

A Study of Galatians

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Dedication

To those who taught me of Jesus and Paul and Luther
and the marvelous heritage that is mine in Christ.

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To begin with...

Welcome to a study of Galatians. We will be using a question-and-answer format. Let's begin....

What do most people believe about how to get to Heaven?

Most people who believe in Heaven at all believe one can work his way there. Keep the rules. Try your best. Do more good than bad.

But at least Christians don't agree with that?

Not so. Over half of Protestants surveyed in 2017 believed that salvation is a matter of faith plus works.

Does the Bible teach this?

We of course won't be studying the entire Bible. But the letter of Paul to the Galatians certainly denies the adding of works to faith in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

What men of God have testified of the impact of this little letter written two thousand years ago?

Martin Luther said this:

"The Epistle to the Galatians is my own epistle. I have betrothed myself to it. It is my Katie von Bora." [Katie was Luther's wife.]

We will hear more from brother Martin later. His own commentary on Galatians will be referred to more than once.

It was Luther's work which brought these amazing words from another man of God:

John Bunyan:

“The God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hand (one day) a book of Martin Luther's; it was his Comment on the Galatians! ... I found my condition in his experience so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart ... I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”

We will consult other greats such as **H. A. Ironside** and **John MacArthur**. And more. The letter to the Galatians is a treasure from which many a spiritual miner has dug out splendid gems.

Who were the Galatians?

Two hundred or more years before Christ came, a group of Celtic folks who settled all over Central Europe and beyond, wound up in what we call Turkey. This particular group had lived in *Gaul*, or modern France, and were thus known as *Gaul-atians*. Other ethnic groups settled near them, but the entire province they occupied, conquered by Rome in 189 B.C., was still named after the folks from Gaul [data from John MacArthur].

Little did these migrants know that they would be some of the most well-known people of all time, because a follower of Jesus Christ would write some of them a letter.

Where exactly was Galatia?

Galatia was in the central and southern portion of [present day] Turkey, sharing a border with the apostle Paul's home province of ancient Cilicia.

The southern portion of Galatia is where the apostle visited on missionary journeys. Familiar – to Bible students – Galatian cities like Antioch (of Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, were places where churches were left behind after a Pauline visit.

And the author of this letter?

There is no reason to challenge the long-standing tradition that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the group of churches clustered in this region, and perhaps others in the general area. It is his only letter addressed to a group of churches as opposed to one congregation, or at least one city.

Paul tells us he was raised as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and sent to Jerusalem from his hometown of Tarsus, to study under the great Gamaliel. He was a rising star in the Hebrew community, a stalwart of Judaism, a hater of any detractor from the faith. One such menace in his eyes was the reportedly dead hero of the Christian cult, Jesus. Without realizing it, Paul was mercilessly persecuting Christ until Jesus Himself put a stop to it.

After Paul's conversion he applied the same zeal to the preaching of the Gospel.

When was the letter to the Galatians penned?

Knowing the date of the Council of Jerusalem, and assuming Paul is reacting to the decisions made there, we assign the date of approximately 49 A.D. Some scholars believe that Galatians was either the first or at least one of the first, of the New Testament writings.

At this writing, Paul has already traveled his first missionary journey. We find him in Acts 13 beginning his ministry to the Galatians in person.

What was Paul's in-person ministry to the Galatians?

(Acts 13:13-14:23)

Somewhere in the mid 40's of the first century, Paul and Barnabas, two teachers of the church in Syrian Antioch, were sent by that church's leadership, under the direction of God's Spirit, west, to proclaim the Gospel wherever the Lord would lead. After ministry in Salamis – and already the departure of a team member, John Mark – they traveled on through what would become known as Asia Minor and Turkey, to this Roman province known as Galatia, and a town known by the same name as the one from which they had departed, Antioch.

Antiochus was a popular name in those days, the one given to a series of kings descended from one of Alexander's generals.

The ministry in Antioch of Pisidia (in Galatia) started out as a rousing success. Paul preached a serious and effective message about Jesus in the synagogue there. "Jew first, and also the Greek" was Paul's method.

After his message, God's grace touched many of the Jews in attendance. But some Gentiles too were touched. We are not told how Gentiles were involved. Perhaps the mention in the text of "God-fearing proselytes" as separate from "the Jews" is one key. Not everyone in attendance that special Sabbath were orthodox Jews. Some were on their way to orthodoxy when Paul appeared.

Evidently these new converts to Judaism spread the word around Antioch during the week, because the next Sabbath, "the whole city" showed up at the synagogue! And when the original Jews saw this, they were seriously jealous and began to disrupt the meeting, even to the point of blasphemy.

Here is where something of God rose within Paul and he realized fully his special calling to the Gentiles. He opened the door of salvation to them, to their great joy. There follows, the church of Antioch. Imagine the joy as these Galatians, Jew and Gentile, are hearing and accepting the message. The enthusiasm on both sides, in fact, must be kept in mind as we read Paul's letter.

But the joy was tempered with evil, as the Jewish element eventually ran the Antioch missionaries out of town.

The next town along the way was Iconium. Almost exactly the same chain of events occurred. Teaching, miracles... and a resistant group of Jews. An attempted stoning, and Paul and company moved on again, to a district within the province, Lycaonia.

First came the town of Lystra. A lame man healed. Paul and Barnabas were thought to be gods themselves before they had a

chance to point them to the God Who had worked this miracle. While in the process of correcting their theology, Jews from the last two towns, who had been pursuing Paul, showed up in Lystra, and this time they were able to complete their mission, or so they thought: they stoned Paul and left him for dead.

But God wasn't finished, by a long shot, with the apostle. He soon got up and moved along to the next Galatian town, Derbe. The Gospel was preached there, then the record tells us he turned around and went back not only to Lystra, but to Iconium and Antioch, where dwelt his recent enemies. And why? To strengthen his new disciples, to encourage them to continue in the faith, just as he was continuing, despite the trouble.

Elders were appointed in every city. Prayer. Fasting. Farewells, and Paul was on his way out of Galatia, to other points of ministry.

That was Paul's blessed introduction to the people whom he now, in this letter, must castigate with no uncertain words. How they have broken his heart we cannot imagine.

What has happened?

What tragedy overtook the Galatians upon Paul's absence?

(Acts 15:1)

Rejection, persecution, stoning, trials that came to that early group of churches and their founder, had not stopped the Galatians from desiring to advance in the faith. But something more awful than any of that now came along.

The record of Luke is clear: Men, supposedly Christian men, but men attached also to Moses, came down from Judea, perhaps following Paul around and conferring with the Jews who of the region. But they went from church to church in Galatia and wherever the Gospel had taken hold.

Their message: Believe in Jesus, but don't forget Moses! Be circumcised. Obey the law.

Paul had already left Galatia when this horror occurred. Somehow, whether in a return to the region, or in meeting with these men further down the road, a clash occurred. Debate. Dissension. Paul is furious. It is determined that he must return, not only to Syria, but to Jerusalem itself, to confer with the leaders of the church.

The stage was thus set for the hugely important council recorded in Acts 15, and, it would seem, for the letter to the Galatians, many of whom he knew to have deserted his message already!

What is the theme of the letter?

The Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) confirms what Paul already knows:

To be right with God is merely to have received his grace by faith. The works of the Law of Moses will save no one.

Does Paul ever write about these same things in other letters?

Macarthur brings out the striking comparison between Galatians and Romans. Both letters speak of:

- Justification by faith.
- A theology and a practical way of living it out.
- A law that cannot justify.
- Believers who are dead to the law.
- A crucifixion with Christ.
- Abraham being justified by faith.
- The fact that we are children of Abraham.
- A law that brings God's wrath.
- The universality of sin.
- Adoption as God's children.
- The importance of our baptism.
- Love that fulfills the law of God.
- Walking in the Spirit.
- The warfare of the flesh against the Spirit.
- Bearing one another's burdens.

So, this will not be the last time the apostle speaks of these matters. But some would argue that the intensity of Galatians exceeds even that of Romans. Paul has known these Galatians personally, had nearly laid down his life for them. He was crushed in spirit to know that his work may have been in vain.

Did Paul ever return to Galatia?

(Acts 15:36-16:6)

Paul did return to Galatia, but we are not told much about this second entry. Paul and Barnabas were still a team as they began a trip to see how the brothers were doing. The letter to the Galatians had already been sent, and Paul was no doubt eager to know of its fruit.

But this is where he and Barnabas split up, as Barnabas wanted to give John Mark another chance in ministry, but Paul felt it unwise. From now on, we read of Paul and *Silas*, as opposed to Paul and *Barnabas*.

They arrived in Derbe and Lystra. Here they met one who will be critical to the advancing of the faith when Paul must move on, namely Timothy.

They continue through the region, this time bolstered by a decree from the Jerusalem church, that salvation is by grace through faith... period.

With that historical background being understood, we are ready to examine the letter that Paul wrote to the Galatians just after he received the bad news about their defection from grace.

The text with comments.

(Note: all Scriptures are from the NASB 1977, unless otherwise noted.)

1. Greetings, 1:1-5:

How does Paul identify himself here and in most of his epistles?

1:1. *1Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),*

Galatians is one of nine letters of Paul's thirteen or fourteen, where he calls himself an apostle. He is not yielding to vanity here. He must make it clear to all recipients of his letters that they carry the same weight of authority as do the letters of Peter and John and the rest.

He is an apostle, not because of a group of men, a denomination, i.e., he is not merely a messenger deputed by the churches, or what we like to call a small "a" apostle. He may have served in this function for a short time, but that was not his original call. We call these small "a" people, "missionaries" today. There have always been apostles in the church, in this sense.

Nor is he an apostle from the laying on of hands of a *particular* man or church.

Rather, Jesus Himself appointed him to be an apostle. He is not sent by humans but by heaven. He owes his calling to no one.

See Acts 26:16,17 for the account of his calling... " I appoint you..." said Jesus.

One cannot take this honor to himself. He did not run before he was sent.

By the way, by saying "not by man" then claiming Jesus was the sender, he is claiming that *Jesus is not a mere man!*

Implication also: there *are* apostles made by men. But not Paul.

Jesus Christ *and* God the Father... as though they are different entities? No, he compares the calling of Jesus to an earthly calling by men. And he implies that both Father and Son did the calling, saying the Two are One.

He is equal to any of the apostles. Called by the same Person. Trained for three years, as were they. Given miraculous powers as were they. Promised and received horrible treatment by men as did they. Offered his life to martyrdom, as did they.

Which, we must add, separates him from all those calling themselves apostles today. These men – and now women – have no miraculous calling. No miraculous powers. No despicable treatment. They are coddled and adulated rock stars, cheered by every audience. None of them have died a martyr's death. By their fruits we know they are not apostles of Christ, whatever else they may be.

Ironside in his Galatians commentary mentions the four categories Jerome listed when looking at the "ministers" of his own day. We would do well to examine this list and our own hearts, should we consider ourselves men of God:

1. Men who receive a call directly from God, not from men.
2. Men who receive a call from God and have it confirmed by men.

3. Men who never receive a call from God but are confirmed by men anyway.
4. Men who free-lance. They are not called from God or confirmed by men, but on their own go from place to place, parading as ministers of the Lord.

Who joined Paul in the composing and sending of this letter?

1:2 *and all the brethren who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia:*

Several brothers were present with Paul, indicating to the Galatians that he was not alone in the following sentiments. Some have remarked that Paul is a little upset with these Galatians – that states the case mildly – and that is why he does not mention any names of the brothers with him (Timothy, Sosthenes, etc.) or names of the churches inside Galatia (Lystra, Derbe, etc.). He is sparing such detail to get to the main point. We will follow his lead...

How does Paul suggest his theme in the greeting of his letter?

1:3-5. *3*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, *4*who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, *5*to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

This greeting (verse 3) is the same in Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, (very close in) II Timothy & Titus, Philemon. Nine of fourteen times he uses a standard greeting.

But as Luther points out, even in the standard greeting, Paul is hinting about his purpose in writing the Galatians. Grace, Galatians. Grace! It is grace that saved us. May that grace be yours!

But he goes a little deeper with that greeting in the following two verses.

Paul here promotes his Gospel, the one the Galatians were turning from. Namely, Jesus died for our sins. You did not take away your own sins by keeping the Law. Jesus paid the price you could never pay.

The deliverance from evil is here said to be present. Now. Notice he makes no apologies about calling this age, and any age on earth, evil. It seems the world is getting worse. And it has always been getting worse in one way or another. Every generation has seen a moral slide, and sin of all sorts. We are delivered from its power now and its presence at Jesus' return.

This is God's will, and this God will be glorified forever. Regardless, Galatians, of your attitude toward this Gospel. Regardless of your final decision as to whether you will follow Christ or Moses, God has produced through Christ a Gospel that saves by grace through faith for God's eternal glory.

So, listen very carefully to what I am about to say...

2. Shock and Warning, 1:6-9.

What caused Paul to be so alarmed at the Galatian beliefs?

1:6-7. *6I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*

Paul wastes no time in coming to the point! The Galatians are turning from the Gospel of grace to what seems to be a different Gospel. They are deserting him, his message, his God, his Christ.

Paul is shocked. He reserves his harshest words for the deceivers, but he is seriously agitated, troubled, with the deceived. He can't believe it!

Luther suggests here that one should soothe a child bitten by a dog but condemn the dog! That will be Paul's approach a little later. But his grief cannot be hidden at first.

Of course, he says, there really is no other Gospel. There is not a true Gospel and a false Gospel. Or a normal Gospel and a "Full Gospel," as we hear in our day. Not a "regular Gospel" and a "Gospel of the Kingdom," as we also have dangled before our eyes.

When you hear a definition of Good News, it is either the Gospel or not the Gospel. It is the Gospel or a perverted formula of words which is not to be accepted as Gospel. No personal opinions are allowed on this! We will speak more of this in verses 8 and 9.

Some evil teachers had come in and were trying to distort Paul's message. We know them today, these first century perverters of the Truth, as "Judaizers." They came out from Jerusalem but were not necessarily sent out by the Jerusalem eldership. They were

establishment. Men who had been around, probably from the beginning. They had perhaps even seen and known Jesus. They knew about and maybe participated in, Pentecost.

But something inside of them would not accept the idea that Moses was to go, that Moses was now past tense. They had been “good Jews” for so long that it irked them to think they would have to give all their family tradition away just to follow this Jesus. So, they didn’t. They accepted Jesus’ message and perhaps His Person. But they would not ask Moses to please exit the back door. They were attempting to enshrine both men in their hearts.

Their passion for the Law was so great that they became obsessed with the idea of following Paul around, and when he left a city or church, they would show up in that same congregation and correct the apostle.

Luther mentions that perhaps they considered Paul an upstart. He was new to this whole Christian thing, even though his Jewish credentials were strong enough. He must be confused a bit and needed some time to grow up in these new things of God. They would educate the churches about Paul, let them know that there was no need to do away with the works of the Old Covenant. Paul was an extremist.

Even though most of Paul’s new people were Gentiles, the Judaizers encouraged even them to add Moses and all he taught alongside Jesus and His new teachings. Circumcision, they said, is still a sign of the covenant. Get circumcised, men. These old laws were made for our good. Follow them! The Temple stands, go there, do what the priests tell you.

In church after church the Judaizers attempted to squash the life out of Paul’s converts. Their attempts were becoming fruitful.

Paul rushed back to do something but much of the damage was done. He brought the issue before the eldership at that point, and wrote this scathing rebuke that we now read, to the Galatian churches.

Paul was so grieved! He had seen people coming to the birth in Christ, and now it was as though a wild animal had invaded the nursery and was tearing out the eyes and ears and limbs of all the little babies lying there. What could he do?

In Luther's day, the application of this epistle could easily be made to Popes, cardinals, bishops, monks – and Luther made it – who did, in his opinion, far worse than the Judaizers. In Romanism, said Luther, not only a law commanded by the Bible [Moses] was enjoined on the people as salvific, but works never even commanded by God but made up by Roman decrees.

He affirms that to mix the Gospel with any law whatsoever, Moses or Pope, is to cut out Christ altogether. If man can save himself, Christ is not needed.

The converts of Paul were sadly receiving and believing false information and would pay a heavy price for it, well beyond this rebuke from Paul, if they did not repent. False information kills.

Ironside tells the tragic but true story of a woman and her baby riding a train to a place where she was scheduled to meet a friend and spend some time together.

It was a wintry day. Snow and sleet and bitter cold. And she was a nervous person, obviously not accustomed to long trips on a train. She made her way to the conductor and asked him to please let her know when such and such a stop took place. He readily agreed to assist her.

Meanwhile another man, a businessman on a business trip, was sitting across from her in that front compartment, and overheard her plight. He offered to tell her the information she needed, implying that the busy conductor might forget. He said he knew the territory. The stop she wanted was the first one past a certain city. He would assist her at that stop. Now she was doubly relieved.

The city came. The train moved on and the businessman informed her that she should be ready to get off at the next stop. At that stop, he even helped her move her luggage off the train, and gratefully she waved a farewell to the kind gentleman, as her train moved on without her.

At the next stop, the conductor arrived in the compartment where he had last spoken with the woman to inform her that this was her stop. In speaking with the now-confused businessman, he discovered what had happened at the last stop. The train was making an emergency stop there, and that was not the stop she needed at all.

The misinformed businessman had let her off in wild country, with no one to meet her, in the midst of a severe winter storm. It was dangerous, but as it was possible in those days, the conductor slowly backed the train to the stop before. The lady was not to be found. A search party was sent out into the storm, only to find the woman and her baby frozen to their demise.

Wrong information kills. False teachers kill. Any information added to the original information we have concerning the Gospel, will cause eternal harm (1:6-7).

What gospel did Paul preach to the Galatians?

*1:8-9 **8**But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! **9**As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*

Twice in these two verses, Paul makes one of his most audacious statements ever. If someone from earth *or heaven* preaches anything different than what I preached, he is cursed.

“We.” I myself. Paul has already changed radically. He is not going to change again. This is the truth. Don’t listen to me if I ever say anything different.

Or any member of my team. Anyone on earth.

Or an angel. Obviously, not an angel from Satan’s side. That would be recognizable enough. Paul, you remember, rebuked a demon spirit that was advertising his Gospel every day through a young slave girl. And hopefully, all of us see through the Joseph Smith and Muhammad claims to have been visited by angels who gave them new revelations of truth. No, not those angels...

