

Notes on  
**Galatians**

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## **Galatians**

Paul's letter to the Galatians addresses the fundamental issue of whether a Christian can or even should live by law. Many Bible interpreters understand Galatians to be primarily about initial salvation, popularly called justification. However, the majority of this letter quite plainly attempts to answer the questions, "Did you receive the Spirit from law works or from hearing consisting of faith? In this way, are you so mindless, having begun by *the* Spirit, are you now matured by flesh?" (Gal. 3:2-3). Paul concerns himself with how we grow, how we live the Christian life, how we serve. Galatians briefly looks back at our initial salvation, but only so far as it reminds us of how we started to help us understand how we are to live.

Galatians also speaks of a gospel. Again, many students of the Word understand only one gospel in Scripture, that of Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection. They read this message into nearly every occurrence of the word "gospel." Yet Scripture presents multiple gospels, not by which the unsaved come to faith in Christ, but gospels that present other areas of truth such as how believers are to live, that God is happy, that the believer is in both the Father and the Son, that God will shortly judge all the world, that the kingdom promised in the Old Testament is/was near. All these are gospels or good news to certain individuals in specific situations. Though some are related, they are also distinct.

## **Introduction**

### Paul the writer

Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians (Gal. 1:1). He identifies himself as an apostle, or one sent on a mission. This mission was not *from* [*apo*] men. They did not commission him with his task. He wasn't an apostle *through* [*dia*] men, as though God sent men with Paul's commission. The legalist teachers troubling the Galatian believers hold human respect and authorization in high regard. Paul cared for none of it. He knew he was commissioned through Jesus Christ and was an apostle from God the Father. He knew precisely what he was to do. He knew precisely who told him what to do. The Father commissioned Paul to reveal His Son in/by Paul (1:15-16). Paul officially met Christ while traveling to Damascus. Christ then commissioned Paul at some point during his three years in Damascus and Arabia. Whether other men approved, were pleased, or might attempt to add to that commission, Paul knew it meant nothing. Only what Christ gave him to do was important.

Paul describes God the Father as the one who raised Christ out from dead ones (Gal. 1:1). At the end of Ephesians one, raising Christ out from dead ones expresses God's power, the power to give life to one who is dead. This letter will emphasize living, especially living by the Spirit, which for us is God's power. He also says "dead ones" not "dead" as of a state. The plural ablative noun *nekrōn* refers to dead individuals. When Christ died He was among those who were dead. When the Father raised Him, He raised from among those who

were dead.

### **The Churches**

Galatians 1:2 names the churches of Galatia as Paul's audience. He names his readers as brothers of those churches or assemblies. They are brothers as they share together as members of one family. Though Paul has introduced himself as an apostle in 1:1, he did so to point out the source and agent of his commissioning, not to throw around the weight of his apostleship. By calling the Galatians brothers, he emphasizes kinship and equality rather than a superior addressing inferiors.

Galatia was a region of central Turkey stretching almost from the Mediterranean Sea northward to just shy of the Black Sea. On Paul and Barnabas' first apostolic ministry they stopped on Cyprus, then Perga in the southern province of Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). They continued north and evangelized and taught the new believers in Antioch of Pisidia, Pisidia being a region of southern Galatia (13:14).

Luke records for us at length Paul's evangelistic words in the synagogue (13:16-41).<sup>1</sup>

For those who followed Paul after the synagogue meeting ended, he persuaded them to continue in the

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<sup>1</sup> This is a helpful record of what Paul's evangelism looked like. In many ways it appears different from our modern methods. He resorts much to Scripture. He gives a history of God's work especially with Israel to provide an historical background on which to locate Christ and His purpose.

grace of God (13:43). The verb “persuaded” is in the imperfect tense, which emphasizes ongoing activity in the past. Our English “persuaded” communicates a simple past act with no emphasis on that act’s duration. The imperfect tells us that Paul was persuading them over a period of time. In light of Luke’s record, that time is most likely the six days between the meetings at synagogue. This message is a Christian message. It is not for the unsaved but for believers. We are called to continue in God’s grace. The verb “continue” or “remain” has the idea of being at ease in the face of God’s grace. God’s grace should put us as believers at ease and we should, therefore, be comfortable in His grace to us. This is foundational for Christian teaching. The Holy Spirit had Luke record this for us so that upon reading Galatians, we can clearly see that Paul had taught the Galatians how to live by grace.

Leaving Antioch, Paul and Barnabas evangelized in the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, all cities in southern Galatia. Their evangelism was successful and drew the jealousy and fury of unbelieving Jews who chased them from one town to the next. During this trip, God saved a Jewish young man named Timothy through Paul’s preaching. Timothy was from Derbe and between Paul’s first visit and return, Timothy distinguished himself among the disciples so that Paul wanted to take Timothy with their group (Acts 16:1-3).

After evangelizing in Galatia, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria on the northeast coast of the Mediterranean (Acts 14:26). While in Antioch an

issue regarding Christian living arose: should they require these new Gentile believers to be circumcised and keep the law (Acts 15:1). Some asserted that if they did not, they could not be saved, by which they did not mean eternally justified but to go on in salvation. Luke uses the same form of the verb “to be saved” in Acts 15:11 where Peter stated that the Jews were believing to be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles. This form of the verb often looks at something as future; therefore the issue was not whether they were saved but whether they could be in the future. Again, that is not about eternal destiny but about present tense ongoing salvation, popularly designated sanctification.

Upon settling the matter that they would not require the Gentiles to keep the law, they penned a letter for Paul and Barnabas to take along that they might have proof of what those in Jerusalem agreed upon (Acts 15:22ff). Upon returning to Galatia, Paul and his companions shared the letter with the churches in those areas (Acts 16:4-5). The Galatian churches were taught by Paul to live by grace. When some raised the first resistance to that teaching, the leaders in the Jerusalem church agreed with Paul not to burden those disciples with law-keeping. The church grew in this environment. They were running well, but as Paul will write in Galatians five, someone hindered them. They were tripped up from this life under grace.

## **The Problem in Galatia**

Every New Testament letter<sup>2</sup> addresses an issue or issues. The letters consisting of Romans-Jude and the seven letters in Revelation chapters two and three address real churches, groups of scattered believers, or individual believers who served in a church or churches. Each church, just like churches today, had problems and the New Testament writers wrote to correct the problems. The Philippians needed to serve together in joy. Peter's readers needed to see that suffering and hardship were not incompatible with God's grace. John's readers in 1 John were struggling with how to respond after a group of unbelievers left their churches.

The common thread in all these New Testament letters is that the writer addresses believers, not unbelievers. We struggle at times with the descriptions and problems with which the readers struggled. We tend to impose certain requirements on one who is a Christian and when we see a failure in those areas, we quickly conclude that such an individual must be unsaved. This leads many to feel that the letters are addressing the problems of unbelievers. However, as an example, though John wrote 1 John to address the problem caused by the unbelievers, whom he called "antichrists," his concern was how their departure affected the believers. John did not write to encourage his readers to go after the antichrists and help them or

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<sup>2</sup> We often refer to these as epistles because the Greek word for a letter or correspondence was *epistolē*. In modern English "letter" is a good translation.



bring them back. He wanted the believers to recognize the negative impact those unbelievers had on their congregations and how to properly respond so they could live out eternal life by love. We should read these letters as addressing believers like us about issues with which we also struggle.

Galatians addresses Christians. They had received the Spirit (Gal. 3:2). They had begun by the Spirit (3:3). They were all sons of God in Christ Jesus (3:26). They had all been baptized<sup>3</sup> or placed into Christ (3:27). They were not slaves but sons, and heirs (4:7). Christ had freed them (5:1). They had been running well (5:7). They lived by the Spirit (5:25). The Galatians were believers who had been living the Christian life well but had recently been hindered (5:7).

Those who hindered their progress were people who distort the gospel of the Christ (Gal. 1:7). In so doing they troubled the Galatian believers. Reading through the whole letter we can see that these teachers were both believers and unbelievers. They questioned the origin of Paul's message (1:11-12). Paul implies that they were like the false brothers (unbelievers) who came to spy on Paul's liberty in Christ with the goal of enslaving him and his companions (2:4). This was slavery under law and began with circumcision (2:3). Like Peter's actions, they compelled the Gentile believers to live like Jews (2:14). They pressed believers to live by law which results in trying to live the

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<sup>3</sup> I'll address this later but this is not water baptism.

Christian life by one's flesh (3:2-3). They were not satisfied with getting the believers circumcised but wanted them to fully keep the law, even days, months, seasons, and years (4:10). They showed an interest in the Galatian believers but it was disingenuous for they wanted to shut out the believers so the Galatians believers would seek them and not listen to Paul anymore (4:16-18). Clearly, the issue resulted in some believers wanting to be under law (4:21). Paul concludes that the ultimate goal of these law-teachers is to be able to boast in the Galatians' flesh (6:13). They wished to be able to claim that they got the Galatians to become law-keepers. However, Paul states that they do not even guard the law. The problem is simply people teaching Christians to live by law instead of living by the work of the Holy Spirit. (3:3).

In Galatians, Paul addresses a form of legalism. Legalism is commonly known as man's attempt to gain favor with God by obeying the law. Thomas Schreiner defines legalism "as the view that one's works are the basis of a right relation with God, so that one can boast in what one has accomplished."<sup>4</sup> The variety of legalism in Galatians is not solely about pleasing God but also about pleasing men. Paul first hits at this problem in Galatians 1:10 when he says that he was not still trying to please men. This indicates that at one time Paul did try to please men. People attempt to impress God or gain righteousness before Him but they also wish to

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<sup>4</sup> *New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). p. 530.

impress others. We like to be acknowledged and that seemingly innocent desire often drives our activity. Seeking their approval, we count ourselves to be righteous when they agree. We do the same with God; when we do “good” we assure ourselves that God approves and we are righteous before Him. This is legalism and some of the Galatian believers were trying to please both God and men, to be righteous in their activity before God and men.

