

Notes on Galatians

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Introduction

WRITER

The authorship of Galatians has been the least disputed of any of Paul's epistles.

"The most uncontroverted matter in the study of Galatians is that the letter was written by Paul, the Christian apostle whose ministry is portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles."¹

RECIPIENTS

The Apostle Paul directed this epistle to the churches of Galatia (1:2), and he called its recipients "Galatians" (3:1). However, who these people were, and where they lived, are problems that have proved difficult to pinpoint.²

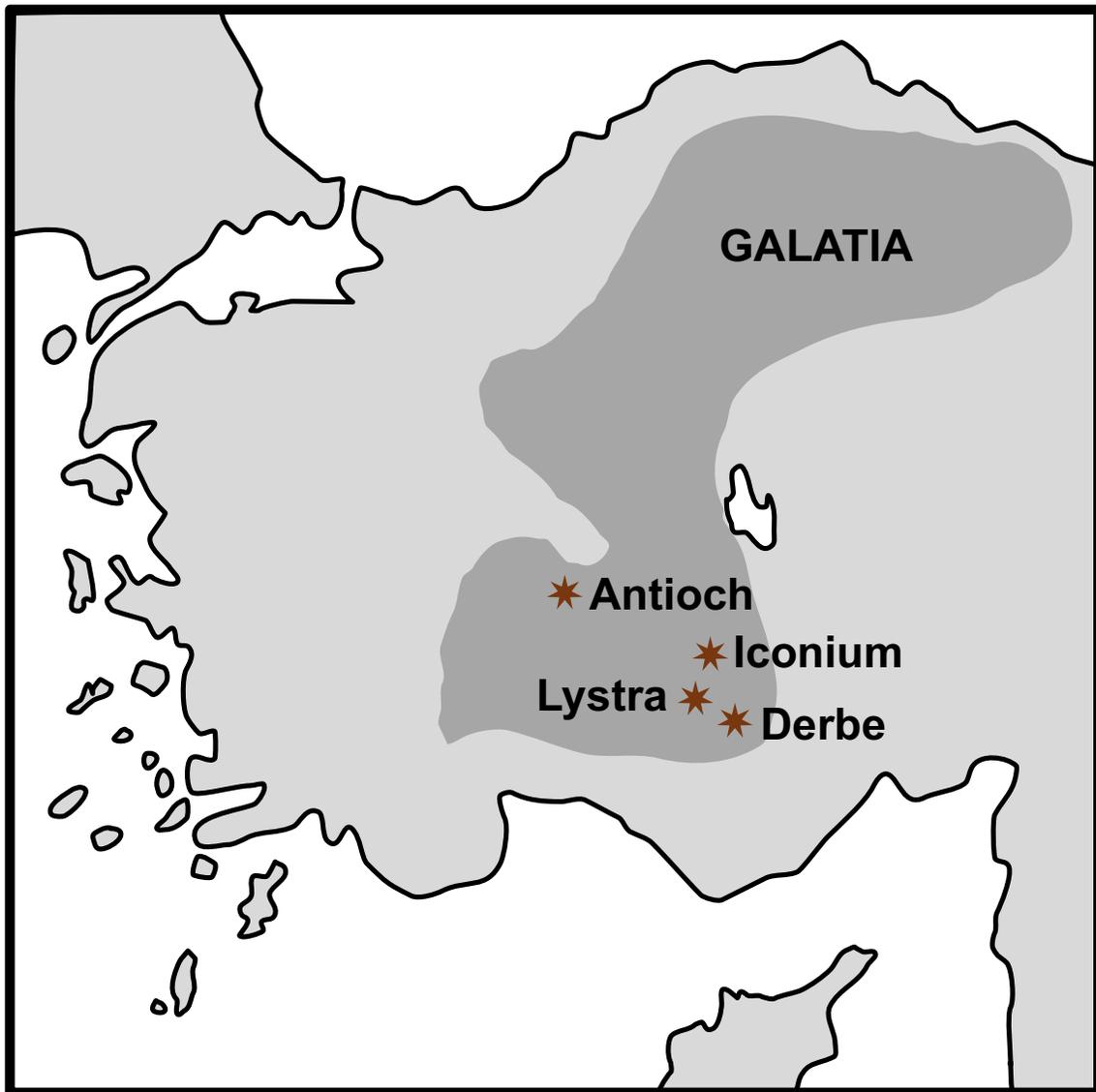
The traditional opinion held that the recipients lived in the geographical district known as Galatia, which was located in the northern part of the Roman province, also called Galatia, in Asia Minor (modern western Turkey).³ This view holds that Paul founded churches in this region on his second missionary journey, after the Spirit forbade him to preach in the province of Asia (Acts 16:6). Paul therefore could have written this epistle

¹Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. lvii. See also Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, pp. 1-7.

²See Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospel to Glory*, pp. 229-36, for a discussion of the issue.

³E.g., John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, p. xxviii; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1256; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:272-73; J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:140.

during his third journey, either from Ephesus, about A.D. 54, or from Corinth, about A.D. 57.¹



The main arguments for this "North Galatian theory" are as follows: First, the popular use of the term "Galatians" usually signified people in this area. Second, in writing Acts Luke normally referred to geographical districts rather than Roman provinces. Third, there is some similarity between the Galatian people, as Paul referred to them in this epistle, and the Gallic

¹W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 477, preferred Corinth, as did J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, p. 55, and Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 3:2:2; H. A. Ironside, *Expository Messages on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 9. Eadie, p. lii; and Jamieson, et al., p. 1257; preferred Ephesus.

inhabitants of northern Galatia. Fourth, Paul traveled through this region during his second journey (Acts 16:6-8).

The more popular view today, since about the middle of the eighteenth century, maintains that Paul wrote to the churches located in the Roman province of Galatia that he founded on his first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:38-39, 46, 48; 14:3, 8-10).¹ The main arguments for this "South Galatian theory" are as follows:

First, Acts 16:6 and 18:23 offer no support to the theory that Paul ever made a trip to the northern part of provincial Galatia. Second, there is no specific information about the northern Galatian churches in Acts. Third, the geographic isolation of the North Galatia district makes a visit by Paul improbable. Fourth, Paul usually referred to provincial titles in his writings. Fifth, the name Galatians was appropriate for people living in the southern area. Sixth, the mention of Barnabas, in Galatians 2:1, 9, and 13, suggests that the Galatians had met him—on Paul's first journey. Seventh, the absence of a North Galatian representative in the collection delegation referred to in 1 Corinthians 16:1 implies that the target readership was not in that area. Eighth, the influence of the Judaizers, whom Paul dealt with in this letter, was extensive in South Galatia.

¹William M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*, pp. 8-11; Frederic Rendall, "The Epistle to the Galatians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:127; Ernest de W. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. xlv; G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 348; Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, pp. 22-31; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 3-18; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians*, pp. 7-14; Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, p. 12; Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty*, pp. 51-54; James M. Boice, "Galatians," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 412-17; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 1-3; Longenecker, pp. lxiii-lxx; Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, pp. 15-20; Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 27; Adolf Deissmann, *Paul*, p. 247; Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 458-61; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:683; Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty*, pp. 9-13; Charles B. Williams, *A Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, p. 53; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 1:3:12-13; Hanna, p. 236.

DATE

If Paul wrote this epistle to the churches of South Galatia, as I think he did, he probably did so at one of two times. If Paul's visit referred to in Galatians 4:13 is the same one described in Acts 16:6, he must have written this epistle after the Jerusalem Council (i.e., in or after A.D. 49). Several commentators believed that Paul wrote it from Corinth, probably in the early 50s.¹ Nevertheless, it seems more likely that Galatians 4:13 refers to the visit described in Acts 14:21. If so, Paul must have written the epistle before the Jerusalem Council (i.e., before or in A.D. 49).² If he had written Galatians after the Jerusalem Council, he probably would have referred to the decision of that council, which he did not, since it would have strengthened his argument considerably. Assuming the earlier date, Paul probably wrote Galatians from Antioch of Syria shortly after his first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem Council.³ This would make the Book of Galatians Paul's first inspired epistle. Another less likely possibility is that he wrote it from Ephesus during his third missionary journey.⁴

OCCASION

The dating of the epistle affects the occasion for writing. Assuming the South Galatian theory and an early date of writing, Paul wrote mainly to stem the tide of the Judaizing heresy to which he referred throughout the letter. Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians also deal with the Judaizing controversy to some degree. Paul mentioned people who opposed him in every chapter of Galatians (1:6-7; 2:4-5; 3:1; 4:17; 5:7-12; 6:12-13).

The identity of the Judaizers is also important. They were determined to discredit Paul. The first two chapters of Galatians especially deal with criticisms leveled against Paul personally. His critics appear to have been Jews who claimed to be Christians and who wanted Christians to submit to the authority of the Mosaic Law and its institutions. They probably came from Jerusalem and evidently had a wide influence (cf. Acts 15). One man seems to have been their spokesman (3:1; 5:7, 10), though there were

¹Rendall, 3:17; Ridderbos, p. 3; Hendriksen, p. 16; Lenski, pp. 15, 17.

²Merrill C. Tenney, *The New Testament: An Historical and Analytic Survey*, p. 283.

³Fung, pp. 22, 28; Longenecker, p. lxxxviii; Morris, p. 22; Campbell, p. 588.

⁴See Richard B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 360; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:148.

several Judaizers in Galatia, as the many references to "them" and "they" that are scattered throughout the epistle suggest.¹

"This short letter has an importance out of all proportion to its size. There is always a need for Paul's forthright setting out of the truth that justification comes only through faith in Christ, not by works."²

Paul wrote much about the law in both Galatians and Romans. Ridderbos distinguished his emphases in these two similar epistles:

"... what is indicated in the letter to the Galatians is the inadequacy of the law for salvation, and ... what gets the emphasis in the letter to the Romans is this: that there is salvation despite the transgression of God's holy law."³

AUTHENTICITY

On the subject of the authenticity of Galatians the same author wrote:

"... there is not a single letter that is so generally regarded as authentic as is Paul's letter to the Galatians."⁴

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-10
 - A. Salutation 1:1-5
 - B. Denunciation 1:6-10
- II. Personal defense of Paul's gospel 1:11—2:21
 - A. Independence from other apostles 1:11-24
 1. The source of Paul's gospel 1:11-17

¹For fuller discussions of these matters, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:72-89; Bruce, pp. 3-32, 41-56; Boice, pp. 412-20, and Fung, pp. 1-28.

²Carson and Moo, p. 473.

³Ridderbos, p. 22.

⁴Ibid., p. 36.

2. The events of Paul's early ministry 1:18-24
 - B. Interdependence with other apostles 2:1-10
 - C. Correction of another apostle 2:11-21
- III. Theological affirmation of salvation by faith 3:1—4:31
- A. Vindication of the doctrine ch. 3
 1. The experiential argument 3:1-5
 2. The Scriptural argument 3:6-14
 3. The logical argument 3:15-29
 - B. Clarification of the doctrine ch. 4
 1. The domestic illustration 4:1-11
 2. The historical illustration 4:12-20
 3. The biblical illustration 4:21-31
- IV. Practical application to Christian living 5:1—6:10
- A. Balance in the Christian life ch. 5
 1. Living without the Law 5:1-12
 2. Living without license 5:13-15
 3. Living by the Holy Spirit 5:16-26
 - B. Responsibilities of the Christian life 6:1-10
 1. Toward sinning Christians 6:1
 2. Toward burdened Christians 6:2-5
 3. Toward teachers 6:6-9
 4. Toward all people 6:10
- V. Conclusion 6:11-18

MESSAGE

Probably the most distinctive impression that the reader of this epistle receives is its severity. Paul wrote it with strong emotion, but he never let his emotions fog his logic. His dominant concern was for truth and its bearing on life.

Compared with the Corinthian correspondence, Galatians is also corrective. However the tone of Galatians is very different. There is no mention here of the readers' standing in Christ or any commendation of them.

The introduction is rather cold and prosaic with no mention of thankfulness. Paul began at once to marvel at the Galatians' departure from apostolic teaching (1:6-9; cf. 3:1-5; 4:8-11). Even Paul's tender sentiments seem to rise from a very troubled heart (4:19-20). Obviously the subject that Paul wrote about in this letter was of the utmost importance to him. He was not dealing with Christian behavior, as he did in his letters to the Corinthians, as much as belief, which is foundational to behavior.

Galatians has been called "the charter of Christian liberty,"¹ "Paul's charter of Christian freedom,"² and "the emancipation proclamation of Christianity."³ This epistle explains Christian liberty: its nature, its laws, and its enemies. This little letter has, at various times throughout church history, called God's people out of the bondage of legalism back into the liberty of freedom. It has also been called "the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation."⁴ Martin Luther loved it so much that he compared it to his wife:

"The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine."⁵

"He paid her the highest tribute when he called St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians 'my Katherine von Bora.'"⁶

The greatest value of this letter is not found in its denunciations but in its enunciations. We readers should not be so impressed with the fiery rhetoric and dramatic words of Paul that we fail to understand the reasons underlying what he said and did. The Book of Galatians' central teaching is a proclamation concerning liberty. It is a germinal form of the Epistle to the Romans, which Paul wrote eight years later, in A.D. 57.

¹Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty*.

²Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*.

³Hanna, p. 238.

⁴Tenney, *Galatians*, p. 15.

⁵Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, p. iv.

⁶Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 228.

The following three paragraphs will set forth its major revelations.

First, the root of every Christian's Christianity is God's supply of His Holy Spirit to that person (3:5, 14). One receives new life by receiving the Holy Spirit by faith at conversion. Nothing other than faith is necessary for salvation. To teach that one must be circumcised, or baptized, or anything else in order to receive eternal life is to proclaim the worst of heresies. New life comes by faith alone. What makes Christians different is the fact that God indwells them. Eternal life is the life of God.

Second, the culture (or medium) in which every Christian's Christianity grows is the desires of God's Spirit who indwells him or her (5:17). When a Christian has life by faith in Christ, he or she is free from all other bondage: that of the flesh, and that of rites and ceremonies. (By "flesh" I mean our sinful human nature.) The Christian has power to master the flesh, and he has found life apart from rites and ceremonies, so he is free from these. However his liberty is not license to sin. God's Spirit enables the Christian to obey. Circumcision or baptism does not make anyone able to obey God. We can only obey God in the power of God's Spirit. In short, we are free to obey God, not to disobey Him, when the Spirit dwells within us. God's life in us bears fruit as we follow the dictates of the Holy Spirit. But if we quench or grieve the Spirit we hinder His production of fruit in our lives.

Third, the fruit that every Christian produces is the evidence of God's Spirit triumphing over his flesh (5:22). The essence of this fruit is love. The works of the flesh are the fruit of a religion that does not have the life-giving Spirit indwelling its members (i.e., ritualism). Fruit issues from life. Works issue from ritualism.

The false teachers in Galatia upset Paul exceedingly because whenever we add anything to faith for salvation we inevitably neglect faith. If we make something besides faith supreme we establish a rite (e.g., baptism). When we establish a rite, practice of the rite becomes the message of the religion, and we are in danger of divorcing morality from religion. There is no power for righteous living. This is one difference between Christianity and all other religions. All other religions have rites, ceremonies, and creeds—but no supernatural life. Consequently there is no vital connection in these religions between belief and morality. All kinds of sin result from the tragedy of adding something to the one responsibility of faith.

Galatians is not only a proclamation of liberty but it is also a protest against legalism. Legalism is both a belief and a practice. As a belief legalism is the conviction that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by keeping rules. Often the rules in view are those imposed by people, in contrast to those required by God. However misapplying biblical laws is also a form of legalism. As a practice legalism is the keeping of rules with a view to gaining merit with God. In a larger sense legalism is the belief that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by our good works. Of course the only thing that makes us acceptable to God is our trust in Christ's good works. He satisfied God's demands for us. We are saved by good works, but it is Christ's good works, not ours. Nomism is the belief that we need to make law the ruling governor of our lives. It sees law as the most important factor in people's relationship with God. This term focuses on law, whereas the term legalism focuses on rules.¹

Galatians protests against preachers of a different gospel (1:8-9). These verses of Paul are not only a curse but they are also a statement of fact. One who preaches another gospel substitutes falsehood (which issues finally in the works of the flesh) for the truth (which issues finally in the fruit of the Spirit).

A poor man knocked on the front door of a suburban home asking for some money. The owner said, "I'll give you some money if you'll do a job for me." "What is it?" the vagrant asked. "Paint my porch." The poor man agreed. "The paint and everything you'll need is out back," said the homeowner. "Just tell me when you've finished." Two hours later the laborer reported that he was all done. "That was fast," said the homeowner. "Well, I'm done. In fact, I gave it two coats. But you ought to know that that's not a Porsche but a Mercedes." It is very important that we get the message straight, especially the gospel message.

Galatians also protests against the receivers of a different gospel (5:4). To add to faith is to trust ceremony, which is to deny Christ, which is to be cut off from Christ, which is to fall from grace. Ceremonies such as baptism and the Lord's Supper have a proper place in Christianity, but to make them necessary for justification is to deny Christ. A person is justified only when he or she says sincerely, "Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to Thy cross

¹See Frank Minirth, Paul Meier, et al, *The Workaholic and His Family*, ch. 8: "Legalism: The Road to Bondage," for a discussion of legalism.

I cling."¹ "Inviting Jesus into your heart" is not the biblical requirement for salvation. This metaphor describes what happens in regeneration, but it is not the clearest one to use to describe how to experience regeneration. Simply believing for oneself in Christ's saving work on the Cross is what is needed.

Galatians also protests against those who practice the deeds of the flesh, which result from a false gospel (5:21). Such people will not inherit God's kingdom. I believe this verse describes unbelievers. Paul's point was that practicing the deeds of the flesh is typical behavior of those who will not enter heaven, so it is certainly inappropriate for believers.

This letter warns us against adding any rite or ceremony or observance to faith in order to obtain God's acceptance. Such a practice cuts off those who rely on the ritual from Christ. Dr. William Culbertson, a former president of Moody Bible Institute, used to say, "It's very hard to tell when the accretions [additions] to faith make faith invalid." Evangelists struggle with this difficulty when trying to assess whether a person is genuinely trusting Christ alone.

Put some pure water in a clear glass tumbler. Then add some arsenic. The water will look just the same, but it has become deadly poisonous. Just so adding a foreign element to the gospel message can transform it from the water of life into the water of death.

Galatians also warns its readers against changing horses in midstream. That is, it warns us against trusting in faith for justification, but later concluding that the only way to be sanctified is to observe rites or ceremonies. Having begun salvation by the Spirit we will certainly not attain God's goal for us (spiritual growth) by the flesh. The life of the Spirit must remain the law of the Christian. We must trust Him for our practical sanctification. The false teachers that Paul was combating in Galatians were perverting the doctrine of salvation in two of its stages: justification and progressive (or practical) sanctification.

I sometimes compare the Christian life to a three-stage Saturn rocket. The first stage (justification) is an act of God alone in which He starts us on our journey to a different world. Justification happens in a moment of time: when one trusts in Christ alone for his or her salvation. The second stage

¹Augustus M. Toplady, *Rock of Ages*.

(progressive sanctification) is a work that God does but which the Christian can cooperate with by continuing to trust and obey the Lord. Or he or she can resist the Holy Spirit's work of making that one more holy by saying no to the Lord. Christians play a part in their sanctification, which begins with justification and ends at glorification. In our progressive sanctification we Christians are moving away from where we have been spiritually toward where we will be spiritually.

The third stage is glorification. This is a work of God alone that takes place in a moment of time, like justification, and in which we finally touch down at our final destination spiritually: the Lord's presence. We do not need to do anything to qualify for glorification. God will glorify every true Christian regardless of how far we have advanced in our sanctification. Glorification for Christians takes place at the Rapture of the church or at death, whichever comes first.

I would summarize the message of the book as follows: Salvation is by God's grace through faith plus nothing.

"In a sentence, we may define God's grace as His favor to the sinner, that favor being shown and proved by His gift."¹

I like the story about the man who was standing at the pearly gates waiting to be admitted to heaven. Peter asked him, "Why should I let you into heaven?" The man replied, "I've been a good man." Peter responded, "Anything else?" The man said, "I've been a pastor." Again Peter asked, "Anything else?" The man said, "I was a missionary for 20 years." "Anything else?" repeated Peter. The man replied, "What's it going to take to get me in here, the grace of God?" Yes, it is only by God's grace that any of us will get into heaven.²

¹W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Grace and Power*, p. 15.

²This message section of these notes has been adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:149-65.

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-10

The Apostle Paul began this epistle in an uncharacteristic way for him. After a customary salutation he rebuked the Galatian Christians. Usually he began his epistles by commending his readers.

A. SALUTATION 1:1-5

Paul began this epistle with a word of greeting for his readers in order to introduce himself as the writer and to emphasize the divine source of his apostolic commission.

1:1 The nickname (cognomen) "Paul" is from the Latin *Paulus*, which means little.¹ The earliest physical description of Paul that we have comes from a second-century apocryphal writing: *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*.² It described Paul as follows:

He was "a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel."³

The apostle's Hebrew name was Saul. Since he was an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul consistently used his Gentile name in his epistles.

In his reference to himself Paul emphasized his apostolic office. The Greek word translated "apostle" (*apostolos*) means one who is sent. The New Testament uses this word in two ways: In its more restricted sense, the word means someone who had

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

²An apocryphal writing is a document of doubtful authenticity, although widely circulated as being true.

³E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:354. For a photo of a portrait of Paul that exists in the catacomb of San Gennaro in Naples, Italy, see Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, fig. 171.

received a special commission directly from the risen Christ (i.e., Paul and the twelve apostles). In its more general sense, it refers to those sent with a message from God (as in Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). It even describes Jesus (Heb. 3:1). In Galatians Paul always used the word "apostle" in the technical sense, to describe the Twelve and himself.

Paul contended that his apostleship did not originate "from men" (any Christian leader) nor did it come to him "through human agency" (any Christian group). These phrases may have been used by his Judaizing critics.¹ Rather, Jesus Christ and God the Father bestowed his apostleship on him. Paul received his commission from Jesus in Damascus after his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:3-16). Note that Paul put Jesus Christ on the same level as God the Father by the way that he described who gave him his apostleship.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrated the power of God. The Apostle Paul may have referred to the Resurrection in order to emphasize the importance of his apostolic office, which he defended in this epistle. Or he may have written this simply to glorify Jesus Christ.

In view of what Paul said in this chapter and the next, it seems clear that his enemies in Galatia were claiming that he had received his apostolic commission from other people. Specifically, they suggested that it came from the other apostles, or the leaders of the church at Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1), rather than directly from Jesus Christ. This would have made it an inferior apostleship.

1:2 We cannot identify all the Christian brothers who were with Paul when he wrote this epistle, but Barnabas and the Christians in the church in Syrian Antioch were probably part of this group, assuming that Paul wrote this letter from Antioch of Syria.

The churches of Galatia were probably the churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (Iconium,

¹Lenski, p. 21.

Lystra, Derbe, et al.) rather than those in northern ethnic Galatia.¹ This is the only one of Paul's inspired letters that he addressed neither to Christians in one specific town nor to an individual.

"... the Church as the total community is not a mere aggregate of individual congregations; rather the local church is the universal Church in its local manifestation."²

"The omission of any expression of praise in addressing the Galatians shows the extent of their apostasy ..."³

1:3 The greeting that Paul wrote in most of his epistles was a combination of the commonly used Greek (*charis*, "grace") and Jewish (*shalom*, "peace") salutations. The former, grace, in the Christian context refers to God's undeserved favor that is His gift and blessing to His children. Galatians opens, closes (cf. 6:18), and is full of references to God's grace (vv. 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 3:18; 5:4). The actual Greek word is *chairein*, which means "rejoice," but this standard Greek greeting was the equivalent of hello.

"When Paul prays for grace on his friends, it is as if he said, 'May the beauty of the wonder of the undeserved love of God be on you, so that it will make your life lovely too.'"⁴

"Paul is pre-eminently the apostle of grace. Out of one hundred fifty-five New Testament references to it, one hundred thirty are his, directly or indirectly."⁵

The second word of greeting, peace, defines not just the absence of hostility but the totality of God's blessings. This

¹See the introduction to these notes above.

²Fung, p. 38.

³Lightfoot, p. 73. Apostasy is abandonment or renunciation of a belief previously held.

⁴William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 8.

⁵Thomas, p. 15.

word had become a standard Jewish greeting. Believers enjoy peace with God, and with other people, because God has taken the initiative in extending His grace to them in Christ (cf. Num. 6:24-26). Peace always follows grace in Paul's salutations, because that is their logical and temporal order.

"Grace includes God's goodwill towards us and his good work upon us; and peace implies in it all that inward comfort or outward prosperity which is really needful for us."¹

"In fact, 'grace' and 'peace' seem to be Paul's (and the NT's) shorthand way of epitomizing the essence of the gospel, with particular reference to its cause and its effect."²

The three-fold title "Lord Jesus Christ" indicates His exalted rank, His saving significance, and His divine commission respectively.³

1:4 Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins" in two respects: He gave Himself all through His earthly ministry as the Suffering Servant of God (cf. Isa. 53), and He gave Himself as the final sin-offering on the cross. Both aspects of His self-sacrifice could be in view here. Paul probably wanted to emphasize the totality of Christ's self-sacrifice. This is an unusual element in Paul's customary salutations, and he evidently included it in this epistle because the Galatians were being told that the Law played a part in their salvation. No, Paul says, we are saved by Christ's sacrifice of Himself.

"The Galatians had practically ignored the atoning death of Christ: comp. ii. 21, v. 4."⁴

The purpose of the Lord's self-sacrifice was that He might "rescue us from this present evil age," specifically, the evil that dominates the inter-advent era during which Christians live. In

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1838.

²Longenecker, p. 7.

³Fung, p. 39.

⁴Lightfoot, p. 73.

contrast, the age to come (cf. Eph. 1:21) is the era in which righteousness will dominate, when Jesus Christ, and later God the Father, will rule directly (i.e., in the earthly messianic kingdom and in the new heavens and earth).

