explained support for Christian teachers (true teachers as opposed to the false teachers). In the Galatian churches, teachers were serving full-time in preaching and teaching.

Paul’s wording emphasized that this giving and sharing with the Christian teachers was necessary for them to live and teach. As the teachers taught the “good things” of the

gospel, the believers reciprocated with sharing “good things” to provide for the teachers. Jesus gave the same advice in Luke 10:7. In the context of the principle Paul was about to state, the teachers were sowing the good seed of God’s Word and had a right to expect a harvest of goodness from their students.

6:7: Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

This verse gives a general principle about the attitudes of kindness, giving, and sharing. Those doing the mocking were the self-righteous, pious Christians who were boasting about their spiritual superiority (5:26; 6:3). While people can deceive one another and even themselves about their motives and attitudes (**I John 1:6, 8**) they cannot deceive God. The passive tense indicates that some of the Galatians had already been deceived in this matter of financial responsibility. The phrase “God is not mocked” could also be translated “God is not fooled.” What they sowed, they would reap.

“Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” From farming to finances, this saying holds true (**Proverbs 22:8**). A farmer plants corn and grows corn; he should not expect nor desire anything else. Believers must plant accordingly, for what they receive will be directly related to what they put in, as Paul explains in the next verse.

6:8: “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Believers who use their time, talent and treasure in a wasteful indulgence in order to do no more than please the sinful nature will earn a harvest of destruction. Those who invest their lives in fulfilling sinful human desires are practicing the works of the flesh that Paul listed in 5:19-21. Paul was most concerned about the tendencies of the Galatians who were practicing sins particularly harmful to the church: quarrelsomeness (5:16, 21), conceit (5:26), envy (5:26), indifference to needs (6:1-2), and pride.

The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Believers who sow their resources and invest their lives in the things of the Spirit have a far different harvest (**Romans 6:20-23**).

6:9: “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

While good works will never earn salvation, Paul did encourage believers to persist in doing good. Paul included himself in his admonishment, saying that while we do good,

we should not become weary and give up or lose heart. By repeating this admonition twice, Paul placed great emphasis upon perseverance.

Paul may have been feeling very weary as he considered his hard work and suffering on behalf of the churches in Galatia. It is discouraging to continue to do good while seeing no tangible results. But fruit takes time as well. Jesus pointed out to the disciples that months elapse between planting and harvesting (**John 4:35**). To continue the analogy of sowing and reaping, a farmer will have no harvest to reap if he becomes too weary to labor in the fields or if he gives up altogether. The harvest will not reap itself. Every aspect of farming, planting, maintaining, and finally the harvesting takes hard work. So, too, believers must not become weary and give up when they follow the Holy Spirit's guidance, grow spiritually, and live out the Christ-life. While it may seem at times like a slow process and a losing battle, we are assured that at the proper time we will reap a harvest. Keep in mind that the proper time is the time of God's own choosing.

6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

This word for "opportunity" in Greek conveys the meaning that once missed, we cannot regain the opportunity. We cannot miss the "time" of the harvest and ought not to miss the "time" of doing good. In both cases, when the time is past, it will never return. How often have we looked back and regretted missing a chance to say a word of encouragement or to do a kind deed?

God calls believers to do good to all people, believers and non-believers alike. Jesus made it quite clear that doing good would not always be easy: "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (**Matthew 5:44**). Some fields may be very difficult to "work," but our purpose should be to sow goodness anyway!

When Paul told individual believers to "do good," he spoke to their responsibility in the community as well as in the church. The church is not meant to become merely a social agency, but individual believers can work together in meeting social needs, giving time and resources as God calls and enables them. Sowing seeds of kindness to those in need expresses Christ's love and prepares hearts to receive the gospel.

PAUL'S FINAL WARNING/6:11-18

Paul left the Galatians with a strong word-picture of the cross of Jesus Christ. What faced his readers was not really between two competing voices of authority, but rather between denying the Cross or finding through it the only true way of life.



6:11: “Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.”

Up to this point, Paul had probably dictated the letter to a scribe. Then he took the pen into his own hand to write his final, personal greetings. Paul did this in other letters as well, to add emphasis to his words and to validate that the letter was genuine (**I Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17**). Most likely, Paul wrote in large letters for emphasis, as these last verses communicate the main points of this epistle. If these “large letters” were printed in our Bibles in all capital or boldface letters, we would understand the effect of Paul’s style and why he mentioned it.

6:12: “As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”

As Paul concluded the key points of his letter, he referred again to the Judaizers, the false teachers who were causing all the trouble and confusion in Galatia. Paul referred to them as *those who want to make a good impression outwardly*. The Greek word for “desiring to make a fair show (*euprosopesai*)” carries the sense of being insincere. The false teachers had insincere motives in trying to compel the Galatian believers to be circumcised because their goal was to win the Galatians to Judaism, not to see them fulfill the law. The word *compel* means to force or drive someone to a particular course of action.

“The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.” Circumcision provided an easy way out. The Judaizers taught circumcision for salvation in order to avoid being persecuted. The Cross of Christ offended the Jews. By insisting on circumcision, they felt they were protecting the Jerusalem and Judean churches from persecution.