### **The Date**

It is difficult to determine when Paul wrote Galatians. Paul does not state where he was at the time he wrote or who else was with him, so we have none of the hints which some of his letters provide for establishing a date. In chapter two, Paul writes about a trip to Jerusalem to settle a matter about his message for Gentiles. We read about this event in Acts 15 when Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to settle the issue of how Gentiles were to live. Therefore, we know Galatians is written sometime after Acts 15. We also know from Acts 16 that after his trip to Jerusalem in Acts 15, Paul personally visited some of the churches in Galatia. If the problem of legalism was going on then, it seems that Paul would have addressed it face to face rather than by letter. He likely writes Galatians after Acts 16. He makes no mention of his imprisonment, though he says nothing of the matter in 1 Timothy and Titus which were two of his later writings. However, this may mean that like the letters to the Thessalonians and Corinthians, Paul wrote Galatians before his arrest

in Jerusalem.

I suggest that Paul may have written Galatians during the early days of his journey to Jerusalem in Acts 20. Paul decided to set sail for Syria but rather than departing from southern Greece, he first traveled north through Macedonia to outsmart a Jewish plot against him (Acts 20:3). Luke lists their traveling companions, and among this list are Gaius of Derbe and Timothy who was also from Derbe (20:4). Derbe was one of the cities of Galatia. Paul and Luke met up with these fellow workers in Troas a city on the Northwest coast of modern-day Turkey then known as Asia. After speaking late into the night with the believers in Troas, Paul sends his companions on ahead by ship to go to Assos. Luke does not tell us why, but Paul went on foot (20:13-14). Perhaps Paul's companions Gaius or Timothy had received word of the problems in the Galatian churches. Upon meeting Paul in Troas, they would likely have conveyed this to Paul. If this is the case, Paul would have been troubled, for Luke tells us in 20:16 that he did not want to spend time in Asia and so he decided to sail past Ephesus, only meeting for a short visit with their elders at the coastal city of Miletus. Paul decided this because he was in a hurry to make it to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Pentecost. If he knew of the Galatian problem at this time, he is faced with the same decision he had to make regarding the Ephesian church: stop and spend them with them, or keep moving. Since he could not stop in Galatia and still make it to Jerusalem, he wrote a letter to address the problem. This is a suggestion. I acknowledge once again

that the letter does not give us direct information for fitting it precisely within Luke's account in Acts.

## **Galatians**

Galatians addresses the problem of whether Christians have liberty in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. This was a good news which Paul announced to believers, not unbelievers. Unbelievers need to hear the good news about Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection. They are saved by believing in Jesus Christ as that good news describes Him. However, once a person had believed in Jesus Christ and stands righteous before God, Paul taught a good news about life by the work of the Spirit or how to live daily. It is a good news or gospel which addresses the Christian life. Paul received that good news through a revelation from Jesus Christ (1:12). Men did not give it to him or teach it to him. He knew well where he had received that message.

When Paul opens his letter to Galatians, he identifies himself as an apostle, which was one sent on a mission. He opens all his letters except Philemon and Philippians by identifying himself in this way. He was an apostle by gifting by the Holy Spirit when Christ ascended on high and gave gifts among men (Eph. 4:8, 11). He was not commissioned among Christ's disciples during His earthly ministry. He is among those apostles gifted for ministry in the Church.

Due to the problem of pleasing men and concern for their approval, Paul states that his apostleship is not from (*apo*) men, as though they sent him out. Paul's first long-term work was in the church in Antioch in Syria

(Acts 11:25-26). He was among a group of prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). Among them, the Holy Spirit spoke instructing the others to set apart Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for a work to which He had called them (13:2). This becomes his official commissioning as an apostle, or one sent on a mission. Men did not send Him, the Holy Spirit did.

Secondly, God did not use men as the agency (expressed by the preposition *dia*) to send him out as an apostle. The Holy Spirit spoke. Here Paul states that He was commissioned through the agency (*dia*) of Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him (Jesus) out from dead ones. While the Spirit was the mouthpiece, the commission was through Jesus and the Father. We should not pass over how important this idea is in the context of the letter. Paul did not need human authorization for a work to which God had personally spoken and commissioned him to do. Others were witness to it. When the Spirit spoke, He did not say, "Barnabas and Paul, go." He used a second person plural verb "You set apart Barnabas and Saul." He was speaking to the others who then obeyed and did not stand in the way of sending these two men off on their work as God had commissioned and spoken.

In Galatians two, Paul relates a visit to Jerusalem which he and Barnabas made according to the Lord's revelation (2:1-2). He went before those who were of reputation or seemed to be somebodies (2:2, 6). Paul said whether they were somebodies or not made no difference to him and they added nothing to him, that is they did not add to his commission. The Lord had told him what he was to do, and what message he was to speak. These men could add nothing to that. He

identifies the key men James, Peter, and John (2:9). These men recognized or knew the grace given to Paul to accomplish the work. They acknowledge that they shared by extending the right hand of fellowship, not a mere shaking of hands but an embrace of the right arms that said to others, we share in common (fellowship). Paul is not denigrating these men nor stating they are nobodies. Rather, since his commission was from Jesus Christ and God the Father, these men could add nothing to that commission. On previous visits, Paul tried to join himself to the disciples (9:26) witnessed God's protection of Peter (11:30-12:25), and states that he considered them apostles (1:17, 19). Paul appreciated the role these men played in God's plan, but those men could not alter or add to his God-given work.

As in many of his letters, Paul identifies the Father as raising Jesus from dead ones. The expression "from the dead" does not describe the state of death but dead people. Death as a state is expressed by the Greek noun *thanatos* and a dead individual is expressed by the noun *nekros*. Paul's expression in 1:1 is that Jesus Christ was raised out from among those who were dead. When Jesus died, He went in the state of death to the location where dead people await resurrection. He did not remain there but came out from among those dead ones. Paul uses this exact expression once while speaking (Acts 13:30), and two others times in his letters (Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12). He uses similarly worded expressions in his letters (Rom. 10:9; 4:24). Several times he speaks of Christ being raised, where he uses a passive form of this verb without direct reference to the Father (Rom. 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12, 20; 2 Tim. 2:8). Paul emphasized the resurrection often.

Paul's emphasis in 1:1 on God raising Jesus Christ out from dead ones does more than just rehearse the resurrection but introduces from the outset Christ's life on which our present freedom rests. Paul emphasizes this by relating Christ to who we are and what we have now, all realities which rest not only on Christ's death but also His resurrection. The resurrection was more than God's approval upon Christ's death but necessary for our justification (Rom. 4:25). The believer is righteous by being in Christ and can only live righteously because he is in Christ. If Christ were dead the believer could neither be in Him, be righteous, or live righteously. So, in Galatians Paul says he died to the law so he can live to God (2:19). He lives now, but it is Christ who lives in him (2:20). The righteous man lives by faith (3:11). Believers are baptized into Christ because He is alive (3:27). Christ has freed us, something He could not do if He were still dead (5:1).

Paul's greeting is not from him alone but from all the brothers who were with him (Gal. 1:2). I developed in the introduction to Galatians that Paul may have written Galatians while traveling to Jerusalem in Acts 20. In 20:4-5, Luke lists seven men in addition to himself who were traveling with Paul. Galatians gives no evidence that Paul was with a church at the time of this writing, and offers no greeting from a church, but only from his traveling companions.

As in his other letters, Paul reminds the believers that God's grace and peace are with the Galatian believers. God's grace and peace are always present for the believer, though the individual may not always avail himself of God's grace, and so he often does not experience God's peace. Scripture does not indicate



that God withholds either from believers. The phrase is verbless in Greek, which commonly emphasizes reality. Both are from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Father emphasizes His relationship to believers as His children and Father to the Son's humanity. Lord emphasizes Jesus Christ as God, but also as the one who is in charge of believers. Jesus emphasizes the Son's humanity and Christ His anointed status as the God-man who now lives at the Father's right hand.

Jesus Christ's work was to give Himself in place of [ὑπὲρ] our sins (1:4). The gospel states that He died for our sins, using the same preposition (1 Cor. 15:3). He did not die for us as though we were worthy that He should, but He died in place of us when we were ungodly, enemies of God, and sinners (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). He gave Himself for that part of us which was the worst, though Scripturally, there was nothing redeemable in us. His death was pure grace.

One goal of His death was that He might deliver or take us out of this present evil age (1:4). He died to take us out of this age. An age is a period of time during which God reveals to His creation something about Himself (cp. Eph. 2:7). This present age is evil in that it infects or spreads [πονηρός]. Both New Testament Greek words for evil involve a deficiency in the character one would seek, but while *kakos* may be content with itself, *ponēros* wants others to share in its character or activity. This present age uses a human standard to judge another's acceptability. This is Paul's very concern that he did not seek to persuade or please men. The age wants everyone to seek the approval of others and naturally does not approve of anything which genuinely glorifies God. Therefore, God's grace

raises us as His children to live righteously in this present age as a contrast (Tit. 2:12). He rescued us so our lives could be different, so we could live without seeking other's constant approval as men-pleasers but be true servants of Christ.