But Paul says, if even an angel from heaven, a “good” angel says something other than what he said about the gospel, that angel from heaven is to be cursed.

Paul was on safe ground in making such a pronouncement. He knew that no angel from the heavenly realm would pervert the Gospel.

But how to tell the perversion? How to know the difference? What exactly was the “gospel” that Paul preached to these Galatians? Do we have a record of it? Yes indeed!

We spoke in the introductory matters above about a certain missionary journey of the apostle, accompanied by Barnabas. Both had been sent out by the church in Antioch of Syria. Ironically, the first sermon recorded by Paul in Galatia, is at a church in Antioch of Pisidia, a region of Galatia (Acts 13).

Galatians, remember my message to you when I was there? This is the Gospel! No one is to add to or subtract from it.

You will note, as we walk through the Antioch message, that it sounds a lot like Peter's first sermon:

- Jewish history.
- Quotes from Psalms and prophets.
- The death and resurrection of Jesus, pointing to David's words about it.
- The offer of forgiveness.

Let's look a little more closely at Paul's Antioch, i.e., Galatian Gospel. Here's an outline of the message in Acts 13:

16-22. Jewish history from Egypt to King David.

23-25. Jesus, from David, comes and is announced by John the Baptist.

26-29. The guilt of the Jews in condemning Jesus to death. Bad news before good news!

30-33. God raises Jesus from the dead, fulfilling God's promise.

34-37. Proof of the resurrection, using David and his words.

38-39. The announcement of forgiveness of sins, attainable to anyone who believes. The Law is excluded from the plan of salvation.

40-41. Exhortation and warning.

Notice in verse 26 of that narration, Paul is addressing not only “sons of Abraham’s family”, the Jews, but also “those among you who fear God,” proselytes and interested persons who were considering the Jewish faith. Gentiles.

This was Paul’s Gospel. Bad news about their sins. Good news about a Savior who died, was buried, and rose again. Encouragement to believe God and be saved.

Any other gospel was to be anathematized. Cursed.

You say, I don’t like hearing about “curses” from God. But they are all over Scripture, whether we care for them or not.

The Israelites were warned many times about actions that could bring a curse upon them. These were not curses from hell, or Satan, but from heaven and God Himself. And the curses fell on people, Jew and Gentile, through the centuries.

Consider:

- The flood of Noah’s day. All mankind cursed!
- Deuteronomy 27 and its long list of curses promised a disobedient Israel before they disobeyed.
- Jeremiah 24-26, curses on Israel and specifically Judah and Jerusalem.

- Malachi 4 warns of a coming curse on the earth unless repentance comes.
- And this very epistle will warn all that to stay under the law is to be under the curse of God!

The curse is universal and will soon be activated worldwide. All men are cursed. No sin ever goes unpunished. That is the bad news. But in the end of time, two thousand years ago, One Man was cursed in the place of many whom God has called to Himself. That's the Good News, or Gospel, of Galatians, Paul, Jesus, and the true church through the ages.

But wait. Does not the Bible itself proclaim at least two different gospels? Is there not a "gospel of the kingdom" and "Paul's gospel"?

I mentioned this earlier. Let's take a closer look. Some of the more modern charismatics, such as in the so-called New Apostolic Reformation, make a big deal of this, refusing to emphasize the "normal" gospel, which deals with things such as salvation and the blood of Jesus etc., choosing instead to be in favor of the "kingdom" gospel which is all about miracles and power and the "kingdom now."

Their division of gospels is disturbing on the face of it. But there is in Scripture mention of the gospel of the kingdom. What is it?

You will notice that this kingdom emphasis occurs at the very beginning and the very ending of the age in which we live, A.D., the year of the Lord. When Jesus appeared, and shortly before that appearance, in the announcements of John, the people of Israel were told that some good news about their long-awaited kingdom was forthcoming. In fact, the King had arrived.

And during the Tribulation, when things are about to be wrapped up, this “gospel of the kingdom shall be preached” in all the earth. Then the end will come.

But this is not the emphasis He has given to us. At the endings of the synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, Luke] are clear directives to disciple, teach, baptize, call to repentance. The kingdom is assumed. It is still coming. But there will be nothing important in that kingdom unless the King does what He was prophesied to do, die for His people.

The message is one. King Jesus has come, He has conquered sin and death, saved His people from their sins, and with them He will reign forever. This is the full gospel, and no one is to enter the kingdom who has not been born into it by repentance from dead works and faith in this glorious King Who died for them.

There is no need to separate kingdoms or gospels into two. The gospel is one. Paul preached it to the Gentiles and Jews. And anyone who dares to preach something different than what he preached is to be accursed! (1:8-9)

So, the letter is now introduced. We know why Paul is writing this letter, and how passionate he is to save the Galatians from this error.

The rest of the letter can be divided three ways:

1. Paul defends himself, and lets the Galatians know that he is a valid apostle, as opposed to false teachers subverting the Gospel.
2. Then Paul explains the Gospel.
3. Then he calls the Galatians to live the Gospel, via the Spirit.

PAUL DEFENDS HIMSELF

3. Paul describes his calling, 1:10-24.

On what basis could Paul make such a serious affirmation as in verses 8 and 9?

1:10-14 **10**For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. **11**For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. **12**For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. **13**For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; **14**and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

It is difficult at first to see the connection between the emotional outburst of verses 8 and 9 and the self-defensive posture of the following verses. But taken as a whole, the paragraph from verses 10 to 14 seems to bring clarity here.

Paul was a rising star in Judaism, a true hero of the Jewish faith. As his ancestor King Saul, he was head and shoulders above the crowd of Jews who might allow heresy to go unchecked, to permit the enemies of Israel simply to ride roughshod over his people.

In Paul's mind, evil men and evil teachings must be confronted with the violence that God's men had always confronted them. These Christians must go.

This is why Saul of Tarsus was “advancing in Judaism.” There is no question that he believed he was serving God, but in these verses, we get the clue that he also had men in mind in his heroics. He was rising beyond his contemporaries. He was more zealous than they (1:14).

A look at the word “religion” might be helpful here, guided by some comments by Ironside. “The Jews religion” is how the KJV translates the Greek word, which as you see in the modern text, is simply Judaism.

But “religion”, though not used here, is another word altogether in James. The word means a worship ceremony. James says a person can have a worship/religion that is vain or meaningless because of his heart, or, when it is backed up by ministering to widows and orphans and the like, is pure. Religion is a neutral word, neither good nor bad. It is the person that determines whether religion is good or evil, not the word itself.

It is therefore improper to say in your testimony, “Once I was religious, but now I am saved.” You mean to say, “Once I worshiped in vain, now I worship out of a pure heart.”

Back to Paul’s point in this verse:

So, write it down, Galatians: In no way am I striving to please men (1:10).

God’s people are not flatterers. The beginning of the Christian message is often one of condemnation. Just read this letter, and Romans, and other passages. The words of Jesus to individuals were plain and blunt and very un-flattering:

“You are of your father the devil!”

“You are a generation of vipers.”

He called a woman a Gentile dog.

“You are a ruler of Israel and don’t know these things?”

Paul is like His Master. Say what needs to be said.

For one thing, this new message I preach, says Paul, did not come from some human being. There was no Gamaliel that came alongside to instruct me about this. I heard from God (1:11-12).

Think about it, Galatian brothers. All those years I devoted myself to persecuting the church of God. I wanted to destroy it (1:12-13). I had the favor of men, many Jewish men, at that point. I was accepted, beloved even. My name was on the lips of the masses.

And now, my actions are totally opposite. So, how could it be that I am now striving to gain an audience? I had all that. But when God interrupted me, took me aside for several years, told me the truth about who Jesus is and what He did, what could I do? My message is poison to the very ones who loved me before. They hate me now. Some would kill me.

Luther suggests that “the arguments which the false apostles advanced impress people to this day. ‘Who are you to dissent from the fathers and the entire Church, and to bring a contradictory doctrine? Are you wiser than so many holy men, wiser than the whole church?’

“When Satan, abetted by our own reason, advances those arguments against us [Luther and his associates] we lose heart, unless we keep on saying to ourselves: ‘I don’t care if Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Peter, Paul, John, or an angel from heaven, teaches so and so. I know that I teach the truth of God in Christ Jesus.’

“When I first took over the defense of the Gospel, I remembered what Doctor Staupitz said to me...

[Staupitz was the Catholic theologian who headed the Augustinian order to which Luther belonged. Luther said of Staupitz elsewhere, "If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz, I should have sunk in hell."]

‘[He said] I like it well that the doctrine which you proclaim gives glory to God alone and none to man, for never can too much glory, goodness, and mercy be ascribed to God.’

“These words of the worthy Doctor comforted and confirmed me. The Gospel is true because it deprives men of all glory, wisdom, and righteousness, and turns over all honor to the Creator alone.”

Surely, Paul says, you remember the trials I experienced when I was with you? What could possibly motivate me to lie to you about all this, when I have suffered the loss of all my friends and family over it?

Think what you must but know that I am in no way striving for worldly popularity by my message change. Ask yourself then, “Why is Paul doing this?”

Then evaluate my warning. Look at the seriousness of the words I have said to you. I say again, a curse to anyone who preaches anything but what I preach, because what I preach comes from heaven! All that I preached before came from men. And because it came from men, men gave me approval when I preached it. Now my approval will come from God.

So, the Gospel did not come to Paul either instantly by one man or in a group slowly by many men. Not a series of lessons in a book or study group. Not a thought process, the result of much meditation. Not at school, not at synagogue, not from the great philosophers.

The fullness of this revelation from Jesus is explained in greater detail in Ephesians 3:3-5. It was a special unveiling of the mystery to himself and all the holy apostles and prophets, via the Spirit of God.

We are not told the vehicle used, whether dream or vision or recitation or word for word impartation, as Paul copied, only that it was clearly from Heaven, through supernatural means, and is therefore not to be contested or disfigured or perverted in any way, as the Galatians were doing.

Paul sets up an authoritative reason for his displeasure with the Galatian Christians. This is not a mere difference of opinion between two loving groups of brothers. This is life and death, Heaven or Hell, right or wrong. Paul is right. The Galatians are wrong.

This clarity is hard for modern Westerners to swallow, but it is the truth anyway.

What were Paul's first steps after his conversion?

*1:15-21. **15**But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased **16**to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, **17**nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. **18**Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. **19**But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. **20**(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) **21**Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.*

[Also see Acts 9, 12, 13, 15 for the full account of this part of his life.]

Paul from the beginning was a proclaimer of predestination. He was "separated from his mother's womb" (1:15). This was not an afterthought of God. This was pure grace. Paul had nothing to do with it. It was not about Paul, this grace. But about Jesus. Jesus was to be revealed through Paul. The revelation of Jesus was to be passed on to the Gentiles.

From the womb to the childhood in a "good Jewish home" to the training in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, to the appointment by the Jewish authorities eventually, to become a missionary to the Christian heretics. All ordained of God.

Then comes the Acts 9 account of his conversion. The blinding light. The confusion. The introduction. Christ is now revealed inside of Paul and called to preach to the Gentiles (1:16).

Luther can relate to the grace of God revealed to Paul, though Paul was a persecutor of Christ Himself. Luther:

“I crucified Christ daily in my cloistered life, and blasphemed God by my wrong faith. Outwardly I kept myself chaste, poor, and obedient. I was much given to fasting, watching, praying, saying of masses, and the like. Yet under the cloak of my outward respectability I continually mistrusted, doubted, feared, hated, and blasphemed God. My righteousness was a filthy puddle...

“I stood in awe of the Pope’s authority. To dissent from him I considered a crime worthy of eternal death. I thought of John Huss as a cursed heretic. I counted it a sin even to think of him. I would gladly have furnished the wood to burn him...”

Paul’s story now continues (Acts 9). Immediately after his baptism and the receiving of his sight, Paul preached Christ in Damascus (Acts 9:20), claiming that He is indeed the Son of God. His ministry became so annoying to the Jews that they decided they would have to kill him. This was when he was let down over a wall by friends and escaped (Acts 9:25).

The Acts 9 account continues with his meeting of apostles, bolstered by an introduction by Barnabas. He began to preach again in Jerusalem, but once more the Jews in the vicinity opposed him and threatened his life.

Brothers rescued him again, brought him to Caesarea, where he took passage on a ship heading to his homeland (Acts 9:27-31).

Paul’s own accounting of his story to the Galatians seems to be at odds with Luke’s history. We assume that only the timing in Acts is

different. In between some of the events recorded by Luke, some other particularly important events happened.

After the revelation on the Damascus road, and the subsequent days of recovery and baptism and calling, Paul is clear that he did *not* confer with any human being about what had happened (1:16-17). Including the leaders at Jerusalem.

Before that Damascus ministry, we assume, he was led by the Spirit into the Arabian desert. MacArthur suggests this is Nabatean Arabia, wilderness desert, that stretches from east of Damascus to the Sinai Peninsula. Just as Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness after His baptism. Here he learned everything firsthand from Jesus, as a true apostle would.

If the “three years later” of verse 18 includes that wilderness time, he would parallel the other apostles who had a three-year training period with Christ. And, adds Ironside, not only the apostles, but many of God’s favorites have spent their time in the wilderness. Moses. Elijah. David. Jesus Himself!

Then back to Damascus? If so, this is left out of Galatians where Paul says he finally went to Jerusalem. Here he met Peter. He stayed with him two weeks. That’s three years with Jesus, two weeks with Peter.

Would that those who wish to be men of God today would use that formula for their relationships. Years with Christ, weeks with men. I wonder who we would come out resembling if that is who we related to? Do we not pick up the characteristics of those with whom we spend the most time?

While in Jerusalem, he had to deal with the fact that the disciples feared him. This was where Barnabas came along and tried to comfort the brethren regarding Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9).

Next, visits with James, the Lord's brother, (1:19). Side note here: He calls James an apostle. Even the eleven, or with Matthias, the twelve, seem to have accepted the authority of James. He was evidently a man of great administrative skills, and one who was not called to an itinerant ministry, as Peter would be. So, James was looked to for leadership in the new church.

Paul deemed it necessary to emphasize that he was telling the truth about this, for there are many who accused him of thinking up things on his own. He was adamant that the message He had received, his flow of doctrinal understanding, did not come from men, but from God. Yes, he talked with this apostle and that apostle, but most of them he did *not* talk with. And before all of that he talked with God. This is God's word, not man's. "I'm not lying."

Acts 9 then speaks of the preaching in Jerusalem, his life being threatened again, the brothers sending him to Caesarea and Tarsus. Here the Galatians account merges with Acts, verse 21, where Paul mentions Syria (Caesarea) and Cilicia (Tarsus) (1:21).

How was the church reacting to the new "Saul"?

1:22-24. **22***I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; **23**but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."* **24***And they were glorifying God because of me.*

Acts 9:31 informs us, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase."

Suddenly they were not being persecuted. The dark days were over, at least for a while. God had captured their main enemy and won him over to their side.

We must pray for our tormentors. Who knows what God might do?

Paul brings out here that he was still unrecognizable by sight. The Christians had been in hiding and had no reason to recognize the man, even if he had walked into their assembly (1:22).

But the word had gone out. The one who hated us now loves us. The one who was against us is now for us. The church destroyer is now the church builder (1:23).

Can we imagine the prayer and praise meetings that took place all over Judea? (1:24)

4. Paul and the Jerusalem Council, 2:1-10

Why did Paul leave the “field” and return to Jerusalem?

2:1- 3 **1**Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. **2**It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. **3**But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

First a few lines about church councils.

Historically councils called by the church do not create or expose some new revelation. Revelations come to individuals, and those were the founding apostles. The church is built on this revelation, as the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem attest. They are strong rocks and have endured the test of time. Wise is the man who builds where God has laid a foundation.

Church councils are called to define revelations, and to announce to the church those definitions. They create nothing new, but rather, sift through the accumulated issues and come up with what God already said to an apostle. That which cannot be traced this far is thrown out in a true council.

Unfortunately, "church" and "council" have been redefined through the years. Undue authority has been given to subsequent councils. Often new ideas were made dogma. Things that could not trace their origin to the apostolic writings were lifted above the Word. It can happen today. Councils are not always inspired of God, even the most well-meaning of them.

What happened in the fourteen-year interval?

The scholars differ as to the timing of events in Paul's life, trying to mesh Acts with Galatians. We will not be overly concerned with the chronology here but offer what seems to be a reasonable one.

From the time of Paul's initial meeting with Jerusalem leadership (Acts 9:27) until his subsequent meeting with many of the same elders at the council of Jerusalem, fourteen years elapsed. Were there other meetings in that city? Perhaps. But Paul has in mind here in Galatians the interval between his first meeting there, and this one, to discuss the serious matter regarding the Gentiles.

It was during that interval that Paul became a teacher in the Antioch church, which later qualified him to be separated to missionary service by that fellowship (Acts 13:1-3). Having hands laid upon them by a praying and fasting group of prophets and teachers, Paul and Barnabas set out from Antioch to preach the Gospel in regions heretofore unreached.

It was at this juncture that Paul and the Galatians met. We have recorded these events above, and only add here that the dealings with the Galatians and the subsequent follow-up by false teachers in the same region, that occasioned the Jerusalem Council to begin with.

What created the need for this Council?

Acts 15:1 tells us, "Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

Those were fighting words to Paul. Not only the Council, but the letter to the Galatians, and one of the clearest presentations of the doctrine of justification by faith, emerged from this broadside of the enemy.

Luther adds his personal experience: “As the opponents of Paul, so our own [Luther’s own] adversaries contend that the traditions of the Fathers dare not be neglected without loss of salvation. Our opponents will not agree with us on anything. They defend their blasphemies. They go so far as to enforce them with the sword.”

These men had an agenda. They were Jews but had converted to some measure to the Christian faith. They could not give up their tradition regarding circumcision and proclaimed even to Gentiles, wherever Paul had been ministering, that in order for the hearers to go to Heaven, they too would have to be circumcised and follow Moses.