"'deliver' ['rescue'] strikes the keynote of the epistle. The Gospel is a rescue, an emancipation from a state of bondage. See esp. iv. 9, 31, v. 1, 13."¹

Christians are in the world, but we are free to live apart from the evil that dominates it thanks to Christ's work for us. Not only so but the Lord will remove us from it, by death or translation (at the Rapture). Both aspects of our deliverance were probably in Paul's mind as he wrote these words, though the idea that Christ has presently removed us out of the world was not what he meant. Christ's death transferred the believer from Satan's power to God's power, from one sphere to the other (cf. Col. 1:13).

"In this one verse Paul has described several aspects of the redemption wrought by Christ: its cause ('for our sins,' that is, because of them), its means (Christ 'sacrificed himself'), its purpose and effect ('for our sins,' that is, for their expiation [an act of making amends for guilt]; 'to rescue us'), and its origin ('the will of our God and Father'). Thereby Paul has in fact touched on the chief argument of the letter, and succinctly announced in anticipatory fashion the main contents of its doctrinal section, inasmuch as the point of the controversy between Paul and his Galatian opponents lies precisely in the significance of Christ and his redemptive work and more specifically in the bearing of this work on the law."²

¹Ibid.

²Fung, p. 42. Cf. Ridderbos, p. 43; and Burton, p. 14.

1:5 This is the only time in his epistles that Paul ended his salutation with a doxology (though in 2 Corinthians 1 and Ephesians 1 doxologies follow the salutation immediately; cf. also 1 Pet. 1).

"The new believers in Galatia were in danger of robbing God of the glory due to Him."¹

"Another feature of this salutation is the extended description of the writer. ... It conveys at once the impression of authority, which underlies the subsequent argument throughout the epistle."²

B. DENUNCIATION 1:6-10

In his following words Paul rebuked his readers for turning away from the gospel that he had preached to them and for turning toward "a different gospel." He accused them of being religious turncoats. He did so in order to impress them with the great folly of their action. Typically in Paul's epistles he expressed his purpose for writing in his second paragraph. The fiery opening of this epistle presents it "like a lion turned loose in the arena of Christianity."³

"An indignant expression of surprise takes the place of the usual thanksgiving for the faith of his converts. This is the sole instance where St Paul omits to express his thankfulness in addressing any church."⁴

"The general proposition or *causa* of the letter is to persuade the Galatians to reject the Judaizers' nongospel and to continue in the true gospel Paul had preached to them."⁵

¹Robert N. Wilkin, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:823.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 56.

³Longenecker, p. lvii.

⁴Lightfoot, p. 75.

⁵Walter B. Russell III, "Rhetorical Analysis of the Book of Galatians, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):436. His previous article in this two-part series, "Rhetorical Analysis of the Book of Galatians, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:599 (July-

1:6-7 In every other one of his canonical epistles, except 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul commended his readers before launching into the main subject of his letter, regardless of his general purpose in writing. Here he recorded no such praise. Its absence stressed the seriousness of his readers' error and the urgency of his appeal to them.

The best evidence points to Paul's writing Galatians before the Jerusalem Council, held in A.D. 49 and after he and Barnabas had evangelized Asia Minor on their first missionary journey (Acts 13—14). I am assuming the South Galatia destination and early date of the epistle. If this assumption is correct, it had been only a few months since his readers had accepted the genuine gospel that Paul had preached to them and had turned from it to another "gospel."¹

The Galatian believers had begun to turn away "quickly" in the sense that not much time had elapsed between Paul's preaching to them and their turning away from his teaching. The meaning is not that their apostasy had been rapid or speedy.² The Greek word *thaumazo* ("I am amazed") was a conventional expression in Greek letters that signaled astonishment, rebuke, disapproval, and disappointment.³ The Greek word *tacheos* ("quickly") also has the sense of easily (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 5:22). The One who had "called" the Galatians was God (cf. v. 15; 5:8).

"In the epistles *kalein* ["to call"] is always used with regard to the successful call and never only with reference to the *invitatio* [invitation] which one has rejected."⁴

"... Paul's converts were in actuality recapitulating the scenarios of Israel's apostasies and rebuffing

September 1993):341-58, describes rhetorical analysis as an interpretive tool. See also Longenecker, pp. cv-cxiv, for rhetorical analyses and outlines.

¹See also Alford, 3:2:4.

²Burton, p. 19.

³Longenecker, p. 11.

⁴Lenski, p. 34.

the very One whom they professed to be attempting to worship more adequately."¹

The word "gospel," of course, means good news. However the "gospel" that fascinated his readers was not good news. The Greek word *heteros*, meaning another of a different kind, appears in verse 6 ["different"], while *allos*, meaning another of the same kind, occurs in verse 7 ["another account"]. Sometimes these Greek words are interchangeable (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:4), but here and elsewhere they indicate significant differences. Paul meant: There is no other gospel.² Perhaps that is why he called it "the gospel of Christ" here (but not elsewhere, cf. v. 11; 2:2, 5, 14). This new, different "gospel" was bad news, not good news. Teachers of false doctrine who were stirring up unrest had followed Paul. The root of the word translated "disturbing" (v. 7) is one that describes the opposite of what the word translated "peace" (v. 3) means. These false teachers were distorting the good news of Christ.

"The modern church has become less clear about the nature of the gospel, but it would do well to ponder the importance that Paul here attaches to distinctions between the true and false gospel."³

Paul consistently referred to the Galatian troublemakers in the third person, but he addressed his readers in the second person. This strongly suggests that the false teachers originated from outside the church rather than from within it. We must deduce who they were from what Paul wrote about them in this epistle (cf. 1:6-9; 2:4-5; 3:1; 4:17; 5:10, 12; 6:12-13). Probably they were Jews who were putting pressure on Gentiles to believe and to live like religious Jews. This is the traditional view as contrasted with the "two-opponent" view (i.e., Judaizers and libertines who emphasized the Spirit), and the "Gnostic/syncretistic Jewish Christians" view (i.e., one

¹Longenecker, p. 15.

²Rendall, 3:152.

³Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 62.

group of opponents within Judaism with both Judaistic and libertine traits).¹

"The word *pervert* ["distort"] is the Greek word *metastrepho*. It is a strong word, used by Dr. Luke in speaking of the sun *turned* to darkness (see Acts 2:20), and by James, speaking of laughter *turned* to mourning (see James 4:9). To attempt to change the gospel has the effect of making it the very opposite of what it really is. This is important to see."²

1:8 Paul leveled his strongest verbal artillery against these teachers. They apparently claimed the highest authority for their teaching since Paul warned his readers to reject it even if it came from angelic messengers sent directly from heaven. This is an example of hyperbole: exaggeration for the sake of emphasis not meant to be taken literally.³ By "accursed" Paul meant under God's judgment: set apart and dedicated to destruction. Islam claims that Mohammed received his revelations from the angel Gabriel, and Mormonism claims that Joseph Smith received his revelations from the angel Maroni.⁴

"In Paul's eyes, the acknowledgment of Jesus as Messiah logically implied the abrogation [abolition] of the [Mosaic] law ... If Christ displaced the law as the activating centre of Paul's own life, he equally displaced the law in the economy of God, in the ordering of salvation-history. Therefore, if the law was still in force as a way of salvation and life, the messianic age had not yet dawned, and Jesus accordingly was not the Messiah."⁵

¹For further study of these views, see Walter B. Russell III, "Who Were Paul's Opponents in Galatia?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):329-50.

²McGee, 5:153.

³See Tenney, *Galatians*, p. 138, for a chart of the figures of speech in Galatians.

⁴See Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, p. 151; John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects*, p. 42.

⁵Bruce, p. 83.

1:9 Paul repeated his warning for emphasis. The prior warning, mentioned in verse 9, probably refers to what Paul had told the Galatians when he was with them in person rather than to what he had just said in verse 8.¹ "We" implies Paul and his fellow apostles, not just Paul alone.

"The vehemence with which Paul denounces those who teach another gospel (literally, he says, 'Let them be damned') has bothered some commentators, as well as other readers of the letter. But this shows how little the gospel of God's grace is understood and appreciated and how little many Christians are concerned for the advance of biblical truth."²

Being "accursed" evidently refers to being under God's judgment, not just excommunication, since even an angel could be the possible object of this curse. Paul changed from the Greek subjunctive mood of possibility in verse 8 to the indicative mood of actuality in verse 9. Not only was this curse a possibility for the heretics (v. 8) but it was certain to fall on them (v. 9)

It is extremely serious to distort the gospel of God's grace and so mislead a person regarding his or her relationship to God. It can result in their eternal damnation.³

1:10 The false teachers evidently charged Paul with preaching in order to win the favor of his listeners, perhaps even to gain a large number of converts in order to enhance his own reputation (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1). They might have been charging him with preaching "easy believism," since he advocated faith in Christ alone for salvation.

"There have always been preachers who have sought popular acclaim above all else, and there are some still. It is part of fallen human nature that even those charged with the responsibility of

¹Cf. Eadie, p. 28; Morris, p. 45; Burton, p. 29; Longenecker, p. 17.

²Boice, p. 429.

³See Ironside, pp. 25-27.

proclaiming the gospel can fall into the trap of trying to be popular rather than faithful."¹

Paul's critics may have accused him of preaching one thing to some people and the opposite to others (cf. 5:2 and 11). It is understandable how some people might have concluded this (cf. 1 Cor. 9:22). However Paul's argument in this verse was that a person can only be the bond-servant of one master (cf. Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). Paul was claiming to have behaved among the Galatians consistent with his commitment to Christ as his Master.

"... his uncompromising attitude as reflected in the severity of his language in condemning the counterfeit gospel (vv. 8f.) is proof positive that he is no men-pleaser."²

Paul liked to describe himself as a "bond-servant" (Greek *doulos*) in relation to Christ (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). This Greek word also describes Moses (Josh. 14:7; Rev. 15:3), David (cf. Ps. 89:3), and Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 10:10) in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament. In the New Testament this word describes Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:7), Christian leaders (2 Tim. 2:24), the apostles (2 Cor. 4:5), the Old Testament prophets (Rev. 10:7; 11:18), James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), Jude (Jude 1), John (Rev. 1:1), Christians (Acts 4:29; 1 Cor. 7:22; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 6:6; 1 Pet. 2:16; Rev. 1:1, 2:20), Tribulation saints (Rev. 7:3), and all believers (Rev. 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6).

"Not long ago I listened to a local Southern California preacher on television. ... He spoke of Christ's death and resurrection. But he failed to mention that the people to whom he was speaking were sinners and needed a Savior. He neglected to inform his audience that Jesus died for them and they needed to trust Him to be saved. Rather, he talked about commitment. He invited folk to

¹Morris, p. 46.

²Fung, p. 49.

commit their lives to Christ. Let us be honest, friend. Christ does not want your old life and He does not want mine. We have nothing to commit to Him. He wants to do something through us today. Oh, if only we could learn that!"¹

"Already in these opening verses the two key concepts in the letter have surfaced—gospel and grace."²

II. PERSONAL DEFENSE OF PAUL'S GOSPEL 1:11—2:21

The first of the three major sections of the epistle begins here. We could classify them as history (1:11—2:21), theology (chs. 3—4), and ethics (5:1—6:10).

"... Paul was ... following the logic of the Christian life: Because of who God is and what he has done (history) we must believe what he has said (theology) in order to live as he commands (ethics)."³

Baxter described this threefold division as: the *basis* of our liberty (chs. 1—2), the *truth* of our liberty (chs. 3—4), and the *effect* of our liberty (chs. 5—6).⁴

A. INDEPENDENCE FROM OTHER APOSTLES 1:11-24

This is the first of three subsections in Paul's autobiographical account that together comprise the historical portion of the epistle. This first section relates Paul's early Christian experience and his first meeting with the church leaders in Jerusalem. The other two subsections record his meeting with the Jerusalem leaders concerning the scope and sphere of his missionary work (2:1-10) and his confrontation with Peter in Antioch (2:11-21). The entire section builds up to Paul's pronouncement that justification is by faith alone.

¹McGee, 5:154.

²Timothy George, *Galatians*, p. 102.

³*Ibid.*, p. 66. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 3.

⁴Baxter, 6:148.

1. The source of Paul's gospel 1:11-17

Paul clarified the source of his gospel message in this pericope (section of text) in order to convince his readers that the gospel that he had preached to them was the true gospel. What the false teachers were presenting, on the other hand, was heresy. He began an autobiographical section here (1:11—2:14). It fills one-fifth of the entire epistle. In this section Paul went to great pains in order to prove that both his gospel and his commission to preach it came directly from Jesus Christ (vv. 15-16). It did not come to him from any intermediary. Wiersbe observed that Paul presented himself in this section as the persecutor (vv. 13-14), the believer (vv. 15-16b, 24), and the preacher (vv. 16c-23).¹

1:11-12 Whenever Paul wrote "I would have you know" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; 15:1; 2 Cor. 8:1) he intended to draw special attention to what he was about to say. Paul did not receive his gospel from traditional sources (his teachers) nor did he learn it through traditional means (the curriculum of his formal education). The gospel came to Paul as a special revelation from Jesus Christ, and it was also, and primarily here, a revelation of Christ's Person—who Jesus Christ really is (v. 12)²:

"... it was the gospel of justification by faith which came to Paul as the result of a direct revelation of Jesus Christ."³

"... Christianity is not simply a religion, it is a divine revelation."⁴

"These opening statements present the whole matter in a nutshell."⁵

1:13-14 Paul's first point in proving that he had not received his gospel from other people (vv. 11-12) was that, before his conversion,

¹Wiersbe, 1:686-89.

²Burton, p. 43.

³Fung, p. 54.

⁴Ironside, p. 44.

⁵Lenski, p. 47.

he was under no Christian influence whatsoever, but he was, in fact, a violent opponent of the Christian gospel.

"... Paul could very well have validated his actions against Christians by reference to such godly precedents as (1) Moses' slaying of the immoral Israelites at Baal-peor (cf. Num 25:1-5); (2) Phinehas' slaying of the Israelite man and Midianite woman in the plains of Moab (cf. Num 25:6-15); and (3) the actions of Mattathias and the Hasidim in rooting out apostasy among the people (cf. 1 Macc 2:23-28, 42-48). Perhaps even the divine commendation of Phinehas' action in Num 25:11-13 rang in his ears ... [cf. 2 Macc. 6:13]"¹

Paul's second point was that he had been an unusually promising young man who was advancing in Judaism just before his conversion. Paul was at that very time surpassing his contemporaries: he was an "up and comer." He had been in such a frame of mind as to make his reception of the gospel impossible. The trajectory of his former life was aimed in the exact opposite direction from what it became.

"This probably does not mean that he became more pious than they [Paul's contemporaries], but rather that he was more highly esteemed by those in positions of influence, which would have resulted in his being entrusted with more important assignments, such as the trip to Damascus during which he was converted."²

The apostle's actions following that revelation on the Damascus Road were consistent with his having received a divine revelation. The whole direction of his life had changed. He had violently rejected the gospel and had tried to stamp it out, believing that it was blasphemous heresy. He had followed his ancestral traditions, including his teachers' interpretations of the Old Testament. Moreover he had been uncommonly

¹Longenecker, p. 28.

²Morris, p. 53.

zealous to obey them, to teach them, and to see that the Jews carried them out. "Beyond measure" (v. 13, Gr. *hyperbole*) means to an extraordinary degree (cf. Phil. 3:4-6).

"Paul's extreme zeal for the law as the reason for his persecution of the Church indicates that he probably belonged to the radical wing of the Pharisaic movement, perhaps the school of Shammai (certainly, Gal. 3:10 and especially 5:3 are more representative of that school than of the school of Hillel). If so, the likelihood is that 'he was rather hostile to the Gentiles and had little interest in winning them for Judaism.'"¹

"Paul's main point in vv. 13-14 was to show that there was nothing in his religious background and preconversion life that could have in any way prepared him for a positive response to the gospel. Quite the contrary."²

"Paul was saved, not *in* Judaism, not *by* Judaism, but *from* Judaism."³

1:15-17 Paul next drew evidence that his gospel did not come to him from other Christians who witnessed his conversion experience. What totally revolutionized Paul was God's choice to reveal Himself to him (cf. Isa. 6:1-9; 49:1-6; Jer. 1:4; Ezek. 1:4—3:11).⁴ God had taken the initiative, completely "through His grace," and Paul had simply responded to that grace. God's purpose for Paul, generally, was to manifest Christ through him, which is His purpose for every believer (cf. 2:20; 4:6). Specifically, God's purpose was that Paul would become an evangelist to the Gentiles. This calling had been God's intent

¹Fung, p. 72. His quotation is from S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, pp. 39-40.

²George, p. 113.

³McGee, 5:155.

⁴See J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, pp. 24-35, for parallels between God's calling of Paul and His calling of Jeremiah and the Suffering Servant of the Lord.

from the time of Paul's birth (cf. Isa. 49:1-6; Jer. 1:5; Rom. 1:1). Paul's conversion probably took place in A.D. 34.¹

"Paul had emphasized that he did not receive his message from men before or at the time of his conversion. Now he affirmed that he was free from human influences afterward as well."²

Since his calling had been undoubtedly supernatural and abundantly clear, Paul did not need to consult with anyone else about it. The word "flesh" (v. 16) is important in Galatians. It has several meanings: sinful human nature, the physical body, and here, with "and blood," the whole of humanity (cf. 2:16; Rom. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:29). It is a synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a prominent part stands for the whole, or vice versa.³

Neither did Paul need the approval of the other apostles who had also seen and received commissions from the risen Christ. Paul's revelation was just as authoritative as any that they had received. Instead of checking his commission with the other apostles he went to an undefined area of Arabia. In Paul's day the geographical area of Arabia included the lands east of Israel, south of Syria, and west of Mesopotamia. Damascus stood on its northwestern edge. Probably Paul retreated into the part of Arabia just south of Damascus.⁴

"The word Arabia was the term applied by Greek writers from Herodotus down, to the whole or various portions of the vast peninsula between the Red Sea on the southwest, the Persian Gulf on the southeast, and the Euphrates River on the northeast."⁵

"Arabia was divided into three sections at this point in history. Reference in Galatians must be to

¹See Appendix 1: "Sequence of Paul's Activities" at the end of my notes on Acts.

²Campbell, p. 592.

³See Robert A. Pyne, "Dependence and Duty: The Spiritual Life in Galatians 5 and Romans 6," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 145.

⁴See C. W. Briggs, "The Apostle Paul in Arabia," *Biblical World* 41 (1913):255-59.

⁵Wuest, 1:3:52.

Arabia Petraea, the northwest section of Arabia, controlled by the Nabataeans."¹

Another view is that Paul proceeded south to Mt. Sinai, which he later identified in this epistle as being in Arabia (4:25).² He went into Arabia apparently to restudy the Scriptural revelations of Messiah.³ This seems more likely than that he went there to evangelize.⁴ Arabia was sparsely populated, so it seems to have been an unlikely place to go to evangelize. Then Paul returned to Damascus, rather than going to Jerusalem, still feeling no need to obtain the blessing of the other apostles. Paul was not being arrogant or uncooperative by behaving as he did. He simply was preparing himself since he believed in the divine origin and authority of his commission.

"Our study of vv. 11-17 has shown that Paul's conversion is to be understood as involving (a) recognition of the risen Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Son of God, (b) the experience of being justified by faith apart from legal works, (c) the revelation of the basic principles of the gospel, and (d) the call to be an apostle to the Gentiles."⁵

Verses 11-17 constitute one of six New Testament passages that describe Paul's conversion and calling (cf. Acts 9:1-7; 22:6-10; 26:12-16; 1 Cor. 9:1-2; 15:3-11).⁶

2. The events of Paul's early ministry 1:18-24

This section advances the point of the previous one: Paul was not dependent on the other apostles for his ministry any more than he needed them to validate his calling. This explanation would have further convinced his readers of the divine source and authority of his message.

¹Vos, p. 34.

²Lightfoot, pp. 88-89; Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 2:209-15.

³Burton, p. 55.

⁴Fung, pp. 68-69.

⁵Ibid., p. 70.

⁶See George Lyttelton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Saint Paul*.

1:18-19 "Then" (Gr. *Epeita*, Next) introduces the next event in Paul's experience chronologically (cf. v. 21; 2:1). He had given a consecutive account of his movements omitting no essential steps. He had done so in order to show that he had functioned as an apostle before contacting the other apostles. Paul's critics seem to have been claiming that it was really the other apostles who had commissioned Paul.

It was three years after his conversion, not after his return to Damascus, that Paul finally revisited Jerusalem and met Peter ("Cephas") for the first time and "James," the Lord's brother (i.e., A.D. 37).¹ We do not know how much of this three-year period he spent in Arabia, in Damascus, and elsewhere. He went to Jerusalem in order to get personally acquainted with these apostles, not to get his gospel from them or to make inquiry of them.² These movements were hardly indications that he had to get them to approve his message. Furthermore he only stayed 15 days in Jerusalem and during that time did not see any of the other apostles. If he had needed to work out a theology consistent with the teaching of the other apostles, extended meetings with all of them would have been necessary.

"These brothers [of the Lord] have been regarded (a) by the Orthodox churches as sons of Joseph by a previous marriage (the 'Epiphanian' view), (b) in Roman Catholic interpretation as Jesus' first cousins, the sons of 'Mary wife of Clopas,' who was the Virgin's sister (Jn. 19:25; the 'Hieronymian' view), and (c) by Protestant exegetes as Jesus' uterine brothers, sons of Joseph and Mary (the 'Helvidian' view). This last view accords best with the natural implications of Mk. 6:3, where the context suggests that the

¹Lightfoot, p. 84; Jamieson, et al., p. 1260; Fung, p. 73; Morris, p. 59.

²O. Hofius, "Gal 1:18: *historesai Kephana*," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75 (1984):73-84. Cf. R. Schnackenburg, "Apostles before and during Paul's Time," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, p. 290, footnote 1.

brothers, together with the sisters unspecified by name, were, like Jesus himself, children of Mary."¹

Alexander Whyte imagined what those 15 days must have included:

"...never before nor since had Peter such a hungry hearer as just his present visitor and interrogator from Arabia and Damascus. Peter began by telling Paul all about that day when his brother Andrew so burst in upon him about the Messiah. And then that day only second to it, on the Lake of Gennesaret. And then Matthew the publican's feast, and so on, till Peter soon saw what it was that Paul had come so far to hear. And then he went on with the good Samaritan, and the lost piece of silver, and the lost sheep, and the lost son. For fifteen days and fifteen night this went on till the two prostrate men took their shoes off their feet when they entered the Garden of Gethsemane. And both at the cock-crowing, and at Calvary, Peter and Paul wept so sore that Mary herself, and Mary Magdalene, did not weep like it."²

1:20 Paul may have added this parenthetical verse in order to help the Galatians realize not only that he was telling the truth (cf. 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31; 1 Thess. 2:5) but that he truly had received his gospel by divine revelation. The truth of the gospel, as he preached it, was at stake in the truthfulness of what he said, as was the error of what the false teachers were proclaiming.³

"... one can not but wonder why Paul should use such very strong language unless he had been

¹Fung, p. 75. Cf. Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul*, p. 28; Lightfoot, pp. 252-91; Eadie, pp. 57-100.

²Whyte, 2:216-17.

³Cf. J. P. Sampley, "'Before God, I do not lie' (Gal. i.20): Paul's Self-Defence [*sic*] in the Light of Roman Legal Praxis," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976-77):481-82.

charged with misstating the facts about his visits to the other apostles."¹

1:21-24 Paul did not even spend time in Judea, where he might have heard the same gospel that he himself was preaching from the other apostles or Christians. Instead he went north into Syria (above Judea, by way of Caesarea, Acts 9:30) and Cilicia, the province in which his hometown Tarsus stood. He was there when Barnabas sought him out later (Acts 11:25). He ministered in Syria and Cilicia for seven years (A.D. 37-43).

"From c. 25 BC Eastern Cilicia (including Tarsus) was united administratively with Syria to form one imperial province (Syria-Cilicia), governed by a *legatus pro praetore* with his headquarters in Syrian Antioch. This arrangement lasted until AD 72, when Eastern Cilicia was detached from Syria and united with Western Cilicia (Cilicia Tracheia) to form the province of Cilicia."²

"At the time when both epistles were written [i.e., Galatians and 1 Thessalonians], the Roman province of Judaea included Galilee as well as Judaea (in the narrower sense) and Samaria (as it had done since the death of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44); 'Judaea' may then denote here the whole of Palestine [cf. 1 Thess. 2:14]."³

However, in Acts 9:31 Judea clearly refers to a division within what later became known as Palestine.

Paul had so little contact with the churches in Judea that even after several years of ministry the people there could not recognize him by sight. He was becoming unknown to them because he had been away from Judea for so long.⁴ Therefore it was impossible that these churches would have influenced or instructed Paul in his gospel. They only knew him by

¹Burton, p. 61.

²Bruce, p. 103.

³Ibid. Cf. Fung, pp. 80-82.

⁴Rendall, 3:157.

reputation, and they thanked God for what He was doing through him, which was the exact opposite reaction of Paul's Judaizing critics. Certainly the Judean Christians would not have been so happy if Paul had preached a different "gospel" from the one the other apostles had been preaching—and if they had subsequently believed the wrong "gospel."

"It is striking proof of the large space occupied by 'faith' in the mind of the infant Church [v. 23], that it should so soon have passed into a synonym for the Gospel. See Acts vi 7."¹

"*pistis* ["faith"] is not the body of Christian doctrine, in which sense the word is never [? rarely, cf. 1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21] used by Paul, but the faith in Christ which the preachers of the gospel bade men exercise."²

This section (1:11-24) helps us to appreciate how convincing God's revelation on the Damascus Road was to Paul. He not only repented (changed his mind) concerning the person of Christ, but he also received an absolutely clear revelation both of his calling in life from then on and his message. He began to preach the gospel immediately without any authorization to do so from any other leaders of the church. We modern Christians too have an equally clear revelation of our calling (Matt. 28:19-20) and our message (2 Cor. 5:20).