**1:4 ff** The present evil age involves assessing others by a human standard as opposed to God's standards. We sometimes miss statements about this age because some English Bibles translate it "world" rather than "age." "World" is an accurate translation of *kosmos* while the word "age" represents *aiōnos*. Jesus may have referenced this present evil age in Mark 10:30 where He promises His disciples that in the age coming they would receive eternal life. Prior to Christ's death and resurrection, God was not giving eternal life to believers. He promised to give it to them when He resurrected them. This reminds us that eternal life is not about duration but the quality of the life.

How does receiving eternal life fit in the present evil age? The two seem at opposite poles, and they are. That is the point. Jesus Christ had life in Himself when He walked the earth (Jh. 5:26). He lived so that the life was visible; His disciples saw it (1 Jh. 1:2). For this reason, eternal life in action is called light (Jh. 1:4; 8:12). The world's works are worthless<sup>5</sup> so they don't want to stand next to light. They don't want that life to shine on their works and bring to light their selfishness, fury, and hate. Though His disciples appreciated what they saw, the world did not, in fact as He lived out that life by doing works, they hated Him and the Father (Jh. 15:24). This follows Jesus' reminder that the world that

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<sup>5</sup> "Evil" in John 3:20 is φαυλον worthless, good for nothing.

hates them hated Him first (15:18-19). This assumes that like Jesus, the disciples would live out the life He promised to them, and the world would react with hate. When believers live in a blameless and innocent manner they stand out in the middle of a crooked and twisted race (generation). Among that race, they are like little lights (think stars) (Php. 2:15). The worthless nature of the world's works and its twisted and perverse activity stand in contrast to eternal life in action. This present evil age gives eternal life a thumbs down because it does not wish its works to be seen for what they are. God gives eternal life a thumbs up. The contrast results in the eternal life being all the more visible because it is so foreign to this world-think of Jesus walking the earth. Therefore, this present evil age is a suitable backdrop for God to show what His life looks like.

The believer's present life differs from his previous life due to a change of standard or measure. The age was the standard of our life before salvation (Eph. 2:2). The pressure from peers to live as they do powerfully motivates people to pursue the same worthless works. The pressure is even greater because it is modeled by the "sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). "Sons" emphasizes those with advanced standing, those that the rest of the world looks to for advice or leadership. Unbelievers seek the approval of others but Christ's work has taken us out of that system (Gal. 1:4).

The sentence in 1:4 ends with the standard of God's desirous will "according to the will of God even our Father." God's will for the believer is our standard. His will is that the believer is transformed by what God has done within the believer rather than the believer

conforming to the age (Rom. 12:1-2). Many English Bibles translate the word *aiōnos* as “world” when it should be “age.” While the age and world are related, this age uses peer pressure to cause people to conform to its standards. God has worked in the believer so that his mind has been renewed (Rom. 12:2).<sup>6</sup> It is from that renewed mind that the believer can be transformed from the inside out, reflecting God’s work within him. God’s grace serves as the believer’s standard today (Tit. 2:11-12). His grace trains believers to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age. Again, this age presents a sharp contrast to eternal life compared to worthless works.

By reminding the Galatians that Christ has removed us from this evil age, Paul draws a contrast to life by law. Life by law is a form of conformity. Can the promise of blessings and the threat of curses sufficiently motivate individuals to obey? The Old Testament records say no. Failure dominated Israel’s history. Under law, Israel operated by pressure to conform whether positively obeying the law or negatively by conformity to the thinking and actions of the surrounding nations or simply their own sin nature. As Paul opens this letter to the Galatians, he wants them to know that obedience to law and conformity to such standards is not God’s method of maturing believers today, for Christ rescued us from such things.

Paul ends his introduction by assigning glory to God into the ages from the ages (1:5). Glory [*doxa*] is a

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<sup>6</sup> The word “renew” is an adjective which describes the state of the mind, not a verb or participle describing an action which the believer performs, i.e. “renewing of..”

reputation or an opinion. Our opinions may be right or wrong. God's opinion is always accurate. His is accurate because it is His reputation. He is the one true God and since He is all-knowing and true He always expresses a true appraisal of who He is.

**1:6** Beginning in 1:6, Paul tackles his chief concern with the Galatians; they had left the One who called them by the grace of Christ for another gospel. This verse is loaded and if we misunderstand what Paul says here, it will impact our understanding of this letter. Briefly, the one who called them was the Holy Spirit. He called them by grace related to Christ. The different gospel is not a different means for an unbeliever to be justified before God, but a way for a Christian to live that differed from the manner Paul taught. Therefore, leaving the Spirit is about not cooperating with the Spirit in what He does for the believer today. As stated in the intro, Galatians is not about initial salvation but present tense salvation. It is not about initial justification but justification as part of Christian living. It remains now to see if Paul's language supports this.

Calling is part of the whole work of salvation (Rom. 8:30). God set out boundaries within which He deals with individuals, He then calls them in time, and because they respond to that call He declares them righteous and so also glorifies them. Calling is God's in-time act by which He calls those He has chosen to believe in Christ. He even chose the moment, so at that moment they believe. Luke said this when he records who people responded to Paul's preaching, "and as many as had been **appointed** unto eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). The verb "believe" is aorist in Luke's historical narrative and views the act of believing as

happening at that moment. The participle “appointed” translates *tassō* meaning “to arrange; to set, appoint”<sup>7</sup> or “to place in a certain order ... to arrange, to assign a place, to appoint.”<sup>8</sup> The voice of the participle is either middle or passive. The middle would support their involvement while passive would indicate that someone else, presumably God, set them to believe. The passive is supported by the fact that the participle is in the perfect tense, indicating that someone had set them in order in the past so that at the moment they believed they were still in order. They had not arranged themselves prior to hearing Paul, as though they came to the synagogue determined to believe whatever they heard that day. They didn’t show up knowing Paul—a guest—would stand and address the synagogue. The picture is that God in His plan had appointed these to believe at this moment in time upon hearing Paul speak the good news of Jesus Christ. That God-ordained appointment had not changed. What God planned came to pass.

Though some texts clearly attribute calling to God the Father, such as Romans 8:30-32, the one calling in Galatians appears to be the Holy Spirit. He is the one who began the believer’s salvation (Gal. 3:3). Taking the texts together, we can say that the Father extends the call but the Spirit makes it effectual. He has called them

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<sup>7</sup> Mounce *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. William D. Mounce with Rick D. Bennett, Jr., 2011 by William D. Mounce, Accordance edition hypertexted and formatted by OakTree Software, Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Formatted and hypertexted by OakTree Software, Inc.

to freedom (5:13). That freedom is in Christ. The Galatians were leaving the Spirit and His work by turning to the Law and circumcision. They were not abandoning the gospel for initial salvation. They were turning to the Law as a way for living the Christian life. The Law does not bring freedom.

**1:6b ff** The Spirit called them by the grace of or from Christ.<sup>9</sup> Grace has no definite article and emphasizes the nature or quality of grace. The nouns grace and Christ occur together in fifty-one passages. John writes that the Law was given through Moses (Jh. 1:17). Moses did not originate the law, he was the avenue or channel through whom God gave the law to Israel. The grace and the truth came to be through Jesus Christ. John uses the verb *ginomai* which means “*to come into existence; to be created, exist by creation.*”<sup>10</sup> Grace and truth existed as long as God has dealt with man, especially since man’s fall into sin. John did not mean that grace as an attitude of God and truth as an expression of God’s character came into existence when Jesus Christ walked the earth. Rather, John refers to a specific grace, namely the grace by which we as believers live today. The Truth also refers to a specific aspect of God’s truth, that He is the one true God and for New Testament Christians, He alone can bring freedom and produce true righteousness. It is about this grace from Christ of which Paul writes the Galatians. In many of his letters, Paul reminds his

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<sup>9</sup> This verse involves a textual problem of whether it should read simply “grace” χάριτι or “grace from Christ” χάριτι Χριστοῦ. The broadest spread of Greek texts favor the second option.

<sup>10</sup> Mounce, op cit. entry G1181

readers that grace is to them from the Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ (e.g. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; et al). He ends Philippians with, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *is* with your spirit.” (Php. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28).

Paul’s point in Galatians 1:6 involves grace by which we live. It is this grace by which the Spirit called us to freedom, freedom secured for us by Christ. We have been called in one hope which comes from our calling and this relates to the **one body** and **one Spirit** (Eph. 4:1, 4). The oneness involves who we all are in Christ. God says all these good things (blessings) about us in Christ (Eph. 1:3). He says we are holy and blameless in Christ, sons, redeemed so we’re freed, and forgiven in Christ (Eph. 1:4-7). He says we are seated all together in Christ (Eph. 2:5-6). He says we are one new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15-16). He says that in Christ we are all joint-heirs, joined as one body and joint partakers of the promise **in Christ Jesus** (Eph. 3:6). These are the blessings or God things God says about believers in Christ and to these things the Spirit has called us, to experience a unity He already counts to exist in Christ. Galatians 1:6 connects this with grace as does Ephesians 1:6. Everything we have, all to which the Spirit has called us is totally by God’s grace. It does not depend upon us, but upon God alone. Our enjoyment or experience of these benefits depends upon our conscious decision to relate to them, but they exist with we consciously appreciate them or not.

Paul was concerned because they were abandoning the Holy Spirit who called them by this grace from Christ (1:6). They were transferring from the Spirit to a different good news. The word



“transferring,” “deserting” [ESV, NASB, NIV], or “remove” [AV] translates the Greek verb *metatithemi* which means “to transport...transfer”<sup>11</sup> so that one moved from one place to another. The form<sup>12</sup> of this verb indicates that they themselves were moving from one place to another. This good news is different [*heteros*] not similar [*allos*] (1:7). To bolster his claim that this other good news is not similar but different, Paul points out that those who proclaim it (presumably) are troubling the believers and want [*thelō*] the Galatian believers to turn from the good news about the Christ (1:7).