The Acts account goes on to tell of the huge argument that broke out while Paul was still “on the mission field.” This was Paul vs what we call the “Judaizers”, the men trying to bring Christians under Moses. It was no small stir. So great was the commotion that cooler heads in the group decided this needed to go to Jerusalem. The authority structure was in place. There would come a time when Paul alone would be trusted to settle disputes, especially among the Gentiles, but for now, he must talk to Peter and John and James and the rest. They’ll know what to do. They’ll stand with me, surely.

Here in Galatians, Paul tells us that he went up “by revelation” to the old city.

Now, there was motivation enough. The brothers were pushing that way. But Paul waited until God Himself told him to go. Acts 15:3-4 tells us of the journey back, and the good reception by the churches along the way, who when they heard the reason for the return trip, rejoiced. A great reception awaited in Jerusalem also.

Why is Titus mentioned here?

Paul notes the fact that Titus came along with him to the Council (2:1). Titus suddenly appears in the narrative and we must piece together facts to determine why it was important that Titus be a part of the Jerusalem Council. Titus was one of Paul's sons in the faith. But he was a Gentile. An uncircumcised Gentile. A product of his new ministry. A living proof that a man could be in favor with God, without keeping the Jewish ordinances. His testimony would be vital.

Ironside says, "This was a test case. These false brethren who had come down to Galatia had insisted that in Jerusalem and Judea no one would condone the idea that a Gentile could be saved if he did not accept the sign of the Abrahamic covenant..."

His testimony was evidently successful, in that he, an uncircumcised Gentile, was allowed to participate in this very Jewish meeting (2:3).

What took place at the Jerusalem Council?

2:4-10, [see also Acts 15:4-29] *4But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. 6But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no*

difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. [7](#)But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised [8](#)(for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), [9](#)and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. [10](#)They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

The Council begins unofficially (2:2) with Paul sharing in a private meeting with the top leadership, the “gospel which I preach among the Gentiles.” He says that he did this privately for a reason. We assume that a general announcement to all those assembled might have brought on a series of condemnations publicly that could have damaged his chances of being accepted.

Wisdom here.

How did the council suddenly turn ugly?

Both in 2:4 and in Acts 15:5 we see that, soon after Paul’s glowing report, the Pharisee-Christians objected and brought up what would become the subject of the coming conference: what constitutes salvation?

Notice how in Galatians he refers to the Judaizers, for whom he never has kind words, in the same manner as His Master, who

confronted Pharisees also. They are "false brothers". Posing as believers in Jesus, their faith was head deep.

They could not ignore the facts of the case regarding who Jesus was and what he did. Gamaliel had taught them to be honest. But they also could not bring themselves to abandon Moses. They did not see how there could be any reconciliation of what Jesus was saying through Paul, and what Moses had said. So inwardly they were still Moses' disciples.

They are "secretly brought in, coming in by stealth to spy out our liberty." (2:4) So we see here another element of their identity. Is it possible they were not believers at all, and were simply sent in by the unconverted Pharisees to keep tabs on the believers, and report their findings to the Council? Spies indeed?

"that they might bring us into bondage..." (2:4) Their desire was an ecumenicity, perhaps, as Rome desires today. Infiltrate, but when possible indoctrinate with preconceived notions. Hold the Christians in check, don't let them go too far with these grace doctrines.

Paul would have none of it. Luther says:

"He did not go up to Jerusalem to be instructed or confirmed in his Gospel by the other apostles. He went to Jerusalem to preserve the true Gospel... (2:5)

"The false apostles also had a gospel, but it was an untrue gospel... the true Gospel has it that we are justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the Law."

How did Luther relate to Paul's meeting in Jerusalem?

And as the papists, says Luther: "They admit that faith is the foundation of salvation. But they add the conditional clause that

faith can save only when it is furnished with good works. This is wrong... good works are the embellishment of faith, but faith itself is the gift and work of God in our hearts.”

Elsewhere he adds,

“The Law is divine and holy. Let it be divine and holy. The Law has no right to tell me that I must be justified by it... it is the Gospel’s business to tell me that. I must listen to the Gospel.”

As we said earlier, Paul claims he was at the Council by revelation. God told him to go. Even though circumstances and councils and leaders all pointed that way, he went there specifically because God had a message to deliver to the church of all time: Grace saves, works damn.

(Acts 15:6). How did the Council begin?

Note it is apostles and elders. Officers who come and go, and officers who stay and shepherd. Clear callings, but they can change over the years. Paul, for example, started out rather stationary at Antioch and then was called to go.

(Acts 15:7-8). Many opinions are put forth, but we are spared the entire discussion. Then we hear from Peter. He reminds them that he is the one who first went to the Gentiles (not Paul!). And how did he and the others know that the Gentiles had been called in to the family of God? A visible outpouring of the Holy Ghost like at Pentecost!

(Acts 15:9) Peter further states that it was by faith all this happened. They had believed in God and worshiped Him the best way they could before Peter came. They prayed, gave offerings etc. The final coming of the Spirit then was a result of faith in God, not something they had earned by works. They did not even know the

entire message of the Gospel until Peter came. The Spirit's outpouring was a true gift of grace. Their hearts were cleansed by it.

(Acts 15:10.) Logically, Peter argues, if we Jews were never able to keep the Law, but God gave us His promises freely through grace, and He gave His promises to the Gentiles also, with no connection to Moses, why then should we now add Moses to the Gentile mix?

(Acts 15:11.) Through grace we will be saved, and they too. Period. Peter sounds like Paul here! They were in perfect agreement, because of the revelation they both received, plus the experiencing of the truths in their own lives. Remember that Peter had to receive a vision from Heaven and an outpouring of the Spirit on Gentiles, to accept non-Jews.

What effect did Paul have at the Council?

(Acts 15:12.) Suddenly the arguments stopped. There was a hush in the crowd, as Barnabas and Paul now gave a missionary report of their first (and only, so far) missionary journey, and how God saved and healed and filled Gentile after Gentile, with not one soul being circumcised or committing to the ten commandments!

Note that in this accounting, as Luther brings out, "God gave to the hearers the Holy Ghost. From this fact Paul and Barnabas inferred that the Holy Ghost approved the faith of the Gentiles..." This explains why in the next chapter Paul is speaking about the promise of the Spirit being fulfilled in connection with Abraham. Abraham is not promised the Spirit. He is promised land and ancestry and the Seed. But in the mind of God all this comes to pass when the Spirit falls on a church or person. This is what God has for all His people, a manifestation of God Himself.

(Acts 15:13-21.) Enter James. The half-brother of the Lord, called an apostle in Galatians, and one who has become a leader in Jerusalem as Peter is often traveling. He wrote the epistle of James, and the epistle that follows in this account.

We have Peter's words, and James' words, but only a summary of the testimonial of Paul and Barnabas. What a delight it would have been to be a part of this conference!

Does James agree with Paul at the Council?

(Acts 15:15-18) James ties in the statements of Peter and Paul to the prophet Amos, who hundreds of years before had prophesied the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, that is, the holy place David established just before the Temple. Why does God, through Amos, speak of this instead of the restoration of the Temple itself?

It is the praise of God that is key to this passage. Worship to the King will be restored, and it will come largely through the nations, the Gentiles, not just the Jews. I believe he speaks of the Millennium as to the fullness of the message, but the Gentiles had to come in from the first days of the church for this prophecy to be completely fulfilled.

(Acts 15:18) James then suggests that God knew about this all the time, even if we did not understand, and that we should not stand in God's way if God wants to restore praise to Himself in this way.

(Acts 15:20) Perhaps his parental care for the new believers, as a true pastor, makes him suggest that at least we let the Gentiles know that they should stay away from polluted foods, sexual immorality, and foods and blood that could be harmful to the body, as well as the soul, since so much of what he mentions has to do with the worship of foreign gods.

We must not suspect that he is asking for legal observance of the law in a condensed version of Moses, but that his concern is that from the beginning they learn to crucify the flesh and walk in this newness of life. Paul concurred with James, as he does elsewhere in his letters, even in Galatians, about the crucifixion of the flesh, but always with the knowledge that whatever the believer is called to do, it is from the standpoint of grace, not earned salvation.

But James does give his own reasoning for this injunction in verse 21 of Acts 15. Jews everywhere held to these four things. They were the basics of the day. Gentiles are asked to at least begin with these requirements to have fellowship with Jewish believers and not cause division among the ranks. The shock value of abandoning everything Mosaic was hence avoided. Of course, much of Moses is New Testament teaching also (nearly all the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament!), though we obey by the Spirit not by our old nature.

(Acts 15:22-29.) **What came of James' wisdom?**

Notice the unity of the church. Apostles, elders... the leadership, yes. But the whole church is in agreement. And still is, the true church, on this matter. Here is where the foundation is being laid for future teachings about grace, and salvation etc.

A document is crafted that will be delivered in person by Paul, Barnabas, Judas, Silas. From the authoritative Jerusalem church to the rest of the world, which at that time was only Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, where the Gospel had permeated so far via Paul's mission. But Paul would carry this message wherever he went in the future, and it is part of us today.

Here is a paraphrase of the final document. (Acts 15: 23-29)

(Acts 15:23 Addressees) Gentile Brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

(Acts 15: 24 Reason for letter) Some trouble you by saying you must be circumcised to be saved. We never said that.

(Acts 15:25-27. Messengers described) Here are some bold believers in Jesus – Paul and Barnabas – bearing the message we have unanimously decided. Silas and Judas are from the church here in Jerusalem and will confirm our decision.

(Acts 15:28-29. The message) The Holy Spirit says you are to have a light load. Just stay away from idols and anything that has to do with the food and sex involved therein.

(Acts 15:30-33 The happy letter was delivered as prescribed and rejoicing spread through the Gentile Christian community... from that day to this.)

Back to Galatians

How does Paul describe what happened at the conference?

(2:4-10)

First, says Paul (2:4), the false brothers made their case. They did not belong there, but had found a way in. They confronted Paul openly.

But Paul did not cower. He openly fought these deceivers and ably defended himself and the gospel in this open forum (2:5).

He was then backed up by the high-ranking apostles Peter and Peter's assistant in Jerusalem, James the Lord's brother.

But Paul is not impressed with the persons of men, even his own friends in the Gospel (2:6). He does not show disdain for his fellow apostles, but neither is he in awe of them. He is an equal, made so by Jesus Christ personally.

Luther: "I would honor the Pope, I would love his person, if he would leave my conscience alone, and not compel me to sin against God. But the Pope wants to be adored himself, and that cannot be done without offending God."

Even the favorable conclusions of the Council added nothing to Paul! His truth was not up for a vote, albeit the vote was decidedly in his favor.

There would be conferences to come in the history of the church or pseudo-church, where truth would be mangled and twisted by men, but continue unabated. As we said, councils are good for confirming truth already revealed, but never for creating new truth.

It was clear to Paul and all at this meeting, that he was to go to the Gentiles just as specifically as Peter was to go to the Jews (2:7-8).

Did Peter and Paul preach the same Gospel?

And no, emphasizes Ironside, there are not two gospels suggested here. Simply two commissions to preach the same Gospel to two different people groups. We see Peter and Paul preaching and writing, and their message, taken as a whole, is the same:

Be aware of your sin.

Repent.

Believe in Jesus.

Never do either of them suggest that a man is saved by the Law or works of any kind, but both will agree that a saved man will work the works that God puts before him to work.

Peter, James, and John (not the same James as with Jesus in His ministry, recall) reach out to Paul immediately, and from that agreement comes the above document and eventually the unanimous mind of the church via the Holy Spirit (2:9).

How did ministry to the poor enter the Council?

Finally, a word about the poor. This mention of poor saints is not recorded as a part of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, but was an ongoing theme of the church, and Paul and Barnabas had already been active in this ministry, per Acts 11.

So far Paul has spent one fourth of his epistle defending himself and his ministry. The Galatians need to know that his ministry is equal to that of any of the apostles, that he has heard from God, that to disobey and disregard his message is tantamount to disobeying the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

As an added anecdote along these lines, Paul now relates an incident that took place after the Council had dismissed, and Paul was back in Antioch (of Syria), his home base for his missionary activity.

One day an illustrious visitor from Jerusalem comes to town.

5. Paul confronts Peter, 2:11-21.

Why did Paul call out Peter publicly before the Gentile church?

2:11-21. **11**But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. **12**For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. **13**The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. **14**But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? **15**"We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; **16**nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. **17**"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! **18**"For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. **19**"For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. **20**"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. **21**"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Without even telling us at first what happened, Paul says that he came against the great apostle, because he was to be blamed! Peter has now met his match for outspoken behavior!

Ironside refers to this episode as “Peter’s defection” at Antioch.

Note that *Cephas* [pronounced *see-fuhs*] is merely the Aramaic form of the name *Peter* (see John 1:42). Both terms mean “rock” or “stone.”

Now, what set Paul off so much, to the point where he called Peter “condemned”?

When Peter came alone to fellowship with Paul and his new friends, Peter felt quite comfortable sitting with Gentiles. He had, after all, received his own personal revelation about the coming in of the heathen, and had himself been present when God ushered them into the Kingdom. That was at the famous introduction of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, into the Kingdom of God straight from the Kingdom of Rome, without stopping by the Jewish Temple!

All was cozy in Antioch until some church members from Peter’s home congregation in Jerusalem, Jews all, joined the group. James in Jerusalem had sent a delegation to meet with Paul also. When Peter saw them, he went and hid! Can’t be seen having a good time with non-Jews! (2:12)

Ironside reminds us that the myth about “Spirit-filled” men never being afraid again is dispelled in this story. He was a mighty champion when the Spirit came upon him, but Peter was Peter still, in his ways. Even as all of us are. We have access to great power and wisdom, but we need to be brought through Spirit-led events to rise higher in our fruit-production. No automatic super-saints overnight.

Other Jews that were present, or perhaps just the delegation itself, followed him into seclusion from the Gentiles. Even Barnabas was a part of this, and Paul was livid because of it! (2:13)

He calls them all hypocrites! He says they are not telling the truth about the Gospel, though they claim to have partaken in it. The truth is, says Paul, that all men are now included in God's Kingdom. No setting aside the Gentiles any longer.

Luther adds: "Paul reproved Peter for no trifle, but for the chief article of Christian doctrine, which Peter's hypocrisy had endangered."

Why was Paul's stand so important?

He brings out how this one man, Paul, literally saved the Christian faith. Peter is fallen. His own companion Barnabas is fallen. All the Jews there are fallen. The Gentiles don't know who to believe.

One man can make a difference!

Now, they all may have given lip-service to such a radical idea as the inclusion of Gentiles in the Kingdom, but in practice they could not participate.

So, Paul went and found Peter, and publicly corrected him. Don't try this elder correcting at home, by the way. These were two equals in church authority.

Another note: It is difficult to say where his rebuke to Peter ends and his ongoing instruction to the Galatians continues. The teaching that begins as a face-to-face with Cephas continues into chapters 3 and 4 as a masterpiece of Christian theology for the church of all ages.

But first, Cephas...

What logic did Paul use in his rebuke of Peter? (2:14):

- a. Peter, you are a Jew.
- b. Peter, you, a Jew, have laid Judaism aside because of the Gospel.
- c. Therefore, Peter, it is not logical for you, a Jew, to ask these people, Gentiles, to live in the way you used to live as a Jew.

He goes on:

We “natural” Jews have believed in Jesus. All these years we have considered ourselves God’s people, as opposed to the sinners we call Gentiles, or the other nations. It was they and us.

Turns out, we were not justified by the Law we kept. We tried to please God this way, but it is and was impossible. We are now made right with God by faith in Jesus. The law justifies *no one* (2:15-16).

As says Luther, in response to papist teaching that God is somehow in debt to us when we do a good work: “God never yet gave to any person grace and everlasting life as a reward for merit... the papacy is founded upon hallucinations.”

So here were the Jews seeking to be justified through Christ alone, and they have broken the Jewish law and are fellowshiping with Gentiles. Paul says, “We’re no better than the people we called sinners, the Gentiles. We are now sinners, too! Did Jesus then lead us all into sin? May it never be!

Is it wrong to fellowship with those whom God has accepted, Peter?

Macarthur: If the Judaizers are right, Jesus is wrong, because He said that food cannot contaminate a person. He also said that all His people are one. There is no distinction.

But Peter's actions made it look like Jesus rejected the Gentiles, that Jesus was not telling the truth, that the Gospel was only for Jews, that Jesus was a minister of sin by allowing Gentiles and Jews to bypass the law (2:17).

Again Luther: "All who say that faith alone in Christ does not justify a person, convert Christ into a minister of sin, a teacher of the Law, and a cruel tyrant who requires the impossible. All merit-seekers take Christ for a new lawgiver."

Do Paul and James agree in their writings?

We really must visit another passage of Scripture here. It usually enters the conversation when faith alone is praised as the way to salvation. It is of course, Brother James' letter. Let's compare Galatians 2:16 and following to James 2:14 and following.

Galatians 2:16, in the middle of the sentence, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus... by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified..."

There may be clearer statements in Romans and elsewhere, but we are studying Galatians, so let's keep it here. Now, brother James, will you weigh in? Yes, this is the James who had a long discussion with the apostle Paul at the Jerusalem Council. This is the James that was in full agreement with Paul and Peter that the Gentiles needed to come into the Kingdom simply by faith. Keep that in mind as you listen to what the Spirit says through him:

James 2:14

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” He goes on to describe a Christian who ignores the physical needs of fellow-Christians, and then concludes: “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”

He is not finished. He makes another argument in verses 18-20, then concludes again that it is foolish to think you can have faith without works. He comes out and says in verse 24, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.... Faith without works is dead.”

What is the context of James’ statement about faith and works?

In that last bundle of words is the key to what James is talking about. He is not talking about the way of salvation, as Paul is talking about. He is not talking about the entrance requirement into Heaven, being born again, or even being justified the way Paul is talking about justification. That would be a discussion that either he was not so informed about or that was still new to him.

He's talking about dead faith that saves no one. He's talking about people who make a profession of faith but really don't have it. He's saying that you cannot have a God kind of faith if it does not manifest itself soon in demonstrating deeds for other people.

The fact that you have a mental concept of Jesus does not save you. Abraham, the father of the faithful, who believed God and God counted it to him for righteousness, true salvation, showed that He knew God by doing what God told him to do. That's how we show others and ourselves that we know God in a saving relationship: when we find ourselves doing for others, things we would not have imagined before Christ came in.