B. INTERDEPENDENCE WITH OTHER APOSTLES 2:1-10

Paul related other events of his previous ministry here, specifically his meeting with the Jerusalem church leaders. He did so to establish for his readers that, although he was not dependent on anyone but God for his message and ministry, he preached the same gospel that the other apostles preached.

¹Lightfoot, p. 86.

²Burton, p. 64.

"While chapter 2 continues Paul's defense of his apostolic authority and the gospel he preached, he focused not on the source of his message but on its content."¹

2:1 From Acts 11:25-26 we learn that Barnabas brought Paul back from Cilicia to assist in the Christian ministry in Antioch of Syria. Paul was living in Cilicia when he visited Jerusalem with Barnabas.

"... this is the third in a series of 'then' clauses Paul stitched together to form an airtight argument for his apostolic independence from the Jerusalem church (cf. 1:18, 21)."²

Probably Paul calculated the 14 years from his conversion date rather than from his first visit to Jerusalem (cf. 1:18).³ Paul visited Jerusalem at least five times, and the visit described here seems to have been his second (Acts 11:27-30).⁴ It was not his third visit to participate in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29).⁵ This seems clear from Paul's statement that it was a "private" meeting (v. 2).

PAUL'S VISITS TO JERUSALEM

¹Campbell, p. 593.

²George, p. 135.

³Eadie, pp. 102-3; G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 485; Rendall, 3:157; Longenecker, p. 45. Lightfoot, p. 102, held the opposite view and dated the writing of Galatians after the writing of 2 Corinthians. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 36-56. See also Ridderbos, p. 76, who also believed that Paul dated the "14 Years" from his first visit to Jerusalem.

⁴See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Chronological Problem of Galatians 2:1-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):334-40; George Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* pp. 56-57; Bruce, pp. 108-9; Longenecker, pp. 45-46; Joe Morgado Jr., "Paul in Jerusalem: A Comparison of His Visits in Acts and Galatians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):55-68; Fung, pp. 9-28, 86; Tenney, *Galatians*, pp. 79-82; and Campbell, p. 593.

⁵Advocates of this view include R. Jewett, *Dating Paul's Life*, pp. 52-54; Conybeare and J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 163, 821-28; Eadie, p. 140; Alford, 3:2:12; Rendall, 3:157; Lenski, p. 68; Hendriksen, pp. 70-71; Ridderbos, p. 80; McGee, 5:157; and Everett F. Harrison, "The Epistle to the Galatians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, pp. 1287-88.

1. The visit after he left Damascus (Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-20)
2. The famine visit (Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:1-10)
3. The visit to attend the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29)
4. The visit at the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:22)
5. The visit at the end of his third missionary journey that resulted in his Caesarean imprisonment (Acts 21:15—23:35)

"Since for the purposes of his argument that he had not been dependent on the other apostles (cf. 1:12, 17) it is his contacts with them that it is pertinent to mention, the fact that he speaks of these as visits to Jerusalem (cf. 1:18) indicates that throughout the period of which he is speaking Jerusalem was the headquarters of the apostles. And this being the case the denial, by implication, that he had been in Jerusalem is the strongest possible way of denying communication with the Twelve."¹

The references to "Barnabas" (vv. 1, 9, 13) suggest that the readers knew him. If Paul wrote this epistle to Christians living in South Galatia, which I think he did, they probably remembered Barnabas as Paul's fellow missionary who ministered to them on Paul's first missionary journey.²

"Titus" was a Gentile believer (v. 3) and one of Paul's faithful disciples in ministry. When Paul wrote this epistle, Titus was apparently living in Antioch. Later Titus would represent Paul to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-16), to the Jerusalem church (2 Cor. 8:6-24; 9:3-5; 12:18), and to the Cretan church (Titus 1:5).

¹Burton, p. 67.

²See Richard Bauckham, "Barnabas in Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (January 1979):61-70.

Titus "possessed considerable people skills ... and was a man of unquestioned integrity, especially with regard to financial resources."¹

2:2 The first reason that Paul went to Jerusalem on this occasion evidently stemmed from one of two events: Possibly Agabus' vision of an impending famine, and the Antioch Christians' consequent desire to send a gift to their hungry Jerusalem brethren, may have prompted his visit (Acts 11:27-30). On the other hand, Paul himself may have received a vision directing him to make this trip. In either case a divine revelation was one factor that moved Paul to visit Jerusalem then.

"The use of the present tense, *kerusso* ["I preach"], reflects the apostle's thought that he is still at the time of writing preaching the same gospel which he had been preaching before he made this visit to Jerusalem."²

Paul considered his calling to be to the people of Gentile lands ("among the Gentiles"), not just to the Gentile people (cf. v. 8; 1:16).³

Paul's fear that he might "be running, or had run," in vain may at first seem to refer to concern that the Jerusalem apostles, upon hearing what he had been preaching, would disapprove of it. But this cannot have been his fear. He previously had said that he was absolutely certain that his gospel, which came to him by special revelation, was the true gospel (1:11-12). He had also said that he did not need to get it approved by the other apostles before he preached it (1:16-17).

It seems, rather, that Paul feared that if he did not contact the Jerusalem apostles (Peter, James, and John: "those who were of reputation") his critics might undermine his evangelistic work. They could have pointed to the fact that Paul had had no fellowship with the Jerusalem apostles. Then they might have gone on to suggest that the reason there was no

¹Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 273.

²Burton, p. 70.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

fellowship was because there was a difference of opinion between Paul and the other apostles over the gospel message. To avoid this possibility Paul met with "James and Cephas (Peter) and John" (v. 9) privately. They may have met in private because Paul was a wanted man in Jerusalem at this time, and a public meeting could have resulted in more harm than good.

There may have been at least two other reasons for this meeting:

"... positively expressed, his concern was to assure that they would recognize his converts as genuine Christians and members of the Church. He was concerned, in other words, with officially securing the freedom of the Gentiles from the requirements of the law and their equality of status with Jewish Christians. Implicit in this concern for Gentile freedom was concern for the unity of the Church: Paul's anxiety was not lest refusal of recognition on the part of the Jerusalem authorities should thereby render his own work invalid and his Gentile Christians non-Christian, but lest such refusal should bring about a rupture of the one Church into two separate branches of Jewish and Gentile Christianity."¹

2:3 Paul's fear was not that he had been preaching an erroneous gospel. It was that the false teachers, who were saying that Gentile converts had to become Jews before they could be saved, might undercut his work (cf. Acts 15:1).

"... Paul could never tolerate any presentation of Christianity which regarded it as a form of Judaism."²

James, Peter, and John apparently agreed with Paul, the proof of which was their willingness to let Titus remain

¹Fung, p. 90. Paragraph division omitted.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 67.

uncircumcised. Circumcision was a rite by which Gentile males became Jewish proselytes.

"Within the crosscurrents of political messianism and apocalyptic speculation, the idea grew that the Messiah would only come when the Holy Land had been purified of all uncircumcised Gentiles."¹

This is Paul's first mention of circumcision, but he dealt with it more fully later in this epistle.

2:4-5 Evidently "false brothers" (counterfeit Christians) had secretly entered the Jerusalem church and were representing themselves as true Christians. They had opposed what Paul had taught. Their intent was to bring Paul and all other preachers and hearers of the true gospel into bondage by imposing circumcision as a condition for salvation. They were not successful. Paul did not yield in subjection to them "even for an hour." "The truth of the gospel" means the true gospel, "the gospel in its integrity ... the doctrine of grace."² The "freedom" to which Paul referred is not liberty in the abstract but the freedom that believers have in Christ Jesus.³

"It thus emerges that the interlopers were sham-Christians precisely because they had not really grasped the fundamental principle of the gospel—justification by faith apart from works of the law."⁴

2:6 Paul's reference to James, Peter, and John may sound a bit insolent ("what they were makes no difference to me"), but his point was that they were not superior as apostles to him as an apostle. They contributed nothing to his authority or message, which he had received from Christ.

"The repetition of the expression 'men of high reputation' from v. 2 (where NEB has 'men of

¹George, p. 143.

²Lightfoot, p. 107.

³Morris, p. 69.

⁴Fung, p. 94.

repute' for the same Greek expression [*hoi dokountes*]) seems to indicate that it is a title given by the Jerusalem church to its leaders, which Paul uses, possibly with a tinge of irony, in depreciation of the arrogant and extravagant claims which the Judaizers were making for the Jerusalem leaders."¹

The expression "allows Paul both to acknowledge the fact that these men possess authority and power and to remain at a distance with regard to his own subservience to such authority."²

2:7-9 James, Peter, and John did not seek to change Paul's message. They agreed with it. They shook hands in agreement over the gospel even though the targets of their ministries were different.

"Peter was the great missionary. Hence, when Paul is speaking of the ministry to the Jews, Peter is prominent and James is not mentioned (vv7, 8). In dealing with a particular and official act of the Jerusalem church, however, James (who apparently presided at the council) is mentioned in the first position with the names of Peter and John following."³

"The grace" that had been given to Paul (v. 9) refers to his apostleship among the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; cf. Gal. 1:16; Rom. 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 3:8; Phil. 1:7).

"The use of the phrase *eis ta ethne* [lit. among the Gentiles, v. 8] rather than [*en*] *tois ethnesin* [lit. to the Gentiles] ... favours the conclusion that the division, though on a basis of preponderant nationality, was nevertheless territorial rather than racial. ... The whole evidence, therefore,

¹Ibid., p. 95. NEB refers to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*.

²H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, p. 92. See also Burton, p. 88.

³Boice, p. 444.

clearly indicates that the meaning of the agreement was that Paul and Barnabas were to preach the gospel in Gentile lands, the other apostles in Jewish lands."¹

"In all likelihood, however, the issue of territory *or* race was not so sharply differentiated in the minds of early Jewish Christians as it is by commentators today. There could have been considerable overlapping between the two spheres."²

"In Paul's eyes the compelling logic of the Christ-event pointed to the supersession of the age of law by the age of the Spirit (3:13f.); it was because there was now [still] but one way of justification for Jews and Gentiles alike—justification by faith (cf. Rom. 3:29f.)—that 'in Christ Jesus' there was 'neither Jew nor Greek' (Gal. 3:28)."³

"While every Christian has an important role to play in missions and evangelism, we must never forget that Jesus himself is the great Missionary, the Son who has been sent from the Father; and the Holy Spirit is the true Evangelist, the divine One who convicts and converts."⁴

2:10 The only request that James, Peter, and John made of Paul was that he should not neglect "the poor" in his ministry. Paul had already made a commitment to do this. "The poor" could be a shorthand reference to the poor saints in Jerusalem.⁵ Or it could simply be a reference to the poor in general.

I imagine that Paul had a special concern for the poor saints whom he had made widows and orphans during his pre-

¹Burton, p. 98.

²Longenecker, p. 59.

³Bruce, p. 124.

⁴George, p. 163.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 165; Fung, p. 102.

Christian years, when he had imprisoned and put to death many believers in Jesus.

"Thus the events of Paul's second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, like the events of his life both before and after his call by God, substantiate his claim that he received both his gospel and his apostleship directly from the risen Lord. If the earlier set of events supports this by showing that there was never a time when he was in a position to have derived his gospel and apostolic commission from the Jerusalem leaders, the events of the second visit support it by showing the full recognition given by those leaders to the gospel and apostolic office which already were his prior to the meeting of the two parties. A third major support will be furnished by the Antioch incident (2:11-21).¹

This section helpfully illustrates the diversity within the unity of Christ's body. Different Christians can minister to different segments of humanity and to people in different regions. Nevertheless there must be unity when it comes to the message that we proclaim. Paul expounded other types of differences that exist within the body elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 12:28-31; Eph. 4:1-16; et al.).

C. CORRECTION OF ANOTHER APOSTLE 2:11-21

Paul next mentioned the incident in which he reproved Peter, who was the Judaizers' favorite apostle, in order to further establish his own apostolic authority and to emphasize the truth of his gospel.

"In Antioch much more clearly than at Jerusalem the issue was made between legalism and anti-legalism. It was incidental to the event at Antioch, but from the point of view from which Paul introduced the matter here, a matter of primary importance that on this occasion more decisively than ever before he declared his independence of Jerusalem and her apostles."²

¹Ibid., p. 104.

²Burton, p. 114.

2:11 Peter had shaken hands with Paul in Jerusalem (v. 9). However when Peter ("Cephas") came to Antioch of Syria, Paul opposed him. Luke did not record this event in Acts, and we cannot date it exactly. It may have happened shortly after Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem to Antioch or, less likely, after the Jerusalem Council (cf. Acts 15:30). I think the second possibility is less likely because I believe Paul wrote Galatians before the Jerusalem Council, as explained above.¹

2:12-13 Peter customarily ate meals with the Christians at Antioch, who were both Jews and Gentiles. He did so until some Jewish visitors came from Jerusalem (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3). They may have been from the group that believed that Gentiles needed to undergo circumcision before they could become Christians. If so they were not "from James" in the sense that James endorsed their views. He did not (v. 9). Probably they were simply Jews who came from the same church as James.²

When these men—Paul did not call them brothers—came, they intimidated Peter (cf. Prov. 29:25) who gradually separated himself from the Gentile Christians, evidently in order to avoid conflict with the Jewish visitors from Jerusalem. Some other Jewish believers living in Antioch followed Peter's example as did even Barnabas. They were being hypocritical, saying one thing (that ethnic Jews and Gentiles could eat together) and doing another (abstaining from eating together).

"The leaven of the Pharisee, hypocrisy, is manifest in Peter's action."³

Peter had a tendency to compromise his convictions when he was under pressure (cf. Matt. 16:16-23; 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27).

"It is perhaps curious that nobody seems to have recalled that Jesus ate 'with publicans and

¹So also Longenecker, pp. lxxvii-lxxxvii, 71.

²Ibid., p. 73.

³Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 3:2:211.

sinner', which can scarcely mean that he conformed to strict Jewish practice."¹

2:14 Why did Paul not follow the procedure for dealing with an erring brother that Jesus had specified (Matt. 18:15: "show him his fault in private")? He obviously knew about it (cf. 6:1). He may have done so before rebuking Peter publicly. But since the offense was public, the rebuke also needed to be public. In ministry it is frequently difficult to know whether to follow Matthew 18:15 or 1 Timothy 5:20 in dealing with people who need correction. Normally we should start with a private rebuke (Matt. 18:15), and then, if unsuccessful, proceed to public confrontation (Matt. 18:16-17).

Paul probably rebuked Peter publicly because Peter's behavior had influenced so many other people (v. 13). He criticized Peter for inconsistency. Peter had also cast doubt on the truth that God accepts Jews and Gentiles equally, thus playing into the hands of the Judaizers. In addition, he was insulting his Gentile brethren by refraining to eat with them.

The weaker brethren in Jerusalem may have concerned Peter. Would they conclude that Peter was participating in other Gentile activities because he ate with them? The Gentile brethren in Antioch, whom Peter made to look and feel like second-class Christians by his behavior, concerned Paul. Peter and Barnabas may have felt that they needed to become all things to all men in order to win some (1 Cor. 9:22). Paul saw that their behavior was implying a difference between Jewish and Gentile Christians. This was as much a threat to Gentile liberty as the intrusion of the false brothers (v. 4).

Peter and Paul both acknowledged the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church (cf. Acts 11:17). But it evidently took Peter longer to see the practical implications of this truth and to apply them to his own conduct consistently.

¹Morris, p. 77. Cf. Mark 7:19.

2:15-16 Some interpreters believe that Paul's words to Peter continue through the end of chapter 2 (e.g., NASB, NIV, NKJV).¹ Others believe they end with verse 14 (e.g., RSV, NRSV, NET2).² It seems more likely to me that they end with verse 14.

"This verse [15] and the next form a single, overloaded sentence in the Greek; they have been aptly described as 'Paul's doctrine of justification in a nutshell' ..."³

Unsaved Jews regarded Gentiles as "sinners." Paul ironically referred to them as sinners here since Peter was discriminating against them by behaving as he did.

"This characterization at once focuses attention on the sharp distinction between Jew and Gentile, for what made the Gentiles sinners in the estimation of the Jews was not only that they did not observe the law but also that they did not even possess it and consequently lacked the possibility of obtaining righteousness through it."⁴

Paul went on to say that God does not justify people (declare them righteous) because they keep the Mosaic Law, part of which involved observing dietary regulations.

"To be justified, *dikaiousthai*, is to be accounted by God acceptable to him, to be approved of God, accepted as being such as God desires man to be."⁵

"By *erga nomou* ["works of (the) law"] Paul means deeds of obedience to formal statutes done in the legalistic spirit, with the expectation of thereby

¹NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, and NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*. See also *The New Scofield Reference Bible* note.

²RSV refers to *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, NRSV refers to *The Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version*, and NET2 refers to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.

³Fung, p. 112. His quotation is of W. Schmithals, *Paul and James*, p. 73.

⁴Fung, p. 113.

⁵Burton, p. 119.

meriting and securing divine approval and award, such obedience, in other words, as the legalists rendered to the law of the O. T. as expanded and interpreted by them."¹

Other scholars, following E. P. Sanders, however, have denied that first-century Jews were legalistic. They believe that these Jews were not attempting to gain favor with God by observing the Mosaic Law, but were only expressing their convictions in a lifestyle that was compatible with Jewish traditions.²

"... Paul's recital of his address to Peter in Antioch is progressively colored by polemic against his Galatian detractors and, as it were, gradually shades into a theological discussion with his readers."³

"... Paul intends by the phrase 'works of the law' the Jewish way of life, described in 2:14 by the word *ioudaikos* ["like a Jew"], characterized by exclusiveness and epitomized by the murder of Christ and the persecution of his followers, and argues that to return to that way of life would be to make Christ a servant of sin."⁴

Justification comes by believing in Christ—period (cf. Acts 16:31). Paul, Peter, and the other believers assembled had simply believed in Christ (cf. Job 9:1-2). Paul stated as a maxim that obedience to works of the Law never justified anybody (Rom. 3:20).⁵

¹Ibid., p. 120.

²See, for example, Longenecker, p. 86.

³Fung, p. 105.

⁴R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "Sacred Violence and 'Works of Law.' 'Is Christ Then an Agent of Sin?' (Galatians 2:17)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52:1 (January 1990):62. Cf. Todd Scacewater, "Galatians 2:11-21 and The Interpretive Context of 'Works of The Law,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):307-23.

⁵On Paul's relationship to Judaism, see Heikki Raisanen, "Galatians 2.16 and Paul's Break with Judaism," *New Testament Studies* 31 (October 1985):543-53. For a chart of the differences between grace and law in Galatians, see the Appendix at the end of these notes.

"This [v. 16] is one of the most important verses in the Epistle."¹

"The threefold repetition of the doctrine of justification by faith in this one verse is important, because it shows the importance the apostle gives to the doctrine. Besides, the three phrases increase in emphasis."²

"This verse will upset every legal system there is today. To say that you have to add *anything* to faith in Christ absolutely mutilates the gospel."³

"'Knowing that a man.' ... This is something you can *know*—you can know whether you are saved or not."⁴

"Justification should not be confused with forgiveness, which is the fruit of justification, nor with atonement, which is the basis of justification. Rather it is the favorable verdict of God, the righteous Judge, that one who formerly stood condemned has now been granted a new status at the bar of divine justice."⁵

"To be justified means to be declared righteous before God, that is, to enjoy a status or standing of being in a right relationship with God, of being accepted by him."⁶

In verses 15-21 Paul was evidently answering charges that his critics had leveled against him. It would be easier for us to interpret these verses if we knew what those charges were. As

¹Boice, p. 448.

²Ibid., p. 449.

³McGee, 5:160.

⁴Ibid.

⁵George, pp. 191-92.

⁶Fung, p. 113.

things stand, we can only infer what they were from Paul's statements.

2:17-18 Paul refuted the charge of the Judaizers that justification by faith led to lawless behavior. He said this made Christ, in effect, "a servant of sin." Far from it. If a Christian puts himself or herself back under the Mosaic Law, the Law will show him or her to be a sinner, since no one can keep the Law perfectly. These verses are a strong testimony that Christians are free from the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

What did Paul mean when he said "while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners" (v. 17)?

"Here he [Paul] may simply mean that when law-abiding Jews like Peter and himself cease to look to the law as the basis of their justification before God and find that justification in Christ instead, they put themselves effectively on a level with 'sinners of the gentiles': they have, in that sense, 'been found sinners'—they themselves (*kai autoi*) as much as lesser breeds without the law. But this applies to all Jewish Christians, even to those who have not appreciated the law-free character of the gospel: by yielding faith to Christ they have in logic, if not in consciousness, abandoned faith in the law, and have had to take their place as sinners, utterly in need of God's justifying grace."¹

"... Paul is arguing that although it is true that in order to be justified in Christ it is necessary to abandon faith in the law as a means of salvation (premise 1) and hence to become sinners in the sense of being reduced to the level of the 'Gentiles and sinners' of v. 15 (premise 2), the conclusion does not follow that Christ thereby becomes an agent of sin (in the sense of a

¹Bruce, pp. 140-41.

promoter of actual wrongdoing), support for this statement being given in vv. 18-20."¹

The "For" at the beginning of verse 18 is probably coordinate with the "For" at the beginning of verse 19. Both verses give reasons for "Far from it" (v. 17). Verse 18 gives the hypothetical negative proof: actual transgression inevitably follows when the Law becomes the authority in the believer's life. Verse 19 gives the actual positive proof.

2:19 This verse means that the Law condemns or kills everyone. If someone is dead he has no more responsibility to what killed him. He is in that sense free (cf. Rom. 7). He can from then on devote his energy, as a resurrected person, not to pleasing the Law, but to pleasing God.

"By virtue of his incorporation into Christ (cf. v. 17) and participation in Christ's death Paul has undergone a death whereby his relation to the law has been decisively severed and the law has ceased to have any claim on him (cf. Rom. 7:4, 6). But since the vicarious death of Christ for sinners was exacted by the law (cf. Gal. 3:13) and was 'first an affirmation of [the law's] verdict,' Paul's death to the law through participation in Christ's death can be said to be 'through [Gr. instrumental *dia*] the law.' This death 'through the law ... to the law' means not only that the law as a false way of righteousness has been set aside but also that the believer is set free from the dominion of the law (under which there is transgression, Rom. 4:15) for a life of consecration to God (cf. Rom. 7:6)."²

2:20 "As a result of his participation in Christ's death on the cross, Paul now explains ... the life he now lives is not lived by him—by the 'I' of v. 19, the self-righteous Pharisee who based his hope for righteousness and salvation on strict observance

¹Fung, pp. 119-20.

²Ibid., p. 123.

of the law—but by Christ, the risen and exalted One, who dwells in him."¹

When a person trusts Christ, God identifies him or her with Christ, not only in the present and future, but also in the past. The believer did what Christ did. When Christ died, the believer died. When Christ arose from the grave, the believer arose to newness of life. My old self-centered life died when I died with Christ. His Spirit-directed life began in me when I arose with Christ. Therefore, in this sense, the Christian's life is really the life of Christ ("Christ lives in me").²

"The heart of Paul's religion is union with Christ."³

Paul used the phrase "in Christ" or a similar one (such as "in the Lord," "in Him," etc.) 164 times.⁴ This shows the prominence of this concept in his thinking and in his theology.

We can also live by faith—daily ("the life which I now live in the flesh")—just as we became Christians: by faith (v. 16). Faith in both cases means trust in Christ. We can trust Him because He loved us and gave Himself up as a sacrifice for us.

In this verse Paul's use of "crucified," instead of "put to death" or "died," stresses our sinfulness. Crucifixion is one method of dying that a person cannot inflict on himself. It was God who crucified the believer with Christ. Christians need not try to crucify themselves, though they should put to death the sinful deeds of the body (cf. Rom. 6:6, 11-13, 19; 8:13; 13:12). Only the worst criminals suffered crucifixion in Paul's day.

Paul's reference to "the flesh" here is literal. It means our physical bodies. We can see Paul's great appreciation of God's

¹Ibid.

²See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12, for discussion of the Christian's essential identity. See also Robert A. Pyne and Matthew L. Blackmon, "A Critique of the 'Exchanged Life,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):131-57.

³James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, p. 147.

⁴Ibid., p. 155.

love for him: He said Christ loved "me" and gave Himself for "me."

"The whole of Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men."¹

"It is not law on the *outside*, but love on the *inside* that makes the difference."²

May we ever grow in our appreciation of the fact that He loved "me"!

"The man on the cross is facing in only one direction. He is not going back, and he has no further plans of his own."³

"Nothing but love would have been a sufficient motive for God to send his Son to the cross, nor for the Son voluntarily to accept it."⁴

2:21 Paul concluded by affirming that he did not set aside ("nullify") "the grace of God," as Peter had done by his behavior. Peter had nullified God's grace by implying that it was not enough. He did this by putting himself back under the Law and saying in effect that obedience must accompany grace in order to make it sufficient. If that were true, Paul ended, "then Christ died needlessly." It would then be obedience that saves, not Christ.⁵

Wiersbe pointed out five basic Christian doctrines that Peter was denying by separating from the Gentiles: the unity of the church (v. 14), justification by faith (vv. 15-16), freedom from the Law (vv. 17-18), the very gospel itself (vv. 19-20), and the grace of God (v. 21).⁶

¹James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p. 151.

²Wiersbe, 1:716. Cf. Ps. 40:8.

³A. W. Tozer, "Total Commitment," *Decision* (August 1963), p. 4.

⁴Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 91.

⁵For another exposition of 2:15-21, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Pattern for Maturity*, pp. 105-15.

⁶Wiersbe, 1:694-96.

The final verses of this section (vv. 18-21) form a bridge from Paul's personal experience to his doctrinal explanation. In chapters 3 and 4 he continued his defense of faith alone as the only method of salvation.

III. THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATION OF SALVATION BY FAITH CHS. 3—4

Here begins the theological section of the epistle, which Paul led up to in his preceding historical account of his own conversion and calling that culminated in his confrontation with Peter over justification. In one sense Paul began this emphasis in 2:15, but 2:15-21 also concludes the preceding section of the epistle. Paul first proved that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is correct (ch. 3), and then he clarified it (ch. 4).