### The Gospel/Good News

Identifying this good news affects whether we will interpret this letter properly. The common approach to Galatians interprets this good news as referring to the message which an unbeliever must believe in order to be eternally righteous with God. However, most of this letter addresses the matter of Christian living. It deals with whether we as believers live the Christian life by law or by the Spirit by this grace from Christ. For this reason, good news in 1:7 does not refer to the message for eternal salvation, but a good news for believers regarding our Christian life.

Contrary to popular thinking, the New Testament records several gospels. Most commonly we think of the good news we proclaim to unbelievers and by which we and they are saved and stand (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The good news is simply that Christ died for our

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<sup>11</sup> Mounce, *op cit.* entry G3572

<sup>12</sup> The form μετατίθεσθε from μετατίθημι is middle.

sins, He was buried and He rose again according to the Scriptures. In Acts 10:36-43, we see Peter proclaim this good news after briefly introducing this Jesus of Nazareth. In Acts 13:17-41, we find Paul proclaiming this same message after a brief historical sketch of God's work with Israel, His choice of David, and that Jesus is the promised descendant of David. This is what the preaching of the gospel by which we are saved looked like. Contrast this to Jesus' gospel of the kingdom. In Matthew 4:23 we see that Jesus was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom and He was healing all kinds of diseases. Beginning in Matthew 5:1, Matthew gives us one example of what Jesus' message looked like-the Sermon on the Mount. It is quite different than the good news we proclaim to the unsaved. It mentions nothing about Jesus dying for sins, being buried, and rising again. It mentions nothing about believing and being declared righteous. Rather it emphasizes the conduct of those who will be part of the kingdom. It also sketches out how stringent the rules in that kingdom will be. These are two distinct gospels.

In Galatians 3:8 we see that God proclaimed a good news to Abraham. Though our English Bibles translate this something like "preached **the** gospel" the Greek text has only the verb "evangelize" which can be translated as "announce good news." There is no noun "good news" and no definite article "the." Paul simply tells us that God announced good news to Abraham by telling him that "in you, all the nations will be blessed." That is not the gospel by which we are saved, nor is it the gospel of the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed.

After the Thessalonians were saved, Paul imparted to them a good news about God (1 Thess. 2:2,

8). This good news announced to believers that they are in God the Father and in Jesus Christ (1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Paul announced a good news about the happy God (1 Tim. 1:11). Believers tempted to live under law needed to know that God is a happy God and His happiness has a positive effect on how we live.

Israel had a good news about rest announced to them (Heb. 2:2-6). That good news was not about salvation, but about rest in the land. Because they doubted that God could give them the land, Paul (the writer of Hebrews) states that a promise of rest remains for us, not of physical rest in Israel's land, but rest from our works as we approach God (4:9).

Christ revealed to Paul a good news about how we as believers mature and become stable (Rom. 16:25-26). This gospel was a mystery (Eph. 6:18), which means it cannot be the gospel of initial faith and salvation, as that message was revealed before Christ came and He Himself announced it to His disciples though they never believed it. This gospel explains how we live by grace today.

I point out these other messages because Galatians is not about how people first believe in Christ and become righteous with God. Paul wrote Galatians because people were telling these Christians that they needed to be circumcised and keep the law. They presented it as a good news and even seem to have implied that Paul hadn't told them everything they needed for their Christian lives. Recognizing that several other messages were designated good news, helps us realize that this message may be one of these others.

What Paul calls “my gospel” in Romans 16 is this message. Paul’s gospel was for Christians. It does nothing for the unsaved because they do not have any of the provisions from God. They do not have a position in Christ. They are not the daily objects of God’s grace. The Holy Spirit does not indwell them. Each of these is a key element of Paul’s gospel. This is the message from which the Galatian believers were turning.

**1:7** The different [*heteros*] gospel to which the Galatians were transferring was not a similar [*allos*] one. Some Bible students treat these words as “virtually interchangeable.”<sup>13</sup> Mounce acknowledges that the adjective *allos* “can denote ‘the other’ of the same kind.”<sup>14</sup> Though the distinction is not obvious in some texts, the idea of *allos* as other that is similar and *heteros* as other that is different is consistent throughout the New Testament. Paul’s whole point hangs on this distinction. The false teachers presented this other message as a good news but it was altogether different and not the same.

## The Christ

Paul announced the gospel concerning the Christ to the Galatians (1:7). The exact expression, without consideration for Greek case differences, is “the good news of the Christ.” It occurs like this in eight passages without question.<sup>15</sup> First, “the Christ” views

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<sup>13</sup> Mounce, op cit under entry OTHER

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> It occurs in Romans 1:16 but this involves a textual problem.

Jesus Christ in connection with His body in several passages, the most obvious being 1 Corinthians 12:12 in which Paul states, “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Christ.” Paul does not mean that Jesus Christ Himself is one and yet many. Rather Paul considers Christ’s relationship with His church to be such a oneness that sometimes-not in every passage-that oneness means he applies the title “the Christ” collectively. It is not an altogether distinct entity, such that we have the Christ - Jesus, and others the Christ-the Church. Rather some passages clearly refer to Christ’s union with His Church. Ephesians 4:11-13 views the body of Christ as it grows until it reaches the full height of the Christ (4:13). Parents often mark the growth of their children, perhaps in a doorway. They never know how tall that child will be when full-grown. God the Father has marked out the full-grown height of this union between Jesus Christ and His body long before (from our perspective) that full union is reached. That full union means everyone God has chosen to be a New Testament believer is in Christ and reaches maturity in Him. The good news of the Christ announces unity in and with Christ.

The Christ does not exist separate from Jesus Christ. Remember, it is not a separate entity but a view of the union Christ grants us to share together with Him. In Himself, He creates this one new man (Eph. 2:15). The united new man is created by God’s standard, not man’s (Eph. 4:24). This passage is often misunderstood and mistranslated as “new self” [NASB] though Paul is not talking about putting on the new me, but the new man which is the union of all New

Testament believers in Christ and so with Christ. As Paul said in 2:15, Christ has created this one new man, not a bunch of new men. My translation “God’s standard” represents *kata theon*, where the preposition *kata* has the idea of a measure or standard. People invent many ways of trying to promote unity, of trying to emphasize oneness among all peoples. God’s standard is to take all of us believers, place us into Christ, and make us one new man. If He made us into new men, we could still be different. United in Christ, we are one body. Viewed in union with Christ, we are this new man, the new creation. Paul repeats this idea in Colossians 3:10 telling believers to put on the new man who has been created according to the standard of the One who created him (i.e. the new man). The good news of the Christ announces and promotes unity in and with Christ.

### **A New Creation**

Because He has created this new man in Himself, He also refers to it as *a* new kind of creation (2 Cor. 5:17). In that new creation, the old things by which we identified (knew) people are gone (5:15-16). In that new creation, new ways of identifying ourselves have come. In this world, we identify each other by our race, our sex, our social status, our class, our education, our occupation, and so on. We have a tendency to unite with those like us: same job, education or alma mater, race, etc. No matter how hard we try, this is built into our nature and some of the works of the flesh express this very problem (Gal. 5:19-21). Since believers are in Christ and *a* new kind of creation in Him, we have a basis of practical union which far surpasses any earthly commonalities.

The false teachers who came to the Galatians churches taught circumcision followed by law-keeping as the means of living the Christian life. Both of these draw distinctions between people. Circumcision physically marked men as those in a covenant relationship with God. Women didn't get that mark, and that made a difference, a difference which is erased in Christ, in fact, it has no bearing in Christ (Gal. 3:28). While the false teachers wish for the Galatian believers to focus on law-keeping and specifically circumcision, the state of circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing, only a new kind of creation (Gal. 6:15). The good news of the Christ announces and promotes unity in and with Christ because together we are a new kind of creation.

Whereas the good news of the Christ announces a union of believers in Christ, those troubling the Galatians wanted them to turn that gospel into something else. Law does not promote unity. The law drew lines of distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcised, between those who were masters and those who were slaves, between males and females.

### **A Curse?**

Paul used the word *anathema* "curse" twice (1:8, 9). It is a noun that normally meant, "*a devoted thing*, ordinarily in a bad sense."<sup>16</sup> The noun occurs six times and the verb *anathematizō* four times. While our English translation brings all kinds of ideas with it, the New Testament uses illustrate Paul's thought. In Acts 23:12,

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<sup>16</sup> Mounce, op cit. entry G353

14, 21 a group of men swore a curse<sup>17</sup> (oath—a noun) to curse [the verb] themselves to not eat or drink anything until they killed Paul. They did not think “cursed to hell” or something similar. Rather they cursed themselves by depriving themselves of food until they accomplished their task. This agrees with the idea of “placing something up” (like putting it on a shelf) in the sense that it was devoted and so removed from use.<sup>18</sup> Paul wished he could be accursed from the Christ for the sake of His brethren (Rom. 9:3). He did not wish he could go to hell (or some related idea) so other Israelis could be saved. Rather, he was willing to give up the benefits of the Christ (the gospel in Galatians one) so he could reach them. To a degree, he did this, by living as though he were under law and living like a Jew when he was with them so he might win them (1 Cor. 9:19-21). No one who speaks by the Spirit can claim that Jesus is accursed, or set on the shelf (1 Cor. 12:3). He warned the Corinthians that if one does not have a fondness for the Lord, he is to be accursed or shelved. After people pointed out Peter as a disciple of Jesus, he began putting himself under a curse and swearing that he did not know Jesus (Mk. 14:71). Like many, Peter probably made a fearful exaggerated claim of what he wished God might do to him if he were lying—which he was.