The Judaizers had brought legalistic issues to the surface, but their rejection of the death of Christ ran deeper. To accept the Cross includes accepting that people are sinners under God’s curse, that only the death of Christ on the cross could secure people’s salvation, and that people can do nothing to obtain that salvation other than to accept Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf. People don’t want to be told they are sinners who can do nothing but accept someone else’s help. Human nature would much prefer to earn salvation. The Judaizers could avoid persecution by giving people a way to “earn God’s favor.” But as Paul clarified earlier in this letter, what they offered was slavery to the law, and no salvation at all.

6:13: “For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.”

In addition to attacking the Judaizers' motives to make a good impression and escape persecution, Paul attacked them because all they wanted to do was *boast about your flesh*. In other words, they wanted to report the number of circumcisions back to their superiors. The Judaizers compelled the believers to be circumcised, as they had been, thereby bringing them under the law with them. Yet the Judaizers themselves did not and could not obey all the law. If the Jews themselves couldn't keep the law, how futile it was to compel new Christians to accept circumcision that would bind them to that same law. Worse yet, the Judaizers did this for the sake of pride; personal pride, religious pride, national pride; yet pride all the same.

6:14: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

While the Judaizers sought to please people, escape persecution, and boast in statistics, Paul had an entirely different perspective (2:20-21). We already know that he did not seek to please people and that he regularly faced persecution; but he did boast. However, his boasting was in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul could boast about the Cross because of what the Cross had accomplished in his life. Paul had no need of the earthly and selfish motives and ambitions. He had let go of the worldly standards and symbols of honor and success (*the world has been crucified to me*). For Paul to say, “The world is crucified unto me and I unto the world” meant that the world had no power over Paul and he had no desire for the world.

6:15: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”

Paul, a circumcised Jew, knew that his circumcision counted for nothing as a means to salvation. Neither was uncircumcision a detriment to salvation (as the Judaizers were teaching). Neither of these outward markings makes any difference to God regarding salvation. The cross of Christ made such distinctions valueless and put all people on equal ground. As Paul had already stated bluntly, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value” (5:6). When anyone becomes a believer, he or she becomes a new creation (more literally, a new “creature”). That is what counts; the only thing that matters is being born again. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

6:16: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”

Paul turned to his listeners before leaving and gave them both a blessing and a warning.

This rule (kanoni) refers to the gospel message that Paul had defended throughout this letter; we receive salvation by grace through faith alone. Paul might have said, “To those who believe this rule”; however, he chose the word *follow* to emphasize the Galatians’ problem. They had initially believed, but they hadn’t “followed” or “walked” or “grown” in that belief and thus had fallen prey to false teachers.

But to those who did follow (and he hoped this would include all the Galatian believers), Paul wished peace and mercy. “Peace” was a common greeting and benediction. At the beginning of this letter, Paul had greeted the Galatians with “grace and peace” (1:3). Here he chose “peace and mercy.” He saved “grace” for his final phrase in the letter.

The immediate context of Galatians, with Paul’s analysis of the significance of Sarah and Hagar and God’s eternal purposes having included the Gentiles all along, points to this interpretation. In other words, by the phrase “Israel of God,” Paul meant that the church is made up of all true believers, whatever their social or ethnic backgrounds.

6:17: “From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul ended his letter with a request that his trouble stop. His words *from henceforth let no man trouble me* did not mean that if the legalizers continued to harass the churches that he would not want to hear about it. Nor was he addressing the legalizers and asking them to stop making trouble; their goal was to make as much trouble as possible for Paul and the Christians. Instead, Paul did not want the Galatian churches to trouble him any longer by turning away from the faith to legalism. Paul had argued against the Judaizers’ teaching in this letter, ending the need for more to be said about them. He expected the Galatian Christian to return to the faith and stand up for themselves against the false teachers. He had provided the ammunition; they should use it.

The suffering Paul had endured for the faith should be enough to encourage these believers to remain steadfast against false teaching. Paul bore on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The marks were the scars Paul received when he was persecuted for the sake of the gospel. Some of these he received while he was in Galatia (**Acts 13-14; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24**). The word *bear* reveals that these marks were not a burden carried lightly. Paul had earned the right to be heard by his track record. The word *marks (stigmata)* was used for the brands put on animals or slaves to signify who owned them. To Paul, these “marks” revealed who “owned” him; “the Lord Jesus.” (Paul referred to some of these persecutions in other letters; **I Corinthians 4:11; 2 Corinthians 4:8-12; 6:5, 8-10; 11:23-33**).

6:18: “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Unlike many of Paul’s other letters, Paul included no personal greetings or remarks as he concluded this letter. Perhaps he wanted to close the letter in a way that would cause the Galatians to think of nothing but Paul’s words. He closed as he had begun in 1:3, wishing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ on these believers, whom he again lovingly called brothers and sisters. Grace was what Paul hoped would be the result of his entire urgent letter to them; that they would appropriate (take possession) of God’s grace (unmerited favor) and by faith walk more in the Spirit and less in the flesh.

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