A. VINDICATION OF THE DOCTRINE CH. 3

Paul explained the meaning of justification and sanctification by faith alone. He argued their validity from experience (3:1-5), from Scripture (3:6-14), and from logic (3:15-29) in order to dissuade his readers from returning to reliance on the Mosaic Law. In 3:1-18 Paul argued against legalism, the belief that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by keeping rules.¹ In 3:19—4:7 he argued against nomism, the belief that we need to make law the ruling governor of our lives.²

"Paul's Galatian letter, it must always be remembered, is not concerned just with 'legalism,' even though sadly it is often understood only in those terms. Rather, Galatians is principally concerned with 'nomism' or whether Gentiles who believe in Christ must also be subject to the directives of the Mosaic law."³

"Gal 3:1-18 is one of the most familiar and closely studied portions of Paul's letters. That is so because of its concentration of themes central to the Christian gospel, its

¹Cf. Tom Thatcher, "The Plot of Gal 3:1-18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:3 (September 1997): 401-10.

²Longenecker, p. 97.

³*Ibid.*, p. 219.

attack against legalism, and the complexity of Paul's arguments in support of a law-free gospel."¹

1. The experiential argument 3:1-5

The apostle here began to apply the principle stated in 2:15-21 to his audience.

3:1 It is folly to mix law and grace. The Galatians were behaving as though they were under some kind of spell ("bewitched") and not in full use of their rational faculties. Paul had drawn graphic word pictures of Jesus Christ crucified as their Substitute when he had been among them, and they had understood the gospel.

In order to bring them to their senses, Paul asked four more questions of them, in addition to the one in this verse, in verses 2 through 5. He probably intended his introductory rhetorical question in this verse as a rebuke.² Fools in Scripture are people who disregard God's revelation (cf. Ps. 14:1; Luke 24:25).

"... Paul regards his Galatian converts as having unwittingly come under the spell—the hypnotic effect—of the false teachers ..."³

"It is quite possible for one to have been truly converted and to have begun with a clear, definite knowledge of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus, and then because of failure to follow on to study the Word and to pray over it, to come under the influence of some false system, some unscriptural line of teaching. And so often when people do come under some such influence you find it almost impossible to deliver them. They seem to be under a spell."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 98.

²F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, §146.2.

³Fung, p. 129.

⁴Ironside, pp. 88-89.

The public portrayal of Christ "crucified" (Gr. perfect participle *estauromenos*, crucified with continuing results) probably refers to the fact of Jesus' death as the crucial event in salvation history. It probably does not refer to some description of the Crucifixion that Paul or someone else had presented to them. Nor does it refer to Christ as presently still crucified in some sense.¹ The Galatians would not have found false teaching attractive if they had truly appreciated the significance of Jesus' crucifixion.

"The suggestion is that anyone with spiritual perception ought to be able to see the impossibility of legal efforts to save a man. This idea Paul proceeds to develop."²

3:2 Question 2: How did you receive the Holy Spirit? The answer to this single question should have settled the whole debate (cf. v. 5). It was obviously not by keeping the Law but by hearing and believing the gospel: the message of Christ crucified (cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). Note that Paul assumed his readers' salvation.

"The only real evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (see Rom. 8:9)."³

Justification (2:16) and the Holy Spirit become the believer's possession not by the works of the Law but by faith through one act of believing. Receiving the gift of God's Spirit is one of the highest privileges mortals can experience. Since God gives us such a great gift when we believe the gospel (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13), believing the gospel is clearly superior to obeying the Law. Furthermore, since possession of the Spirit is the guarantee of our final salvation (glorification; cf. Eph. 1:13-14), and the Spirit comes to us by faith, final salvation must depend on faith, not obedience to the Law.

¹Fung, p. 129.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 91.

³Wiersbe, 1:698.

"... those who stressed the law put no emphasis on the Holy Spirit. But from the day of Pentecost on, the Christians emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit for Christian living."¹

3:3 Question 3: How is God sanctifying you? "Being perfected" refers to the process of progressive sanctification by which the Holy Spirit works in the believer to make that one more like Christ. The Galatians' justification had been a work of the Holy Spirit in response to believing faith. Likewise their progressive sanctification was also a work of the Holy Spirit in response to believing faith. The idea that keeping the Mosaic Law will somehow help the Holy Spirit is a fallacy that persists to our day.

"The Judaizers in Galatia, it seems, claimed not to be opposing Paul but to be supplementing his message, and so to be bringing his converts to perfection ..."²

"Flesh" here refers to one's sinful human nature, the seat and vehicle of sinful desires. This is a metaphorical use of the word.³ Notice that reception of the Spirit does not mark a second or higher stage of sanctification after justification, a "second blessing." It belongs to initial justification, and it now (since Pentecost) takes place at the moment of conversion (cf. John 7:39; 16:7; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:38; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

"Some people find it difficult to distinguish between a hatred of false doctrine and a love for the people themselves who have come under the influence of it. When we stand up for the truth of God and warn people against false teaching, that does not imply for one moment that we have any unkind feeling toward those taken up with that false teaching. We love such a person as one for

¹Morris, p. 95.

²Longenecker, p. 106. Cf. Betz, p. 136.

³See I. Howard Marshall, "Living in the 'Flesh'," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002):387-403, for an excellent word study of "flesh."

whom Christ died, and pray that he may be delivered from his error and brought into the light of the truth."¹

3:4 Question 4: Have your experiences been useless? The word "suffer" can mean to suffer persecution or simply to experience something. In the former case it would refer to the persecution the Galatians had experienced since they became Christians (cf. Acts 14:21-22). The point would be that all of those afflictions would have been needless or purposeless suffering. In the latter case, it would refer to all the experiences that the Galatians had gone through, good and bad, since their conversion. The point would be that all of those experiences would have been meaningless. Perhaps we should prefer the wider significance here since the other questions in this passage concern positive benefits that the Galatians had received from God by faith.²

3:5 Question 5: What accounts for the miracles that you witnessed (cf. Acts 14:3, 8-10)? God did not perform them because the Galatians did something special to earn them. He gave them freely in response to their believing the gospel.

Paul knew, of course, that miracles do not necessarily show that God is at work. Satan can empower people to do miracles too (2 Thess. 2:9; cf. Exod. 7:22; 8:7). Paul regarded the evidential value of miracles as secondary (e.g., Rom. 15:19). Here he appealed to the fact that miracles accompanied his preaching to the Galatians, whereas presumably they did not accompany the preaching of the Judaizers. He did this in order to remind them of the Holy Spirit's miraculous confirmation of his gospel.

These miracles may have been those that the Holy Spirit continued to work among the believers even after Paul left the Galatians. Note the present tense of the word translated "works" (Gr. *energon*). God continues to do miracles in and through believers even today, not the least of which is the

¹Ironside, pp. 94-95.

²See Longenecker, p. 104.

miracle of regeneration.¹ However Paul was speaking of the miracles that his original readers had witnessed.

Lightfoot believed that a better rendering of the Greek phrase translated "works miracles among you" is "works miracles in you" on the basis of Paul's similar statement in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 28-29 (cf. Matt. 14:2; Mark 6:14).² The Greek preposition *en* can be translated either way: "among" or "in." Probably Paul's reference to miracles was more broad than just to visible miracles and included other demonstrations of spiritual power.³

For Paul the Mosaic Law and the Holy Spirit were as antithetical as works and faith—regarding what makes people acceptable to God now (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6).

Thus Paul reminded his readers of their own experience of salvation in order to prove that it was by faith alone.

2. The Scriptural argument 3:6-14

Next Paul appealed to Scripture in order to defend salvation by faith alone. In order to refute the legalists Paul first argued that it is incorrect to say that only through conformity to the Law could people become sons of Abraham (vv. 6-9). Second, he argued that, by the logic of the legalists, those whose standing the Law determines are under the curse of the Law, not special blessing (vv. 10-14).

The blessing of faith 3:6-9

3:6 The Judaizers, by emphasizing the Mosaic Law, appealed to Moses frequently. Paul took them back further in their history to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. He cited Genesis 15:6 in order to prove that God justified Abraham by faith, not because he kept the Law. Abraham believed the promise that God would bless him. Abraham could and did do nothing but believe God's promise that He would do something

¹See Ironside, pp. 95-96.

²Lightfoot, p. 136.

³Vos, p. 53.

supernatural for him (cf. Rom 4:3). One writer suggested that the best commentary on Galatians 3 is Romans 4.¹ Abraham's faith was his trust in God.

"... Paul takes it for granted that Abraham's being justified by faith *proves* that the Galatians must have received the Spirit by faith also; and this argument from Scripture falls to the ground *unless* the reception of the Spirit is in some sense equated with justification. For if this were not so, it could be objected that even though Abraham was indeed justified by faith, it does not necessarily follow that reception of the Spirit also has to be dependent on faith; conceivably while justification is by faith the gift of the Spirit could be conditioned on works. We may take it, then, that Paul conceives of receiving the Spirit in such close connection with justification that the two can be regarded in some sense as synonymous, so that in the Galatians' receiving the Spirit their justification was also involved."²

Genesis 15:6 is one of Paul's two key proof-texts for his teaching about justification by faith in Galatians (cf. Rom. 4:3). The other is Habakkuk 2:4, which he quoted in 3:11 (cf. Rom. 1:17).

This verse (v. 6) introduces Paul's major explanation of salvation history. It is a bridge that concludes one section of his argument (vv. 1-6) and introduces the next (vv. 6-9).

3:7

"In this verse [v. 7] Paul extended his argument from Abraham to his posterity and raised for the first time the question that would dominate the remainder of Gal 3 and 4: Who are the true children of Abraham? This train of thought will find a conclusion in the allegory of the two mothers,

¹George, p. 219.

²Fung, p. 136.

Sarah and Hagar, and their two sons, Isaac and Ishmael (4:21-31)."¹

The spiritual sons of Abraham, Paul contended, are not necessarily his physical descendants, but those who believe God ("are of faith") like Abraham did—whether they are Jews or Gentiles.²

3:8-9 Paul expounded Genesis 12:3c and 22:18a (from the Septuagint translation) in order to prove his point. We should understand the promise that God made to Abraham to include salvation. Paul clarified that this is what God intended. However, it is only those who trust God who enter into God's blessings for believers. Paul was not a universalist; he did not believe that everyone will eventually go to heaven. Personal appropriation of God's gift is necessary for salvation.

"He is said to be justified in God's sight who is both reckoned righteous in God's judgment and has been accepted on account of his [i.e., God's] righteousness."³

The Judaizers were evidently teaching the Galatians that, in order to become Abraham's children, they had to be circumcised. This was necessary for pagan proselytes to be admitted to Judaism. The Judaizers may have said that God had declared the Galatian Christians righteous by faith while yet uncircumcised, like Abraham. Nevertheless now they needed to undergo circumcision, like Abraham did. Circumcision would be a seal of their justification as it had been for Abraham. Circumcision would make them true sons of Abraham.

Paul argued that it was not circumcision that made a person a son of Abraham but faith in God. He treated circumcision as a part of the Law because, even though God instituted circumcision many generations before He gave the Law, He

¹George, p. 223.

²See Michael H. Burer, "'Sons of Abraham' in Galatians 3:7 as a Spiritual, Qualitative Designation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:691 (July-September 2016):337-51.

³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:11:2.

reaffirmed it and incorporated it into the Mosaic Law (Lev. 12:3), and it became obligatory for the Jews.

"What endeared Abraham to many Jewish thinkers were his virtues and his deeds. They understood him to have kept the law before it was written."¹

The curse of works 3:10-14

"In vv. 6-9 Paul set forth a positive argument for justification by faith. In vv. 10-14 he turned the tables and argued negatively against the possibility of justification by works."²

3:10 Living under the Mosaic Law did not bring blessing but a curse. The reason is that, in order to obtain God's blessing under the Law, a person had to keep it perfectly, and no one could do that. Even one failure brought God's curse. Paul cited Deuteronomy 27:26, which is a passage that the legalists would have respected highly, because it is in a highly legal section of a highly legal book. He did so in order to support his argument. The Law is similar to a chain: One must forge every single link securely or it will not support the person who clings to it for salvation (cf. 5:3; James 2:10).

Paul was not changing the original intention of the passage that he quoted (i.e., Deut. 27:26). The whole Law taught that people cannot earn God's blessing. The blessing that people experience because they do God's will is not something that they earn. God grants it freely by His grace. What people earn and deserve is nothing less than cursing and judgment from God since they cannot perfectly obey the Law (Rom. 6:23).

"Suppose I had kept all of the laws of Pasadena, which is my home city, for twenty years. Then I wait at my house for the officials of Pasadena to come and present me with a medal for keeping those laws. Let me tell you, they do not give medals for keeping the law in Pasadena. If I had kept every law for twenty years and then stole

¹Morris, p. 98.

²George, p. 227. Cf. Lightfoot, p. 137.

something or broke a speeding law, I would be arrested. You see, the law does not reward you. It does not give you life. The law penalizes you."¹

3:11 Paul further quoted Habakkuk 2:4, from the Prophets section of the Old Testament, in order to show that justification by faith has always been God's method of providing salvation. Since Scripture says that it is the person who is righteous by faith that will live, no one can be justified by works of the law.

Old Testament saints were not saved by keeping the Mosaic Law. They were saved by faith. Faith in whom? God. Faith in what? A promise from God. What promise? That varied from age to age. Adam probably believed God's promise to him recorded in Genesis 3:15. Noah probably believed that God would send judgment and was providing deliverance from it with the ark (Gen. 6:9). Abraham believed that God would fulfill His promises concerning Abraham's future (Gen. 15:6). Moses probably believed that God would do for Israel what He promised (Exod. 12:13).

The Israelites probably believed that God had redeemed them at the Exodus (Exod. 12:13). Many scholars believe that the Israelites were saved by believing that a Messiah would come one day, but the Old Testament does not connect their salvation with believing in a coming Messiah. Rather it constantly refers back to the Exodus as God's great work of redemption for the Israelites. Christians believe that God has provided redemption for them at the Cross (John 3:16). God did not state explicitly in Scripture what each of these individuals or groups believed that resulted in their salvation, but we know that they all believed a promise from Him. Taking God at His Word, and relying on it as trustworthy, is what saving faith involves.

In verse 10 Paul argued that anyone who seeks justification by works of the Law will suffer God's curse. He or she will be cursed because he or she cannot keep the Law perfectly.

¹McGee, 5:168.

3:12 Responding to the idea that perhaps both Law and faith are necessary for justification, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5. This verse shows that they are mutually exclusive ("the Law is not of faith"). They are two entirely different approaches to God. The Law demanded perfect compliance whereas faith simply trusts God to deliver what He has promised. "Them" refers to the statutes and ordinances of the Mosaic Law.

Law and faith are as different as apples and elephants. The Law requires works, but the gospel calls for faith.

3:13 If the Law shows that every person is under God's curse, how can we escape God's wrath? Paul reminded his readers that Christ paid the penalty for our sins and made justification possible for every person (cf. Titus 2:11). He voluntarily took the wrath of God that was directed toward us upon Himself. He became the object and bearer of God's curse (2 Cor. 5:21).

"Not merely *accursed* (in the concrete), but *a curse* in the abstract, *bearing the universal curse of the whole human race*. So II Corinthians 5:21, 'Sin for us,' not *sinful*, but bearing the whole sin of our race, regarded as one vast aggregate of sin."¹

"He neutralized the curse for them, so that they, on whom the curse rightfully falls because of their failure to keep the law, now become free from both its demands and its curse. ... Verse 13 thus represents Christ's death as a vicarious bearing of the curse of the law which delivers his people from the same curse. This is in simple terms Paul's Christian interpretation of Christ's death on the cross."²

"Hebrew thought tended to identify the man on whom a curse was laid with the curse, as it

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 1266.

²Fung, pp. 149-50. Paragraph division omitted.

identified the sin-offering with the sin, calling it *hamartia* ["sin"] (Lev. iv. 21-25)."¹

"Christ has done all that is necessary and his death is the means of making sinners free."²

The proof that Christ became a curse for us was the fact that His executioners hung Him on a tree. Under the Law, this was the fate of criminals whom God had cursed (Deut. 21:23).

"Christ's bearing the *particular* curse of hanging on the tree, is a sample of the *general* curse which He representatively bore."³

Note that God did not curse Christ because He hung on a tree, but Christ hung on a tree because God had cursed Him.

"The Jews did ... as a mark of ignominy hang bodies on a post or stake (not a tree) by the hands after the individual had been killed in some other way."⁴

"The curse of the Law" is the curse pronounced by the Law on the law-breaker (Deut. 27:26; cf. v. 10).

"By bringing these two texts [in Deuteronomy] together and interpreting the latter [Deut. 21:23] in terms of the former [Deut. 27:26], Paul understands Jesus' death on the cross (to which a curse was attached according to Dt. 21:23) as a bearing of the curse of God incurred (according to Dt. 27:26) by all who fail to continue in obedience to the law."⁵

3:14 Christ's death has resulted in two blessings: The blessing of justification that Abraham enjoyed has become available to the

¹Rendall, 3:169.

²Morris, p. 106.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 1266.

⁴Vos, p. 60.

⁵Fung, pp. 147-48.

Gentiles, and the blessing of the promised Holy Spirit's ministry has become available to all believers (Acts 1:8, 2:33).

"... at several points in the argument of Galatians 3 Paul so parallels or intertwines the categories of being justified and receiving the Spirit that we can draw the conclusion: the experience of the Spirit and the status of justification are, for the apostle, inconceivable apart from each other."¹

The contrasts between faith and law-keeping, presented in this section, would have been especially persuasive to people such as the legalists of Paul's day, who regarded the Old Testament Scriptures as authoritative. They help us too, of course, to see the issue clearly, and they help us to deal with the legalistic false teachers of our day.²

Paul was not saying that the Mosaic Law is valueless for Christians. The Mosaic Law is a part of the Old Testament, all of which is profitable for Christians (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He was saying that obeying the Mosaic Law never results in the justification or sanctification of anyone, because no one can obey it completely.

3. The logical argument 3:15-29

Paul continued his argument that God justifies (declares right with God) people by faith alone by showing the logical fallacy of relying on the Law. He did this in order to disprove the legalists and to clarify the distinction between works and faith as ways of salvation (i.e., justification, sanctification, and glorification). He continued to base his argument on the biblical revelation concerning Abraham.

The continuance of faith after the giving of the Law 3:15-18

3:15-16 Paul now turned to the objection that when God gave the Law He terminated justification by faith alone. He reminded his readers, with a human analogy, that even wills and contracts made between human beings remain in force until the

¹Sam K. Williams, "Justification and the Spirit in Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (February 1987):97.

²See James D. G. Gunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14)," *New Testament Studies* 31:4 (October 1985):523-42.

fulfillment of their terms. Likewise the covenant that God made with Abraham will remain in force until God fulfills it completely. The promises made to Abraham extended to his descendants as well as to him personally. They even extend to Christ, the descendant ("seed") of Abraham who became the greatest source of blessing that God promised would come through Abraham's descendants.

Paul did not mean that Christ fulfilled all of the promises in the Abrahamic Covenant completely. He meant that through Christ, who was a descendant of Abraham, God continued to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Law did not supersede (take the place of) the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Hebrew word for "seed" (*zera*, v. 16) is a collective singular. As such it can refer either to one descendant or many descendants. An English collective singular, for example, is the word sheep, which can refer to one sheep or many sheep. The word seed (sometimes translated "offspring") is also a collective singular in English. Paul explained that the seed that God had in mind in Genesis 13:15 and 17:8 was one particular descendant of Abraham: Christ.¹

"The term *seed* not uncommonly denotes all the descendants of some great ancestor, but it is not normally used of one person. Used in this way it points to the person as in some way outstanding; the *seed* is not simply one descendant among many but THE descendant."²

"Just as in Genesis 21:12 the person of Isaac is designated by the word seed in distinction from that of Ishmael, though not, of course, by exclusion of Isaac's descendants, so, according to Paul, the singular of the noun is also a designation of the one Christ in distinction from all other

¹See Robert A. Pyne, "The 'Seed,' the Spirit, and the Blessing of Abraham," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):214-16; Andrew E. Steinmann, "Jesus and Possessing the Enemies' Gate (Genesis 22:17-18; 24:60)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:693 (January-March 2017):13-21.

²Morris, p. 110.

3:18 "The inheritance" (cf. v. 29; 4:1, 7; 5:21) refers to what God promised to Abraham and his descendants, including justification by faith, which is implicit in the general term "blessing" (v. 14). Reception of this inheritance did not depend on obedience to the Law, but God promised to provide it nonetheless. The idea of inheritance dominates much of the discussion in the following chapters.¹

"... the inheritance of Gal. 3:18 and 4:30 is parallel not with the land promises, Canaan, but with the gift of justification to the Gentiles. This is the major passage in the New Testament used to equate the inheritance of the land of Canaan with heaven, but the land of Canaan is not even the subject of the passage!"²

The purpose of the Law 3:19-22

3:19 In view of the foregoing argument, did the Law have any value? Yes, God had several purposes for it. Purpose, not cause, is in view, as is clear in the Greek text.

There have been four primary interpretations of what the phrase "on account of the violations" means. First, some take it to mean: to restrain violations.³ This seems reasonable since all law has a restraining effect. Second, some understand the phrase to mean: to reveal violations.⁴ This also seems valid in view of other statements that Paul made about the purpose of the Law (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13).

"The law was given therefore to set the stamp of positive transgression upon already existing sin. It was not to give the knowledge of sin as sin, but

¹George, p. 249. See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):448-49.

²Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 90.

³E.g., David J. Lull, "'The Law Was Our Pedagogue': A Study in Galatians 3:19-25," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105:3 (September 1986):482.

⁴E.g., Eadie, p. 264; Longenecker, p. 138.

to show that it was a violation of God's commandments."¹

Third, it may mean: to provoke violations.² This too seems legitimate. A "Do not touch! Wet paint!" sign on a bench tempts people to touch the bench to see if the paint really is wet. Likewise the prohibitions in the Law tempted some to see if breaking them would indeed provoke God's punishment. Fourth, some have understood that Paul meant: to awaken a conviction of violations. This seems less likely, in this context, since Paul showed more concern with the objective facts of salvation history than he did with the subjective development of faith in the individual.³ So yes, the Law had several purposes, and it had value.

Angels, who stood between God and the Israelites, mediated the Mosaic Covenant to Moses and the Israelites (cf. Deut. 33:2, LXX; Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2).⁴

"The N.T. refers three times to the interposition of angels in the promulgation of the Law: God's intercourse with Moses through the angel of His presence was evidently a common topic in Jewish schools of theology."⁵

Both God and the Jews had responsibilities under the Law. In contrast, God Himself revealed the Abrahamic Covenant, without mediation, in which only God had responsibilities (v. 20; cf. Gen. 15). This shows the greater glory of the promise (the Abrahamic Covenant) compared to the Mosaic Law.

"Just as it [the Law] had a point of origin on Mount Sinai, so also it had a point of termination—Mount Calvary."⁶

¹Wuest, 1:3:105.

²E.g., Ridderbos, pp. 137-38.

³Fung, pp. 159-60.

⁴LXX refers to the Septuagint (Greek) translation.

⁵Rendall, 3:171-72.

⁶Fung, p. 254.

Paul clarified that the Law was only a temporary measure designed to function until Christ came.¹

"The function of the law was to point people to Christ, not to provide for all time the way the people of God should live."²

"He [Paul] conceives of a sequence which may be summarized as follows: age of promise, age of law, age of Christ, the last being conceived as a fulfillment of the age of promise."³

The Christian Reconstruction movement answers Paul's question, "Why the Law then?" (v. 19) this way: God gave the Mosaic Law in order to provide a framework for the operation of every nation's government.⁴

"Reconstructionists anticipate a day when Christians will govern using the Old Testament as the law book"⁵

Reconstructionism rests on presuppositional apologetics, theonomy (lit. the rule of God), and postmillennialism. Other names for it are "the theonomy movement" and "the Chalcedon school." It has gained many followers, many among charismatic evangelicals. Its popular appeal is that it claims that God wants America, and every other nation, to function as God intended Israel to function, namely, as a theocracy. It fails to make a distinction, however, between God's unique purpose for Israel and His purpose for other nations throughout history.⁶

¹See J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):21-35; and Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

²Morris, p. 113.

³Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 104.

⁴See Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*.

⁵Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* (February 20, 1987), p. 17. This article is an excellent popular evaluation of the movement.

⁶Other helpful critiques include the following: Thomas D. Ice, "An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:579 (July-September 1989):281-30; Robert

3:20 The meaning of this verse has drawn numerous different explanations.¹ I think Paul probably meant that a mediator is necessary when two parties making an agreement both assume responsibilities, as was true in the Mosaic Covenant.² However, a mediator is not necessary when the covenant is unilateral, as when God made the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant.

"... the inference intended to be drawn is that the law, being given through a mediator, came from God indirectly. That the promise came directly is not affirmed, but assumed to be in mind."³

3:21-22 Do the Law and the promises contradict each other? "Far from it!" God designed them for two different purposes. The purpose of the Law was never to provide justification. It served as a mirror to show people their sinfulness. When they realize that they cannot save themselves, they will be open to receiving salvation as a gift by faith. By "the Scripture" (v. 22) Paul may have meant the teaching of the Old Testament in many places, or he may have had in mind a specific text, such as Deuteronomy 27:26.⁴

"The Law is a mirror that helps us see our 'dirty faces' (James 1:22-25)—*but you do not wash your face with a mirror!* It is grace that provides the cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:7b)."⁵

Lightner, "Theological Perspectives on Theonomy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:569 (January-March 1986):26-36; 570 (April-June 1986):134-45; and 571 (July-September 1986):228-45; Meredith Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41:1 (Fall 1978):172-89; and Douglas Chismar and David Raush, "Regarding Theonomy: An Essay of Concern," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:3 (September 1984):315-23.