In no occurrence does the noun or verb indicate a curse to hell or to be stripped of salvation. The idea

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<sup>17</sup> The Greek expression is two words “said” [*eipan*] and the instrumental form of the noun “curse” [*anathemati*].

<sup>18</sup> cp. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1948) p. 29.



was to be set aside from normal things, often in a bad sense, such the men not eating or drinking, or Paul not enjoying the benefits of being in Christ.

The intent of those troubling the Galatians was that they become circumcised and keep the law. The implication seems to be that only by doing these could the Galatians really move on in their Christian lives, and only then could they really serve God.

However, Paul's use of "cursed" indicates that any who would suggest such things should be put on the shelf. That means that though they think circumcision and law-keeping will improve their service to God, in reality, they are being pulled out of the activity. To use an athletic image, those who do not play the game as God has revealed are removed from the activity of the game and made to sit on the bench or stand on the sidelines. Though they may be very busy, God is accomplishing nothing through them at that time.

**1:8** Among those threatened with a curse are angels from heaven. It is unlikely that Paul was literally concerned about angels from heaven perverting the good news for Christian living. God personally wrote the main ten sayings which summarized the law. Moses claimed the commands were written by God's finger (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10). Stephen and Paul attribute the giving of the law to the agency of angels (Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2). In Galatians 3:19, Paul used the same verb *diatassō* to set in order, as Stephen had used. His words in Hebrews 2:2 further distinguish God's law to Israel from His word to us. Paul asked that if Israel received a righteous payback for the disobedience, how would we as New Testament believers escape if we choose to

show no interest in this New Testament truth. Therefore, Paul's statement about angels may simply be an appeal to angels as a source of authority for applying the law to Christians.

The matter of "we" is trickier. Paul may be using "we" as an unrealistic illustration, as he could not think of himself undermining what he taught. By exaggerating with "we" Paul was hammering home the seriousness of this situation. However, if Paul wrote Galatians on his way to Jerusalem about Acts 20, then his "we" came true. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, James confronted Paul with how many Jews believed but were also ardent keepers of the law (Acts 21:20). They had heard that Paul was teaching the Jews who lived among the Gentiles to not circumcise their boys (21:21). While Paul had not taught that specifically, he wrote in Galatians before this trip that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision gives any strength (Gal. 5:6) and that neither counts for anything but only the new creation (6:15). To assure these Jewish believers that Paul was a law-keeper, they asked him to financially underwrite four men who had vows (presumably Nazarite) to pay for the required sacrifices which ended their vow (Acts 21:23ff). Paul went along with their plan and in this way, he undermined his gospel. He was indicating to these Jewish believers that it was ok to continue living their "Christian life" by keeping law. In the end, Paul was arrested and spent two years in prison at Caesarea Philippi. During this time, Paul spoke with some leaders but spent most of his time "set on the shelf" (accused) just as he wrote. He did not remain on the shelf. God began opening doors for him to serve while traveling to Rome in chains and though under house arrest in Rome, people

were allowed to come freely to him (Acts 28:30-31).

Paul pronounced a curse, a sitting on the bench for anyone who taught Christian living by law. Paul's actions in Acts 21 told those Jewish believers that it was OK to continue living by the law. He did not promote life by the Spirit but by law and he came under the very curse he expressed in Galatians 1:8. Ironically, as I attempted to demonstrate in the introduction to this letter, Paul may have written Galatians while en route to this very event, only to find himself struggling with the same issue. Paul repeats this warning, as it is such a problem for Christians. Many of us have struggled with this exact idea of how to live the Christian life. Many default to law and many have promoted law as at least a good principle. It isn't a good principle for Christian living because God did not give it to establish our righteousness but to demonstrate our failure. It proves we are all guilty (Rom. 3:19).

Some Bible teachers have suggested that Paul's actions in Acts 21 fit his words, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law" (1 Cor. 9:19-20). However, Paul is interacting with two distinct groups. In Acts 21, he was confronted with Jews who believe but were zealous for the law. In 1 Corinthians 9, he is trying to reach unbelievers with the gospel of salvation, and he determined not to let any actions or preferences get in the way. These are different situations.

## Who do we seek to please?

The matter of teaching Christian life by law leads Paul to point out that he is not seeking to please men (1:10). The NASB has “seeking the favor” for the Greek verb *peithō* which meant to persuade or convince. “Persuade” does not at first appear to make sense, so translators have used something similar to the NASB. However, Paul is talking about a motive for keeping the law. One may try to keep the law to persuade men or persuade God. This would be an attempt to persuade men or God that one is righteous. Paul wrote that a man is not righteous before God by law works (Rom. 3:20). Therefore, if Paul were attempting to live by the law, he would not per persuading God. However, as James states, I show you my righteousness by my works (Jas. 2:18). So, law works can persuade men as we look at each others’ works. But Paul is not concerned about what men think. I pointed out in the introduction how many times Paul expresses his lack of concern for what man thinks. In what way was Paul persuading God? He answers this in his next question, “Am I seeking to please men?” God has provided the believer all things for life and godliness. As a result, He has made it possible for believers to please Him. It was his ambition to be pleasing<sup>19</sup> to God whether he was in the body or out of the body (2 Cor. 5:9). If Paul were still trying to please men, he concludes that he would not be Christ’s slave. Jesus stated that one can only slave to one master, and Paul chose God to be his master, not men.

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<sup>19</sup> In Galatians, Paul uses ἀρεσκω and in 2 Corinthians ευαρεσκω. The former is the simple form, the latter a compound form, adding the idea of “well” to “pleasing.”

Paul describes himself as Christ's slave (1:10). New Testament believers are called to love one another, and in 5:13 Paul urged the Galatians to use their freedom from law to serve others as slaves from love. God does not demand that we be slaves, but serving a kind and good God as a slave makes sense. It is a choice for the individual believer. When Peter urged his readers to set Christ apart as Lord in their hearts, he does not use the word slave in any of its forms but viewing one's self as a slave is logical (1 Pet. 3:15). How do we slave to God? Similar to how we love God by loving other believers, so we slave to God by slaving to one another. How does a slave operate? A slave does the will of his master (cp Php. 2:5-8). Therefore, when we act as a slave, we focus on the need of the other, not ourselves. We do what they need, regardless of what it costs us, or how it inconveniences us. Jesus said that a slave tends to himself only after he has done all that his master requires of him, and when he has done it, he does not receive thanks from the master (Lk. 17:7-9). When Paul slaved to Christ, he put Christ's requirements ahead of anything he was most interested in. He argued that he was Christ's slave, but only if he did Christ's will. If he were trying to persuade others and show himself pleasing to them, he would not be Christ's slave.

### **The Origin of Paul's Gospel**

The gospel by which a person is saved is simple. It tells of Christ's death for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again (cp 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Jesus' disciples did not preach that message while Jesus walked the earth. When Jesus revealed what was about to happen to Him, Luke tells us, "But the disciples understood none of these things, and this utterance was hidden

from them, and they did not know the things that were spoken.” (Lk. 18:31-34). So, when Jesus sent those disciples to proclaim the gospel about the kingdom, it was not this message. That was a distinct gospel about the kingdom being near and the King being near (Mt. 10:5-7). At Pentecost, Peter announced that Jesus was raised. Nearly his whole message was about the resurrection. Only at the end does he call on people to repent or change their minds about Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 2:36-38). A few years later, Peter articulated the good news as we would recognize it when talking to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:38-40) and made clear the promise of forgiveness of sins (10:43). This matched the gospel Paul announced for salvation consisting of forgiveness and justification. So, that gospel was the same.

Paul’s gospel in question is not a message for unbelievers but a message for believers. That message was not according to man. Paul did not receive it from man, nor was he taught it by man. The Lord Jesus Christ revealed it to Paul. This indicates that these other teachers had suggested that what Paul taught was of human origin.

**1:11** Paul’s gospel was not of any human origin. Jesus Christ revealed this good news to Paul. The noun “revelation” can refer to either that an appearance of the Lord, or the information the Lord revealed at that time. The noun has no article and therefore may refer generally to both. At times, Paul stated that what he said was from the Lord or not from the Lord (cf 1 Cor. 7:6, 10, 12; 2 Cor. 8:8; 11:17). That means the Lord had instructed him in specific areas of truth, while at other times he did not have specific instructions on how

believers were to act. In the latter case, Paul used his judgment based on what he did have from the Lord. We should be cautious that such statements are less binding than those from the Lord. If God did not agree with Paul's opinions in those matters, God would not have included those statements in Scripture. Not everything, Paul taught came directly from the Lord. So, the things God has prepared for those who are loving Him, He revealed to Paul through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-13). The Lord did appear to Paul at times and gave him specific instruction both for himself and for him to give to others. When Paul stopped speaking in Corinth due to opposition, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and instructing him to resume his work (Acts 18:9). Paul could attribute charges [*parangelia*] he gave as coming through the channel of the Lord (1 Th 4:2). In the following verses, he rehearses his past to show when the Lord appeared to him and gave him this gospel.

### 1:13-2:2

Paul now lays out some of his personal history to demonstrate that the message for Christian living which he had taught the Galatians was from the Lord and not his own invention. They knew about his former life. His daily routine conduct was within Judaism (1:13). The noun "manner of life" [*anastrophé*] refers to the routine of life, which is repeated again and again and again. The term is a compound of the preposition *ana* meaning "again" or "up" and *strophō* meaning to "return," and at one time it may have meant "return again" and in this way came to describe this repetition of life. Paul's reference to Judaism is important as he will reference this idea in chapter two indicating how

Peter's actions compelled even Gentiles to live like Jews. Again, this demonstrates that Paul is not concerning himself with how an unsaved person comes to salvation, but how believers are to live.