If Paul and James stood before you, based on what we know of James' position at Jerusalem, and his welcoming of the Gentiles without circumcision or the whole bondage of the Jewish Law hung around their necks, they would be in perfect agreement about what saves (Paul) and what proves your salvation (James).

Back to the Galatians text

...and Paul's dissatisfaction with Peter and all who would try to bring people back under the Law:

First, we have said that the old law cannot save us. Now we are trying to build the Law back up into prominence? That means I have been sinning all along. I shouldn't have left the law behind (2:18).

No. In fact, the law itself caused me to die to the law, since I could not keep it, and to throw myself on the mercy of God. It was the law that taught me how sinful is my nature. It was the law that pronounced curses on me if I could not keep it. The law was killing me, and I finally had to respond, NO! the law cannot save. I need another Savior if I am ever to be pleasing to God (2:19).

Luther: "Paul manhandles the Law. He treats the Law as if it were a thief and a robber. He treats the Law as contemptible to the conscience, in order that those who believe in Christ may take courage to defy the Law, and say: 'Mr. Law, I am a sinner. What are you going to do about it?'"

The oft-quoted words to come ["I have been crucified with Christ etc."] are richer by far when placed in the context of the teaching Paul is attempting here, whether he is speaking to Cephas or to all the Galatians at this point (2:20).

We have abandoned the law as a means of salvation. The law kills. I had to die to the law so that I could live to Christ. But wait. Another death is mentioned in 2:20. The death of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who nailed the law to His cross in dying. Paul and all his hearers must die with Him in this way and be dead to that law as Christ was. We're starting over. No law. No sin. Dead and gone.

I am not alive, but Christ lives in me. I live this human life by faith in the Son of God, period. Trusting His blood, not the words of Moses, to save me.

So, although Galatians 2:20 is used to talk about the cross, and the crucified life, it is actually about the way to salvation. Paul's earlier teaching in life led him along a hard Mosaic pathway that eventually ended in him crying out, I can't do this.

But Christ, by pointing to Himself as the Pathway to Heaven, and setting aside the Law, nailing it to His cross, has put us all on a new Pathway. When Jesus said He was the Way to Heaven, the only Way, that's what He meant.

And not only does He lead the Way, within us He is the Way. A totally different way of looking at life.

It was this grace revealed in Christ that saved me. If I return to keeping the law for my salvation, then why did Christ die to begin with? Is he just our Heavenly Hero, our Exalted Example? Are we truly just members of some Jewish sect, with a Superman Savior?

No. We have joined personally to the God-Man from Heaven in a journey that bypasses Moses, who never did make it to the Promised Land, and goes right into the eternal Heart of God forever, through what Jesus did, not through what we do. All grace.

PAUL EXPLAINS THE GOSPEL

6. The law vs the Spirit, 3:1-5

Why does Paul seem to insult the Galatian believers?

3:1. 1You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

The first issue we must deal with is Jesus' and Paul's use of the word "fool" or "foolish", even in talking to believers, in the light of Jesus' clear command in Matthew 5:22, never to call someone a fool (*moros* in Greek).

Of course, Jesus cannot contradict Himself. Let's look always at context. In Luke 12:20, the man who stores up things in this world is called a fool (Greek *aphron*). Foolish men build on the sand (Greek *moros*). Then there are the five foolish virgins of the parable (*moros*).

In I Cor 15:36, persons who do not comprehend the nature of resurrection are called fools, *aphron*.

II Corinthians 11:16, 23 and 12: 6, "Receive me as a fool," says Paul. You have demanded that I accept this title...*aphron*. I have become a fool in boasting (*aphron*).

That's how the English looks in the "fool" passages.

But our text here in Galatians uses another Greek word, *anoetos*.

Strong's tells us the differences in the words used:

- *Moros*. dull, stupid, heedless, blockhead, absurd.
- *aphron*. mindless, stupid, ignorant, rash unbelieving. translated unwise.

- *anoetos*. unintelligent. sensual. (listening only to your own senses. Not a mental idiot.)

Jesus in Matthew is talking about anger. If in anger you accuse someone of being a fool, you have committed a sin. If like Jesus or Paul you assess a person's standing before God and realize he is making a serious mistake, and you let that person know of that mistake in love, not in anger, you are on a different level altogether.

The Galatians had heard the true Gospel from the apostle to the Gentiles. They had rejoiced in it, seen its value and origin, welcomed its results, when along came the Judaizers and robbed them of their joy in their newfound faith.

It is *foolish* to exchange truth for a lie. We can say that with wisdom and compassion, not in a fit of rage. It is the anger associated with lack of self-control, which leads to hatred and murderous thoughts that seems to be at the heart of Jesus' warning.

This is not about the discernment of knowing what is wise and what is foolish and calling it so.

But then woe to the man who calls foolish that which God has called wise, or who in anger discourages one who is growing in the Lord by such an epithet.

Luther suggests that even the use of "Galatians" here instead of "brothers" or "beloved" is a part of the rebuke of these churches.

Next, we should discuss Paul's use of "bewitched". In English this has to do with influencing someone's mind by way of witchcraft, or the demonic. The Greek Paul uses does not demand this, only that someone had maligned the good doctrines they had been given,

had fascinated them in some way to believe untruths. This of course is the Devil's work, but to think in terms of a witch here is not necessarily what the text implies.

Another word altogether (in the Greek) is used in connection with the actual bewitching, sorcery, going on in Acts 8 in the city of Samaria. Unfortunately, we have used the same word in both passages in most translations. But sorcery and fascination are not the same.

Paul certainly is frustrated. He preached Christ crucified to the Galatian people. A crucified Christ, as he implies earlier, demands the crucifixion of His followers. Dead to the law, alive to Christ. Dead to the sin that the law must bring, alive to the forgiveness through grace alone. Paul preached this message, and they had rejoiced in it as they took it to their hearts, yet someone had "fascinated" them into turning their heads away from the obvious truth.

How does Paul use rhetorical questions in his argument?

3:2-5. ²This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Paul now appeals to the manifestations the Galatians had received, and how they had received them. By way of review, here is some of the record of what happened in Galatia when Paul first visited:

- (Acts 13:52) The true disciples of Jesus in Antioch of Pisidia were filled with the Holy Ghost.

- (Acts 14:3) In Iconium, as the apostles preached, the Lord granted signs and wonders to be done.
- (Acts 14:8) Lystra, a cripple is healed by the Spirit.

People ask, what sort of power is released in our own day? Is the Gospel accompanied by the miraculous now?

Ironside gives a good answer: "When the gospel of the grace of God is preached, men and women believing it are delivered from their sins... the drunkard finds the chains of appetite are broken. The licentious man who reveled in his uncleanness like a swine in the mud, gets a sight of the Lord Jesus... and becomes pure and clean. The liar who has not been able to speak honest words for years... learns to speak right words, true words..."

"When men genuinely believe, they actually become new creations. There were no such signs and wonders accompanying law-preaching."

In none of these cases was the hearing and obeying of Moses a prerequisite to God's moving upon them. The very first falling of the Holy Spirit upon Gentiles, in Peter's presence and during his message, is further proof that God responds to this Gospel in ways He does not respond to Moses.

They knew therefore, experientially, that the Judaizers were wrong, but these Jews were convincing teachers, and perhaps introduced the element of fear.

In verse 3 we see the "foolish" title applied again, this time because the Galatians were thinking that a work begun by God must be completed by man. But the promise to us is that God Himself will

complete that which He began in us. We listen, we obey, but it is His work through and through. We can rest on the fact that He will do it. They were not resting, and suddenly felt that they must take the reins. This is foolish thinking.

Another point in verse 4. They had paid a great price for their faith. Jews persecuted them. The Roman Empire certainly did not welcome the New King, Jesus. Were they to run back to the safety of Moses and admit they made a big mistake, making all that persecution, so much wasted time and effort?

Paul repeats the argument he puts forward in verse 2, only perhaps personalizing it to himself, as the supplier of the Spirit. He insists that He did not do what he did because of obedience to Moses, but because of the new life flowing through him.

Many would point to Christ Himself as the supplier, but it would appear to me that Paul is speaking of the human agent Christ used, namely himself.

7. The faith of Abraham, 3:6-14

How and why is Abraham brought into the argument?

3:6-9. **6**Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. **7**Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. **8**The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." **9**So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

The answer to his questions points to a need for an example to prove his point. It was merely your faith that allowed the Spirit to come, that made you want to suffer for Jesus, that produced miracles. Not the Law. Even so Abraham...

What was Abraham believing for? Genesis 15:5 says that a multitude of descendants are going to come from Abram's own - very old - body. Implied is one descendant in particular, from whom eventually would come Messiah. Paul then quotes Genesis 15:6.

Luther adds a question here that is probably common among the skeptical: "Some find fault with Paul for applying the term 'faith' in Genesis 15:6 to Christ. They think Paul's use of the term too wide and general... they claim Abraham's faith has no more in it than a belief in the promise of God that he should have seed.

"We reply: all the promises of God lead back to the first promise concerning Christ, the *protoevangelium*, the first Gospel message, of Genesis 3:15: 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.'... the faith of the fathers was

directed at the Christ who was to come, while ours rests in the Christ who has come.”

Here was the plan of the ages, and Abram, though he could not understand any of it, took the leap of faith and trusted what God was telling him. Faith in the program and promise of God without question is the ticket to righteousness. Paul says the ticket still works today.

To be a spiritual descendant of Abraham means one has the same kind of un-questioning faith Abram had, in the same God, and in that same plan: God's decision to save many through a descendant of Abraham (3:7).

See, next, in verse 8, how Paul personifies "Scripture" here. "The Scripture foresaw." The Scripture "preached the gospel." The Word of God is living and active, and here it is said to be able to see and to preach.

What did the Scripture see? In Genesis 12:3, families, which make up nations, and in Genesis 18:18, nations, shall be blessed.

By the way, the word nations in this latter verse is *goy* or "Gentiles".

How did the Jews miss it? In their first Mosaic book, the Gentiles are promised a blessing through the seed of Abraham.

Paul points out in verse 9 that we who have come by faith into Christ, believing in Him as Abram believed God, have also entered into the blessing promised Abram. We know there is persecution and death awaiting us in the first phase of our "blessing," but it is blessing nonetheless, and will eventually become eternal bliss.

Ironside complains: "It makes one start sometimes to find that after all our gospel preaching so many people who make a Christian

profession have never yet learned that salvation is absolutely of grace through faith... how can anyone profess to believe this Book and yet insist upon salvation by human effort? In Romans we read, 'If by grace, then it is no more of works...'"

He relates that some believe salvation is like the old man in the rowboat described it. He held up the two oars, and labeled one "faith", and the other "works". He said, "If I pull only on this oar the boat goes round and round. Same with the other. But if I pull on both I get across the river."

Ironside says that's a great illustration for going to heaven in a rowboat. But that's not how we are going. We're going to heaven in a rocket-propelled spaceship, fueled only by the grace of God. And there's nothing you can do to help propel yourself on that boat.

Notice that in modern translations, Abraham is called the believer, or believing Abraham. This speaks to a consistency in the Greek text, where the same word family translated "believe", is used throughout the passage.

Nothing wrong with "faithful" in KJV, but that word in English does not match with "believe" or "believing" used as a translation in the other verses. And, in English, there is a slight difference between one who is faithful and one who simply believes God.

Is not a serious attempt to keep the law equal to faith in God's sight?

3:10-14. **10***For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."* **11***Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* **12***However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE*

WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.” [13](#)Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”— [14](#)in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Here is a death blow to the Judaizers. You can try to keep the law, but you will fail, and you therefore will be cursed. He quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, where a curse is placed on all who do not continue in and obey *all* the laws Moses has given (3:10). MacArthur points us to James, whom many want to be at odds with Paul, as we explained above. James 2:10 reminds us: “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”

What an awful thought. Offend only once, and guilty of all. Yet such is the just righteousness of the law of God. He is not to be disobeyed, even in the least. Hence, the law condemns us, even though it is holy in itself.

How is the law contrasted to faith?

Paul next jumps to Habakkuk 2:4, Luther's defining verse, "the just shall live by (his) faith." Paul declares that even the prophets after Moses knew that law itself does not justify. This is evident, or obvious (3:11).

There is a clear difference, says the apostle between the concept of believing and that of doing. The law, doing the law, does not spring from faith. If one starts with faith in the Son of God, that will not lead him to keep the law, but rather to believe more.

Rather, the law is described in yet another passage, Leviticus 18:5. We need to note here that New Testament writers quoted from Old Testament writers scores of times. Those enticing us to give up the Old Testament in our day are misled and misleading.

The text says, Keep my statutes. If a man *does* them, he shall *live* by them (3:12).

True! It is true that if a man obeys, he lives. God's laws are so perfect and specific, that if you would keep them all, you would live, because of the nature of the laws themselves, and the constant blessing of the God who gives them.

Can we keep the law?

But the operative word implied in Leviticus 18:5 is "if." *If* one could keep them. And one can't. The law is our teacher, to bring us finally to Christ, who did keep the law perfectly, and paid the price for the rest of us who didn't.

Luther: "I cannot tell you in words how criminal it is to seek righteousness before God without faith in Christ, by the works of the Law. It is the abomination standing in the holy place..." He uses the words of Jesus regarding the sign of the end of the world in Matthew 24.

Why was Christ cursed?

Yet another passage is brought in to bolster Paul's case in verse 13, namely Deuteronomy 21:23. Obviously the Israelites would have been clueless of the ultimate destiny of the words they were hearing (3:13).

Moses let them know that if they killed a criminal, who deserved death according to the law, and afterward to shame him more they

hung him on a tree, that one who is hanged in this way would be considered accursed of God.

How awful to think that the One who spoke these words in heaven would one day descend to earth, descend to shame, descend to death, the death of a criminal, on a Roman tree, not already dead, but to die a slow painful death. God Himself cursed this One by the very laws of Heaven given to Moses fifteen hundred years earlier.

That curse was the price of our redemption. To redeem is to buy back. To pay a price for sin. We were in debt way over our head. He owed nothing. Yet in love He offered to pay the price we could not pay, and in so doing He incurred the wrath of God, the very curse of a holy Father.

Luther: "Christ is personally innocent. Personally, He did not deserve to be hanged for any crime of His own doing. But because Christ took the place of others who were sinners, He was hanged like any other transgressor. The Law of Moses leaves no loopholes. It says that a transgressor should be hanged. Who are the sinners? We are...

"I am told that it is preposterous and wicked to call the Son of God a cursed sinner. I answer: If you deny that He is a condemned sinner, you are forced to deny that Christ died... our sins must be Christ's sins, or we shall perish forever.

"[God] sent His only Son into the world and said to Him, 'You are now Peter, the liar; Paul, the persecutor; David, the adulterer; Adam, the disobedient; the thief on the cross. You, My Son, must pay the world's iniquity.' The Law growls... 'He shall die on the Cross.' And the Law kills Christ. But we go free.

“When we hear that Christ was made a curse for us, let us believe it with joy and assurance. By faith Christ changes places with us. He gets our sins; we get His holiness.”

What is the “promise of the Father”?

Through this process of redemption and becoming the curse for us, came the promised blessing of Abraham. Two thousand years it had been out there. Abraham believed it, and so did Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, the promise that in Abraham's seed would come one who would bless the Gentiles, the nations (3:14).

Notice that Paul ties the promise of the Spirit immediately to the blessing of Abraham. First the bearing of our sin, then the promise of a new life through the Spirit. The Old Testament promise is in Isaiah 32:15, and Jeremiah 31. They are one plan, not a later add-on.

I grant you, but just for a moment, that the “promise of the Spirit” could be interpreted as the promise of Messiah and the blessing of all families of the earth given through the Spirit to Abraham and have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit coming into your life because of knowing Christ.

But without belaboring the point, I think we will find later in this book and in others, that the Spirit Himself is the promise of the Father, though not obvious in the passages Paul has mentioned so far, but easily gleaned from the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost. After telling the assembled multitude that they needed to repent and be baptized to receive forgiveness of their sins, he assured them that they would then receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

And without taking a breath, Peter adds, “For the promise is for you... and as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:38-39).

Somehow, the promise of a coming Messiah who would justify men by simple faith in His sacrifice, is tied together with the promise of the Spirit who would come upon the believer, invite Him to this salvation, keep him from further sin, prepare him for Heaven. But more of the work of the Spirit as we progress through Galatians.

The Gentiles' blessing is not only a historical fact, i.e., Calvary, it is an *ongoing reality* that will one day encompass an entire planet.

8. The Law vs the promises, 3:15-25

Which came first, the law, or the promises?

(3:15-18). [15](#)*Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.* [16](#)*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.* [17](#)*What I am saying is this: The Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.* [18](#)*For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.*

We see Paul returning to a little calmer communication. Now the Galatians are called "brethren".

How is God's covenant compared to a human contract?

Paul gives to the Galatians an example from everyday life (those are the actual words in the NIV). You go to court, and you establish a will or some other legal agreement. Perhaps it is a constitution, a legal code, anything that men settle in court. Once it is settled, it is settled. It cannot be changed (3:15).

So it is with God's promises. The covenant made between God and Abraham, mentioned in Genesis 12 and elsewhere, cannot be changed. What was the promise? Paul zeroes in on the term "seed", or descendant.

In Genesis 12:7 and 13:15 the Hebrew word *zehrah*, seed, is used to define the promise to Abraham. The NKJV and others have loosely translated this word "descendants", which in some contexts might be correct, but Paul says, not here! He specifically corrects the translator in the verse before us! "He does not say 'seeds' but 'seed', one Seed, Christ" (3:16).

The land, the Kingdom, the blessing to all the world, belongs to the *Seed*, singular, of Abraham, namely *Jesus Christ*. Paul makes this crystal clear.

So, who inherits the promise? Christ! But in verse 14 the blessing comes to the *Gentiles in Christ*. And Gentiles become a part of the blessing only by faith. By saying that Christ is the promised Seed he also says that everyone who is in Christ, inherits also.