¹Lightfoot, p. 146, mentioned 250 to 300, and Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, with a Revised Translation*, p. 83, estimated over 400.

²Longenecker, pp. 141-42.

³Burton, p. 190.

⁴Ibid., p. 195.

⁵Wiersbe, 1:703.

"God always intended to save by faith, apart from law. God gave the law, but he gave it in order that it would condemn all and thus prepare negatively for redemption on the basis of faith (3:22, 24, the purpose clauses conveying God's intention). The law was not given to make alive (3:21)."¹

"It [the Law] rivets upon us the conviction that we cannot be justified by anything we can do. Like the Israelites in Egypt, we are commanded to make bricks without straw, to be perfectly holy when we have none of the makings of holiness—to love God with all our hearts and the neighbor as ourselves when we are without divine charity."²

"A law can lay down what people ought to do, but it cannot give them the power to overcome the temptations to do evil."³

The whole Old Testament (v. 22), not just the Law of Moses (v. 21), showed that people are sinners and incapable of saving themselves. Paul personified "Scripture" to illustrate that the Scriptures are really God working through them.

The conditions of people under Law and under faith 3:23-29

"Continuing the perspective of salvation history introduced in vv. 13f. and developed in vv. 15-22, Paul gives further consideration to the place of the law in the divine economy by showing the relation between law and faith as two distinct dispensations."⁴

In another sense, the argument returns to its starting point in verse 7.⁵

¹E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 68.

²A. R. Vidler, *Christ's Strange Work*, p. 42.

³Morris, p. 115. See also Barclay, p. 32.

⁴Fung, p. 167.

⁵Burton, p. 198.

3:23 Paul pictured Israel, before the advent of Christ, as a child. The coming of faith (v. 23) is synonymous with the coming of Christ in Paul's view of salvation history.

2:24-25 In Paul's day it was common for children between about age six and 16 to be under the care of a "guardian" (Gr. *paidagogos*).¹ The guardian escorted, supervised, and protected them from evil influences and demanded their obedience.

"... while today we think of pedagogues as teachers, in antiquity a *paidagogos* was distinguished from a *didaskalos* ('teacher') and had custodial and disciplinary functions rather than educative or instructional ones."²

"Christ is the real teacher, who takes us in hand and shows us the way of God in terms of grace."³

"No doubt there were many pedagogues who were known for their kindness and held in affection by their wards, but the dominant image was that of a harsh disciplinarian who frequently resorted to physical force and corporal punishment as a way of keeping his children in line."⁴

The Law served the function of such a guardian for Israel.⁵ The Law was essentially a disciplinarian for the Israelites. However, the need for that kind of assistance ended when Christ came.

The Mosaic Law was never intended to provide salvation for lost Israelites. God gave it to His redeemed people, after the Exodus (when He redeemed them), in order to let them know their responsibilities as redeemed people. It had a regulatory

¹Ibid., p. 200.

²Longenecker, p. 146.

³Harrison, p. 1292.

⁴George, p. 265.

⁵See Michael J. Smith, "The Role of the Pedagogue in Galatians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):197-214.

purpose and a revelatory purpose, but never a redemptive purpose. It led them to Christ in the sense that it prepared them for the coming of Christ, by showing them that human righteousness was inadequate, and that they needed a righteousness that only God could supply for them.

"... the Jews were not *born* through the Law, but rather were *brought up* by the Law. ... So, the Law did not *give* life to Israel; it *regulated* life."¹

3:26-27 Now all who trust in Christ are adult "sons" (Gr. *huioi*) and no longer children who are under a guardian. It is faith in Christ Jesus that makes one a son (or daughter) of God (v. 25). The coming of faith ("now that faith has come") is identical to the giving of the gospel.²

"The article ["the," *tes* with *pisteos*, "faith," v. 26], though ignored in our versions, is essential to the sense. By the coming of *the* faith is meant the historic fact of the Christian religion, the spread of the Gospel on earth."³

"Now the focus shifts from the historical to the personal, from the institutional to the individual. Paul has discussed the inheritance promised to the children of Abraham; now he zooms in on the heir who claimed his bequest."⁴

Timothy George suggested that verse 26 is the center of a chiasm.⁵ The first half of the chiasm has a Jewish emphasis, whereas the second half has a Gentile emphasis.

A Promise (Abraham) 3:6-14

B Law (Moses) 3:15-22

¹Wiersbe, 1:703.

²Burton, pp. 201-2.

³Rendall, 3:173.

⁴George, p. 271.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 271-74. A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.

- C Faith (Christ) 3:23-25
 - D "You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus." 3:26
- C' Faith (Spirit) 3:27—4:7
- B' Law (*stoicheia tou kosmou* ["elementary principles of the world"]) 4:8-11
- A' Promise (Sarah) 4:21-31

What unites us to Christ is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that takes place at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13). Paul's original readers may have taken his reference to baptism (v. 27) as being to water baptism, but water baptism illustrated what happened to them when the Spirit baptized them.

"This is one of the proof texts often used to teach baptismal regeneration. Yet it actually refutes it!"¹

When a Roman male child reached "son" status, his father exchanged his *toga praetexta* [bordered toga] for the *toga virilis* [manly toga] that identified him as a responsible citizen.² Paul compared that toga to Christ (v. 27).

"'To put on Christ' is to become as Christ, to have his standing; in this context to become objects of the divine favour, sons of God, as he is the Son of God."³

God has dealt with humanity like a loving father deals with his children. When children are young, having limited information and experience, a good father makes allowances for their immaturity, but when they become mature, he deals with them as adults (cf. Acts 17:30). The differences in the house rules that Paul spoke of here reflect different dispensations (i.e., economies, Gr. *oikonomos*, lit. house law). It is interesting that

¹Wilkin, 2:838.

²Rendall, 3:174.

³Burton, p. 203.

even non-dispensational commentators admit that the coming of Christ, as Paul spoke of it here, inaugurated a new dispensation in God's dealings with humanity.

3:28 Another difference, in addition to God dealing with believers as sons, is that under faith all believers share the same privilege and position. Paul was not saying that all distinctions between people have ceased. Obviously people are still either Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, and male or female. His point was that within the body of Christ all have the same relationship to God. God does not observe the differences that exist among us and treat some of His sons and daughters differently than He treats others. He treats all believers equally. Paul may have used a fragment of an early Christian hymn here (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 3:9-11).

"The three pairs of opposites Paul listed stand for the fundamental cleavages of human existence: ethnicity, economic capacity, and sexuality. Race, money, and sex are primal powers in human life."¹

"Difference of sex makes no difference in Christian privileges. Under the law the male sex had great privileges. Males alone had in their body circumcision, the sign of the covenant (contrast *baptism* applied to male and female alike); they alone were capable of being kings and priests, whereas all of either sex are now 'kings and priests unto God' (Rev. 1:6); they had prior right to inheritances."²

"When Chief Justice Charles Evan Hughes, the first Sunday after he arrived in Washington to take his seat on the Supreme Court bench, presented himself for membership in the First Baptist Church there, a Chinese laundryman was received with him. The pastor, as he received them, looked at

¹George, p. 284. See his excursus "Was Paul a Feminist?" pp. 286-93, which also relates this passage to liberation theology.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 1268.

the scene and remarked, 'At the foot of the cross all men are equal.'"¹

Most of the evangelical feminists regard this verse as the major passage that teaches the abolition of male leadership in Christianity.² One such writer, Paul Jewett, believed that Paul's teaching that woman is subordinate to man, for whose sake God created her, came from Rabbinism rather than divine revelation.³ Daniel Fuller reflected the same conclusion but for a slightly different reason:

"... he [Paul] supported, by way of accommodation, a Christianized slavery and patriarchy, but with regard to both he left sufficient clues for the church to have understood that these teachings no longer applied after the 'neither Jew nor Greek' issue had been settled."⁴

Bruce took what I consider to be a more biblically defensible position on this verse:

"The first stipulation here ... is that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek ... the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between these two was fundamental to Paul's gospel (Eph. 2:14f.). By similarly excluding the religious distinction between slaves and the freeborn, and between male and female, Paul makes a threefold affirmation which corresponds to a number of Jewish formulas in which the threefold distinction is maintained, as in the morning prayer in which the male Jew thanks God that he is not a Gentile, a slave or a woman. ... The reason for the threefold thanksgiving was not any disparagement of Gentiles, slaves or women as

¹C. B. Williams, p. 71

²See Lucy Mabrey-Foster, *Women and the Church*, ch. 8 "Is Feminism Biblical?" for an excellent discussion of feminism from a traditionalist perspective.

³P. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, p. 112.

⁴D. Fuller, "Paul and Galatians 3:28," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* 9:2 (November-December 1985):12-13.

persons but the fact that they were disqualified from several religious privileges which were open to free Jewish males."¹

Gentiles, slaves, and women did not enjoy the same access to God in Israel's formal worship as did Jews, free men, and males. They could trust God for their personal salvation, of course. The priests in Israel had to be Jews, free, and males. Now, in the church, every Christian is a priest (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Paul's emphasis, however, was on believers' equality in Christ, not their equality with one another.

"Galatians 3:28 says nothing explicitly whatsoever about how male/female relationships should be conducted in daily life. Even the feminists acknowledge that the context of Galatians 3 is theological, not practical.² Paul is here making a theological statement about the fundamental equality of both men and women in their standing before God. Thus any ideas about how this truth should work itself out in social relationships cannot be drawn from Galatians 3:28, but must be brought to it from one's broader understanding of the nature of things."³

Paul's statement does not mean "that all male-female distinctions have been obliterated in Christ, any more than that there is no racial difference between the Christian Jew and the Christian Gentile."⁴

¹Bruce, p. 187. See also Charles C. Ryrie, *The Place of Women in the Church*, pp. 70-71; Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, pp. 52-55.

²Footnote 21: Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, pp. 18-19.

³A. Duane Litfin, "Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:543 (July-September 1979):264. For a good evaluation of the feminists' arguments, see *ibid.*; and Roger Oldham, "Positional and Functional Equality: An Appraisal of the Major Arguments for the Ordination of Women," *Mid-America Theological Journal* (Fall 1985):1-29; Kenneth Gangel, "Biblical Feminism and Church Leadership," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (January-March 1983):55-63; and H. Wayne House, "'Neither ... Male nor Female ... in Christ Jesus'," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):47-56.

⁴Fung, p. 175. See also Vos, p. 70.

3:29 A third change in believers is that those joined to Christ by faith have become spiritual descendants of Abraham and beneficiaries ("heirs") of some of God's promises to him. This does not mean that Christians become Jews. Christians are Christians; we are in Christ who is the Seed of Abraham (cf. v. 16). God promised some things to all the physical descendants of Abraham (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3, 7). He promised other things to the believers within that group (e.g., Rom. 9:6, 8).

God promised still other things to the spiritual seed of Abraham who are not Jews (e.g., Gal. 3:6-9). Failure to distinguish these groups, and the promises given to each, has resulted in much confusion. For example, amillennialists conclude that Gentile believers inherit the promises of the believing remnant within Israel, thus eliminating any future for Israel as a nation. Here is another example of this error:

"Throughout the whole vast earth the Lord recognizes *one*, and *only one*, nation as His own, namely, the nation of believers (1 Peter 2:9)."¹

Why can the amillennialist position represented above not be correct? The reason is that Scripture speaks of the church as an entity distinct from Israel (Eph. 2:11-22).² Jews, and Gentiles who became religious Jews to enter Israel, made up Israel. The church consists of both Jews and Gentiles who enter it as Jews or Gentiles (Eph. 2:16; cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). Furthermore, Paul called Jewish and Gentile equality in the church a mystery, something unique, not previously revealed in Scripture (Eph. 3:5). The church began on the day of Pentecost, not in the Old Testament (Acts 1:5; 11:15-16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18). Believers of all eras are all the people of God. Nevertheless God has dealt with different groups of them, and has had different purposes for them as groups, as human history has unfolded.

¹Hendriksen, p. 151. Cf. Ridderbos, p. 150.

²See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 113-30, especially pp. 126-27.

Does the church inherit the promises to Abraham? It only inherits some of them. The Jews will inherit those particular promises given to the physical descendants of Abraham. All believers (Gentile and Jewish) will inherit those given to the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Saved Jews (Jewish Christians) will inherit those given to the physical descendants who are also spiritual descendants. In Bible study it is very important to note the person or persons to whom any given promise was made.

That all of the promises given to Abraham are not fulfilled by believers today and in the future is clear in that the land that God promised the patriarchs was specifically the land of Canaan (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8; 26:2-4; 28:13-15). Thus it is incorrect to say that the church fulfills all of the promises that God gave to Abraham and that the land promises refer to heaven.

"The Jewish covenants contained two types of promises: physical and spiritual. The physical promises were, and still are, limited to Israel and will be fulfilled only to, in, or by Israel."¹

B. CLARIFICATION OF THE DOCTRINE CH. 4

In chapter 3 the Jews' preoccupation with the Law of Moses was foremost in Paul's mind. In chapter 4 he restated his argument for the benefit of Gentiles, for whom religious syncretism and pagan idolatry were primary concerns. Whereas in chapter 3 Paul dealt mainly with justification (cf. 3:20), in chapter 4 his emphasis was primarily on sanctification (cf. 4:3).

1. The domestic illustration 4:1-11

Continuing his case for faith over the Mosaic Law, Paul cited an illustration from family life. He did this in order to clarify the condition of believers, as contrasted with that of nomists, and to urge his readers to abandon nomism. Nomism is the belief that we need to make law the ruling governor of our lives. It sees law as the most important factor in people's relationship

¹Idem, *The Book of Romans*, p. 286.

with God. Nomism focuses on law as a whole whereas legalism focuses on particular rules.

The illustration 4:1-7

4:1-3 Already Paul had compared the Law to a prison warden (3:22) and a child guardian (3:24). Now he compared it to a trustee or manager who was appointed to care for a young child and his property. The purpose of all three comparisons was to clarify the difference between the previous historical period of spiritual immaturity and the present period of spiritual freedom.

Paul contrasted the spiritual immaturity of those living under the Mosaic Law with the spiritual maturity of those living by faith in Christ. Now, as then, a very young child is under the direction of others, even though he may be the heir of a vast inheritance. Similarly all people, before their coming to Christ by faith, were under bondage. In the case of Jews, their bondage was to the Law. In the case of Gentiles, it was the restraints of pagan religion and superstition. The rite of passage into adulthood took place in Jewish circles when a son reached the age of 12. In Greece it was at age 18, and under Roman law it was between 14 and 17.¹

Paul used the term *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* ("the elemental principles of the world") four times in his writings, twice in this chapter (vv. 3 and 9) and twice in Colossians 2 (vv. 8 and 20).

"The word *stoicheia* ["elemental principles"] means primarily things placed side by side in a row; it is used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and then, because the learning of the ABCs is the first lesson in a literary education, it comes to mean 'rudiments,' first principles (as in Heb. 5:12). Again, since the letters of the alphabet were regarded as the 'elements' of which words and sentences are built up, *stoicheia* comes to be used of the 'elements' which make up the material

¹Barclay, pp. 36-37.

world (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10, 12). This would be the natural meaning of *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* unless the context dictated otherwise ..."¹

Some scholars have understood these elemental principles to be basic philosophical or religious teachings.² Others believe that Paul was referring to the material components of the universe: earth, water, air, and fire.³ Still others believe that he meant the host of spiritual beings that Satan heads up.⁴ Other names for this vast company of demonic beings are "principalities," "powers," "the enemies of God," and "the rulers of this age" (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; 15:24, 26). Still another view is that the elemental things are elementary stages of religious experience.⁵

It seems to me that the context favors the first of these views: elementary teachings. Verses 4 and 5 refer to the Law as that from which Christ redeemed all believers, but especially Jewish believers. For a Gentile believer the elemental principles of the world from which he or she had been redeemed would have been the teachings of pagan religion and superstition.

Paul contrasted the believer's condition before and after Christ's incarnation (cf. v. 4), not his condition before and after his conversion. He was talking about stages in salvation history, not stages in a person's personal history.

4:4-5 God sent forth Christ into the world when He determined that the time was right ("the fullness of the time").

"It would seem that 'when the time had fully come' (RSV, NIV) does not mean that a certain divinely appointed period had elapsed (so NEB?), or that certain divinely ordained events had to

¹Bruce, p. 193.

²E.g., Lightfoot, p. 167; Burton, pp. 215-16; Barclay, p. 38; Harrison, p. 1293; and Bruce, pp. 202-3.

³E.g., E. Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 18, 20," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988):455-68.

⁴E.g., George, pp. 298-99; and Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 113.

⁵Campbell, p. 601.

transpire (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3ff.), or that God sent his Son into the world when all the conditions were ripe for his appearance. In view of the fact that the word 'came' denotes in the context (cf. 3:23, 25) the eschatological event of the coming of Christ and of the principle of justifying faith, the thought is rather that the appearance of the Son brought the 'fulness [*sic*] of the time,' marking the end of the present aeon (cf. 1:4) and ushering in the future aeon."¹

Nevertheless, God had providentially prepared the world for the coming of His Son politically, intellectually, and religiously through Roman, Greek, and especially Jewish means.²

"The greater part of the civilized world was politically united, but the old classical religions were bankrupt."³

Paul may have been referring to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, not just His birth.⁴ On the other hand, the Incarnation may have been in his mind.

Redemption has a double aspect: it delivers from bondage to the Law, and it delivers into sonship. God sent His Son to free those children whom the Law held in bondage and to elevate them to the status of full sons. In Roman culture the father determined the proper time to conduct the ceremony of passage. He took his child out from under the tutelage of his professional guardians and made him a free son.⁵

Paul referred to both Christ's divine nature ("His Son") and His human nature ("born of a woman," v. 4). The Messiah was born

¹Fung, p. 184.

²See Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, pp. 37-47.

³F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, p. 14.

⁴Burton, p. 217.

⁵For more information about the Jewish, Greek, and Roman customs involving a son's rite of passage, see Boice, p. 471.

under the Mosaic Law that He alone fulfilled by keeping it perfectly (cf. Matt. 5:17).

"We meet certain professed Christians today who deny what is is [*sic*] called the Eternal Sonship of Christ. They tell us He was not Son from eternity. They admit He was the Word, as set forth in John 1:1, but they say He became the Son when He was born on earth. Verse 4 definitely denies any such teaching."¹

Seventh-day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, and Spiritualism all teach that Christ was not preexistent.²

"Verses 4-5 contain one of the most compressed and highly charged passages in the entire letter because they present the objective basis, the Christological and soteriological foundation, for the doctrine of justification by faith."³

4:6 God also sent the Spirit of His Son to indwell believers and to motivate them to approach God. The heart refers metaphorically to the seat of the will (cf. Prov. 4:23). The believer's relationship with God can be intimate rather than formal. We can call Him Daddy. *Abba* means that in the Aramaic language (cf. Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15-16).

"However, we oversentimentalize this word when we refer to it as mere baby talk and translate it into English as 'daddy.' The word *Abba* appears in certain legal texts of the Mishna as a designation used by grown children in claiming the inheritance of their deceased father.⁴ As a word of address *Abba* is not so much associated with infancy as it is with intimacy. It is a cry of the heart, not a word

¹Ironside, p. 137.

²See Gerstner, pp. 161-63.

³George, pp. 299-300.

⁴Footnote 192: See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*abba*," by G. Kittel, 1(1964):5-6.

spoken calmly with personal detachment and reserve, but a word we 'call' or 'cry out' (*krazo*).
..."¹

"Most of the Jews knew both Greek and Aramaic. But there remains the question why Jesus used both in his prayer [cf. Mark 14:36]. Was it not natural for both words to come to him in his hour of agony as in his childhood? The same thing may be true here in Paul's case."²

"The presence of the Spirit is thus a witness of their sonship."³

"The purpose of the Son's mission was to give the rights of sonship; the purpose of the Spirit's mission, to give the power of using them."⁴

4:7 Consequently believers this side of the Cross are full "sons," and, in keeping with the custom of that day, full "heirs." How foolish it would be then to go back under the bondage of the Law!

"When a sinner trusts Christ and is saved, as far as his *condition* is concerned, he is a 'spiritual babe' who needs to grow (1 Peter 2:2-3); but as far as his *position* is concerned, he is an adult son who can draw on the Father's wealth and who can exercise all the wonderful privileges of sonship."⁵

"All Christians are heirs of God by faith alone. But like the Old Testament there are two kinds of inheritance: an inheritance which is merited and an

¹George, p. 307.

²Robertson, 4:302.

³Lightfoot, p. 169.

⁴H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 204.

⁵Wiersbe, 1:705.

inheritance which belongs to all Christians because they are sons, and for no other reason."¹

The appeal 4:8-11

Paul next reminded his readers of their former way of life, the transformation that their adoption into God's family had made, and his concern that they were in danger of trading their future blessings for present self-gratification.

4:8-9 Before conversion, Paul's original readers of this epistle—who were mainly Gentiles but some Jews—were slaves to religious traditions that, in the case of Gentiles, included counterfeit gods. Now at liberty, they were in danger of turning back to the same slavery. They, like children (v. 1), might return to a system that was "weak" (with no power to justify or sanctify), "worthless" (providing no inheritance), and enslaving.

"To recognize oneself to be the centre of divine attention [v. 9a] is one of the profounder aspects of Christian conversion."²

"For all the basic differences between Judaism and paganism, both involved subjection to the same elemental forces. This is an astonishing statement for a former Pharisee to make; yet Paul makes it—not as an exaggeration in the heat of argument but as the deliberate expression of a carefully thought out position. The *stoicheia* to which the Galatians had been in bondage were the counterfeit gods of v. 8; the bondage to which they were now disposed to turn back was that of the law."³

¹Dillow, p. 89.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 116.

³Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, pp. 202-3. Paragraph division omitted.

"The demonic forces of legalism, then, both Jewish and Gentile, can be called 'principalities and powers' or 'elemental spirits of the world.'"¹

However these elemental principles probably refer to all the things in which people place their trust apart from the living God.² Both Jewish and Gentile converts had lived bound to worldly forces until Christ released them from them. These forces, even today, include everything in which people place their trust apart from God: their "gods" to which they become slaves.

4:10-11 The Judaizers had urged Paul's readers to observe the Mosaic rituals. Here the Sabbath day and the annual feasts are in view. Paul despaired that they were going backward, and that much of his labor for them had been futile. They were not acting like heirs of God.

"They were 'dropping out' of the school of grace and enrolling in the kindergarten of Law!"³

"... Paul was always against any idea of soteriological legalism—i.e., that false understanding of the law by which people think they can turn God's revelatory standard to their own advantage, thereby gaining divine favor and acceptance. This, too, the prophets of Israel denounced, for legalism so defined was never a legitimate part of Israel's religion. The Judaizers of Galatia, in fact, would probably have disowned 'legalism' as well, though Paul saw that their insistence on a life of Jewish 'nomism' for his Gentile converts actually took matters right back to the crucial issue as to whether acceptance before God was based on 'the works of the law' or faith in what Christ had effected."⁴

¹G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, p. 51.

²Fung, p. 191.

³Wiersbe, 1:707.

⁴Longenecker, pp. 176.

"Yet while not legalistic, the religion of Israel, as contained in the OT and all forms of ancient and modern Judaism, is avowedly 'nomistic'—i.e., it views the Torah, both Scripture and tradition, as supervising the lives of God's own, so that all questions of conduct are ultimately measured against the touchstone of Torah and all of life is directed by Torah."¹

"... Judaism speaks of itself as being Torah-centered and Christianity declares itself to be Christ-centered, for in Christ the Christian finds not only God's law as the revelatory standard preeminently expressed but also the law as a system of conduct set aside in favor of guidance by reference to Christ's teachings and example and through the direct action of the Spirit."²

"... the Sabbath day of the Jews has found its fulfillment in Him who said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11:28)."³

Paul himself observed the Jewish feasts after his conversion (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8; Acts 20:16). However he did so voluntarily, not in order to satisfy divine requirements. He did not observe them because he believed that God expected him to do so but because they were a part of his cultural heritage. He also did so because he did not want to cast a stumbling block in the path of Jews coming to faith in Christ by failing to observe them (1 Cor. 9:19-23; cf. Rom. 14:5-6). In other words, he did so in order to evangelize effectively, not to gain acceptance from God.

"In recent years some have argued that all or at least most of the laws that these interlopers were pressing on the Galatians were the legislative

¹Ibid., p. 177.

²Ibid..

³Ironside, p. 148.

pieces that established 'boundary markers'—the practices that differentiated Jews from other people, in particular circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath. Paul wants those things dropped because he wants to build a unified church composed of Jew and Gentile alike, and the boundary markers inevitably provoke division. Certainly Paul is constantly at pains to unite Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Nevertheless, this 'new perspective' on Paul is too narrow. Paul cast the function of the law in more sweeping terms than boundary markers (esp. chap. 3), not least its capacity to establish transgression (3:19), and he ties the heart of his debate to the exclusive sufficiency of the cross of Christ to see a person declared 'just' before God."¹

2. The historical illustration 4:12-20

Paul appealed next to his past contacts with the Galatians, and he called on them to remember his visits to Galatia, in order to move them to abandon nomism. He stopped arguing and began entreating; he dropped his appeals to the intellect and now appealed to the Galatians' emotions.

"If the reader is inclined to think Paul has been impersonal in dealing with the problems at Galatia, that he has been arguing as a scholar and not as a pastor, the present passage should disabuse him of this idea."²

"Paul was a wonderful spiritual father; he knew just how to balance rebuke with love. Now he turns from 'spanking' to 'embracing' as he reminds the believers of their love for him and his love for them."³

"What we have in this personal aside is a poignant witness to the indissoluble linkage between theological content and

¹Carson and Moo, p. 466. See also pp. 470-72.

²Boice, p. 477.