Paul's distinguished life in Judaism extended to excessively persecuting the Church of God trying to lay waste [*portheō*] to or overthrow it. Paul progressed beyond many of his contemporaries. His excessive progress was driven by zeal. In 5:20, Paul lists zeal among the works of the flesh, though our English Bibles translate it "emulations" or "jealousy." The word meant to act so as to outdo another, to attempt to be as good as or better than them. In Titus 2:14, we find there is a type of zeal, which God desires. In this latter kind of zeal, one pushes himself to be better rather than rest on his accomplishments. It does not compete with others. However, before salvation, Paul could only operate within the realm of the flesh, and therefore, this zeal is the negative type of zeal.

The object of his zeal was the traditions of the fathers. By traditions, Paul is likely things of the additions the Jews made to the Law. This does not mean that Paul is concerned only with the problem of these additions. Some teachers who have focused on the matter of second temple Judaism, claim that Paul was still in favor of the Law, but the Law without these additions made after the second temple was built. Yet one of the issues is circumcision and this was not a matter of second temple Judaism. God had told Abraham that anyone who was uncircumcised would be cut off from his people (Gen. 17:14). As Moses returned to Egypt, God was seeking to put Moses to death, and the matter appears to be over his sons not being



circumcised (Ex. 4:24, 25). Paul's concern for the Galatians extends to the whole law not only later traditions.

### 1:15

In that environment, God acted in Paul's life. God separated Paul from his mother's womb. God's plan for us does not only begin at the moment we believe. David knew that God had designed him in every part of his being (Ps. 139:13-16). Paul understood that things do not just happen, but that God works all things according to His purpose (Eph. 11). He could look back at His life and say that even at the time that He was born, God was working in the details of Paul's life. He later writes that angels are spirits sent to minister to those who are "about to inherit" salvation<sup>20</sup> (Heb. 1:14). So, Paul does not view God's work as loose or hands-off but engaged even in the details of our lives.

God called Paul. "Calling" is not to ministry but to salvation. In the logical arrangement of God's plan, calling follows God's determination of boundaries (predestined) and precedes God declaring the individual righteous (Rom. 8:30). We were called into a fellowship related to His Son Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9). Paul devotes several sentences to the issue of our earthly status relative to God's calling us (1 Cor. 7:17-24). God called some while they were slaves, others while they were free. They were to be OK with whatever their earthly status because God didn't call anyone based on either. All believers who make up the

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<sup>20</sup> I understand this phrase to mean that God uses angels to assure that the elect reach the point at which He determined they would hear and believe the good news.

body of Christ share “one hope from your calling” (Eph. 4:4). God called us to salvation in the body of Christ, and our hope is that we can live as part of that body rather than as an annoyance in that body. Christians often use “call” of a call to ministry, though this is not found in Scripture.<sup>21</sup> So, Paul’s reference to calling is not God’s call to ministry, but God’s calling him to salvation.

God called Paul through His grace. God did not call Paul to more zealous law-keeping. God did not call Paul to even more works. God called Paul through<sup>22</sup> His grace. Grace was the channel of this salvation and the preposition *dia* focuses on that grace as the channel. The focus on grace sets the tenor for the direction of Paul’s life as well as our Christian lives. In Ephesians 2:8, Paul uses a perfect periphrastic grammatical construction to emphasize that we are in a state of being ones who are saved and remain saved by His grace through faith. Believers during the fifteen hundred years that the Law was in force were saved by

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<sup>21</sup> This is an addition to explain how some fell when they are moved emotionally to do something different “for God.”

<sup>22</sup> Two Greek prepositions have similar ideas: *ek* [ἐκ] meaning “out from”, *dia* [διὰ] meaning “through means of” or “through the channel of.” Comparing these two prepositions we find the results are nearly identical and it may seem unclear as to why one is used as opposed to the other. So in 2:16, Paul states that man is only righteous before God **through** [*dia*] faith and we believed that we might be declared righteous **from** [*ek*] faith. In comparing the many uses of these two prepositions where they appear to communicate similar ideas, *dia* appears to emphasize more the channel than the result, while *ek* appears to emphasize more the result than the source. Neither eliminates the other, it is a matter of emphasis.

God's grace, not by law-keeping (Rom. 4:6-8). However, they lived their daily lives and enjoyed God's promised blessings by living obediently to the Law (cp Deut. 28). Since God began the body of Christ, believers are both saved by God's grace and live by God's grace.

**1:16** God's purpose in separating and calling Paul was that Paul might reveal His Son. Paul was to announce the Son as good news among the Gentiles. God told Ananias that Paul was to carry His name before the **Gentiles** and kings and sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). He was to carry the name of the Son to all men (Acts 22:15). Paul's emphasis in Galatians 1:16 is "the Gentiles." He was to work to that end. Though Paul frequently went to the synagogues or started by seeking a group of Jews upon entering a city, his commission was to go to the Gentiles. He repeats this in 2:8-9 that Peter was to deal with the Jews (circumcised) and Paul with the Gentiles. The later distinction of calling the Jews "the circumcision" highlights the problem in the Galatian churches; keeping law and getting circumcised is to make one live like a Jew and that was not God's plan for either Gentile or Jew.

So, after meeting briefly with Ananias, Paul immediately did not confer with flesh and blood. The verb "confer" translates *prosanatithēmi* which in the middle voice means to set one's self up before presumably another or others.<sup>23</sup> Paul did not go stand before other people for instruction in the matter of this gospel. I state that this was after his brief meeting with

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<sup>23</sup> J.H. Thayer, op cit., entry 4323. See also Mounce, op cit. entry G4651.

Ananias because it was not until he went into Damascus and Ananias came to him that he knew to whom God wanted him to go (see Acts 22:12-15). The importance of Paul not conferring with other people was that his gospel did not come from any of them. He was not proclaiming their message and so he did not learn it from them. He did not go up to Jerusalem and confer with those who were apostles before him (Gal. 1:17). Paul does not dismiss the other apostles. Certain versions of dispensationalism think that only Paul was an apostle for and in the Church. They understand the other apostles as to the Jews or Jewish church. Yet, Paul views the Church as built on the foundation which is Christ and that foundation is laid by the apostles and prophets<sup>24</sup> (Eph. 2:20). They also consider only Paul to be responsible for “mystery” truth, though Paul also attributes the revelation of the mystery about the Christ to both His holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:4-5). Paul does not assert himself as the apostle or the only apostle in or for the Church. Paul recognizes others as apostles and having a key role in the Church. Though God gave this message initially only to Paul,

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<sup>24</sup> “The apostles and prophets” is a grammatical form falling under Granville Sharp’s rule, where two nouns are joined by the conjunction *καί* and share one definite article. In such constructions when the substantives are singular, they refer to the same person by two different names, titles or descriptions, e.g. “Our Great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” all refers to the person of the Son (Tit. 2:13). Sharp stated that in the plural his rule of identity does not work. However, in the plural, both groups share something in common in that immediate context. For Paul, both the apostles and prophets (New Testament) were involved in laying the foundation which is Christ upon which the Church has been built.

Paul did not see himself as acting alone. But Paul did not receive this message from those other apostles, and he did not consult with them about it.

Paul went away into Arabia (1:17). Paul does not state where he went in Arabia. Scripture nowhere states precisely what Paul did during this time. James Montgomery Boice, referring to Luke's account in Acts, suggests that Paul was not evangelizing and starting churches, and it is for this reason the Luke does not include this fact.<sup>25</sup> Paul's total time in Arabia and Damascus is three years (1:18). Luke describes Paul's time in Damascus as "many days" (Acts 9:23). Only here is space given to his ministry in Damascus. In 26:20, before Agrippa, Paul mentions Damascus, Jerusalem, the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles in a breath. He did not indicate how long a time he spent in any of these locales. Some have questioned the validity of Paul's claim to have been in Arabia as Luke does not mention it at all. But in 22:16-17, Paul glosses over his time in Damascus, jumping from his brief meeting with Ananias to his return to Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> Luke's use of "many days" (Acts 9:23) for Paul's time in Damascus seems understated for a stay of three years. For this reason, Paul's time in Arabia likely constituted the larger portion of the three years. Those three years

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<sup>25</sup> James Montgomery Boice, Galatians in, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, op cit. under Galatians 1:17.

<sup>26</sup> I would suggest that in Acts 22:16-17, Paul jumps over years of ministry, from his initial salvation to the very trip in Acts 21 in which he was found in the temple. I do not think that by "returned to Jerusalem" Paul means his first trip as a believer in Acts 9.

constituted Paul's training in Christian living teaching. The Lord personally revealed to Paul what he would present as good news. If this is merely Christ's death and resurrection, Paul was acquainted with that fact by the Lord appearing to him on his trip to Damascus. But our Lord will instruct Paul in the ministry of the Spirit, of life by grace rather than law, of life by faith not sight, and of the ramifications of believers being in Christ, a truth Jesus revealed but did not explain in the upper room (cp. Jh. 14:20). His message regarding Christian living would be Paul's most important charge and is the issue of this letter.

**1:18** Paul left Damascus for Jerusalem The conflict over Jesus being the Son of God escalated and Paul's life was in danger. So, the disciples got him out of the city by lowering him in a basket through the wall (Acts 9:20-25). He fled Damascus and arrived in Jerusalem where he spent fifteen days with Cephas. Cephas was the Aramaic word for a stone and equivalent to his Greek title *Petros*. Of our Lord's disciples, the book of Acts demonstrates Peter's key role in evangelizing, teaching, and helping lead the church in the vicinity of Jerusalem. It is important that after Paul has served for a brief will, God provided him an opportunity to meet with Peter. Luke tells us that the disciples were afraid of him, and did not believe he was a disciple (Acts 9:26). Barnabas, a disciple from the tribe of Levi laid hold of Paul and brought him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). During those fifteen days, Paul was moving about freely<sup>27</sup> with them. He was speaking boldly in the name of the Lord (9:28).