But then along comes the law, four hundred thirty years after the promise (3:17). Four hundred thirty years after Abraham? No, many calculate these numbers as four hundred thirty years after the last giving of the promise, to Jacob. Note this chronology, per Macarthur and others:

- 2090 BC, promise to Abraham, Gen 12:3
- 2030 (?), the promise to Isaac, Gen 26:24
- 1928, the promise repeated to Jacob, Gen 28:15
- 1875, the promise repeated yet again to Jacob. This is the last time the promise was recorded. Gen 46:2-4
- 1445, law given to Moses
- 1875-1445= 430

Paul's point: Once a case is settled, once a promise is made by God, it cannot be withdrawn or changed. Inheritance of the promised Kingdom is by faith, the same faith Abraham had. The covenant of

the law does not annul the covenant of the Abrahamic promise! We go back to the beginning, and the beginning is the faith of Abraham, not the law of Moses.

Salvation by law and salvation by promise via grace through faith, are incompatible. If you are to be saved by law, you cannot go to Heaven. You must be saved by believing in God's grace to you (3:18).

So why was the law added, by this same God, to a promise that had been out there for four hundred thirty years?

(3:19-25) [19](#)Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. [20](#)Now a mediator is not for one party only, whereas God is only one. [21](#)Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. [22](#)But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. [23](#)But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. [24](#)Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. [25](#)But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

After all, the Law brings a curse. It cannot save. It has no effect on the promise. So why have it?

Reason One:

It was added because of transgressions (3:19). Or as Ironside puts it, "with a view to transgressions."

The law defined sin and at the same time restrained it. It had a civil purpose, says Luther, and a spiritual one.

The Law showed the awfulness of sin and the depravity of the human perpetrator by exacting punishment, including death. From the time of the promise to the time of its fulfillment, sin abounded, even among the people He called His chosen ones, Israel. That sin had to be identified and dealt with.

Why is a Mediator needed?

This awesome law according to Paul and earlier Stephen, Acts 7:53, came via the direction of angels. Hebrews 2:2 talks of the word spoken through angels. Deuteronomy 33:2 and Daniel 7:10 talk about the myriads of holy ones, saints, that surround God.

And, this law came through the hands of a hand-picked human mediator, Moses. We see in the story of the Law's arrival that the people did not want to hear directly from God (Exodus 20:19). So, Moses stood between God and the people.

All of this proves the distance created by the Law between Heaven and Earth.

The Law was to be in place until eventually the promise was to be fulfilled, a blessing on all the nations through a particular Seed, namely Christ and all who are in Christ.

Following Paul's train of thought becomes a little more difficult now. He begins to speak more of mediation, mentioned first in verse 19. Moses, the mediator.

How does mediation work?

Concerning the idea of mediation (3:20). There are two parties. There is disagreement, alienation, between the two. So, there is someone in between the two, who tries to reconcile them. Such was Moses, reconciling, it was supposed, the God of Israel with His people. We see the subsequent history of Israel, screaming to us that this type of mediation does not work in the long run.

God's attempt to reconcile the people through Moses was none other than the giving of the Law. Here, says God, is the way to please Me so that I will not be offended any longer. Simply do everything I tell you to do.

But wait. A mediation had already taken place hundreds of years before. No, there was no middle man, implies verse 20. A mediator usually implies two persons are involved, one being offensive to the other, and a means of reconciliation offered. But, Paul says, God was the mediator by Himself, in dealing with Abraham.

See, then, his working with Abraham. Only the One God, giving the promise to a man whose only qualification to receive it is his faith, which he gladly gives back to the Promise-maker. Deal sealed. Alienation addressed for all men everywhere, through the Promised Seed. The salvation of God has been delivered to the world in a method that cannot fail. It depends not on the righteousness of men, which does not exist anyway, but on the character of God and the righteousness that that God will bring to pass by becoming the Seed of promise Himself! Win-win situation.

Some point to Genesis 15, and that surreal event orchestrated by God to prove His intentions to Abraham. Abraham is told to assemble some animal sacrifices, cut down the middle, in the fashion of treaty-makers of his day.

But strangely enough, Abram is put to sleep, and God Himself finished the details of the covenant by sending fire between the two halves of the sacrifice. No human being was responsible for the grace of God that would appear to all men.

Why two covenants?

Two covenants. Abraham, the covenant of grace. Moses, the covenant of law. But Paul's question in verse 21 is relevant here. God gave both covenants. Is one opposed to the other?

Such a stark contrast between law and promise. Is Paul setting up conflict here, trying to make us hate the one and love the other? No! May it never be!

This law was meant to give life but was stopped cold because of man's inability to keep it.

Sin! Except for the sin problem, righteousness would have come by the law. The law is good and holy, as he says elsewhere. There is no opposition in one sense. The law and the promise both want the same thing: the righteousness of God spread all over the earth through a holy people who walk in God's ways daily.

Note in verse 22 once more his personifying of "Scripture" as a living entity that performs actions. This action: it puts in prison, confines, everyone who has ever lived, as guilty of sin.

Ironside tells of a man who was turned off by the idea of everyone being lumped together as sinners. He was a person who had tried all his life to live decent and respectable, and he didn't want to be compared to another who deliberately and always lived in the worst of sinfulness. They are both lost sinners?

It was explained to this man as follows. "Suppose you and I were out walking and passed a museum we wanted to enter. The admission fee was \$1.00. You had 25 cents and I had 70 cents. Who would go in?"

"Neither of us," he said. True enough. Though one had more money than the other, it was not enough.

The price to Heaven is sinless perfection, no sin attached. Christ has paid the price and on that basis we enter, because no one has what is needed to be worthy of eternal life.

The world is lost. Remember that Jesus said that he who does not believe in Him is condemned already. Jesus did not come to condemn the world, for it was already condemned. He came to save it, for all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. This was what the holy law of God did to the world vs. what the promise of the Gospel, essentially given to Abraham, does.

Note the unusual wording about our faith in this verse (3:22): The promise, offered to anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ, will indeed be given to those who believe. He seems to be repeating himself, but he is merely confirming that salvation, that comes from faith in Jesus, is the way to God, and that all believers will receive that salvation.

Why else was the Law added?

The Law keeps us under guard until faith comes.

The picture is of the guardian appointed to a young child, one who became his personal trainer/teacher.

But first take a look at the term "shut up" in verses 22 and 23 in the NASB. Two different words translate the Greek here, but originally

there is only one Greek word, and it has to do with “shutting together” or “including.”

Originally, says Paul (3:22), all were included in sin, according to the Scripture. All under the curse, because of the law of God. But he seems to add here (3:23) that some were included in a group of people who would become believers. This group would be kept, guarded, put into custody, as it were, by a special guardian called the Law.

Luther sees the words “shut up” as a reference to bondage: “The Law is a prison to those who have not yet obtained grace. No prisoner enjoys the confinement. He hates it. If he could, he would smash the prison and find his freedom at all cost. As long as he stays in prison he refrains from evil deeds. Not because he wants to, but because he has to... he does not regret the crime that put him in jail...

“... the spiritual prison of the Law proves a chamber of torture... until faith be revealed... The silly conscience must be educated to this. Talk to your conscience. Say: Sister, you are now in jail all right. But you don’t have to stay there forever... we are ‘shut up unto faith which should afterwards be revealed.’ Christ will lead you to freedom... Just take it easy, Sister conscience. It’s good for you to be locked up for a while. It will teach you to appreciate Christ.”

Through the ages, or through the first years of our lives, man/mankind has been slowly led to see his wretched condition by comparing his life to the requirements of the law. Honest men will see eventually that there is no way they can be saved by trying to keep rules.

The seeing of this fact is the first step toward seeking Christ. Someone tells us that there is another way to be saved without having to keep every rule perfectly. Faith is born in our heart. The law has become our teacher guardian (3:24). Our schoolmaster. Luther again:

“Show me a pupil who loves his schoolmaster... [the Jews] would have been glad to stone Moses to death... How can a pupil love a teacher who frustrates his desires? And if the pupil disobeys, the schoolmaster whips him...As soon as the teacher turns his back, the pupil breaks the rod and throws it into the fire...

“But how long are the scolding and the whippings to continue? Only for a time, until the boy has been trained to be a worthy heir of his father.”

Now that we have come into Christ and are living by faith, we no longer need the tutor, and he is dismissed (25).

9. Slaves vs sons, 3:26-4:7

How is it that we are sons of God?

3:26-29. [26](#)For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. [27](#)For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28](#)There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29](#)And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Continuing the imagery established by the tutor picture, Paul goes on to say that we are indeed the very sons of God, not because of the tutor, but by simple faith in Jesus Christ (3:26).

The tutor has been dismissed. Thanks for your help, but your services won't be needed now. I'm a son, a full-fledged member of the family. I've learned what I need to learn, namely that the Law cannot save me, and that it will in fact curse me. Good-bye Law, hello grace through faith.

Where does baptism come into the Christian walk?

That sonship is an inherited thing, a relational thing. And you were baptized to show a new relationship to Jesus. Baptismal regeneration is not taught here but the obvious obedience of the one who trusts in Christ. You believed. Of course, you were baptized. It just follows. Why would you not have done that? And that picture you portrayed was not just a water thing. As the water covered you, so did Christ, as a garment. You have put Him on, and so become a part of the seed promised to the world.

There is indeed a fine line to be drawn here when speaking of water baptism. Some read the text, Baptism is what clothed you with

Christ. Some say, all you baptized people are people who already were clothed, with Christ.

Notice the context. He first says (3:26) that we are sons of God through faith. He immediately adds baptism as a confirmation, a witness, to the fact that Christ has clothed you, that you have become a son.

There is a close connection in the book of Acts between faith, repentance, and baptism. You will scarcely find a conversion in that book without the immediate application of the water. No, Peter says, 1 Peter 3, water cannot take away the filth of our carnal nature, but you won't walk with Jesus very long before He asks you to be baptized.

To be completely righteous before God, even Jesus told John to baptize Him. If you have not followed Christ into the waters of baptism, the church has a right to wonder, why?

Do we lose all identity and function in Christ?

Clothing ourselves with Christ only, takes away all the distinctions we might have had before. Christ is one. To be in Christ is to leave all national, racial, denominational, cultural distinctives. Even gender is left behind. And occupation. And social status. It all melts in His presence. Gentiles are now one with Jews. The law did none of this. Only faith in Christ (3:28).

Granted that there are some among us who foolishly erase all functions attached to these various groupings. They would tell us that there is no such thing as a man or woman or Jew or Gentile etc.

Utter foolishness. Jews continue to be Jews! But their Jewishness is swallowed up by Christ.

Men still function as men and women as women, but their worth before God is seen through the shed blood of their Savior.

Paul did not tell slaves to run from their masters in rebellion against slavery. He told them to obey their masters, and honor Christ in doing so.

Ultimately, what is life about for the Christian?

Christ is all and is in all.

To be sure the argument is not lost, we remember what we are talking about here. A Seed was promised to Abraham. That Seed would inherit the earth. That Seed is Christ. To be in Christ is to be a part of the promised inheritors of the blessing. Christ is the Seed of Abraham.

Now you are the Seed of Abraham, but only because you are in Christ. Everything that is His is yours! What He inherits, you also inherit.

And not because of law, but because of grace working through faith.

Ironside tells of a young Navajo who was invited for the first time to an English Bible study. They were talking about Galatians, law, and grace. They were having a tough time of it, but somehow the young man picked up what they were saying.

When asked to tell the group what he had learned, he talked about his train trip to their city. This was many years ago, when spitting in public was forbidden. He had never seen a train station, and when he got there and was walking around awhile, he saw a sign that said, "Do not spit here."

As he looked around that sign, he saw that many had “spitted” there. Before he could stop himself, he “spitted” too.

He was then taken to the home where he would be staying. A beautiful place. He sank into a comfortable chair and started looking around at the luxurious furniture and curtains etc. And he also started looking for a sign like he had seen in the train station. After all, a beautiful place like this, you wouldn’t want to mess up with spit.

Of course, there was no such sign.

He had his explanation of law and grace right there. When he was told not to spit, law, he spit anyway. Law. That’s just how we are.

But in that beautiful home he had no desire to spit, nor did anyone else. Grace.

The Law kills. Grace gives you a new heart.

What is the difference between the child heir and the adult heir?

4:1-7. **1**What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he is the owner of everything. **2**He is subject to guardians and trustees until the date set by his father. **3**So also, when we were children, we were enslaved under the basic principles of the world. **4**But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5**to redeem those under the law, that we might receive our adoption as sons. **6**And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” **7**So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, you are also an heir through God.

In 3:15 and following above, Paul uses an illustration taken out of everyday life to make his point: the making of a contract, or covenant. He applies it to the promises of God, and the interactions between Himself and Abraham.

Here Paul continues his picture of the family, begun at the end of the last chapter, to show us that in Christ, heirs of God's promises have graduated from a child with no more status than a slave, to a son with all the privileges of such (4:1).

When he starts out in life, a child may or may not know that he has access to everything that is the Master's. Paul says that such a person can rise to the place of prominence in the home, even becoming the master of all because of his position, but still be no better than a slave until the time appointed for him to *inherit*. He is totally controlled by teachers and other servants of the house (4:2).

Now how does Paul apply this picture to the present discussion?

Is this about going from the Jewish covenant to the New Covenant? Or is this about every person's journey from the flesh to the Spirit?

The journey from unsaved to saved surely can be traced here, but it would seem that the greater discussion has to do with the Law vs the Gospel. These Galatians were about to be swallowed up by teachers who were trying to drag them back to Moses and away from Christ.

Here then is the comparison to the spiritual condition of the Galatians: the "child" stage was when Israel too was under guardians, the Law, our schoolmaster/tutor, which told us not to touch this, eat that, do that. Our flesh wanted to do all these things, and we tried to obey, but could not because of our nature. Total

bondage. Not that we could not physically do anything we wanted, but that we could, though our conscience said no (4:3).

Notice his mention of “elemental” things here and in 8 and 9. People who do not know God are bound to the elements. The world. The flesh. Slaves to a non-God, but slaves, nonetheless.

But historically, or in your own personal history, if the text reads better for you this way, then came Jesus. In history. In our lives. Born of a woman, like us. Born under that same law that was crushing all of us (4:4).

Was/is Jesus always the Son?

Ironside points out that there are “certain professed Christians today who deny what is called the Eternal Sonship of Christ... they say He became the Son when He was born on earth. Verse 4 definitely denies any such teaching. ‘God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.’ He was the Son before He ever stooped from the heights of glory to the virgin’s womb. It was the Son who came in grace to become Man...”

Thankfully Ironside, who no doubt used the KJV, recognized that the KJV “made” instead of “born”, is a little misleading here. When the Word became flesh, the Son became flesh. Father, Son, Spirit, are one and three and eternal and inseparable. Jesus was never made.

Under the law Himself, He kept the Law perfectly and still paid the price for the rest of us who could not keep it. When this transaction was made, we were allowed to be adopted as sons, whereas before there was no way we could attain to this because of our sins. "Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons of God" (4:5).

Luther cannot refrain from taking another jab at Romanism here, which is the legalism he dealt with in his day. He says, "The Roman conception of Christ as a mere lawgiver more stringent than Moses, is quite contrary to Paul's teaching. Christ, according to Paul, was not an agent of the Law, but a patient of the Law. He was not a law-giver, but a law-taker."

Love and condescension. How could one so unholy as I, be called a son of God? But that's what it says, that's what He did. God is now my legal Father, Jesus my kinsman-redeemer, through simple faith in the shed blood.

Is our sonship sure?

Note the order of events. First you are made an adopted son. Then the Spirit of God comes into your heart and says "Abba" Father through you in prayer. Automatically the word comes out. You just know so much that you are a son that your tongue admits to it immediately (4:6).

Macarthur tells us that *Abba* is "an Aramaic term of endearment, used by young children to speak to their fathers; the equivalent of the word *Daddy*."

Luther, denying those who try to quash a man's certainty of his salvation, says, "As certain as we are that Christ pleases God, so sure ought we to be that we also please God, because Christ is in us."

He argues in another place, "If our [Roman] opponents are so uncertain about their status with God, and even go so far as to say that the conscience ought to be kept in a state of doubt, why is it that they persecute us as vile heretics? When it comes to

persecuting us, they do not seem to be in doubt and uncertainty one minute.”

From a slave bound to this world and with no relationship to the true God, to a son calling out “Daddy” to a personal Friend in Heaven, to an heir of the promise of the Spirit and of eternal life.

All through Jesus (4:7). The Textus Receptus (and therefore KJV) says, “heir of God through Christ.” Others say “through God” based on other texts. The theology does not change. God Himself saved us, brought us into the family, through the work of Christ on the cross, and His resurrection.

10. Paul vs the Judaizers, 4:8-20

Why is Paul so worried about the Galatians?

4:8-11 **8**Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. **9**But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and worthless principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? **10**You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! **11**I fear for you, that my efforts for you may have been in vain.

"Formerly" goes back, we presume, to verses 1-3, when the Galatians were "children" and did not know God. There was some reason for their serving other gods, which are not really gods, but rather those elemental things, also mentioned in 3. A person who does not know the true God will cling to what he is told is god. It's only natural. We understand (4:8).

But now! Not only do you know Him, not only have you experienced Him, but you and He have entered into an agreement whereby He knows you too, in a personal way. How *could* you turn back to your list of rules, rules that tie you to "things" instead of God? Before you worshiped false gods, now you turn your back on the true God by serving instead the old Mosaic law instead of the living God. You want to be in bondage again. You have forgotten the living realities you knew and have decided just to be outwardly religious instead (4:9).

Luther: "Those who do not know God in Christ arrive at this erroneous conclusion. 'I will serve God in such and such a way. I will join this or that order. I will be active in this or that charitable endeavor. God will sanction my good intentions and reward me with everlasting life. For is He not a merciful and generous Father

who gives good things even to the unworthy? How much more will He grant unto me everlasting life as a due payment in return for my many good deeds and merits.' This is the religion of merit..."

Paul gives his own examples in our text: following the Judaizers' lead, you carefully keep the Jewish holidays, the special yearly, seasonal, monthly observances. Not just because you think they are nice days to keep, as an out-flow of the reality of God in you, but because you believe in keeping them you are earning your salvation in some way. You're missing the point, which is what all these observances stood for! They all pointed to Jesus and His work (4:10).

Remember that if you are going to keep the weekly Jewish Sabbath, Ironside reminds us, you must keep all the Sabbath laws. There was the sabbath of the land, and the jubilee. If you're going to keep sabbath laws, to be saved, you better keep all the ceremonies and sacrifices too. You must obey everything.