³Wiersbe, 1:707-8.

pastoral concern. All true theology worthy of the name is pastoral theology."¹

"Rhetorically, a major shift in Paul's argument occurs at 4:12. There are, of course, still elements of forensic rhetoric to be found in what follows, particularly in Paul's accusations against the errorists (4:17; 5:7-12; 6:12-13) and his statements of self-defense (4:13-16; 5:11; 6:14, 17). But the dominant tone from 4:12 onwards is that of deliberative rhetoric, not forensic rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric, rather than taking a judicial or defensive stance, seeks to exhort or dissuade an audience regarding future actions by demonstrating that those actions are expedient or harmful ... In 4:12ff. Paul is no longer so much concerned to accuse or defend as to persuade his Galatian converts to adopt a certain course of action."²

4:12-14 Paul had become "as" his readers were in the sense that he had lived among them as a Gentile, not under the Mosaic Law. He now called on them, out of a sense of fair play, to live independent of the Law, as he did. This is the first imperative in the Greek text in Galatians.

"In seeking to win other people for Christ, our end is to make them like us, but the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. If they are to become one with us in Christian conviction and experience, we must first become one with them in Christian compassion."³

Evidently Paul suffered with some physical ailment or handicap when he preached the gospel in Galatia (v. 13). The Galatians had put up with some bodily affliction that Paul had without despising him, when he had evangelized them, because they so valued the good news that he brought them.

The commentators have suggested many different ailments that might have been Paul's including severe headaches,

¹George, p. 319.

²Longenecker, p. 184.

³John R. W. Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians*, p. 113.

malaria, headaches and malaria,¹ epilepsy,² ophthalmia, exhaustion, and others.³ Obviously his condition was something repulsive (v. 14). However there is not sufficient information in the text to be dogmatic. Whatever it was the Galatians knew what Paul was referring to. This affliction may or may not have been Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

"The reference to the bodily weakness which was the occasion of his preaching to them had for its purpose in Paul's mind to remind them of their affectionate attitude towards him and to renew it."⁴

The Galatians had received Paul with the honor and belief that they would have given "an angel of God," not that they had viewed him as a superhuman.⁵

- 4:15-18 The Galatians were losing their good attitude toward Paul and its accompanying blessing. They had appreciated Paul so much that they would have given him their most precious possessions. "Torn out your eyes" is probably a figurative expression similar to "given your eye teeth."⁶ However some interpreters believe that Paul had some affliction of the eyes.⁷ Now the Galatians were regarding Paul suspiciously as an enemy. The Judaizers were seeking to shut the Galatians out of the sphere of Paul's influence and the gospel's so that his readers would become dependent on them. Paul sought his readers for the right reason ("in a commendable way"), namely, their need to grow in grace, not only while he was with them but always.
- 4:19-20 Paul's loving affection for the Galatians comes through more strongly here than before. The tender expression "My children"

¹Lenski, p. 219

²Lightfoot, pp. 186-91.

³See Eadie, pp. 329-45; Longenecker, p. 191.

⁴Burton, p. 237.

⁵Ibid., p. 242.

⁶See *ibid.*, pp. 243-44; Longenecker, p. 193; Alford, 3:2:45.

⁷E.g., Ironside, p. 155; Wuest, 1:3:125.

(Gr. *tekna mou*) occurs only here in Paul's writings. Paul felt as if he was going through labor pains again for them. He had agonized for them before, when he had evangelized Galatia, but now he had to repeat his laborious work for them.

"This is a striking metaphor without parallel in any other Pauline writing. ... Only here in Galatians does he appear in the role of a mother, a mother who willingly undergoes the ordeal of pregnancy and delivery all over again in order to secure the well-being of her children.¹

"The Galatians who a moment ago were described as being formed in the womb were now spoken of as expectant mothers who themselves must wait for an embryonic Christ to be fully developed (*morphoo*, a medical term for the growth of the fetus into an infant) within them."²

Paul wished he could be present with the Galatians personally in order to communicate the nuances of his feelings for them better. Their irrational desire to become slaves to the Mosaic system and followers of the legalistic false teachers perplexed him—as well as disturbed him.

3. The biblical illustration 4:21-31

Paul made and interpreted an allegory of the history of Abraham's two sons in order to convince his readers that they were in danger of joining the wrong branch of Abraham's family by following the Judaizers. Paul was not using the allegorical method of interpretation, which denies the reality of the characters (e.g., *Pilgrim's Progress*).³ The apostle appears to have used the story of Abraham in the way that he did, as an allegory, because this was a common rabbinic method that the Judaizers probably employed in

¹George, p. 329.

²Ibid., p. 330.

³See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 7.

their teaching in Galatia.¹ Paul used the same method as the false teachers, but he taught his readers truth rather than falsehood with it.

"We have one Old Testament story, but two complementary interpretations of it. The first [vv. 22-27] defends the equation of existence *hupo nomon* [under law] with captivity and thus takes up a theme from what precedes. The second [vv. 28-30] makes a statement about the freedom of the believer in preparation for what is to come."²

The biblical story 4:21-23

4:21 Paul challenged his readers who claimed to value the Law so highly to consider what it taught. He chose his lesson from Genesis, a book in the Law section of the Old Testament. Thus he used the term "law" to refer to two different things in this verse: the Mosaic Law (the Torah, or Pentateuch; cf. Luke 24:44; Rom. 3:21) and the whole Old Testament (cf. Rom. 3:19).³ Again Paul returned to Abraham, the founder of Judaism, for his illustration.

4:22-23 Paul pointed out two contrasts between Ishmael and Isaac: First, Ishmael's mother was a slave, but Isaac's mother was free. These conditions affected the status of their sons in Abraham's household. Second, Ishmael was born naturally, but Isaac was born supernaturally in fulfillment of God's promise. Isaac's birth was supernatural in that Abraham and Sarah were both past the age of childbearing when Isaac was conceived.

"In the scriptural record of the birth of these two sons of Abraham Paul recognizes the same opposition between reliance on self ('according to the flesh') and reliance on God ('through promise') as exists between those who would be

¹R. Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, pp. 128-29. Longenecker wrote an excursus on "The Hagar-Sarah Story in Jewish Writings and in Paul," pp. 200-6.

²Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Law Has Given Sarah No Children [Gal. 4:21-30]," *Novum Testamentum* 29:3 (July 1987):235.

³Lightfoot, p. 179.

justified by legal works and those who are justified by faith."¹

The allegorical interpretation 4:24-27

4:24 Paul then interpreted these events figuratively. He acknowledged the historicity of the events but used them as illustrations.² An allegory, as we use that term today, is a story in which the events are not historical. Paul was calling allegory what we refer to as analogy.³ He saw in this story parallels between the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, between non-Christians and Christians, and between law and grace.

"Paul's allegory was an illustration or analogy in which he was pointing out that certain facts about Hagar correspond to non-Christians and that certain facts about Sarah correspond to facts about Christians."⁴

"Since the kind of OT exegesis found in this passage is by no means generally characteristic of Paul, the natural inference is that there was a special reason for its use here. The reason is not far to seek: if the Judaizers in Galatia were using a similar kind of argument to persuade the Christians that sonship to Abraham entailed circumcision and observance of the law, it would be especially appropriate for Paul to turn his opponents' own weapons against them."⁵

"The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that in him and his offspring all nations would be blessed (cf. 3:8, 16). The law, which was given later, was a parenthetical dispensation introduced by God for a limited

¹Fung, p. 206.

²See Robertson, 4:306-7.

³See Longenecker, p. 209.

⁴Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pp. 46-47. See also pp. 221-26.

⁵Fung, p. 219.

purpose; its validity continued only until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ, and even while it was valid it did not modify the terms of the promise (cf. 3:17-25)."¹

At least one covenant theologian has used this verse to support the contention that God made a covenant with Adam, and his descendants yet to be born, before the Fall. In this "covenant of works," God promised that if Adam would obey the command to not eat of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, he would receive as his reward a permanent state of holiness.² However, the covenant in view in this verse is identified as the Mosaic Covenant in the next verse.

4:25 Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant in Paul's analogy. This covenant went into effect at Mount Sinai. Hagar's descendants represent the Israelites who lived in bondage under the Mosaic Law. Sarah, not mentioned in verse 25, represents the Abrahamic Covenant, and her descendants are free, living under the promise given to Abraham.

The earliest identification of Mt. Sinai with Jebel Musa in the Sinai Peninsula, the most popular probable site, comes from the writing of Egeria in the fourth century A.D. It is possible that in Paul's day the Sinai Peninsula was part of Arabia.³ Another possibility is that the real Mt. Sinai was in ancient (and modern) Arabia, perhaps just east of the Gulf of Aqabah.

"Paul is apparently viewing Arabia as the land of Hagar's descendants and the land of slaves; it was not the holy land that God gave Israel."⁴

4:26 Hagar also represents the Jerusalem of Paul's day that was enslaved under Rome and the Mosaic Law. Sarah represents the heavenly city of Jerusalem, the final destiny of departed

¹Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, p. 219.

²See William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:152-53. See Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, for a comparison of covenant and dispensational theology.

³Lenski, 239.

⁴Morris, p. 146.

believers, which is free. She is also the mother of all true believers.

The main features in this analogy are as follows:

Hagar is the slave woman.	Sarah is the free woman.
Ishmael was born naturally.	Isaac was born supernaturally.
The old covenant	The new covenant
The earthly Jerusalem	The heavenly Jerusalem
Judaism	Christianity

4:27 Isaiah 54:1 predicted that Israel, which was comparatively barren before the Babylonian exile, would enjoy numerous children in the future. This is probably a reference to the blessings of the millennial kingdom. Paul applied this prophecy to Sarah. She would have greater blessing and more children in the future than in the past, children of the promises, namely, all true believers, including Christians.

The practical application 4:28-31

4:28 Paul drew three applications from his illustration: First, Christians are similar to Isaac in that they experience a supernatural birth and are part of the fulfillment of God's promise. Therefore they should not live as enslaved sons.

4:29 Second, so-called believers, whose origin is different from that of real believers, persecute real believers, like Ishmael persecuted Isaac. Legalists persecute those living in liberty. Paul referred to the Galatian believers in general in this passage as brothers and sisters, which group also included the so-called (false, cf. 2:4) brethren: the legalists who were mingled among them.

4:30 Third, Christians should drive out legalists from their midst, since legalists have no inheritance with the legitimate sons and daughters of God. As Abraham cast Ishmael out of his household, so the Galatians should cast the Judaizers out of

their church. This does not mean that church leaders should excommunicate all legalistic Christians. However it would be wise (and Scriptural) to exclude promoters of legalism and nomism, especially if they do not change their teaching. Paul's point was that nomists will not inherit as much blessing from God as those who live by the Spirit.

"The Apostle thus confidently sounds the death-knell of Judaism at a time when one-half of Christendom clung to the Mosaic law with a jealous affection little short of frenzy, and while the Judaic party seemed to be growing in influence and was strong enough, even in the Gentile churches of his own founding, to undermine his influence and endanger his life."¹

Legalism is both a belief and a practice. As a belief legalism is the conviction that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by keeping rules. Often the rules in view are those imposed by people, not those required by God. However, misapplying biblical laws is also a form of legalism. In a larger sense legalism is the belief that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by our good works. Of course the only thing that makes us acceptable to God is our trust in Christ's good works. He satisfied God's demands for us. So we actually are saved by good works after all, but it is Christ's good works, not ours. As a practice legalism is the keeping of rules with a view to gaining merit with God.

"Legalism is one of the major problems among Christians today. We must keep in mind that legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards, it means worshiping these standards and thinking that we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards."²

¹Lightfoot, p. 184.

²Wiersbe, 1:712.

"Some run from rules, claiming it is legalism. It is not. Legalism is not the law. There has always been law in the world. Since Moses, there has always been law in the Bible. Even in the New Testament, we have law. As believers, we operate under 'the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2). The commands of the New Testament provide this code for us. And this law is good and beneficial for us, since it comes from God. So, legalism is not the presence of law or moral code. Legalism is an attitude. Legalism exists when you conform to a rule or code with the motivation of exalting yourself. You may pretend it helps sanctify you. For instance, you could claim a vegan diet accelerates our personal spiritual growth. On the outside, that may seem plausible. But because your motivation is wrong and you have exalted yourself, you actually stunt growth."¹

"Legalism may be defined as 'a fleshly attitude which conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self.'"²

4:31 Paul concluded his allegorical argument by reminding his readers of the very basic and drastic difference between himself and the Galatians, who were children of faith, and the legalists and nomists, who were children of the flesh.

Paul's defense of salvation by faith alone (chapters 3—4) points out in the strongest terms the incompatibility of faith and works as methods of obtaining justification and sanctification. The Judaizers were trying to get the Galatians to submit to the Mosaic institutions in order to earn something from God. This approach is antithetic to grace, which acknowledges that people cannot merit God's favor and simply trusts in God to deliver what He has promised.

"Many people talk about salvation by grace who do not seem to have the least conception of what grace is. They think that

¹J. Paul Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian*, p. 111. Paragraph divisions omitted.

²Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God*, p. 117.

God gives them the grace to do the things that make them deserving of salvation. That is not it at all [cf. Rom. 3:24]."¹

Paul contrasted faith and works as methods of obtaining God's favor. Elsewhere he stressed the importance of good works and gave many commands, positive and negative, to guide Christian behavior (e.g., Eph. 2:8-10; et al.). In those passages works express the Christian's gratitude to God for His grace. They do not make us more acceptable to God or make God love us more than He would if we did not do them.

What Jesus and the apostles taught about our rewards does not contradict Paul's emphasis here. We should commit ourselves to Jesus as Lord (Rom. 12:1-3) and exercise discipline in our lives. We should do these things so that we can earn a reward and receive the maximum inheritance possible when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). However, we should do so as an expression of our gratitude for what God has done for us (cf. Col. 1:10). We do not have to do so in order to earn His favor or love (Rom. 8:31-39).

James' emphasis in his epistle was on the importance of living by faith after God has accepted us (James 2:14-26). Paul's emphasis in Galatians was on what makes us acceptable to God.

IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO CHRISTIAN LIVING 5:1—6:10

Paul moved next from theology (chs. 3—4) to ethics, from doctrine to practice. This is a change in degree of emphasis, however, rather than a totally new emphasis.

A. BALANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE CH. 5

Having ruled out the Mosaic Law as a regulatory standard for Christian behavior, Paul proceeded to explain how God does lead us. He did this by first discussing two opposite extremes and then the proper middle or higher road. The indwelling Holy Spirit now leads us, but we must be careful to follow His leading.

¹Ironside, p. 163.

Balance is extremely important in theology and the Christian life. Probably most of the errors that Christians get into, in both doctrine and practice, result from failure to balance biblical revelation on various complementary subjects. Here Paul stressed balance between living without Law and living without license.¹

1. Living without the Law 5:1-12

The apostle warned his readers not to think that they could satisfy the demands of the Mosaic Law by obeying only a few of its commands. Only complete compliance satisfies its demands.

5:1 Paul's mainly Gentile readers were in danger of returning to slavery, not so much to the slavery of their heathen sins, but to the yoke of slavery that is the Mosaic Law. The false teachers were evidently telling them that they needed to submit to circumcision in order to be truly acceptable to God.

"Before plunging into this third section of his letter, Paul interjects a verse that is at once a summary of all that has gone before and a transition to what follows. It is, in fact, the key verse of the entire Epistle. Because of the nature of the true gospel and of the work of Christ on his behalf, the believer is now to turn away from anything that smacks of legalism and instead rest in Christ's triumphant work for him and live in the power of Christ's Spirit. ... The appeal is for an obstinate perseverance in freedom as the only proper response to an attempt to bring Christians once more under legalism."²

"One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in

¹See Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, and Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, for excellent discussions of many important areas of theology and practice that need balancing. See also Charles C. Bing, *Simply by Grace*, pp. 139-42.

²Boice, p. 486. Hanna, p. 238, also considered this verse the key verse in Galatians.

reality, it leads the believer back into a 'second childhood' of Christian experience."¹

In the quotations above, Boice and Wiersbe used the term "legalism" as it is commonly used to describe both legalism and nomism.

In what sense has God liberated Christians from the "yoke of slavery" (v. 1) that is the Mosaic Law (cf. Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:12; Gal. 3:24)? Obviously it has some value for us (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). There were two purposes of the Mosaic Law: regulatory and revelatory. Its regulatory value has ceased, but its revelatory value continues. What is the Christian's proper relationship to the Mosaic Law?

Calvin and many reformed theologians have answered this question by saying that the ceremonial laws (e.g., animal sacrifices, dietary restrictions, feast days, etc.) are no longer binding on Christians because of the death of Christ. Nevertheless the moral laws (the Ten Commandments) are still binding. They say that God has done away with the moral laws only in the sense that they no longer condemn us (Rom. 8:11).²

The problem with this explanation is that it makes a distinction between two parts of the Law that the text does not make. The text simply states that Christ is the end of "the Law" (Rom. 10:4), not the ceremonial part of the Law. Furthermore, if the Ten Commandments are all still binding on us, why have Christians throughout history (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Cor. 16:2) met to worship on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath (Saturday)?

Some reformed theologians, following Calvin, believe that God abolished Sabbath worship along with the ceremonial laws.³ This seems somewhat inconsistent. Others, following the Westminster Confession, regard Sunday worship as a

¹Wiersbe, 1:705.

²Calvin, 2:11:4.

³*Ibid.*, 1:2:8:33, 34.

continuation of Sabbath worship.¹ Nevertheless it is, of course, very different.

Dispensational theologians have suggested another answer to this question that, to me, seems more consistent with what Scripture says. They say that God did away with the Mosaic Law completely: the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral parts. He terminated it as a code and has replaced it with a new code: "the Law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Some commandments in the Law of Christ are the same as those in the Law of Moses (e.g., nine of the Ten Commandments, excluding the command to observe the Sabbath day).

Ancient codes of laws that governed people's behavior existed even before God gave the Law of Moses (e.g., Gen. 1:28-30; 2:16-17 [pre-Fall]; 3:14-19 [post-Fall] ; 9:1-17 [post-Flood]). God incorporated some specific commands from these former codes into the Law of Christ, even though they were not part of the Law of Moses (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:3; cf. Gen. 9:3). He also incorporated nine of the Ten Commandments from the Mosaic Code.

"May this procedure not be likened to the various codes in a household with growing children? At different stages of maturity new codes are instituted, but some of the same commandments appear often. To say that the former code is done away and all its commandments is no contradiction. It is as natural as growing up. So it is with the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ."²

"The 'yoke' was used in current Jewish parlance in an honorable sense for the obligation to keep the law of Moses, and the Judaizers may well have urged the Galatians to 'take the yoke of the law' upon themselves. But Paul bluntly points out that the ordinances of the law as demanded by the

¹ *The Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large*, 21:7.

² Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):247.

Judaizers constitute a slave's yoke, so that he uses the word in the bad sense of an imposed burden, like slavery (cf. Acts 15:10; 1 Tim. 6:1)."¹

"Sad to say, there are some people who feel very insecure with liberty. They would rather be under the tyranny of some leader than to make their own decisions freely. There are some believers who are frightened by the liberty they have in God's grace; so they seek out a fellowship that is legalistic and dictatorial, where they can let others make their decisions for them. This is comparable to an adult climbing back into the crib."²

5:2 Paul now began to attack the Judaizers' teaching about circumcision. Insistence on circumcision was a central feature of the false gospel that the Judaizers were promoting. It was the practice around which the whole controversy swirled.³

"At this point St Paul assumes a severer tone in condemning the observance of the law. It is not only a useless imposition, a slavish burden; it is pernicious and fatal in itself."⁴

"The false teachers said, 'Except ye be circumcised, you cannot be saved;' and the apostle affirms, in the teeth of this declaration, 'Of what advantage shall Christ be to you, if you are trusting in something else than Christ—in the blood of your foreskin, and not in His atoning blood?'"⁵

¹Fung, pp. 216-17.

²Wiersbe, 1:714. See also Minirth, et al., ch. 9: "Grace: The Road to Freedom."

³See Monte A. Shanks, "Galatians 5:2-4 in Light of the Doctrine of Justification," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:674 (April-June 2012):188-202.

⁴Lightfoot, p. 203.

⁵Eadie, p. 380.

5:3-4 The Galatians would be obligating themselves to obey the whole Mosaic Code ("Law") if they allowed the false teachers to circumcise them.

"The acceptance of circumcision is in principle the acceptance of the whole legalistic scheme."¹

"It is not the fact of their *having been circumcised* which St Paul condemns (for this is indifferent in itself), but the fact of their *allowing themselves to be circumcised*, [while] being free agents."²

The Galatians' confidence in circumcision would reveal a confidence in their own ability to earn salvation by obeying the Law. This legal approach to salvation would separate them from Christ, since He provided salvation as a gift. They would fall away from the grace method of salvation if they chose the law method.³ "Grace" was a favorite word of Paul's. He used it 100 out of the 155 times it occurs in the New Testament. In view of the many scriptural promises that God never withdraws His gift of salvation, verse 4 cannot mean that the readers had lost their salvation (e.g., John 1:12; 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39; et al.).

"Certainly he is not suggesting that the Galatians had 'lost their salvation,' because throughout this letter he deals with them as *believers*. At least nine times he calls them *brethren*, and he also uses the pronoun *we* (Gal. 4:28, 31). This Paul would never do if his readers were lost. He boldly states, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father"' (Gal. 4:6). If his readers were unsaved, Paul could never write those words."⁴

The legalists appear to have been claiming that circumcision was a necessary step in the process by which people become

¹Burton, p. 274.

²Lightfoot, p. 204.

³See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 218-19.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:715.

acceptable to God. These steps, from their viewpoint, were faith in Christ, reception of the Spirit, and circumcision of the flesh. Paul argued that anyone who submits to circumcision in order to gain acceptance with God really believes in salvation by law-keeping. If one believes in law-keeping for salvation, he must keep the whole Law, not just the requirement of circumcision. That is impossible for sinners to do. Rather than gaining acceptance with God, circumcision would be the very thing that would separate them from Christ.

5:5-6 Paul's approach, and the one that he tried to persuade the Galatians to adopt, was simply to trust God to deliver all that He has promised and that we anticipate in the future, based on the fact that we are now already righteous in His sight (justified).¹ This hope includes our ultimate glorification (cf. Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Pet. 1:3-4, 13). We do not work for this, but we wait for it. Paul typically used the word "righteousness" to describe what we have now, which comes with justification, but he usually used the word "salvation" to stress our future deliverance. The Greek word translated "waiting" (*apekdechometha*, v. 5) appears seven times in the New Testament in reference to Christ's return (Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28).

"'The hope of righteousness' is the only prophetic reference in the entire epistle. This is quite remarkable, because in all Paul's epistles he has something to say about the rapture of the church or about Christ's coming to earth to establish His kingdom."²

God does not care if a Christian has a circumcised body or not. What does matter to Him is that we trust Him and love Him. Paul united the three basic Christian virtues in these verses: "faith," "hope," and "love" (cf. Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:3). The Holy Spirit makes all three possible.

¹Fung, pp. 225-26.

²McGee, 5:185.

"For the disclosure of the apostle's fundamental idea of the nature of religion, there is no more important sentence in the whole epistle [than verse 6], if, indeed, in any of Paul's epistles."¹

"This verse [v. 6] on its own merits would show that Paul is not out of harmony with James' doctrine of faith plus works (Jas 2.24ff.)."²

"When you live by grace, you depend on the power of the Spirit; but under Law, you must depend on yourself and your own efforts."³

"We must guard against the misunderstanding current especially in Catholic theology (though Protestantism is far from exempt) that only faith made perfect in love leads to justification. This represents a serious distortion of the relationship between faith, love, and justification. In speaking of justification Paul never talks of faith *and* love, but *only* of faith as receiving. Love is not therefore an additional prerequisite for receiving salvation, nor is it properly an essential trait of faith; on the contrary, faith animates the love in which it works."⁴

"... to the Romanist 'faith' is not faith in the Biblical sense of the term. The Romanist doctrine is not understood until one understands what Romanist faith is. Rome hurls its anathema against the teaching that faith consists of knowledge, assent, and *fiducia*, confidence or trust. It cancels the first and the third factors, especially the third. It leaves only assent, namely blanket assent to whatever Rome teaches, whatever that may be. Such assent is indeed *informata* and needs

¹Burton, p. 279.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 130.

³Wiersbe, 1:715.

⁴Bornkamm, p. 153.

something to make it *formata*, to give it form and substance. Rome declares that this substance is love and good works. When assent has enough of these it is fully formed. Since we seldom know when we have enough we cannot be certain of salvation. Hence also justification is not forensic, not instantaneous and complete but medicinal, gradual, for the most part completed in purgatory; any certainty is doubtful in this life according to Rome's own teaching."¹

5:7-10 The false teachers had bumped Paul's readers as they ran the Christian race. God had not led the legalists who hindered them to do so.

Zola Budd and Mary Decker ran close together in the pack of 1,000-meter runners in the 1984 Los Angeles, California, Olympic Games. Unexpectedly, Zola Budd bumped into Mary Decker, and Mary went sprawling into the infield. She was out of the race. Just so, the false teachers in Galatia had interrupted the Galatian believers' good progress toward their goal.

"It is important to note that Paul never uses the image of the race to tell people how to be saved. He is always talking to Christians about how to live the Christian life. *A contestant in the Greek games had to be a citizen before he could compete.*"²

The "leaven" in Paul's proverb (v. 9; cf. 1 Cor. 5:6) could refer to the error in the church, the leading false teacher in their midst (cf. v. 10), and/or the single requirement of circumcision already mentioned (vv. 2-3). I think it probably refers to the Judaizer or the Judaizers rather than to the legalistic teaching.³ Paul was confident that the Galatians would side with him ("adopt no other view," v. 10), and that they or God would judge the false teacher or teachers. "Whoever he is"

¹Lenski, pp. 261-62.

²Wiersbe, 1:715.