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<sup>27</sup> The literal phrase is "going in and out" a fit way to describe moving about freely in a city.

Paul's conversations were not with the Hebrew Jews but the Greek Jews (9:29). Paul claimed to be a Hebrew from Hebrews (Php. 3:3). Certain Jews claimed this title to distinguish themselves from Greek-speaking Jews. They spoke Hebrew and Aramaic, and held to a proper Jewish lifestyle while claiming that those Jews who spoke Greek also adopted the Greek lifestyle following the Greek conquest of their land. However, these Jews not the Hebrews or Pharisees took issue with Paul's claims regarding Jesus. Eventually, they too attempted to put Paul to death.

Peter knew all this as Paul moved about with him. He could plainly hear what Paul proclaimed about Jesus Christ. He could hear him speaking with the same Jews that probably contested the matter with Peter and the other apostles. Peter knew Paul was not announcing a different message for initial salvation.

**1:19** James was the only other apostle Paul met on this trip. He identifies James as a brother of the Lord. Jesus was Mary's first child, she being a virgin at His conception and yet at His birth. Joseph took Mary as his wife as the angel instructed him and did not have sexual relations with her until<sup>28</sup> she gave birth to Jesus (Matt. 1:24-25). They did have relations after Jesus' birth and Jesus had half-brothers and sisters, with Joseph being His step-father. Because of James' leadership role at the time Paul writes Galatians, he mentions him. James, like Peter, could hear that Paul announced the same Jesus with the same emphasis for initial salvation as they.

Paul refers to James as a *different other* apostle

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<sup>28</sup> The adverb *heōs* [εως] means "upto that or a point."

(1:19). The adjective *heteros* indicates another as being different in some way, while *allos* is the same in some way. Paul does not indicate how James was a different type of apostle. Perhaps he simply means to distinguish those apostles initially commissioned by our Lord toward the end of His earthly ministry, from those gifted by our Lord after His earthly ministry and during the time of the Church. Some were apostles by gifting from our Lord, not by commission (Eph. 4:11).

When the believers learned of their plot, they snuck Paul out of the city and sent him away to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). Tarsus was Paul's hometown (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3). We hear nothing more of Paul until Barnabas seeks him out in Acts 11:25.

The Galatians may never have heard most or all of Paul's history, and he assures them he is not lying. He acknowledges that he stands before the Lord as he asserts the veracity of this account. The Galatians need to know this because it backs up that Paul's message for Christian living was not from these other men but from our Lord Himself. The false teachers claim that Paul left something out, implies that they knew what should be said, but they did not. Paul hadn't received it from them. The message at stake was received by Him only from the Lord.

### **An Excursus on Paul's Time in Arabia**

Paul did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. In his testimony, which Luke records three times in Acts, God sent Ananias to Paul. But, Ananias did not tell Paul the message he was to proclaim. Ananias revealed that God was sending him to the Gentiles,



kings, and Israel and that he would suffer (cp Acts 9:15-16). Neither did Paul go up to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles (Gal. 1:17). Paul did go to Jerusalem after three years and then for only fifteen days, during which he spent most of his time with Peter (Cephas) (1:18).

Paul went away into Arabia and then back to Damascus (Gal. 1:17). Paul is stating why his gospel was not from men. No men gave Paul the message he preached. No one in Damascus told him what to say. No one in Jerusalem told him what to say. The Apostles did not tell him what to say. Without too much speculation, we can safely conclude that Paul went away into Arabia to learn from the Lord Himself the message he was to preach. On this, Robert Gromacki writes, "Doubtless, during his retreat into Arabia, Christ appeared to Paul again and revealed spiritual truth which was completely understood by him through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. There is no indication that he preached this desolate area."<sup>29</sup> Thomas Schreiner appears to disagree with this thought, asserting that Paul's arrest in Damascus was tied to his preaching in Arabia. He then adds, "Therefore, the view that Paul went to Arabia merely to study the OT Scriptures in light of the revelation given him on the Damascus road is likely mistaken."<sup>30</sup> Schreiner's view was expressed by some of the early church fathers, but J.B. Lightfoot disagreed, pointing out that Paul's point was not about his preaching but his not conferring with flesh and

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<sup>29</sup> Gromacki, *op cit.* p. 44. On this, Thomas Schreiner appears to disagree, "There

<sup>30</sup> Schreiner, *op cit.* p. 103.

blood.<sup>31</sup> I think Gromacki is right.

### Paul's New Message

Paul's message was new. The gospel was not new, for the apostles had been proclaiming that message. Paul's gospel for believers, which announced that we are not under law, was new. It did not come from men, either in Damascus or in Arabia. Neither did it come from Paul's contemplation about the Law. Rather, Paul's instructions referencing the Lord indicate that Paul was instructed directly from the Lord Himself on this matter. He gave the Thessalonians instructions about proper sexual behavior **through the Lord Jesus** (1 Thess. 4:2). "Through the Lord Jesus" While I might want to see Paul use the preposition "from" he sees the Lord as the channel of this information, presumably in a face-to-face encounter. Paul uses the same phrase "through the Lord" when he speaks of our Lord's speaking to the disciples in the Upper Room. That was where He began to speak about this great salvation, and then those who hear Him confirmed that message (Heb. 2:3). Paul stated that the present way of life (dispensation or administration) was made known to Paul by revelation (Eph. 3:3). The other apostles and prophets received a revelation of the mystery about the Christ by the Spirit (3:5). Paul claimed to have seen the Lord (1 Cor. 9:1). While this could have referred to his experience on the Damascus road, the perfect tense of the word "seen" may indicate more than one appearance. The Lord appeared to Paul

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<sup>31</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 90. Originally published in 1865.

while he prayed in the temple and warned him to leave (Acts 22:17-21). He again appeared after Paul's arrest to assure him that He would accomplish the purpose for which Paul was chosen (Acts 23:11). As Paul recounts the Lord's first appearance to him, he uses the verb "appear" three times (Acts 26:16). The first two verbs are aorist tense and refer to the Damascus road experience. The last occurrence of the word is a future tense. The Lord told Paul He would appear to him in the future. It wasn't a one-time appearance.

Paul had a charge from the Lord to those who are married (1 Cor. 7:10). At other times Elsewhere, Paul states he does not have a direct charge from the Lord indicating that he did have some charges from the Lord (7:6). When Paul relates the facts of communion, he states that he received that information from the Lord (11:23). Paul adds details not related by the Lord in the upper room because the Lord gave Paul more information about communion. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul gives some instructions for an organized meeting of their church as opposed to the chaos which was characterizing their meeting. Paul identifies this information as "a command of *the* Lord" (14:37). The Lord gave no such command during His earthly ministry, indicating that this command was given later to Paul. If Paul wished to boast as the false apostles did, he claims he could boast about visions and revelations of *the* Lord (2 Cor. 12:1). "Revelations" translates a noun meaning unveiling. The Lord was unveiled before Paul more than once indicated by these two plural nouns. He tells us that the Lord personally and specifically told Him that His grace was enough for Paul's problems (2 Cor. 12:8-9). This does not mean the Lord appeared, but at least that He spoke to Paul.

### **Did Paul develop his religion?**

Religion evolves. Men have a set of rules and as those rules are passed on they evolve. The next generation asks, "What does this rule mean?" God charged Israel that they were not to cook a calf in its mother's milk. Today, some Jews who practice Judaism have gone so far as to having different bowls, utensils, and cooking facilities to avoid accidentally mixing milk and beef. God never extended the charge that far, man did. We could say the same for Christianity. What would first-century Christians think about the manner in which we gather for church? Would they recognize our modern church? When we read of Paul and Peter's presentation of the gospel in Acts 10 and 13, it is interesting how little emphasis they give to man's sinful state. In our development, we've moved to little or no emphasis on the resurrection and spending much time trying to convince people that they are sinners condemned to Hell. We don't find this in New Testament preaching. It is a development, which may be a wrong emphasis or maybe a logical direction to move.

Many teachers of religions have asserted that not only have adherents to Christianity modified Christianity but that Paul himself did so. As demonstrated above, some suggest that Paul spend his time in Arabia in meditation, reflecting on what His meeting with Jesus said about Judaism. They nearly leave Jesus out of the picture and treat Paul like a modern student of Scripture who sits at a desk pondering over the Scriptures and how best to interpret them, especially when confronted with a correct interpretation of them which contradicts what

one once held. But the whole point of Paul's comment about Arabia was to state that he did not consult with flesh and blood to get this new message. Rather he went elsewhere. As I have demonstrated, Paul claims that the Lord appeared to him on multiple occasions.

Paul was not sitting in Arabia pondering, but sitting with the Lord as the Lord instructed him in this new revelation especially as it involved this new way of life. Paul will tell the Colossians that part of his responsibility was to fill up the Word of God (Col. 1:25). Some translations such as the ESV have Paul concerned "to make the word of God fully known." But this is not what he writes. He uses the word "fill", the same term in Ephesians 5:18. This verb indicates that something is missing. A believer lacks something and the Spirit fills up that lack. The Scripture which told of a coming event needed that event for it to be filled. When our present dispensation began, God had many things which He needed to tell us. The Old Testament Scriptures were not sufficient for our new way of life. Therefore, God used Paul to fill up some of what was lacking in our revelation. That revelation is substantial. Some of that revelation was gained while in Arabia, some at later appearances. Therefore, Paul was not taking some truths and developing them. Paul was transmitting truths that God had given to him for us. This is the point of Paul's time in Arabia, during which our Lord explained to Paul at least some aspects of our new way of life.