Paul says, I spent all this time, suffered all this much for you so that you could receive the power and life of the Spirit, and look at you, abandoning it all for rules. What a waste of time (4:11).

How does Paul show his true compassion for the Galatians?

4:12-20 **12**I beg you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.**13**You know that it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. **14**And although my illness was a trial to you, you did not despise or reject me. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself. **15**What then has become of your blessing? For I can testify that, if it were possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. **16**Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?**17**Those people are zealous for you, but not in a good way. Instead, they want to isolate you from us, so that you

may be zealous for them. [18](#)Nevertheless, it is good to be zealous if it serves a noble purpose—at any time, and not only when I am with you. [19](#)My children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, [20](#)how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you.

What appeal does Paul make?

Become like me. I am free from the law, trusting totally in Christ to save me. If I do Jewish things it is because I want to, not because my salvation depends on it.

Become like me. After all, I became like you. You Gentiles were free from the law when I met you. I never once told you to subscribe to the law of Moses. Maintain this liberty that both of us know.

"You did me no wrong" is a new sentence. But it is connected to what precedes.

Luther points out that Paul is not angry with them because they hurt him, but because they are hurting themselves. He has leveled some angry comments at them, and this explanation may seem strange to them and us. But Paul is showing the Christ in himself, coming out in a righteous justified anger to some people who ought to no better. He hurts for them, not because of some personal injury. So he proceeds,

Become like I am, I beg you. Look, I am not upset with you because of any way you treated me. You were great. I'm not taking it personally as against me. No, I am upset only because of your going back to the law. In fact, you treated me royally (4:12).

He tells what he means next.

First note "because of"; I believe this is the more accurate way to express what happened in Galatia, per the Greek construction, not simply "through". He is not just saying that he suffered while he preached the Gospel to them. He is saying that the suffering caused his extended ministry to them. It would seem that he fell ill during his stay there. For that reason, needing a time to recover, he stayed and ministered while he recovered (4:13).

The "trial" in Paul's flesh could be the same as referred to in 2 Corinthians 12:7,8, the thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. It was an infirmity, though some refer to verse 15 and his comment about them giving their own eyes to him, to suggest that the light he saw on the Damascus road affected his sight from that day.

Possible, but this does not fit the imagery of a beating by Satan's messenger. Some believe he had epileptic seizures, which seems purely physical to the onlookers, but is often demonically engineered.

Why does he call it my "trial/temptation" in my flesh? It was a test to him for sure, and he asked several times for God to remove this thing, whatever it was. Was he disfigured in some way? Embarrassing to look at? The seizure itself, while it was happening, certainly would frighten some.

Was it their trial also? They would be tried/tempted/tested regarding his appearance and actions, to the point where they might ignore his message altogether.

But regardless of all that, the Galatians refused to despise him or reject him. In fact, they listened to his message as though he were a messenger from Heaven, or Jesus Himself! (4:14)

As Luther points out, they were in that class of people defined by Christ, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

Why did they treat him so well at first?

So why did you do all this? I mean, you would have given me your very eyes! Think back. What motivated you to be so sacrificially minded, so overlooking of my inadequacies, so hungry for the message I was giving you? You knew you were being blessed by what I was giving you. Why the change now? (4:15)

And now why the perception that they had become an enemy?

Why am I now your enemy? My visits were profitable and friendly. His suggestion that animosity is forming can only be based on later correspondences of which we know nothing. For sure it is a letter that informed him of the apostasy of some. His own response to it may not have been first aired in this letter we call Galatians. But here is the epistle the Holy Spirit wanted us to have for the church of all time, a clear exposing of the heresy and his emotional response to it (4:16).

Other knowledge he has, either implied or direct: the Judaizers are infiltrating the Galatian church with a passion, and a zeal to win converts back to Judaism, even if mixed with Christian thoughts too.

How do false teachers operate?

Galatians, they do all they do with bad motives and without you in mind. What they have for you is not good. Stay away from them.

"They admire (have warm feeling for) you in no good way." Oh, it is flattering to get all this attention, brothers, but the end product will be loss for you.

You know what it's like when someone comes alongside you and starts whispering things about some "Word from God" that you have never heard before. You listen. Your eyes light up. Then the flatteries begin. "Oh, you are so mature in Christ, I can see it! God wants you to know that if you will believe what I am telling you, He is going to prosper you in every way."

"Really, me?" "Oh yes. It's obvious you are sincerely seeking the best from God."

Now the next part of that verse doesn't seem to fit. Paul says, They want to exclude you.

It could be a type of threatening. Perhaps they were saying, "If you don't follow us, you will miss out on so many spiritual benefits. A trick played often through the years by all sorts of groups. Follow us to the perfect path. Don't follow us, you will be excluded from all the blessings you could have had.

"You see," they will imply, "God has a people. He has certain requirements that only the mature can hear about and follow. His sheep hear His Voice. Can you hear what I am saying to you?"

The effect of such a threat is often the slavish obedience of the threatened. "That you may be zealous (same word as in beginning of verse), have warm feeling, [be zealous] for them" (4:17).

Paul commends zeal, warm feelings, and asks the Galatians to direct it toward the good.

He suggests that he cannot be with them - holding their hand - all the time. They had zeal for him at one time, and it was a good thing. That zeal they must hang on to now, and not be distracted (4:18).

How does Paul express his parental compassion?

Now Paul shows the passion of a mother! Usually the "children" passages of Scripture are from a father, as in I John. Here he plays the role of a mother in labor, *again*. They have fallen from their first status, and he is laboring that Christ will *once more* be formed in them (collectively and figuratively). Imagine giving birth to the same child twice. He's speaking of all the turmoil when he was physically in Galatia, and now the pleadings of this letter (4:19).

Such frustration! He wants to be with them. He wants to be proved wrong or change their minds face to face, but as he has just intimated, that cannot always be. He wants to change his tone, as a parent does not like always to be talking down to his children and correcting them. He wants to share the life in Christ. But for now, doubts prevail. He has heard this and heard that and knows that the Judaizers have made inroads. Just how far he isn't sure (4:20).

11. The bondwoman vs the free woman, 4:21-31

What are the two covenants compared to now?

4:21-23 [21](#)*Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not understand what the law says? [22](#)For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. [23](#)His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born through the promise.*

So, you want to be under Moses. Listen to Moses awhile, what he really said, from Genesis on. Notice Paul calls the entire Pentateuch "the Law" because it was written by the great lawgiver, Moses (4:21).

This is well-known history to a Jew and to many of us. Abraham first had a son by a "bondwoman", that is, a servant or slave. We know her as Hagar. Then he had a son by a freewoman, namely his own wife Sarah (4:22).

He who was of the bondwoman, namely Ishmael, was born according to the flesh. Now, birth is a flesh thing. Everyone must have a flesh and blood birth. Everyone is born according to the "flesh" in that respect.

But the means to that birth, though also of flesh, can be guided by men or by God. People have babies every day, many out of wedlock, many with a partner God never intended, and so on. Ishmael was of this nature, and because Hagar, his mother, was not the legal wife of Abraham, and because the plan to have a child through her was conceived in the carnal mind, he is said to be born carnally, or in the flesh (4:23).

On the other hand, Isaac, who also came into the world by the union of a man and a woman, a real flesh and blood child, came in

through a legal and God-blessed, even God-promised union. He was therefore a child of promise. God said Abraham would have a son from his own body and his wife's. There is no other but Isaac who was born this way, by promise, by power of God, yet fully human in nature.

Being born out of wedlock is not unpardonable or to be judged. This is not the point of the story here. He uses Isaac and Ishmael to make a point, symbolically.

What do the two covenants stand for?

4:24-27 [24](#)These things serve as illustrations, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children into slavery: This is Hagar. [25](#)Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present-day Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. [26](#)But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. [27](#)For it is written:

*“Rejoice, O barren woman,
who bears no children;
break forth and cry aloud,
you who have never travailed;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband.”*

He says that these two sons can stand for the two covenants, namely the covenant of Mt Sinai, and the New covenant of the Spirit.

Ishmael, born from Hagar the servant, born of the carnal will of man, matches up with the Law, born from Mt. Sinai (4:24).

He carries the analogy even farther. He says that Hagar, which equals Sinai's law, is also equal to the present form of Jerusalem, namely the Jews without Christ, still in bondage to the law which curses (4:25).

Fascinating. He brings in something altogether new here. He says there is a New Jerusalem, one located in the heavens. This is Isaac's Seed, the children of promise, children who are free from the curse of the law, believers who are connected to God by faith - ultimately - in the promised Seed Jesus (4:26).

What is the difference between being saved by grace and being saved by works?

Ironside brings out here that God's covenant with Abraham, through Isaac, was a covenant of sovereign grace. "Grace does not make terms with people; grace does not ask that we do anything to procure merit. Many people talk about salvation by grace who do not seem to have the least conception of what grace is. They think that God gives them the grace to do the things that make them deserving of salvation... you and I cannot do one thing to deserve the good treatment that God gives us... what a marvelous thing to be saved by grace!"

He goes on to explain this further by relating a story of a wealthy lady in New York who built a large, beautiful house of worship for the Episcopalians living there. On the day of the dedication, she was given by the bishop \$1.00 for the deed. And legally, the transaction went down as a sale, not a gift.

What a generous gift, you say. No. It was a sale. It cost the episcopal church \$1.00.

You see, there are people who will tell you they were saved by grace, then they will point to the time *they* went to the altar and *they* prayed through. Or *they* raised their hand. Or *they* shook the preacher's hand. Or believed with all their might. Or were baptized in water. They will point to the action they did as the reason for

their salvation. We all want to think we had a part in it, even just a little part.

But grace will not share the stage with even one of your actions, though you may have done all of those things. The fact is, God saved you. You were dead. He made you alive when you could not do it for yourself.

All the religions of man demand that you do something to be saved. This religion revealed to Abraham and all the saints since is totally different. This is something God did and does to this day.

This family of believers corresponds to Sarah in his picture and is aptly named "the mother of us all." So, Hagar gives birth to bondage, and Sarah to liberty. Faith in the promises of God is the dividing line.

How are a barren woman and a fruitful woman a picture of the two kinds of religion?

He now brings in Isaiah 54:1. Both parts of his illustration are contained in this prophecy.

Ironside explains it: "Grace in the past had been like a woman who was forsaken and alone, and longed to be the mother of children, but wept and mourned alone. And on the other hand, here is legality typified by another woman, and she has thousands of children, people who profess to be saved by human effort, saved by their own merits, Yes, legality is a wonderful mother, she has a vast family, and poor grace does not seem to have any children at all.

"But now the Gospel goes forth, and what happens? Grace, the one forsaken, neglected, becomes the mother of more children than legality..."

God says it like this through Isaiah [NASB 1995]: "Shout out for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman," says the Lord.

So, told to rejoice, is the relatively small remnant of believers, the desolate who have trusted Christ, the Seed of Isaac, the promises of God. One here, one there, and all barren for a season. But when all is said and done, this group will increase exponentially, as promised Abraham. In Abraham, and his seed, all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth will be blessed eventually.

"She who has a husband" would be the "Jerusalem that now is", the keepers of the law, the builders of the Temple, the priesthood and all its trappings, the Jewish nation in bondage yet in existence Eventually eternal loss for them all (4:27).

How do the two covenants apply to us?

4:28-31 [28](#)Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. [29](#)At that time, however, the son born by the flesh persecuted the son born by the Spirit. It is the same now. [30](#)But what does the Scripture say? "Expel the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." [31](#)Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

"We" of verse 31 is spoken by Paul the Jew, true, but I believe it can encompass Jews and Gentiles both, who have accepted the Seed of Isaac, Jesus. We are children of promise (4:28).

However, we are still "barren" in the sense that we are being persecuted by Jews and other unsaved people who have not yet accepted the promised Seed and been set free.

Notice here he replaces the idea of "promise" with "Spirit." Isaac was promised by the Spirit, born according to the Spirit, just as we have been born again by that same Spirit. Those who trust in the flesh to save them by the law of Moses are totally opposed to those basking in the liberty of Christ, and they persecute us just as Ishmael began to come against Isaac. In Genesis 21:8-9, for example, Ishmael is seen scoffing at Isaac's birth (4:29).

Luther: "We who are born of the Gospel, and live in Christ, and rejoice in our inheritance, have Ishmael for our enemy... This is our [Luther's, reformers] daily experience. Our opponents tell us that everything was at peace before the Gospel was revived by us. Since then, the whole world has been upset. People blame us and the Gospel for everything, for the disobedience of subjects to their rulers, for wars, plagues, and famines, for revolutions, and every other evil that can be imagined. No wonder our opponents think they are doing God a favor by hating and persecuting us. Ishmael will persecute Isaac."

Ironside backs up Luther: "Luther took hold of the text, 'The just shall live by faith,' and the truth began to ring out all over Germany and Europe and then spread to Britain, and soon bitter persecution broke out and people cried, 'Put them to death, these people who believe in salvation by grace, who do not believe that they can be saved by penances and human merit; burn them, starve them, shoot them, behead them, do everything possible to rid the world of them.' ... the world still hates and detests the people who are saved by grace."

Sarah responds immediately to this "persecution" by saying that Ishmael must go (4:30).

It is a harsh reaction, yet Paul says it fits our situation too. He is not suggesting a Sarah-like response on the part of the believers but indicates that God Himself has declared that we have separate identities now from those who insist on clinging to Moses. Our descent is traced through the New Jerusalem, the promised Seed of Abraham, Jesus, not through the law given at Sinai via Moses. His message is clear, and segues perfectly into his next theme (4:31).

Recall that there is no chapter division in most Biblical writings. This letter flows on seamlessly, Chapter 4 ends, "We are children of the freewoman," and chapter 5 begins, "for freedom Christ set us free..."

Take a deep breath here if you must, but don't lose the thought of chapter 4.

**PAUL CALLS THE GALATIANS
TO THE SPIRIT WALK**

12. Freedom in the Spirit, 5:1-15

Why is the Jewish law not necessary for salvation?

(5:1-6) **1***It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be encumbered once more by a yoke of slavery.* **2***Take notice: I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.* **3***Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.* **4***You who are trying to be justified by the law have been severed from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.* **5***But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the hope of righteousness.* **6***For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. All that matters is faith, expressed through love.*

Recall that there should be no break between the chapters here. The thought continues, indeed, encompasses the whole book.

Christ set you free from the law. Don't go back under it and assume you are earning your salvation by it. Only bondage and shipwreck are on that route. The reference to the yoke of bondage could well refer to Peter's handling of the topic in Acts 15:10. There, Peter says to the sect of the Pharisees, "... why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (5:1)

Is circumcision a bad thing?

Paul is not saying that all who now become circumcised are lost. There are other reasons for this ancient practice. Medical for one. And see Acts 16:3, where his faithful partner Timothy was circumcised at Paul's advice simply because he wanted the Jews of that area to know he was not coming against their laws and ways.

He became all things to all men so he could win some. He taught his disciples to do the same.

But if Timothy had been circumcised because, somewhere inside himself, Timothy believed that this adherence to Jewish custom was necessary for his salvation, then what Jesus did for him on the cross would be cheapened, Christ would be unprofitable. Why cling to salvation in Jesus when you can save yourself? (5:2)

Indeed, once you start down the path of obedience to Moses to be saved, you have to go the whole way. And since you cannot possibly do that, if you trust in the Law of Moses, you will be damned (5:3). Luther puts it this way:

“Rightly are the doers of the Law called devil’s martyrs. They take more pains to earn hell than the martyrs of Christ to obtain heaven. Theirs is a double misfortune. First, they torture themselves on earth with self-inflicted penances, and finally when they die, they gain the reward of eternal damnation.”

You may have started out with a relationship in Christ, but observance of the law for salvation will strangle that friendship. You will be cut off from Him and His grace.

Can a Christian fall from grace?

"Fallen from grace" carries many connotations today. Here is its originally intended meaning: To trust anything but the grace of God to save you. "For by grace you have been saved, through faith, [and [even] that [faith (or the grace) is] not of yourself." It is simply a gift. Grace is grace and that is all it is. Add something to it and you have it no more.

If the fare has been paid, and you throw in your two dollars, it's not a free trip any longer. It is an insult to the one who offered to pay it all.

Notice it is "to attempt" to be justified by law. "You are seeking to be justified by law." KJV has the literal correctness here, implying that some Galatians were actually *being* justified by law. You cannot really be justified this way. Though we must say that the Greek only supports the idea of justified, we understand why modern translators have supplied the "attempt" or "seeking" idea, so as not to mislead.

Paul says they are "justified in law", but in the same verse says they are fallen from grace and estranged from Christ, hence not really justified at all.

So what does "fallen from grace" mean here? Loss of salvation? Fallen from being saved, since grace is what saves? Luther takes all this very seriously:

"The words 'Ye are fallen from grace' must not be taken lightly. They are important. To fall from grace means to lose the atonement, the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness, liberty, and life which Jesus has merited for us by His death and resurrection. To lose the grace of God means to gain the wrath and judgment of God, death, the bondage of the devil, and everlasting condemnation."

If grace picks you up, then grace must let you go if you reach out to the Law. When grace lets go, you fall.

In the Luther context, there were Galatians who had heard the message of grace, and delighted in it at first, but never subscribed to it before those wicked Judaizers came along like the birds in

Jesus' parable of the four soils, snatched the word out of their hearts, and caused them to trust in Moses.

"Severed from Christ" in the first part of that verse is no less severe than "fallen from grace" in the last part. Cut off from Jesus just as the good seed was making its way into their hearts, as they were distracted from the truth by a lie. Paul's warning is serious here.

Can I repent before it is too late, before I "fall"?

Others, like Ironside, are not as clear on this point. He says, "Falling from grace... is turning from the full, clear, high Christian standard of salvation by grace alone, to the low level of attempting to keep one's salvation by human effort." In his view, we are to repent of such thinking the moment we are made aware of it, but not that we have lost out with God forever.

He tells the story of a man who asked a Methodist minister, "I understand that you Methodists believe in falling from grace; is that so?"

The Methodist minister answered, "I understand that you Presbyterians believe in horse-stealing."

"We do not!"

"Well, don't you believe it's possible for a man to steal a horse?"

"Yes, but we wouldn't do it."