³Lightfoot, p. 206.

may allude to the high standing of the false teacher in the Galatians' minds (as in: "Whoever he thinks he is"), rather than expressing Paul's ignorance about his identity.¹ On the other hand, "the one who is disturbing you" could refer to anyone who might hereafter disturb them (cf. v. 12; 1:6).²

5:11 Evidently some people were saying that Paul advocated circumcision. He may have preached it before his Damascus Road conversion, but since then he had stopped doing that. Probably Paul meant that the accusation from his critics, that he preached circumcision whenever it suited him, was not true (cf. 1 Cor. 7:18).³ Paul thought it wise for some Christians, such as Timothy, to undergo circumcision for the sake of effective ministry (Acts 16:3). But he did not teach that it was necessary for salvation.⁴

Paul's point here was that, if he was teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation, the Judaizers would not have persecuted him. The legalists opposed Paul's preaching of the Cross because it pointed out that people are unable to save themselves.

"The *skandalon* ["stumbling block"] of the cross, for Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), lay in the curse which it involved for one who was hanged on it (cf. 3:13). That one who died such a death should be proclaimed as Lord and Christ was intolerable. In the eyes of Gentiles the idea that salvation depended on one who had neither the wit nor the power to save himself from so disreputable a death was the height of folly. But there is a more general *skandalon* attached to the cross, one of which Paul is probably thinking here: it cuts the ground from under every thought of personal achievement or merit where God's salvation is in view. To be shut up to receiving salvation from

¹Fung, p. 238.

²See Burton, p. 285.

³Boice, p. 490.

⁴See Longenecker, p. 232, for other possible reasons for this charge against Paul.

the crucified one, if it is to be received at all, is an affront to all notions of proper self-pride and self-help—and for many people this remains a major stumbling-block in the gospel of Christ crucified. If I myself can make some small contribution, something even so small as the acceptance of circumcision, then my self-esteem is uninjured."¹

"Actually, the cross of Christ is an offense to all that man prides himself in. It is an offense to his morality because it tells him his work cannot justify him. It is an offense to his philosophy because its appeal is to faith and not to reason. It is an offense to the culture of man because its truths are revealed to babes. It is an offense to his sense of caste because God chooses the poor and humble. It is an offense to his will because it calls for an unconditional surrender. It is an offense to his pride because it shows the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart. And it is an offense to himself because it tells him he must be born again."²

In short, Paul's gospel was a stumbling block for two reasons: it presented a crucified Messiah, and it advocated a way of salvation apart from circumcision and the Law.

5:12 The Judaizers had gone too far with circumcision. Paul's wish, that the Judaizers who were so keen on circumcision would even emasculate (i.e., castrate) themselves, reflects his deep feelings about the seriousness of their heresy (cf. Phil. 3:2). If God granted Paul's wish, they could not produce converts, figuratively speaking. And they would be excluded from the congregation of the Lord according to the Law that they professed to live by (cf. Deut. 23:1). Priests of the Cybele cult in that region practiced castration.³

¹Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, pp. 237-38. See also Lenski, p. 270.

²McGee, 5:186.

³Rendall, 3:185; Burton, p. 289; Barclay, p. 48; George, pp. 371-72.

"The remonstrance is doubly significant as addressed to Galatians, for Pessinus one of their chief towns was the home of the worship of Cybele in honour of whom these mutilations were practiced ..."¹

Paul regarded his legalistic rivals as no better than pagan priests.

"... for Paul to compare the ancient Jewish rite of circumcision to pagan practices even in this way is startling. For one thing, it puts the efforts of the Judaizers to have the Gentiles circumcised on the same level as abhorred pagan practices. For another, it links their desire for circumcision to that which even in Judaism disbarred one from the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:1)."²

Paul's desire for the false teachers seems to have been that they would cut themselves off from the company of believers.³

"Most often Galatians is viewed as the great document of justification by faith. What Christians all too often fail to realize is that in reality it is a document that sets out a Christ-centered lifestyle—one that stands in opposition to both nomism and libertinism. Sadly, though applauding justification by faith, Christians frequently renounce their freedom in Christ by espousing either nomism or libertinism, and sometimes (like the Galatians) both. So Paul's letter to the Galatians, though directly relevant to the Galatian situation, speaks also to our situation today."⁴

¹Lightfoot, p. 207.

²Boice, p. 491.

³Fung, p. 242.

⁴Longenecker, p. 235.

2. Living without license 5:13-15

Paul urged his readers to live unbound to the Law of Moses (5:1-12). But he also warned them against using their liberty as a license to sin in order to prevent them from overreacting.¹

"Christian freedom is not licence [sic] for the simple but tremendous reason that the Christian is not the man who has become free to sin, but the man, who, by the grace of God, has become free not to sin."²

"The theme of love ... informs all of Paul's exhortations vis-à-vis [regarding] the Galatians' libertine tendencies ... Yet undergirding all of Paul's admonitions regarding love and service is the reality of life lived 'by the Spirit,' with references to the Spirit being more frequent in 5:13—6:10 than references to either love or service."³

5:13-14 The word "flesh" here refers to the sinful human nature that every person, saved and unsaved, possesses.

"The word *sarx* ["flesh"], previously in this epistle a purely physical term, is used here and throughout this chapter (see vv. 16, 17, 20, 24) in a definitely ethical sense, 'that element of man's nature which is opposed to goodness, and makes for evil,' in which it appears also in Rom., chap. 8..."⁴

It is possible to reason that, since it is unnecessary to keep the Law in order to be saved, it is unnecessary to pay attention to the Law for any reason whatsoever. However Paul was not urging his converts to burn their Old Testaments. The Law has values, as he previously pointed out, one of which is to reveal how to express love for God and other people. Actually the

¹See Ryrie, *The Grace ...*, pp. 121-26.

²Barclay, p. 50.

³Longenecker, p. 236. Paragraph division omitted.

⁴Burton, p. 292.

whole Law is a revelation of how to love (Lev. 19:18; cf. Mark 12:28-31).

"The true ideal of the Christian is not freedom, but unfettered service to the love of God and man, which annihilates self, and subordinates all selfish desires to perfect love."¹

"Here lies the danger for all the called. They are ushered into a wonderful land of freedom. Yet freedom is like a great fortune of money, it may be a great blessing if it is used aright, a curse if it is abused."²

Under grace we are free to fulfill what the Law required by loving God and one another. For the Christian, the Mosaic Law has revelatory value (2 Tim. 3:16-17), even though it does not have regulatory value: controlling our behavior.³ Two of the revelatory purposes of the Mosaic Law are to show us how to express love for God and others, and to teach us by Israel's example (Rom. 15:1; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Another view is that Paul was referring to divine law in a general sense here, namely, natural law or the law of conscience, rather than the Mosaic Law or law legalistically interpreted.⁴ If so, he used the word "law" here in a different sense than he used it previously in this epistle. I do not think that this is what Paul meant.

When her husband deserted her, my friend Frank's mother began taking in ironing to pay the bills and to save money so that Frank could go to college. Even when a deacon's wife in her church scorned her for doing menial work, she continued to do it out of love for her son. She served her son through love.

¹Rendall, 3:186.

²Lenski, p. 274.

³See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):227-33.

⁴Burton, p. 294.

If his readers insisted on living in slavery Paul wished that they would enslave themselves to love of one another. If they wanted to live under law, let it be the law of Christ (6:2) impelled by the indwelling Spirit, rather than by an external code. There is no external entity that can enable us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but the Holy Spirit can produce that love within us.

In what sense does Leviticus 19:18 fulfill the whole Mosaic Law?

"There is a play on two meanings of the Greek word *peplerotai*, translated 'summed up' [NIV, or 'fulfilled,' NASB]. On the one hand, it refers to the fact that the law can aptly be summarized by the words of Leviticus 19:18. This idea was a commonplace of rabbinic opinion and Jesus endorsed it in Matthew 22:39 and Luke 10:25-28. On the other hand, the word can also mean 'fulfilled' (as in Rom 13:8), and in this sense Paul is suggesting that it is actually out of the new life of love made possible within the Christian community through the Spirit that the law finds fulfillment."¹

"... the primary meaning is not that we must properly love ourselves before we can love others (although this is true in itself), but that we are to love our neighbor with the same spontaneity and alacrity [eagerness] with which we love ourselves."²

Paul later wrote: "no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph. 5:29). By this he meant that it is not normal behavior to hate oneself but to love oneself. People only hate themselves because bad experiences, choices, or influences have had that effect on them.

¹Boice, p. 493.

²Fung, p. 246. Cf. Ridderbos, pp. 201-2.

5:15 Apparently the believers who advocated grace and the believers who advocated law bitterly opposed one another in the Galatian churches. Paul cautioned both sides to love one another, or else they would be consumed by each other. That would not be a good example of Christian love. Attacking each other is the only sin that Paul warned the Galatians to avoid in this letter, and he did not speak of it as a sin that they were committing.¹ Perhaps they were better off spiritually than some other congregations to which he wrote, or possibly he did not want to deal with other needs of theirs in this letter.

Paul evidently did not consider that he was biting and devouring the false teachers that he assailed in this epistle (cf. v. 15). It is possible to love people and at the same time condemn their actions.

3. Living by the Holy Spirit 5:16-26

Paul had told his readers that they should not live either under the Mosaic Law or licentiously. Now he gave positive direction and explained what living under the Holy Spirit means. He did this so his readers would know how to live to the glory of God as Christians.

The promise of victory 5:16-18

"In this passage the Spirit is doubly contrasted, first, with the flesh, and secondly, with the law. The flesh and the law are closely allied: they both move in the same element, in the sphere of outward and material things. The law is not only no safeguard against the flesh, but rather provokes it; and he who would renounce the flesh, must renounce the law also. We have here germs of the ideas more fully developed in the Epistle to the Romans."²

5:16 Walking "by the Spirit" means living moment-by-moment submissively trusting in the Holy Spirit rather than in self.

¹Lenski, p. 280.

²Lightfoot, p. 209. See especially Rom. 6—8.

"Walk by the Spirit' means 'let your conduct be directed by the Spirit.'"¹

"Regulate your lives by the rule of the spirit."²

"To 'walk by the Spirit' means to be under the constant, moment-by-moment direction, control, and guidance of the Spirit."³

"Walking is a metaphor used from time to time in Scripture to denote spiritual progress. People in the first century could not travel as fast as we do, with our cars, planes, trains and the like, but even so, for them as for us, walking was the slowest way of going places. But even though walking was slow and unspectacular, walking meant progress. If anyone kept walking, she or he would certainly cover the ground and eventually reach the destination. So for the apostle walking was an apt metaphor. If any believer was walking, that believer was going somewhere."⁴

We could translate the Greek present tense imperative as "Keep on walking." To the extent that we do this, we will not at all (Gr. *ou me*, the strongest negative) carry out our fleshly desires. This is a promise to all believers.

This does not mean that one must be constantly thinking about his or her dependence on God in order to be walking in the Spirit. It is, of course, impossible to be thinking about this all the time. Nevertheless we should be trusting in Him all the time. The more that we acknowledge our dependence on God, the more consistent we will be in trusting in Him and in walking by the Spirit.

¹Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, p. 243.

²Rendall, 3:186.

³Fung, p. 249.

⁴Morris, p. 167.

"In other words, there must be a cooperation of the saint with the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctifying the life."¹

"The contrary way of living is to *fulfil the lust of the flesh*. The *flesh* is the physical part of our being and stands accordingly for that which is opposed to our spirit as well as to the divine Spirit. Our *flesh* is characterized by *lust*, which stands for the strong, but sometimes evil, desires that are associated with bodily living."²

This is one of the most important and helpful verses on Christian living in the Bible.

5:17 This verse does not present two natures fighting each other inside the Christian. The conflicting entities are God's Holy Spirit within the believer and the believer's sinful human nature (cf. 3:3; 4:29; 5:16, 18, 22, 25; Rom. 8:4-6, 9, 13). We will always experience conflict, whether we side with the Spirit against the flesh, or with the flesh against the Spirit. "Whatever you want" may be good or evil. It is impossible for us to remain neutral; we either follow one or the other. Note too that we cannot blame Satan and his demons for all the conflicts that we experience. Our own sinful nature is responsible for many of them.

"So long as we remain in this present life, we never outgrow or transcend the spiritual conflict Paul was describing in this passage. There is no spiritual technique or second blessing that can propel the believer onto a higher plane of Christian living where this battle must no longer be fought."³

"The choice lies with the saint. He must develop the habit of keeping his eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus and his trust in the Holy Spirit. The more he

¹Wuest, 1:3:154. Italics omitted.

²Morris, p. 168.

³George, pp. 387-88.

says NO to sin, the easier it is to say NO, until it becomes a habit. The more he says YES to the Lord Jesus, the easier it is to say YES, until that becomes a habit."¹

The conflict described in this verse and in verses 16-23 is not the same as the one presented in Romans 7:13-24. The opponents of the sinful nature are different: In Galatians it is the Holy Spirit, but in Romans it is the whole regenerated individual. The condition of the believer is also different: In Galatians Paul saw him as under law or grace, but in Romans he viewed him as under law only. Furthermore, the results of the conflict are different: In Galatians there may be defeat or victory, but in Romans defeat is inevitable. Finally, the nature of the conflict is different: In Galatians it is normal Christian experience, but in Romans it is abnormal.²

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONFLICTS		
	Gal. 5:16-23	Rom. 7:13-24
Opponent of the flesh	The Holy Spirit	The reborn person
Condition of the believer	Under law or grace	Under law
Result of the conflict	Defeat or victory	Defeat
Nature of the conflict	Normal Christian experience	Abnormal Christian experience

5:18 If we are led by the Spirit we are not under the Law. This statement is a first class condition in the Greek text, indicating that the writer assumed the statement was true for the sake of his argument. Other information about what he said

¹Wuest, 1:3:155.

²See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contrast between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):310-14.

determines whether it is really true. In this case Paul apparently believed that the Holy Spirit does indeed lead every Christian (cf. vv. 24-26; Rom. 8:14). The question is: will we follow His leading and walk after the Spirit (v. 16), or will we walk after the flesh? The "if" in this sentence has the force of "since." However we should not conclude that the Spirit forces us to do God's will. He does not lead us that strongly.

"The *if ye are led* does not imply that believers are passive; it is at the same time a matter of [purposely, submissively, and prayerfully] letting themselves be led (cf. verse 16)."¹

"To be led by the Spirit, in the full sense of it, is to be under His benign and powerful influence in all thoughts, aspirations, and acts,—to be yielded up to His government without reserve,—to have no will without His prompting it, no purpose without His shaping it,—is to be everywhere and in all things in willing submission to His control, and always guarding against any insubordination which may 'grieve the Holy Spirit of God.' ... To be led by the Spirit is much the same as to walk by the Spirit, ver. 16."²

The Holy Spirit leads us to do the moral will of God. He does this primarily through Scripture. He helps us to understand the will of God as He has revealed it there. In addition, He motivates us to do what we know to be right. And He provides the power for us to obey God (Phil. 2:13). We can overcome the flesh by siding with the Spirit when we are tempted to sin.

How does God lead the Christian? He does it partially by providentially arranging external circumstances, partially by His revealed Word, and partially by the inward influence of His Spirit on our minds. This last, however, is also done through

¹Ridderbos, p. 204.

²Eadie, p. 412.

the Word, by making it intelligible and memorable: bringing it suitably to our remembrance.¹

"Walking by the Spirit, the antidote to nomism [walking by the law] of every kind, calls for resolution and staying power, as is made plain by Paul's frequent use of athletic metaphor for the Christian life."²

"Being led by the Spirit does not imply passivity but rather the need to allow oneself to be led. Responding to the Spirit is described by three mutually interpreting words in vv. 16, 18, and 25—'walk' (RSV), 'led,' and 'live.'"³

We might have expected Paul to write that since we are led by the Spirit we are not under the flesh. But instead we read that we are not under the Law. His point was that the Christian cannot overcome the desires of the flesh by remaining under the Law, that is, by staying with the old way of nomism versus the new way of the Spirit. The Judaizers were advocating submission to the Law as the way to overcome the flesh, but Paul advocated submission to the Spirit.

The works of the flesh 5:19-21

What the sinful human nature produces, unless checked, are ugly works.

"This does not mean to say that they always happen in public; it means rather that they can plainly be recognized as works of the flesh (cf. Rom. 1:19)."⁴

Behavior normally (but not always) demonstrates nature. Paul identified five categories of sins of the flesh here. He seems to have been saying ironically: Look at the accomplishments of the flesh!

¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:68.

²Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, p. 246.

³Boice, p. 495.

⁴Ridderbos, p. 205.

Sexual sins

- "Sexual immorality" (Gr. *porneia*, all types of forbidden sexual relationships)
- "Impurity" (Gr. *akatharsia*, all moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed)

"A Welshman said, 'I cannot help it if a bird alights on top of my head, but I can help it if he builds his nest in my hair,' and so you may not be able to help it if evil thoughts come surging into your mind, but you can help indulging in those thoughts."¹

- "Indecent behavior" (Gr. *aselgeia*, the open, shameless display of these sins)

"But why begin with these? It may be because of the prevalence and apparentness of them in Paul's time. They were much in evidence in the pagan background from which the Galatians had come. Indeed they were sanctioned in the rites of pagan worship."²

Religious sins

- "Idolatry" (Gr. *eidololatria*, worship of anything but God and the practices associated with that worship)
- "Witchcraft" (Gr. *pharmakeia*, attempts to use and/or aid the powers of evil and the practices associated with that)

Societal sins

- "Hostilities" (Gr. *echthrai*)
- "Strife" (Gr. *eris*, antagonism)
- "Jealousy" (Gr. *zelos*, self-centered animosity)
- "Outbursts of anger" (Gr. *thymoi*, temper eruptions)
- "Selfish ambition" (Gr. *eritheiai*, putting others down to get ahead)
- "Dissensions" (Gr. *dichostasiai*, disputes over issues or personalities)
- "Factions" (Gr. *haireseis*, divisions over issues or personalities)
- "Envy" (Gr. *phthonoi*, wrong desires to have another's possessions)

¹Ironside, p. 207.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, pp. 136-37.

"The Arab said, 'Once I felt bad and I complained because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet.'"¹

"The general impression created by these words is one of chaos."²

Intemperate sins

- "Drunkenness" (Gr. *methai*, excessive use of intoxicants)
- "Carousings" (Gr. *komoï*, parties involving excessive eating and drinking)³

Other sins

- "Things like these" (similar violations of God's moral will)

"The common feature in this catalogue of vices seems to reside not in the precise ways in which these fifteen items manifest themselves but in the self-centeredness or egocentricity that underlies all of them."⁴

Paul warned his readers here, as he had done when he was with them, that people who practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:5). The use of the phrase "inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21) is in keeping with Paul's emphasis in this letter (e.g., 4:1-7; et al.). There are two important views as to what this exclusion involves.

Most interpreters understand Paul's words here to mean that people who practice these types of sins are not the kind of individuals who will inherit the kingdom (i.e., they are unbelievers).⁵ Inheriting the kingdom is equivalent to entering the kingdom in the Gospels. The kingdom in view is God's kingdom that Messiah rules over. Those who hold this view usually equate inheriting the kingdom with obtaining eternal life (cf. John 3:3-5). Some who hold this view concede that these vices may characterize some Christians, but Paul mentioned the fate of these sinners so that the Galatian

¹Ironside, p. 208.

²Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 137.

³See Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 105-10, for discussion of each of these works.

⁴Longenecker, p. 266.

⁵E.g., Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, p. 250; Boice, p. 497; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 283.

Christians would avoid these vices.¹ Others who hold this view believe that no genuine Christian would practice these sins, but this, I believe, is naïve and unrealistic.

The second view is that Paul meant that Christians who practice these vices will have less inheritance (reward) in the millennial kingdom than Christians who do not practice them.² Those who hold this view often equate inheriting the kingdom with obtaining an inheritance in the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

I favor the first view. Paul seems to have been contrasting unbelievers, whose lives typically bear the marks of these vices, with believers, whose lives typically manifest the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). He said that those who practice these vices will not inherit the kingdom in order to warn his Christian readers away from them. I do not believe the Scriptures teach that genuine Christians are incapable of committing these sins (cf. Rom. 13:13). However I believe that there will be differences in rewards for believers depending on their faithfulness to God (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

The fruit of the Spirit 5:22-23

Paul had just identified the behavior that results when a person does not follow the Holy Spirit's leadership but follows the dictates of his or her sinful nature (cf. v. 17). He next listed the behavior characteristics that become evident when a person allows the Spirit to control him or her rather than the flesh.

Note that he called what issues from our sinful human nature "deeds" (v.19) but he called what issues from the Holy Spirit "fruit" (v. 22). This contrast is consistent with Paul's emphasis throughout the epistle. He repeatedly contrasted working and trusting. Deeds are what a person does when he or she works, but fruit is something that emerges because of an inner working power. The word "fruit" is singular suggesting the unified Christ-like character that the Holy Spirit produces. This fruit comes in nine delicious flavors. Both deeds and fruit are the behavioral manifestations of the driving forces within the Christian: his or her sinful human nature on the

¹E.g., René A. López, "Paul's Vice List in Galatians 5:19-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:673 (January-March 2012):48-67.

²See Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 76-77; Dillow, p. 90; Robert N. Wilkin, "Galatians 5:19-21: Who Will Inherit the Kingdom?" *Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter* (December 1987), p. 2.

one hand and the Holy Spirit on the other. Fruit is beneficial to others. Deeds may or may not be, and the deeds that the flesh produces are not.

My wife and I used to live on a beautiful wooded lot. The largest tree on the property was a stately red oak that was over 100 years old. In the fall most of the other trees would shed their leaves and remain bare through the winter months. But that red oak tree would usually retain most of its leaves through the winter. When the spring came, the sap flowing through that tree would cause buds to develop, and in the process the buds would push the old dead leaves off the branches. Similarly, the life of the Spirit normally expels the old dead habits of the flesh as the new life within grows stronger. Rather than trying to remove all of our former sinful practices ourselves, we should cultivate the spiritual life, and the Holy Spirit will deal with them. This phenomenon has been called "the expulsive power of a new affection."¹

Mental or God-ward qualities

- "Love" (Gr. *agape*, self-sacrificing affection for others)
- "Joy" (Gr. *chara*, deep-seated gladness regardless of circumstances)
- "Peace" (Gr. *eirene*, inner quietness and repose regardless of circumstances)

Interpersonal or other-ward qualities

- "Patience" (Gr. *makrothymia*, forbearance even under provocation)
- "Kindness" (Gr. *chrestotes*, benevolence and graciousness)
- "Goodness" (Gr. *agathosyne*, constructive action reaching out to others)

General or self-ward qualities

- "Faithfulness" (Gr. *pistis*, reliability, trustworthiness)
- "Gentleness" (Gr. *praytes*, submission to authority and consideration of others)
- "Self-control" (Gr. *enkrateia*, ability to master oneself)

¹Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.

"Self-control is one of the principal necessities for a well-balanced mind. Without a measure of self-discipline, we become the prey of our own emotions."¹

"Again, it appears that Paul is not so concerned with precisely how each of these matters works out in practice, but with the underlying orientation of selfless and outgoing concern for others. For in commitment to God through Jesus Christ one discovers a new orientation for life—an orientation that reflects the selfless and outgoing love of God himself."²

"Christian character is not mere moral or legal correctness, but the possession and manifestation of the graces of vv. 22-23. Taken together they present a moral portrait of Christ, and may be understood as the apostle's explanation of 2:20."³

There are laws in society against the deeds of the flesh, because they are destructive, but there are none against the fruit of the Spirit, because it is edifying (cf. Rom. 8:1). The works of the flesh know no law, but the fruit of the Spirit need no law. This fruit involves both character and conduct.⁴

"... the law is not against those who walk by the Spirit because in principle they are fulfilling the law (verse 14)."⁵

"Law exists for the purpose of restraint, but in the works of the Spirit there is nothing to restrain ..."⁶

¹Ernest White, *The Way of Release*, p. 92.

²Longenecker, p. 267.

³*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1270. See Baxter, 6:154-55, for a helpful study of the fruit of the Spirit.

⁴For a helpful exposition of what is and what is not within the scope of the fruit of the Spirit, see James E. Rosscup, "Fruit in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):56-66. See also Charles C. Ryrie, "What is Spirituality?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:503 (July-September 1969):204-13.

⁵Ridderbos, p. 208.

⁶Lightfoot, p. 213.

"PERSONALITY TRAITS FOR MEANINGFUL MINISTRY

This past June [of 1985], Rick Rood attended a conference on Student Development in Theological Education held in Deerfield, Illinois. At the conference John L. Davis, of the North Central Career Development Center, New Brighton, Minnesota, spoke of nine 'personal and social formation characteristics.' His staff identified these as being significant for the practice of ministry...

1. Ego-strength or inner resiliency to cope with personal and professional stress; sense of self-worth.
2. Integrity about one's inner being; a willingness to ... share selectively and appropriately about one's regrets, fears, needs, aspirations, and visions.
3. Discriminatingly assertive; self-starting; resourceful, energetic, poised, interdependent; even some degree of entrepreneurship.
4. Inquisitiveness; openness to learning; avoidance of rigidity.
5. Healthy skepticism; evidence of questioning, probing, doubting.
6. Presence of joy, humor, hope.
7. Patience; long endurance.
8. Adaptability; willingness to come to terms with role expectations in ministry without violating one's inner conscience.

9. Demonstration of a collegial attitude and behavior; avoidance of an authoritative or laissez-faire approach to leadership; leadership sometimes described as participating and/or consultative.

Sounds almost like the fruit of the Spirit, doesn't it?"¹

The provision for victory 5:24-26

5:24 The Christian has crucified the flesh in the sense that, when he or she trusted Christ, God broke the domination of his or her sinful nature. While we still have a sinful human nature, it does not control us as it did before we trusted in Christ (cf. Rom. 6:6-7). Paul said that those who belong to Christ, not God, have crucified it. We did this when we trusted in Jesus Christ as our Savior (cf. 2:20). Therefore it is inconsistent for us to return to the flesh. "Passions" (Gr. *pathemata*, cf. Rom. 7:5) are the outward expression of inner "desires" (Gr. *epithymiai*, cf. v. 16). In another sense we need to continually crucify the flesh by choosing to yield to the Spirit (vv. 16, 18, 25; Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5).

5:25 Since ("If," another first class condition in Greek that here states a condition true to reality) God has given us new life, we should do something. We should daily follow ("keep in step with," NIV, as soldiers do when they march) the Spirit. He is God's provision to lead us in victory. The Holy Spirit leads every Christian, but not all choose to follow His leading.

In verse 16 the Greek verb translated "walk" is *peripateo*, which means to walk about. It refers to pursuing one's daily activities (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). In verse 25 the Greek verb translated "live" is *stoicheo*, which means to walk in a row, or to go in order. It refers to pursuing the right way in an orderly fashion (cf. Rom. 4:12).

"In verse 16 we were given the principle of walk; here in verse 25 it ["live"] means to learn to walk. Just as we learned to walk physically by the trial

¹Roy B. Zuck, "The Dean's Doodlings," 1:2 (October 1985):1.

and error method, so are we to begin to walk by the Spirit—it is a learning process."¹

One writer argued that "flesh" and "spirit" were "... theological abbreviations in Paul's argument that represent the two competing identities of the people of God in Galatia. The 'flesh community' (Judaizers) is a community identified with the Mosaic law era and is therefore a community identified and characterized by a person bodily in his or her frailty and transitoriness and not indwelt by God's Spirit. This community is representative of a person before or apart from Christ's liberating death, burial and resurrection. By contrast the 'Spirit community' is a community identified and characterized by a person bodily aided and enabled by God's presence and also bodily liberated from sin's dominion, a person experiencing the full liberation of Jesus' death and resurrection. Such persons are experiencing the freedom that Christ set them free to experience (Gal 5:1)."²

This community view does not commend itself to me as much as the individual view.

"Stated simply, the flesh is the individual behaving independently of the Spirit."³

Living by the Spirit is the same as walking by the Spirit. The former term looks at the Spirit as the source and sustaining power of the believer's spiritual life, whereas the latter one views Him as the regulative principle in his or her conduct.⁴

"The Christian life is not a balloon ascension with some great overpowering experience of soaring to

¹McGee, 5:192.

²Walter B. Russell III, "Does the Christian Have 'Flesh' in Gal 5:13-26?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:2 (June 1993):186-87.

³Pyne, "Dependence and ...," p. 148.

⁴Fung, p. 275.

the heights. Rather it is a daily walk; it is a matter of putting one foot ahead of the other, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit."¹

5:26 This last verse seems to be an application of this principle to the specific Galatian situation.

"This is a very instructive verse because it shows that our conduct to others is determined by our opinion of ourselves."²

"To 'be conceited' ["boastful"] is to boast of things that are insignificant and lacking in true worth, whether the boaster actually has them or only imagines that he has them or desires to have them."³

Liberty lies between legalism and license. That balance is central in chapter 5. The key to being fruitful as a Christian is being submissive to the Holy Spirit, following His leading, walking in dependence on Him (cf. John 15:4-5).

Is the fruit of the Spirit the same as the gifts of the Spirit? In one sense, everything that God gives us is a gift, since we do not deserve it, including love, joy, peace, etc. However in the apostles' references to gifts of the Spirit the emphasis is on service, abilities that God gives believers with which to serve Him. In their references to the fruit of the Spirit the emphasis is on personal character and general conduct. Personal character is, of course, essential for effective service. Thus it should be no surprise to find Paul's emphasis on love, a fruit of the Spirit, in the middle of his discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12—14.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE 6:1-10

Being free from the Mosaic Law does not mean being free from responsibility. In this section of Galatians Paul explained various responsibilities that Christians have to one another in order to clarify the

¹McGee, 5:192.

²Stott, p. 156.

³Fung, p. 277. Cf. Burton, p. 324.

will of God for his readers. Manifesting the fruit of the Spirit is not a mystical experience. Paul said spirituality is evident in personal relationships (vv. 1-5) and in a person's use of money (vv. 6-10).

1. Toward sinning Christians 6:1

"Walking by the Spirit will mean not only avoidance of mutual provocation and envy (5:26) but also, positively, the rehabilitation of those who have lapsed into sin."¹

The situation that Paul envisioned here is that of sin overtaking a Christian, like when a runner overtakes a walker. It is not that God has caught him in the act of sinning as much as that sin has gotten the better of him in a particular instance. He has been surprised by sin rather than detected in it. "Wrong-doing" (Gr. *paraptoma*) is not a habitual action but an isolated act. Neither is it intentional sin, but inadvertent sin (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11; Rom. 16:17). Peter was overtaken by a temptation in the courtyard of the high priest and, before he realized what he was doing, he had sinned. Even though a person strives to walk by the Spirit, he or she will occasionally sin (cf. 1 John 2:1). Thus the need to help those who stumble.

The spiritual Christian should restore such a person: help such a one to his or her feet spiritually. Elsewhere the Greek word, *katartizo*, translated "restore," refers to mending nets (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19) and setting a fractured or dislocated bone.² Restoration may involve confrontation (cf. Matt. 18:15-17). However the "spiritual" Christian is the one who should do this, namely, one whose life bears the fruit of the Spirit because he or she habitually walks by the Spirit (5:16, 25). The more spiritually mature he or she is, having walked by the Spirit for some time, the better (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15; Heb. 5:13-14). The spiritual Christian must restore the Christian who has stumbled gently, carefully, and cautiously (cf. 5:23). The Lord Jesus restored Peter after he had stumbled terribly (John 21:15-17). The spiritual Christian can avoid a spirit of self-righteousness in dealing with those who stumble by remembering his or her own personal vulnerability to temptation.³

¹Fung, p. 284.

²Lightfoot, p. 215.

³For general studies of church discipline, see J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):353-64; and Ted G.

"The spirit of meekness compassionates while it must blame, soothes while it may expostulate; its fidelity is full of sympathy—itself the image of that gentleness which in the benign Exemplar did not 'break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.'"¹

"It [the restoration in view] concerns restoration to a former spiritual condition. Absent from the context is any indication that Paul was concerned with restoration to leadership. Rehabilitating the sinner, not reinstating the leader, was the primary issue. However, these situations, though not identical, need not be mutually exclusive. It certainly seems reasonable to suppose that Paul envisioned restoration to some sort of usefulness, which in some cases might involve the restoration to leadership. Therefore Galatians 6:1, while not referring specifically to reinstating a fallen leader to his former position, certainly leaves open that possibility."²

2. Toward burdened Christians 6:2-5

6:2 In view of the context, probably the type of "burdens" that Paul had in mind were excessive burdens of particular temptations and struggles with the flesh (cf. Rom. 15:1). McGee suggested that this type of burden includes our personal faults, tensions, and griefs.³ These could be burdens caused by social, economic, spiritual, or other conditions. Verse 1 deals with restoration, and this section (vv. 2-5) deals with prevention. We can bear one another's burdens by praying and perhaps counseling together.

"Human friendship, in which we bear one another's burdens, is part of the purpose of God for his people. So we should not keep our burdens to

Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):201-13.

¹Eadie, p. 434. Cf. Matt. 12:20.

²Jay E. Smith, "Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):468.

³McGee, 5:195.

ourselves, but rather seek a Christian friend who will help to bear them with us."¹

Paul probably referred to the "law of Christ" (cf. 5:14; John 13:34; 1 Cor. 9:21) here in order to help his readers realize that freedom from the Mosaic Law does not mean freedom from all responsibility. The "law of Christ" encompasses the whole of Jesus' teaching in person, while He was on earth, and through His apostles and prophets from heaven following His ascension (cf. Acts 1:1-2). It boils down to the command to love God wholeheartedly and one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; 15:12; 1 John 3:23).

"Galatians, which in attacking 'Jewish' legalism proclaims the true freedom based on Christ, consequently contains more exhortation, admonition, and summons to obey the 'law of Christ' ... than any other letter, and to quite a remarkable degree—a third of the whole letter."²

The "law of Christ" is the code of commandments under which Christians live. It is the same as New Covenant responsibility.³ Some of the commandments that Christ and His apostles gave are the same as those that Moses gave the Israelites. However this does not mean that Christians are under the Mosaic Code. Residents of the United States live under a code of laws that is similar to, but different from, the code of laws that govern residents of Great Britain. Some of our laws are the same as theirs, and others are different. Just because some laws are the same we should not conclude that the codes are the same. Christians no longer live under the Mosaic Law. We live under a new code: the law of Christ (cf. 5:1).

At first this may sound as if we are under law as Christians after all. Paul contrasted law with grace because the primary characteristic of the Mosaic Law was its legal character whereas the primary characteristic of the law of Christ is its

¹Stott, p. 158.

²Bornkamm, p. 83.

³Femi Adeyemi, "The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):438-52.

gracious character. He did not mean that there is no law under grace any more than he meant that there was no grace under the Mosaic Law. The motivation for keeping the Mosaic Law was external for the Old Testament believer (the Law itself), but the motivation and power for keeping the law of Christ is internal. Our motivation and power come from the indwelling Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13), though Paul did not emphasize this in chapter 6.

6:3-4 In the context the high-minded person is probably one who thinks of himself as being above helping another Christian bear an excessive burden. One remedy for this is to remember that we are not intrinsically superior to other Christians (cf. Rom. 12:3). An objective review of our accomplishments should also remind us that the only legitimate ground for justifiable self-satisfaction is God's working through us (v. 4). The emphasis is on personal responsibility.

"Two errors might keep a believer from fulfilling this role [of bearing one another's burdens]. The first is conceit, that is, thinking himself to be more important than he is. ... The second ... is to be always comparing himself and his own work with others [v. 4]."¹

"... there is a great difference between introspection and self-examination. The former can easily devolve into a kind of narcissistic, spiritual navel-gazing that has more in common with types of Eastern mysticism than with classic models of the devotional life in historic Christianity. True self-examination is not merely taking one's spiritual pulse beat on a regular basis but rather submitting one's thoughts, attitudes, and actions to the will of God and the mind of Christ revealed in Holy Scripture."²

¹Boice, p. 502.

²George, p. 417. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:28.

6:5 This verse gives a reason for the command in verse 4. Every Christian is responsible to fulfill his or her own responsibilities. We all have this load to bear, but it is comparatively light (Matt. 11:30). The "burdens" in verse 2 are excessive burdens beyond the normal burdens that one bears as he or she goes through life. For example, the pain associated with unusual experiences or situations is an excessive burden. But the "load" in verse 5 is our normal burden of responsibility. We must bear these burdens ourselves rather than expecting other people to carry them.¹ Paul used two different Greek words to describe these two kinds of burdens (*bare* and *phortion* respectively).²

"It is the man who knows he has a burden of his own that is willing to bear his fellow's burden."³

"If my car breaks down, my neighbor can help drive my children to school, but he cannot assume the responsibilities that only belong to me as their father."⁴

"Those are best able to sustain another who have proved their own power to be sustained in trials of their own."⁵

3. Toward teachers 6:6-9

6:6 Here is a specific example of mutual burden-bearing. Perhaps the Judaizers had been instructing the Galatians not to support those who taught them financially. Under Judaism the parents of students, or the students themselves, paid a tax, and the teachers' pay came through the Jewish government. The Galatian Gentiles also customarily paid fees for services rendered. The concept of voluntary giving out of love for the

¹Alford, 3:2:62; McGee, 5:196-97.

²For instances of similar paradoxes of expression by Paul, see 2 Corinthians 12:10 and Philippians 2:12-13.

³Burton, p. 334.

⁴Wiersbe, 1:722.

⁵Guthrie, *Galatians*, pp. 144-45.

teacher was new and different in Christianity. Those who learn from Bible teachers who provide the spiritual needs of others should provide them with "all good things" including, but not limited to, their physical needs (cf. Luke 10:7; Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:11; 2 Cor. 11:7-12; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Thess. 2:6, 9; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

"The word translated 'communicate' ["share"] really means 'to share with,' and 'all good things' has a far more general meaning than worldly goods; probably it refers to blessings of the Christian faith."¹

Paul regarded the acceptance of gifts as a right that one could claim or not claim depending on other factors. He did not regard accepting such gifts as the teacher's duty. But he did regard offering them as the learner's duty.

"This is probably the bluntest verse in the Bible."²

6:7-9 Paul introduced these verses with an abrupt warning (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9). Sowing normally leads to reaping.

"Someone may say, 'I got converted.' That is wonderful, but you are still going to have a payday someday. You will still reap what you have sown."³

If a person selfishly withholds what he has he will not see God multiply it and bless him with it. If he follows the prompting of his sinful nature in his investments ("sows to his own flesh"), he will reap death ("destruction"), but if he follows the Spirit ("sows to the Spirit") he will reap eternal life. Paul was not saying that he will necessarily die if he sows to his flesh but that his sowing will at least yield a disappointing harvest. Neither was he saying that a person can earn salvation by sowing to the Spirit. He was saying that a person's continuous, abundant, and Spirit-motivated sowing will yield the best harvest. Our harvest will suffer if we grow weary and stop

¹Vos, p. 113.

²McGee, 5:198.

³Ibid., 5:199.

sowing. Remember that the context of these verses is the support of Christian workers, though these principles certainly have wider application.

"Paul here seems to regard the whole of a man's earthly life as a period of sowing, with harvest awaiting him on the last day: the eschatological yield is determined by present sowing."¹

The term "eternal life" has two different though related meanings in the New Testament. Essentially it is the life of God that He shares with believers. On the one hand, the New Testament writers spoke of it as a gift that one receives by faith (John 10:28; et al.). However eternal life also refers to the quality of the believer's life, which depends on the extent to which he or she walks with God in fellowship (John 10:10). In this second sense some believers experience eternal life to a greater degree than other believers do. It is in this second sense that Paul spoke of eternal life here.²

"It is extremely important to note that in every place where eternal life is presented as something which can be obtained by works, it is contextually *always* described as a future acquisition. Conversely, whenever eternal life is described as something in the present, it is obtained by faith alone."³

Paul did not refer to the concept of eternal life as much as John did in their writings.

"The continued and willful indulgence of our unrenewed nature becomes its own penalty, as it does not realize the end of its being, and unfitting itself for blessedness, sinks and darkens into ruin; but the work of the Spirit of God, fostered within

¹Fung, p. 295.

²See Dillow, pp. 135-45; Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 81; and Robert N. Wilkin, "Sow for It! Reaping Abundant Eternal Life as a Reward (Galatians 6:8-9)," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 5:8 (August 1990):2.

³Dillow, p. 140.

us and consciously elevated into predominant and regulative influence, ripens surely into blessedness."¹

Not growing weary is the condition for this reward. The same root expression ("become discouraged") elsewhere describes a bowstring that has become unstrung.² Losing heart is what causes this sad state. Giving up mentally leads to growing faint spiritually.

"... in *we//* doing let us not show an *ill* heart."³

"It is easy for the servants of God to become discouraged: the opposition they meet is so constant and the good they are trying to do is so hard to accomplish."⁴

In a manufacturing town in Scotland a young lady began teaching a Sunday school class to poverty-stricken boys. The most unpromising youngster was a boy named Bob. After the first two or three Sundays he did not return. So the teacher went to look for him. Although the superintendent had given Bob some new clothes, they were already worn and dirty when the teacher found him. The teacher gave him more new clothes and he came back to Sunday School. But soon he quit again and the teacher went out once more to find him. When she did she discovered that the second set of clothes had gone the way of the first. "I'm completely discouraged about Bob," she told the superintendent. "I guess we must give up on him." "Please don't do that," he pleaded. "I believe there is still hope. Try him one more time." So they gave Bob a third change of clothes, and this time he began to attend regularly. It was not long until he became a Christian, and he eventually even taught in that same Sunday school. Who was that obstinate, ragged boy who for a time seemed so unreachable? He was none other than Robert Morrison, who later became the first Protestant

¹Eadie, p. 448.

²Robertson, 4:317.

³Lightfoot, p. 219.

⁴Morris, p. 183.

English missionary to China. He translated the Bible into Chinese and brought the Word of God to countless millions of Chinese people. How wonderful it was that that Sunday school teacher did not become discouraged and weary in doing good.

4. Toward all people 6:10

Christians have a responsibility to do good to all people, including the unsaved. But we have a special responsibility to do good to other Christians as we have opportunity, namely, when we hear of a need and have the resources to help. Like in a home, family needs come first, then those of the neighbors. But we must be careful that taking care of fellow Christians does not constitute all of our good works.

"Every poor and distressed man had [sic] a claim on me for pity, and, if I can afford it, for active exertion and pecuniary relief. But a poor Christian has a far stronger claim on my feelings, my labors, and my property. He is my brother, equally interested as myself in the blood and love of the Redeemer. I expect to spend an eternity with him in heaven. He is the representative of my unseen Savior, and he considers everything done to his poor afflicted as done to himself. For a Christian to be unkind to a Christian is not only wrong, it is monstrous."¹

V. CONCLUSION 6:11-18

In this section of the epistle Paul summarized some of his more important points. He also appealed to his readers again urging them to follow through and put into practice what he had taught them.

"Before concluding his letter Paul returns once more to the antithesis of cross and circumcision, setting them forth this time as representing respectively the true and the false ground of boasting, and thus carrying a stage further his polemic

¹J. Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 348.

against the Judaizers and their way of legal observance (cf. 5:2-12)."¹

"... the subscription [6:11-18] provides important clues for understanding the issues discussed throughout Galatians, particularly those having to do with the judaizing [*sic*] threat brought into the churches by certain legalistically oriented Jewish Christians, for it not only summarizes the main points dealt with earlier in the letter but also allows us to cut through all of the verbage [*sic*] and see matters in their essence as Paul saw them."²

6:11 Evidently Paul wrote the rest of this letter with his own hand, though some interpreters believe that he wrote the whole epistle himself.³ He probably dictated the former verses to a scribe, as was his custom (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21-24; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17-18).

"Hellenistic letters in Paul's day usually exhibited two styles of handwriting: a more practiced, carefully constructed script of an amanuensis or secretary in most of the letter and the cruder or more casual style of the sender in the subscription ..."⁴

The "large letters" were probably all capital letters, which Paul used for the sake of emphasis and to distinguish his handwriting from his secretary's. Perhaps Paul also intended the boldness of his handwriting to emphasize the force of his convictions.⁵ Some interpreters have seen in this reference evidence that Paul's eyesight was limited, and that this was his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7).

Betz observed that what Paul wrote with his own hand "contains the interpretive clues to the understanding of Paul's major concerns in the

¹Fung, p. 300.

²Longenecker, p. 301.

³E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 1277.

⁴Longenecker, p. 289.

⁵Lightfoot, p. 221. Cf. Burton, p. 348.

letter as a whole and should be employed as the hermeneutical key to the intentions of the Apostle."¹

6:12-13 The Jews would not persecute the false teachers as much as they would the apostles, because the false teachers required their converts to undergo circumcision but the apostles did not. Also the false teachers desired to please people, and they wanted to boast inappropriately about their converts in Galatia.

"Whereas Paul was concerned about the Spirit's inward work in his converts, so that Christ should be 'formed' in them (cf. 4:19), the Judaizers' concern was for an external mark, a mark produced in the 'flesh' of those whom they could win over to their side."²

"The cross of Christ" (v. 12) stands here for the whole doctrine of justification by faith alone that Paul had been defending in this epistle.³

6:14-15 Paul boasted only in Christ's cross, namely, the work of Christ for him. That was all that he took pride in. The Cross was a symbol of shame to the world. But because of the Cross, ironically, the world system had lost its appeal to Paul, and he had lost his appeal to the world. Now circumcision was unimportant. Only being a new creation in Christ mattered (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

"It is difficult after sixteen centuries and more during which the cross has been a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and loathing which the very mention or thought of the cross provoked in Paul's day. The word *crux* was unmentionable in polite Roman society ... even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used an archaic formula

¹Betz, pp. 312-13.

²Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, p. 268.

³Fung, p. 305.

which served as a sort of euphemism ... But Paul, Roman citizen by birth and religious Jew by upbringing, not only dismisses as the merest refuse (*skubala*, Phil. 3:8) those things in which he had once taken a proper pride but embraces as the most worth-while goal in life the knowledge of the crucified Christ and boasts in his cross—a shocking paradox indeed."¹

"I remember some brethren who were talking about a Christian's relationship to oath-bound secret societies. (This Book tells me concerning the Lord Jesus that He said, 'In secret have I said nothing' (John 18:20), therefore I know that He never was inside of an oath-bound secret order, and He has called upon me to be a follower of Him.) One of these brethren said to the other, 'You belong to such-and-such an order.' 'Oh, no,' he said; 'I do not.' 'Why, you do; I was there the night you were initiated, and once a member of that you are a member until death.' 'Exactly; I quite admit what you say, but I buried the lodge member in Lake Ontario.' He meant that in his baptism the old order came to an end."²

6:16 Paul wished that God's "peace" and "mercy" would be the experience of all who would walk by the rule that he had expounded, namely, faith apart from works.

"It is interesting that he goes on: *according to this rule*, for he has been opposing people who subjected believers to strict rules. But rule (= 'straight rod', BAGD) points us to the authentic way, the one right path on which to walk."³

¹Bruce, *The Epistle ...*, p. 271. Paragraph division omitted.

²Ironside, pp. 230-31. Paragraph divisions omitted.

³Morris, p. 190. BAGD is Walter Bauer's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, revised and augmented by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (5th ed., 1979).

"This conditional blessing at the end of the letter stands in marked contrast to the conditional curse with which Paul opened his epistle (1:6-9)."¹

Additionally, and probably with even greater feeling, Paul wished this for "the Israel of God." Many interpreters understand this phrase as referring to all believers in the church.² But this unusual title refers to saved Jews: "those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham" (3:7). It describes a second group in the verse, not the same group. Note the repetition of "upon" that makes this distinction. Also, "Israel" always refers to physical Jews everywhere else in the New Testament (65 times).³ So we would expect that meaning here unless clues to a different meaning are present, which they are not. Furthermore it would be natural for Paul to single out Christian Jews for special mention since in this epistle he sounded almost anti-Semitic. Therefore it is better to take this phrase in its regular usage than as a unique designation for the church as a whole as many non-dispensationalists do.⁴

"It [the designation "the Israel of God"] is a last blow at the Judaizers, his final triumph over them and their contention."⁵

"Strong confirmation of this position [i.e., that "Israel" refers to Jews in the New Testament] comes from the total absence of an identification of the church with Israel until A.D. 160; and also

¹George, p. 439.

²E.g., Hendriksen, p. 247.

³See Longenecker, p. 297.

⁴See Rendall, 3:191; S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "Paul and 'The Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 181-96; Saucy, *The Case ...*, pp. 198-202; Harrison, p. 1298; Ironside, p. 234; Paul Benware, "The Church Is Not Israel." In *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 288-308. For the covenant theology position that equates Israel here with the church, see Lightfoot, p. 225; or Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Church As the New Israel and the Future of Ethnic Israel in Paul," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 3:3 (April 1983):17-38.

⁵Lenski, p. 321.

from the total absence, even then, of the term 'Israel of God' to characterize the church."¹

"The conclusion is that the church is never called a 'spiritual Israel' or a 'new Israel.' The term Israel is either used of the nation or the people as a whole, or of the believing remnant within. It is never used of the church in general or of Gentile believers in particular. In fact, even after the Cross there remains a threefold distinction. First, there is a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles as in 1 Corinthians 10:32 and Ephesians 2:11-12. Second, there is a distinction between Israel and the church in 1 Corinthians 10:32. Third, there is a distinction between Jewish believers (the Israel of God) and Gentile believers in Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16."²

6:17-18 In closing Paul appealed to his readers to end the controversy in Galatia. It had caused him much grief as Christ's bond-servant. He cited the scars ("marks") that he had received as a target of persecution as his final proof of his devotion to Christ (cf. Deut. 15:17). He may have received some of these scars when the people of Lystra stoned him during his preaching tour of Galatia (Acts 14:19-20; cf. 2 Cor. 11:25).

"If a thing costs us nothing men will value it at nothing."³

"These genuine and honorable marks in the body contrast strikingly with the ritualistic and now meaningless mark (circumcision) the legalizers wished to impose on the Galatians."⁴

"... Paul's readers immediately would have identified the branding of the flesh with slavery, for slaves in the ancient world frequently were

¹Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, p. 83, n. 2.

²Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and ...," p. 126.

³Barclay, p. 11.

⁴Boice, p. 508.

marked with the insignia of their master as a badge of identification."¹

"A class of slaves (*hierodouloi*) attached for life to the service of a temple were branded with the name of the deity. Paul likens himself to these in respect of his lifelong dedication to the name of Jesus, and of the marks imprinted on his body, by which he was sealed for a servant of Jesus in perpetuity."²

Paul finally appealed for God's "grace" to be the portion of the Galatians (cf. 1:3). "Your spirit" means you. As in no other of his epistles Paul bid farewell by referring to his readers tenderly as brothers and sisters.

Whereas this epistle began very solemnly and harshly (1:6-9), Paul's tone mellowed as he proceeded (e.g., 4:19). It ends on an uncommonly loving note (cf. Phile. 25; Phil. 4:23).

¹George, p. 442.

²Rendall, 3:191. See also J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 4:399.

Appendix

Differences between Grace and Law

"Grace ...	Law ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is based on faith (2:16). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is based on works (2:16).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • justifies sinful men (2:16, 17). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is incapable of resulting in justification 2:16; 3:11).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • begins and ends with Christ (2:20). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes Christ nothing (5:2-4).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is the way of the Spirit (3:2, 3, 14). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is the way of the flesh (3:3).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a 'blessing' (3:14). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a 'curse' (3:13).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is God's desired end for His people (3:23-25). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • was intended to be only a means to an end (3:23-25).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • results in intimacy with Christ (3:27). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • results in estrangement from Christ (5:4).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes one a son of God and an heir of Christ (4:6, 7). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeps one a slave (4:7).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brings liberty (5:1). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • results in bondage (5:1).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on the power of the Holy Spirit (5:16-18, 22, 23). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on human effort (5:19-21).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is motivated by love (5:13, 14). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is motivated by pride (6:3, 13, 14).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • centers on the cross of Christ (6:12-14). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • centered on circumcision (5:11; 6:12-15)."¹

¹ *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1976.

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