"Well, we believe it is possible for men to fall from grace, but we do not believe in doing it."

Don't want to blur the lines here. Let's just leave it as a profoundly serious position in which to be, if you are trusting anything to save you but the blood of Jesus Christ shed for your sins. You earned

nothing by anything you tried to do. Nor will you earn an entrance to that grace by any future acts. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and that not of yourself. It's all the gift of God (5:4).

How can I be right with God?

The idea of justification points to righteousness, which is where the apostle's mind goes next. Keeping the law will not make us righteous. Trusting the promise of God will. The Spirit in us tells us to expect fully a righteousness apart from the law, imparted, imputed to us. Faith tells us we can fully expect this. A right standing with God. An ultimate perfection of who we are as we are transformed into what He is.

Paul calls this in Romans 8:24, the redemption of our body, that we are fully hoping for. We do not see it now, and that is why we hope for it (5:5).

So, if you were a Jew and already circumcised, or a Gentile who may never be, God is not looking at this act or any other act to save you. Nothing is produced by your good intentions and works or lack of same. What does produce salvation is God-induced faith, a faith that works itself out, also by grace, via the love of God and the brothers and our neighbors.

This is the order he always insists on: Grace-created faith that produces works, not works that produce merit. There are indeed works for the Christian to do, but they stem from an already-right relationship with God. They do not produce that relationship.

"If I can work hard enough, God will love me. Yes?"

No, Christ died for you while you were still in your sins. It was His voice you heard calling you out of that sin to Himself and the

Father. He'll never love you any more than this. This love is undeserved, amazing grace.

Ironside tries to drive the point home by the story of a young girl who fell seriously ill. She was a wonderful child and her mother loved her dearly. The doctor's orders were that this mother be the only one allowed to care for her. The girl would need this special attention.

Now, says Ironside, that directive was not difficult at all. The love was already inside of her, and the desire to bring her child to health.

So it is with grace. When Christ comes in, He brings with Him the desire to do good works, and we do them out of love for Him. We can get drunk or break the law or anything else any time *we want to*. But in Christ, we don't *want to* anymore. That's grace.

Strange but true, after a while, people get the message somehow that if they do such and such things, they'll score points with God And then God must save them. That's not grace. People who believe this have *fallen from grace*.

So, if they fell, Ironside implies, they can stand up again and live on that higher plain. I believe the next verses prove that this fall from grace for the believer is a temporary thing. Paul has some encouragement and exhortation to one who has tripped and fallen (5:6).

Why did the Galatians change their mind?

5:7-12 **7**You were running so well. Who has obstructed you from obeying the truth? **8**Such persuasion does not come from the One who calls you. **9**A little leaven works through the whole batch of dough. **10**I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.

The one who is troubling you will bear the judgment, whoever he may be. [11](#)Now, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. [12](#)As for those who are agitating you, I wish they would proceed to emasculate themselves!

Paul next reminds them of the persecution that he and they endured when they first came to Christ, the price they were willing to pay to separate themselves from everything Mosaic. But after the dust settled, with no more threats to their lives, Moses' disciples moved in and tried the new tactic of infiltration and false teaching (5:7).

God is not trying to get you to go to the Law, says Paul and I am not. Think about it. You were going in a certain direction and were happy with it. If you are now changing direction, it is not the fault of the one who first called you. God does not change His mind. The Gospel has not changed. You changed.

This “persuasion”, Ironside prefers to call “persuasibleness”, that is, the tendency to be easily persuaded. We might call it doublemindedness today. One day they believed in salvation by grace. Then suddenly they were believing the opposite (5:8).

Can't we just change this grace doctrine a little bit?

It doesn't take a lot of poison to kill. A lot of leaven to make the bread rise. A lot of false teaching to spoil a believer. Some things do not mix with the Gospel. Dilute it, and it is Gospel no more.

Luther comments: “[Some of] the Galatians perhaps saw no harm in deviating a trifle from the doctrine of justification and faith. When they noticed that Paul made so much ado about a matter that

seemed of no particular importance to them, they raised their eyebrows and thought within themselves, 'What if we did deviate a little... He ought not to make such an issue of it...To this Paul replies in the words of this verse."

And it isn't the only time Paul has used this adage about a little leaven. The church in Corinth had some *moral* leaven that was threatening to destroy the fellowship. Whether it's moral or doctrinal, God says, throw it back. Keep it out. We don't want it.

"Small faults," says Luther, "grow into big faults. To tolerate a trifling error inevitably leads to crass heresy. The doctrine of the Bible is not ours to take or to allow liberties with. We have no right to change even a little of it..." (5:9).

How severely does Paul warn the Galatians about the Judaizers?

For the first time, after some very severe words, Paul expresses confidence that the Lord is going to finish what He started in the Galatians. He hopes out loud here that they will agree with him on what he is trying to get across to them.

"Listen to me. Don't listen to the one who is disturbing you, or as in verse 12, the one who is throwing you into confusion.

"Don't listen. These guys are going to be punished."

Certain is the judgment of the false teacher, the distributor of the poison that is sickening their souls. He doesn't know the names and faces of these teachers, but he knows the smell of the poison from a long distance (5:10).

He turns the conversation back to himself and his own role in their salvation. He asks them to consider the logic of the situation:

Paul's stance against the Judaizers is causing personal trouble to Paul. He refuses to preach the necessity of circumcision for salvation, so he is being maligned and hurt everywhere. They should understand that the very fact of his persecution is reason enough for them to believe that the legalists' message and his message are two different messages, even radically different.

Luther quotes Bernard here: "The church is in best shape when Satan assaults it on every side by trickery and violence," then goes on to add, "Paul looks with suspicion upon any doctrine that does not provoke antagonism...So do not be surprised or offended when hell breaks loose. Look upon it as a happy indication that all is well with the Gospel of the Cross."

What is the "offence" or "scandal" of the cross?

If he would cave in to the Judaizers, as some of them seem to want to do, he would not be preaching the message of the cross. It is that message that is the most offensive to the unsaved. That Jesus died in my place and gives me free salvation, not based on my works but His, is so exceedingly difficult for the world to understand. Especially "good Jews." It is a *scandalon* in the Greek. We get the word scandal, the KJV says offence.

Scandal is a serious word in English: "discredit brought upon religion by unseemly conduct in a religious person." First definition in *Merriam-Webster*.

What religion here? Judaism. What discredit? Moses is wrong, you don't keep the Law to be saved. Who is the religious person? Christ Jesus, who nailed that Law to His cross and paid the price for all the laws broken. Scandal! Heresy! Unpopular to the max! You're hated when you preach such a thing. Leave Moses? Saved by some gift from God? C'mon, that's offensive on its face.

And then you're telling us that the One dying there is really God in the flesh, the Son of God? On a Roman cross, naked and bleeding and suffering? God? Scandal! Stop it! Our God doesn't die on a cross!

Today the scandal of the cross involves creating another Christ altogether. Jesus died to make you happy. And rich. And powerful. So you can fulfill all your dreams and reach your destiny. The idea of Jesus dying for *sin to keep you from hell*, that's old stuff. Your parents emphasized that, but God's changed since those days.

As some preachers get more and more popular, they need to examine their message to see whether they are truly preaching Christ crucified, absolutely necessary for their salvation, or if they have veered off into a works Gospel, or a pleasure Gospel, or a prosperity Gospel. The Gospel is good news, but only in that sins may now be forgiven due to the blood of Jesus. Any other "good news" is not good, and it is not new: the enemy has been trying to keep Jesus and His people away from the real cross from the beginning (5:11).

What does Paul mean by "cut off"?

A sudden splash of anger comes over Paul, frustration, wishing he could be there in Galatia to do something about this. He then suggests something the false teachers should do.

MacArthur tells us that in Galatia was the cult of the worship of Cybele. One of the acts of worship for them was castration. This was the extreme sacrifice. Paul seems to be saying, if these Judaizers love God so much as to believe that God wants a part of that member cut off, why not show even more devotion and cut off the entire member?

The Greek bears such a translation, and Paul's personality seems to also. But there are others who contend that the "gravity" of an apostle would not allow him such language, and that he is merely saying that, as skin is cut off in circumcision, he wishes they themselves would cut themselves off from the body of Christ, that is, excommunication. Or, as Luther suggests, that God himself would curse them by cutting them off from the church.

Neither option was likely to be followed by the false teachers, and Paul knew that full well. He is simply being extreme because this is an extreme problem. In another place he says he wishes he could be *cut off* from Israel for the sake of his unsaved brothers. In another, if anyone does not love Jesus let him be accursed.

Paul was extreme. And we love him and thank him for it. His Master was also extreme and played not with sin (5:12).

To what sort of freedom were we called?

5:13-15 **13***For you, brothers, were called to freedom; but do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Rather, serve one another in love. 14*The entire law is fulfilled in a single decree: "Love your neighbor as yourself." **15***But if you keep on biting and devouring one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.*

We now go back to 5:1 in Paul's discussion of liberty. Freed from the Law. The Law is not my master. Christ is my master. The Law cannot now send me to hell. Jesus will take me to Heaven.

Liberty is precious, but many want to take liberty to the point where even our carnal flesh has liberty, and that is never the case. Your spirit has been set free, but your flesh, the evil nature with

which you were born, cannot be turned loose. To obey the flesh is to deliberately disobey the Law and live in even greater bondage.

Rather, we are freed to obey the Spirit. Freed from the certain judgment that law-keeping (for salvation), will bring. Be filled with the Spirit and allow that Spirit to lead you into the new life of love and service. When your flesh, meaning here your body, is thus engaged it will have no desire to do its own thing. Flesh and blood bodies are great servants, but awful masters. The true you of your life now calls the shots, with this new-found liberty.

He says this to answer one of the serious arguments that legalists wield: You are against law, you are against God's righteousness, you think you can just do anything you want now. No, we teach that we can do anything *God wants* now, whereas before we tried so hard to please him, but wound up being carnal anyway. Bound. Now free to love. Free to serve. Free to give. Freely forgiven (5:13).

And don't worry. You will be keeping the Law after all. The Spirit within you will give you the grace to love, and when you love you have fulfilled God's law. Leviticus 19:18 is here quoted as the OT standard.

Luther comments on this verse, "Let nobody think that he knows all about this commandment... It sounds short and easy, but show me the man who can teach, learn, and do this commandment perfectly."

He suggests that Paul is saying to the Galatians, as Luther would to the Papists of his day, "You are so taken up by your superstitions and ceremonies that serve no good purpose, that you neglect the most important thing, love."

And he quotes Jerome, who could say some good things, “We wear our bodies out with watching, fasting, and labor, and neglect charity, the queen of all good works (5:14).”

We're led to believe here that not only is Paul excited about this matter, but the Galatians themselves may have been arguing much about it, and in so doing had become like wolves themselves, not to mention the wolves coming from outside to devour them.

He warns them to be careful about their contentions, to discuss all this in love, for without love, all is lost. Slowly, slowly, Christ is being formed in the Galatians, and in us, as we read this sound advice from an apostle of Christ.

Note the balance. In no way should false teaching be allowed. But in no way must correct teaching exclude the presence of the love of God in their midst.

At first sight, it seems strange to be seeing this discussion of love all of a sudden. But we are so glad that he entered this pathway, because churches tend to forget loving spirits when discussing doctrinal issues. Eventually their first love is lost, as with the church of Ephesus in Revelation, and all that is left is the list of rules (5:15).

Ironside adds to this, “Do you know why many a testimony that was once bright for God today is in ruins? It is because of a spirit of quarrelsomeness, fault-finding, and murmuring... if you and I are guilty of that, we ought to get into God’s presence and examine our ways before Him; yea, plead with Him to search our hearts...”

13. Walking in the Spirit, 5:16-26

What are the two ways we can walk in this world?

5:16-18 [16](#)So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17](#)For the flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you want. [18](#)But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

What starts as an exposition of Judaizers evolves into a discussion of the Spirit-filled life. Actually though, Paul has been talking of the things of the Spirit since chapter 3. The Galatians had begun in the Spirit. God through Paul had provided miracles by the Spirit. The faith of Abraham had produced a promise of the Spirit, he tells them.

Chapter 4 mentions the Spirit's bringing of our "Abba" prayer to God. And Isaac is portrayed as one who was "born according to the Spirit."

Here in chapter 5, it is through the Spirit that we have faith to expect our hope.

What was the solution to the problem at Galatia?

We enter now one of the classic passages of that subject, the Spirit, one which normally is lifted out of its context. But see it in the light of the entire letter. Here is a church being attacked by men who would threaten its very existence. The return to the Law of Moses would make everything Paul has done vanity to the extreme. The solution? The Holy Spirit of God.

The way to be righteous before God is not reading a book and trying really hard. The way to be holy before God is to be filled with God Himself, a way made possible through what Christ did.

The Spirit-filled walk leads one "naturally" (but really supernaturally) to avoid evil. God inside a man never leads that man to obey the carnal nature. It is impossible to sin, as the apostle John would confirm, when one is walking according to the Spirit's directions (5:16).

Does the promise of the Spirit imply the battle is over?

That is not to say that there will be no battles. Carnality does not sleep. The old nature still desires to have its own way. The battle is constant to stay in the Spirit, as opposed to the losing battle of obeying the Law without the help of the Spirit within.

As he says in Romans, the things a man really wants to do, he cannot do, because of the flesh.

Ironside explains: "The new birth does not imply the elimination of that old carnal nature which we received at our natural birth, neither does it imply a change in it, but rather the impartation of an absolutely new nature born of the Holy Spirit of God, and these two natures abide side by side in the believer..."

And Luther tells his own story here.

"When I was a monk, I thought I was lost forever whenever I felt an evil emotion, carnal lust, wrath, hatred, or envy. I tried to quiet my conscience in many ways, but it did not work, because lust would always come back and give me no rest. I told myself... 'your joining this holy order has been in vain, and your good works are good for nothing.' If at that time I had understood this passage... I could have spared myself many a day of self-torment. I would have said to

myself: "Martin, you will never be without sin, for you have flesh. Despair not but resist the flesh."

"... the better Christian a man is, the more he will experience the heat of the conflict" (5:17).

The opposite of such carnal living is being led by (same as walking in) the Spirit, which means one is not under the law. Note the comparison: "under the Law" seems to parallel walking in the flesh. Trying to please God without the Spirit means you are trying to please Him with your carnal nature, and that will never work because the carnal nature is not equipped to love and serve God, no matter how much the will wants it.

God takes us out from under the law, always being beaten down by our own desire, to a new desire, fostered by Heaven Itself, and always pleasing to Heaven. Be filled with the Spirit and do what the new you wills to do (5:18).

And always be aware of the enemy within.

What are the works of the flesh?

5:19-21 [19](#)*The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; [20](#)idolatry and sorcery; hatred, discord, jealousy, and rage; rivalries, divisions, factions, [21](#)and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

How can you identify when you are being led by the flesh? Eventually the flesh will lead you to one or more of these practices: (From NKJV, slightly different from NASB above)

- Adultery. Unfaithfulness in a number of applications. Maritally, spiritually. Turning from your vows and promises to something else that your carnal nature likes better (5:19).
- Fornication. All sorts of sexual immorality from straight to gay and everything surrounding them (5:19).
- Uncleaness. Physical or moral impurity. This takes us into the thought life, the speech, the intake of this or that into an otherwise healthy body or mind. Poisoning the well (5:19).
- Lewdness. Licentious behavior. Anything goes. Filthiness. Incontinence (5:19).
- Idolatry. Anything that comes before God in our thoughts or actions or energy or time (5:20).
- Sorcery. Originally, a medication or potion given by a sorcerer or magician to induce an altered state. Note it is called a work of the flesh because it starts in the body and invites the spirit world. Drugs. Hallucinations. Trips. Still very much with us. Referred to as witchcraft in the KJV for this was one of the works of a spiritist (5:20).
Ironsides says here, "I think that Chicago has a good many witches in it. Often while passing along the street I see such signs as "Spiritualist medium" ... people pretending to have traffic with the dead. That is witchcraft and it is an abomination in the sight of God."
(Henry Ironsides was pastor at Chicago's Moody Church from 1930-1948. Witches have been among us for a long time.)
- Hatred. Suddenly the list gets a little more personal. Hatred is the anteroom of anger and therefore murder (5:20).
- Contentions. Variance in the KJV. Originally, wrangling or quarreling. Strife (5:20).

- Jealousies. Emulations. You want something of someone else. Someone's position, attention, stuff (5:20).
- Wrath, as in outbursts of. Comes from word meaning breathing. Passion. Fierce indignation. Not righteous indignation... (5:20).
- Selfish ambitions. Strife. Intrigue, faction, contention. Related to contentions (above). In that earlier word it seems to be the argument for the argument's sake. Here it is the desire to divide and conquer within a group setting. Not just a hot-head who later apologizes, but a man with a mission, who fights to win converts to himself (5:20).
- Dissensions. Seditious. Disunion. Division. Overlapping to be sure, but here, the outcome is in focus, as opposed to the method one might take to achieve it. Disunity is a work of the carnal nature. When two born again believers cannot walk in unity, one or both of them is sinning. There are times, though, as with Paul and Barnabas, where two different ministries clash and demand separation (5:20).
- Heresies. Not just the teaching, but the party or disunion that comes from it. Again, some overlap, to be sure everything is covered (5:20).
- Envy. Jealousy, as above. Also, ill-will. Spite. The feelings that come as a result of or leading to the disunions in a body. Division is often blamed on doctrine, when in fact the carnal nature comes into play also as merely human dislikes for other humans could be the culprit (5:21).
- Murders.
- Drunkenness. No definition is given, but there is a universal understanding of what drunk means. InTOXICation. Poison. And it is a work of the flesh (5:21).

- Revelries. Added to drunkenness and followed by "the like", any number of wild parties, a "letting loose", in the Greek. Carousing. Orgies... (5:21).

He adds, at the end of the list, another one of his sobering and startling statements: A person who is regularly practicing this sort of behavior, any item on the list, has no place in God's Kingdom. This new life in Christ excludes evil behavior, not on the basis of the Law, but on the basis of the new life in Christ. One either has Christ or he doesn't.

Luther: "There were many hypocrites among the Galatians, as there are also among us, who pretend to be Christians and talk much about the Spirit, but they walk not according to the Spirit; rather according to the flesh. Paul is out to show them that they are not as holy as they like to have others think they are."

What is the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

5:22-26 [22](#)But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23](#)gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24](#)Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25](#)If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [26](#)Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

When the Holy Spirit is in a man, He produces things that the flesh cannot produce. A man walking in and filled with the Holy Spirit simply cannot do the works of the flesh. Nine manifestations of that fruit: (From NKJV, slightly different from NASB above)

- Love. First and foremost. The highest form of Spirit living in all apostolic writings.

- Joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength. For the joy set before Him of bringing us to glory, Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame.
- Peace. "You will keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You."
- Longsuffering. Patience. Waiting on God. Waiting for men. Waiting for yourself.
- Kindness. Called gentleness in the KJV. "Useful" in original Greek. "Employed" for moral purposes. Moral excellence. Overlaps with next fruit, goodness.
- Goodness. Virtue. The inner quality, perhaps, as opposed to the outer working of the prior fruit.
- Faithfulness. From the Greek *pistis* which nearly always means "faith" as in the KJV list, though sometimes taken to mean "constancy" in belief. The Spirit produces God-faith in His people, that they might believe for more.
- Gentleness. KJV, meekness. Humility. Lowliness of mind and heart.
- Self-control. KJV, temperance. The KJV word is so related in people's minds to alcoholic beverages, that it is better today to use the general term, "self-controlled." The Greek bears this out. Strong mentions control in appetite, and continence, the latter of which influenced the Catholic reading, "chastity". The basic meaning is "strong" and sums up what the Spirit will make us, against those constant cravings of our flesh (5:22-23).

His after-comment on this list takes us back to the whole discussion of the Law, which is the subject of Galatians throughout. The Law cannot keep me from sin, the Law cannot produce holy things, yet the Law is in no way opposed to the things which the Spirit

produces. Indeed, far from the Law being opposed to the Spirit, a man walking in the Spirit keeps the Law of God by his new nature. That which the flesh could not accomplish, the Spirit does.

The fact of the Spirit's life in an individual means that flesh has already been dealt the death blow. It's not that we keep trying to die or try really hard to be good. Christ was crucified and we were crucified with Him. When He enters our lives, He brings that reality alongside. The flesh is dead. We do not desire the flesh when the Spirit takes its place. The real struggle is to stay in the Spirit's control (5:24).

What is the difference between living in, and walking in, the Spirit?

Next, there is a difference stated here between living in, and walking in, the Spirit.

To live in the Spirit seems to mean the fact that Christ is in us and we are in Him from the beginning. We have transferred from the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of His Son. New life is in us. All things have become new. Some want to continue reveling in this newness and forget that there is a walk involved.

The walk begins the moment we must go back to family or friends or job and do the things we used to do but in relationship to the newness described above. There are challenges that come because of the flesh that continues to try to resurrect, people around us that do not understand this newness, an entire world system that is opposed to everything spiritual.

But if we live in the Spirit, we must learn to walk with Him and in Him, to believe that He will be with us if we are listening for His voice, that He will empower us, give us wisdom, the very words and

actions we need to meet every circumstance we could possibly face. Being Christian in Church is one thing. It's outside of Church where we must stay awake and aware of the New Life (5:25).

Strange that Paul should so quickly admit that even with the crucified life we claim to have, there is the possibility that God's people can be lifted up with pride, partially because of the new claims they can now make about eternal life and their security in Jesus.

The context here is the church family. Even in church there are believers who aggravate other believers, out of pride or insensitivity. There are others not satisfied with their own giftings, who begin to want what other believers have and secretly hold grudges against them.

The flesh and the enemy are always at work among us. Paul is diligent to remind them to be watching, that nothing be allowed to rob them of this Spirit-filled life he has just described to them (5:26).

Luther would add, especially to those in any kind of public service, though his comments are about his own turbulent ministry: "It is really kind of God to send so much infamy, reproach, hatred, and cursing our way to keep us from getting proud of the gifts of God in us... There are a few on our side who love and revere us for the ministry of the Word, but for every one of these, there are a hundred on the other side who hate and persecute us..."

The practical portion of Galatians concludes in the final chapter with a word about bearing burdens.

14. Bearing burdens, 6:1-10

How does God want His people to care for one another?

6:1-10 **1**Brothers, if someone is caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him with a spirit of gentleness. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **2**Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. **3**If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. **4**Each one should test his own work. Then he will have reason to boast in himself alone, and not in someone else. **5**For each one should carry his own load. **6**Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word must share in all good things with his instructor. **7**Do not be deceived: God is not to be mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap in return. **8**The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. **9**Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. **10**Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to the family of faith.

With all this talk of law and free grace, it is inevitable that someone will misunderstand, and do what in 5:13 the apostle counsels against: use his liberty as an occasion for his flesh to prosper. "I'm free, I can do what I want." We all know the mentality.

There is a world of important ideas in verse 1. First, we understand that Christians do get overtaken, caught in the enemy's traps. The word literally means to take in advance, for example to eat before others have a chance. Figuratively, to overtake, to surprise. Someone is surprising you, going ahead of you, and setting a trap for your fall.

Second idea, When the above happens to someone in the church, the spiritual are to restore him. That lets us know that there are persons in every church who have grown to a point where they should be helping other people. Notice, leadership is not mentioned, though we would hope that the leaders and the spiritual would be the same. The word here is *pneumatikos*, and refers to the non-carnal or non-fleshly. Those who have taken Paul's advice in chapter 5 would be of this caliber. They walk not according to the flesh, but they walk in the Spirit as He fills and completes their own spirit.

Third idea, that restoration, when done by a truly spiritual person, will be gentle and kind. Fruit of the Spirit will be evident in the process. The harsh members, critical, angry, punishing, judging, are not spiritual, but carnal.

Fourth, we are told that even the spiritual can be tempted to fall, especially if they are blind to their potential weakness when restoring the brother.

Ironside says, "It is no evidence of spirituality to give way to harsh judgment... a hard, critical spirit will drive the failing one deeper into sin and make it more difficult to recover him at last. "

Our attitude should be that of one of the Fathers quoted by Luther, who, when dealing with a backslidden brother said, "He fell yesterday; I may fall today."

As Paul says here, "Looking to yourself" (6:1).

In the context of restoration of a brother we are told to bear his burden, for he has truly made a huge mistake and he knows it. This could refer to other burdens that people carry, but it is encouraging to know that, yes, God's people do have burdens, but no, they are

not asked to bear them alone. Here is Jesus inviting us to come to Him, via the Body, when we labor and are heavy laden, and He Himself will give us rest.

Paul again brings the subject matter back home when he suggests that here is a way to be keeping Christ's law, the bearing of burdens. His law, as well as what He gave to Moses, is love, and the Spirit within us guides us eventually there (6:2).

Fulfilling the law of Christ involves interdependence on the Christ manifested in the Body, the Church. Without this networking of love, a brother is on his own, and if he should score a temporary success, he begins to think he is something. In fact, without the Christ of the Body, He is nothing. It will not be long before a charcoal taken from the fire will burn out. Alone (6:3).

Are we to bear each other's burdens, or are we totally responsible for our own burden?

But there is a deeper meaning to verse 3 as we go on to the next 2 verses. In one way it looks as though Paul reverses himself in verses 4 and 5. If these two ideas had been found in two different epistles, the so-called "higher critics" would be telling us that one of them was not genuine Pauline teaching. Thankfully, they came out of his heart within seconds of each other.

Bear one another's burdens, be involved in the body, we need one another, that's the word of verses 1-3.

But, says Paul, we will bear our own burden. Examine yourself. Rejoice in yourself alone, not in someone else's estimation of you. Independence!

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How does it fit together? Try this paraphrase.

“Condescend to help your brother to be restored if he messes up. Don't think of yourself as too good for this, and don't treat him in a holier-than-thou manner. If you think you are so good, you have some surprises in store. In fact, you need to examine yourself to be sure all is well there, so that his life is not the focus of your growth and perfection, but your own life. Though you should help this brother, eventually you will stand before God, not on his behalf, but on your own behalf. “

This puts a different light on "you who are spiritual." Who would volunteer for the task of helping such a brother now? Paul calls us all to examine ourselves thoroughly, to be sure the Spirit is doing the work in us which He ought to do, and that we are receiving it.

We must not judge ourselves based on our brother's conduct compared to ours. We must judge ourselves based on us as we are now vs us as we were then. Have we grown? Are we on the way, or just in the way? (6:4-5)

What is the church's responsibility to its ministers?

Next is Paul's admonition to the church of all time directed to disciples. The connection to the previous verses is aided by the addition of the word “nevertheless” in some translations.

That is, “Each one will bear his own load... nevertheless, disciples are responsible for helping their shepherds.”

Disciples are responsible for their master's upkeep. In another analogy, the wool and in some cases the meat of the sheep provide for the shepherd's needs.

A disciple needs to lay down his life for the shepherd as the shepherd has laid down his life in protecting and nourishing the sheep. That's a Kingdom principle that gets buried in the presence of huge mortgages, paying staff that do not need to be paid, and other frills of the modern church that are not Kingdom-oriented.

Money in the first century church provided for workers to spread the Gospel, and the poor and needy. Our money needs to flow in that direction. Money that is not specifically for the speeding of the Gospel, the care of the shepherd, and the needs of the hurting in the assembly, should probably be removed from the budget (6:6).

Luther gives his insights from the century in which he lived, not all that different from our own:

“In the old days when the Pope reigned supreme everybody paid plenty for masses. The begging friars brought in their share. Commercial priests counted the daily offerings. From these extortions our countrymen are now delivered by the Gospel. You would think they would be grateful for their emancipation and give generously for the support of the ministry of the Gospel and the relief of impoverished Christians. Instead, they rob Christ. When the members of a Christian congregation permit their pastor to struggle along in poverty, they are worse than heathen... Before long they are going to suffer for their ingratitude.”

Sowing and reaping may be used in a variety of applications for sure, but the context here is provision for the one who is teaching you. Sowing to the flesh, either by the church or the individual, means giving to excess material pleasures at the expense of the spread of the Gospel. It means living rich while your teacher lives poor. There is no excuse for it. Sacrifice for the true man of God is a primary principal and Paul will have it no other way.

What happens to those who live for themselves?

A person who continues to give financial support to fleshly foolishness will one day see all he has given his life to, disintegrate before his eyes. On the other hand, the one who has given time, energy, life blood, to the things of the Spirit, and in particular, the Word of God flowing from his teacher's heart, will see His harvest in the next life.

This is not to say that we purchase Heaven by our money and effort. It is to say that a man flowing in the Spirit will "naturally" be investing the contents of his wallet as well as his prayers in the Kingdom, and as a result of walking in the Spirit, not as a payment for his gifts, which came from God anyway, he will arrive at a Heavenly home where his tiny seeds will have grown to immense proportions (6:7-8).

Things like giving, and other mundane tasks can often grow so "routine" that we want to desert them and move on to something more exciting. Perhaps we have been doing this thing, whatever it is, so long, and nothing has come of it. Paul says, Hang on. The harvest always comes. It's a law of the Kingdom, borne out by harvest laws we have seen on earth. You plant, you reap. You plant a lot, you reap a lot.

But we cannot "lose heart" or "faint". The farmer who just abandons the field to go work in the city will never see the harvest that could have been his. The runner who decides he does not have a chance of winning, and stops running, will fulfill his own thought process. For surely the one who does not run does not win. Don't give up (6:9).

Our life is full of opportunities to do and to give. When we ask God to open our eyes to these opportunities, we start seeing them everywhere.

Paul puts a premium here on blessing the "household of faith." It is only proper that family should be first in our hearts. I Timothy 5:8 lays down the principle of family (natural family) support to the extreme.

Paul is also thinking still of the subject of his letter. He remembers the fervent love and support he and his colleagues had received at the hands of the Galatians at first. He sees them now losing some of that devotion as the Judaizers are trying to steal some of their hearts away. He reminds them that it is the household of faith, true faith, that demands our first allegiance, even though believers are free, and encouraged, to bless "all men." (6:10)

15. Final appeal and farewell, 6:11-18

How does Paul summarize his comments to the Galatians?

6:11-18 **11**See what large letters I am using to write to you with my own hand!**12**Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. They only do this to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ. **13**For the circumcised do not even keep the law themselves, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.**14**But as for me, may I never boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. **15**For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is a new creation.**16**Peace and mercy to all who walk by this rule, even to the Israel of God.**17**From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**18**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Did Paul write a large letter, or in large letters?

The consensus of commentaries I have read, and agreement with other of Paul's statements, is that Paul made an exception with respect to the writing of Galatians (but see also Philemon, v 19) as far as personally writing a letter.

That is, Romans 16:22 tells us Tertius wrote this much longer epistle to Rome. Whoever physically wrote I Corinthians, Paul gave the signature only, in his own writing (16:21). Colossians likewise (4:18).

II Thessalonians 3:17 indicates that this dictation method was his normal way. Find a Timothy or Titus or Epaphroditus to do the handwriting of the entire letter, and Paul will add the signature.

But not to the Galatians.

“Look at what I am doing, brothers! I am writing out this entire epistle, start to finish, in my own difficult penmanship. Because I love you so much, I want you to know how personally grieved I am over your situation. It is so critical that you hear me!”

Was there another factor that entered in here?

Frustration upon frustration! He has voiced it in other ways, now the ultimate problem: no one to write for him? Doesn't write in Greek as well as Hebrew? Has a physical deformity from some persecution that will no longer allow him to use a pen properly?

Why did the earlier translations (KJV etc.) translate a plural Greek word (*grammasin*) as "letter"? The meaning would obviously be as I have described above. Paul wrote a large letter, epistle, without the help of a scribe.

But the newer translations seem to have corrected that, and have the apostle saying that he wrote with (uncharacteristic, except for him) large letters, an entire piece of work to them. That is, perhaps his eyes were truly bad, and he had to make the letters large so that he could see them?

Even the NKJV, usually reliable, points in this direction. The overall feeling is the same. Due to the urgency of the subject, and perhaps the absence of help, Paul is forced to do what was for him the unthinkable: use his deformed hands and/or his failing eyesight to compose his own manuscript to the Galatian church (6:11).

What is the final word Paul wants them to remember about the false teachers?

Now that he has gotten their attention by showing how far he is willing to go to make his point, he makes his point, or rather summarizes the entire message of the letter:

He says that those who are trying to make you do something (as circumcision) for your salvation have two good reasons:

- 1) They are trying to have something to boast about to others, namely that they won you to their ways, and the law of Moses.
- 2) They want to be Christians without suffering for Christ. For, all who accept the grace message and turn from the law are going to be held up for ridicule, rejection, and worse, by the Jewish people. Judaism was the main persecuting body of the day for Jews recently turned Christian.

Similar attempts have been made through history. Compromisers with Catholic Rome's works system did not want to come out and stand firmly on grace alone through faith alone. The Inquisition was real.

Who today is willing to stand for the simple Gospel vs all the aberrations it has suffered at the hands of men? Who is willing still to come out and be separate, taking the abuse that a worldly church will certainly apply? Who takes the cross in our day? (6:12)

The irony is that there has never been a circumcised man anywhere who has ever kept the law of Moses by the standard that is set in the Old Covenant, specifically, "The soul that sins shall die!" Yet they desire for you to join up with them by circumcision. For what purpose?

As stated, we know their purpose: A notch on their belt. A means whereby they can boast of their evangelistic efforts (6:13).

Paul will have none of it. He of all men has nothing to boast about. He persecuted the church of God. He was an antichrist in the very first century of the church! God forbid that he should boast! Even the things he used to boast about he has found to be dung, as he says elsewhere. What man can stand before God and brag about what he has done to help God save him?

In his mind it was Christ and/or Christ's cross that was the means of Paul's own "death". He has been totally desensitized to the world. No connection. Nothing matters but Jesus. The world does not allure. Boasting for the praise of men, ridiculous. For him to live is Christ and only in his death will be ultimate gain.

Luther adds, "By the cross of Christ is not to be understood here the two pieces of wood to which He was nailed, but all the afflictions of the believers whose sufferings are Christ's sufferings. Elsewhere Paul writes, 'who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.'"

And again, says Luther, "The monks imagined the world was crucified unto them when they entered the monastery. Not the world, but Christ, is crucified in the monasteries."

Luther would know, for that is where his pilgrimage began (6:14).

Once you are in Christ, Sir Legalist, what happens to that certain region of your body doesn't matter anymore. There is a new body, a new creation that has been formed with the entering in of Christ. Christ is everything in that new creation. What God was after, all

the time, was a circumcised heart, a heart totally exposed to the life that is from above (6:15).

What is the rule for all of us to follow?

If you agree with me, says Paul, about this new rule -circumcision doesn't matter, only Christ matters - bless you. Peace on you. Mercy will be extended to you. And on all the (true) Israel of God.

"Israel of God?" you say. There is an Israel, to this day, that is not the Israel of God. They live in a land called "Israel", many nations of the world recognize them as Israel, we see the name in the papers and internet every day. But until Messiah enters their heart and takes the reigns of the government, they are not the Israel of God.

Rather, those who walk by the rule of the "new creation" of verse 15, that ignores physical circumcision and demands spiritual circumcision, are part of a new Israel, the Israel of God. Perhaps he is even including Gentiles in this new definition (6:16).

A final stab wound into the heart of those who would come against His Gospel with the Gospel of a fleshly cutting:

Leave me alone! You glory in the "mark" of circumcision in your body. I bear in my own body other marks: the marks of the Lord. Stripes on the back, as Jesus had. Imprisonment, shipwreck, stoning, ridicule... all of it like Jesus. To be like Jesus is to bear His shame and His pain. I am doing that, what about you Judaizers? (6:17)

Don't trouble me, Judaizers, like you are troubling these Galatians. Don't steal my message out of their hearts, false teachers. Don't try to teach me the ways of the Lord when the Lord Himself appeared to me and shared with me over many years the truth of the Gospel. Leave the Galatians alone, and leave me alone, or pay the price.

A final blessing on the true brothers closes his letter. Notice how the spirit is pictured here as the recipient of God's grace. Our flesh cannot receive grace, it will always be in opposition to it. But the Holy Spirit will be working in your spirit to communicate the grace of God to you (6:18). Amen. So be it.

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