### **1:21 Paul's gospel**

Luke tells us that while Paul was in Jerusalem, he was moving about freely with the disciples and spoke boldly in the Lord's name (Acts 9:28). The words

“going in,” “going out,” and “speaking boldly” are present participles tied to an imperfect verb. The imperfect emphasizes ongoing activity in the past. The present similarly emphasizes ongoing activity, therefore, these three words tell us that not once or twice but regularly or often during Paul’s visit he moved about freely and continued speaking boldly. The importance of Luke’s record is that Paul continued actively speaking about Christ. The disciples with whom he moved about while speaking knew Paul’s message. If the good news he was proclaiming was wrong, if it contradicted what Peter and James said about Christ, they would have known it here towards the beginning of Paul’s ministry.

Paul spoke in the name of the Lord (Acts 1:28). In this context, Luke uses this expression of the authority by which Paul operated. He represented the Lord. He had been commissioned by the Lord. The Lord had spoken to him (1:27). In keeping with Paul’s testimony in Galatians one, he had not consulted with flesh and blood, therefore, the Lord had told Paul what he was to say. Also imbedded in the expression “name” is that Paul proclaimed the Lord in the manner or character which the Lord had made known to Him.

Paul debated with the Hellenists (Acts 9:29). The Greek noun “Hellenist” meant a Greek-speaking Jew, Jews who had been dispersed in history, as well as Jews who had compromised with the Greeks when they controlled Israel. Many of these Jews had returned to Judea resuming life under the religion of Judaism with the Law. In this way, these Jews resisted preaching which claimed Christ was risen, as they claimed the preaching was against Moses, the temple, and the Law

(Acts 6:11-14). They charged Stephen with blasphemy, the claim that God was behind a change, though they did not understand the change which Paul would eventually proclaim. They moved with fury and killed Stephen when he told them he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (6:56). For them, this meant God excepted this one they had voted to kill, and that He was alive in God's presence, which for Jews also meant He was God. These same Jews now debated with Saul.

As with Stephen, the unanswerable proclamation of Christ crucified and raised frustrated these Jews. They were attempting to do away with Paul (9:29). The verb "attempting" is also an imperfect tense meaning they attempted over a period of time, rather than the sudden impulsive rush they made upon Stephen. The brothers learned of the Jews' plan and led Paul to Caesarea which was west of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast (9:30). From there he went into Cilicia to the city of Tarsus, Paul's hometown. Paul refers to these as the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21). The Jewish brothers who sent Paul did so for his safety, not their own. They did not consider Paul's message to conflict with theirs.

Because Paul was absent from Judea, the other churches did not personally know him (Gal. 1:22). Paul viewed those churches as "in Christ." While some wish to see the Church in the early chapters of Acts as distinct from the Church under Paul, Paul did not. "In Christ" is the special relationship in Christ at the Father's right-hand about which Paul spoke much. The way of life by grace which our Lord gave Paul to proclaim rests largely on being "in Christ."

These churches in Judea heard about Paul (1:23). “Hearing” is an imperfect tense communicating that they continued hearing as the word spread of Saul’s change from persecutor to preacher. They knew he had been persecuting the church. They now were receiving word that he was proclaiming the same faith which he had attempted to destroy. They glorified God in or by means of Paul, that is because Paul was now one proclaiming Christ. Luke states that the church in regions of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace (Acts 9:31). Paul was no longer persecuting them.

Their hearing about Paul did not mean they were hearing reports of his evangelistic work in the region of Cilicia. They were hearing reports from his time among the believers in Damascus and Jerusalem. Luke’s record says nothing about Paul’s time in Tarsus. When Barnabas went to Tarsus, he had to seek Paul. About the verb “seek,” Moulton and Milligan write, “But it is specially used of searching for human beings, with an implication of difficulty, as in the NT passages.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas Paul was notable in both Damascus and Jerusalem, he was not so notable in the area of Tarsus that it was easy to find him. This again may suggest that Paul’s time in Tarsus served a different purpose in God’s training.

### **Paul’s Trip to Jerusalem Galatians 2**

This chapter break interrupts Paul’s testimony and the history of the message he communicated to

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<sup>32</sup> James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 32. See also Mounce, p. 1081, “to track; to seek diligently, inquire, search for.”



believers. He begins with a reference to a fourteen-year interval since his first visit to Jerusalem after being saved and the visit to Jerusalem he is about to relate. Bible students do not agree on the time of the trip. Luke relates Paul making five visits to Jerusalem as a believer: (1) his visit in Acts 9; (2) a visit with famine relief in Acts 11:27-30; 12:25); (3) the visit for the council in Acts 15; (4) a visit after his second apostolic trip in Acts 18; (5) the visit in which he was arrested and imprisoned in Acts 21ff. The debate regarding when the Jerusalem trip in Galatians took place focuses on the famine relief trip in Acts 11 and the council in Acts 15. The following lists include the views of various commentators on this matter. I am not including documentation on these. An abbreviation follows those who wrote as part of a larger commentary or set. Those who favor the Acts 11&12 visit: Donald K. Campbell (BKC), Thomas R. Schreiner, Robert K. Rapa (EBC), Robert G. Gromacki, Alan Cole - is not clear (TBC). Those who hold that Galatians 2 describes Acts 15: C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine (Vol. 3), Lehman Strauss, Kenneth S. Wuest, Craig S. Keener, A Lukyn Williams, William L. Pettingill, A.T. Robertson (WP), Frederic Rendall (EGT), J.B. Lightfoot who also cites Irenaeus, R.C.H. Lenski, Ernest De Witt Burton. In their introductions to the New Testament both D. Edmond Hiebert and Henry Thiessen favor Acts 15, while Donald Guthrie is inconclusive but sees Acts 11 as having fewer difficulties.

Nearly all who favor the Acts 11&12 identity of Galatians 2:1-10 do so by citing that Paul and Barnabas went up by revelation (2:2). They equate this with Agabus' prophecy regarding a famine (Acts 11:28). However, the believers determined individually to send

gifts to help believers in Judea, and they chose to send Paul and Barnabas (11:29-30). Luke does not state that the prophecy told them to send Paul to Jerusalem. Second, they think Paul would not have omitted this visit because he is attempting to prove that no one had given him his gospel and he had not consulted with flesh and blood. Therefore, they assert he would have to include the meeting in Acts 12, though no such meeting is mentioned. What Luke tells us is that Peter was locked up and the church was focused on prayer for Peter and regarding Herod's threats. Luke writes that they sent the gift with Paul and Barnabas, and they returned when they fulfilled their task (12:25). Luke gives no indication at all that Paul went to Jerusalem to settle a matter regarding the requirements for Gentile believers.

In favor of Acts 15, Paul agrees with Luke that Paul and Barnabas and others went up to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2), by adding that they took also Titus with them (Gal. 2:1). Some argue that Acts 15 was a public meeting while Paul said he met privately in Acts 2:2. But after Paul gave a general report of God's work in 15:4, the matter moved to a gathering of the apostles and elders (15:6). This would have been a private meeting. Certain Pharisees who believed wanted to require the Gentile believers to be circumcised and observe Mosaic law (15:5). Because they were believers, the matter did not regard whether the Gentiles were saved, but that since they were saved, how should they now live? Remember, the matter in Galatians is about Christian living, not how a person is eternally righteous before God. When this matter arose, the private meeting came together to allow Paul to lay before the apostles and elders the message he and Barnabas were

presenting to the Gentile believers for daily Christian living. This is the issue they discuss in Acts 15.

### **Galatians 2:1 The Jerusalem Meeting**

**2:2** Paul and his companions went to Jerusalem because of a revelation. Paul does not state how God revealed that they should go, just that he did and that he did so by the standard [*kata*] of that revelation. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul set before the leaders the gospel he was proclaiming among the Gentiles.

I do not think it is a coincidence that the Spirit had Paul use the verb form ἀνεθέμην [*anethemān*]<sup>33</sup> which is a cognate of the noun ἀνάθεμα [*anathema*] (1:8-9). The verb in 2:2 means to “to set forth (in words), declare.”<sup>34</sup> The verb helps to illustrate the idea of the noun in 1:8-9 to be not cursed with a sense of “to hell” but to be “put up” or “set up” in the sense of shelved. By including this term in the very same letter, the Spirit has provided us with an illustration of the term.

Paul set his good news before those who seemed to be somebodies. He describes them in this way more precisely in 2:6. While the Church throughout its history has paid more attention to and honored some over others, Paul indicates in 2:6 that God makes no such distinction, and neither did Paul. These were the ones Paul wished to speak with and did so privately. Paul’s meeting begins as a public rehearsal of God’s work and then moved to a private session. The ESV

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<sup>33</sup> The verb is an aorist middle indicative form of ἀνατίθημι [*anatithēmi*].

<sup>34</sup> J.H. Thayer, entry 394.

translation “who seemed influential” translates the articular participle *tois dokousin*. This verb means “to be of an opinion” or “to be of reputation.” In this case, “reputation” best represents Paul’s idea. These were the people that other believers tended to look up to, or at least those in the church in Jerusalem and perhaps Judea. Those on Cyprus and in the regions of modern central Turkey may not have known these leaders, except by reference. Even in Antioch in Syria, they did not yet personally know Peter.

Paul presented this message to the “leaders” “in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.” I see two possible understandings of this statement that reflect the context: uncertainty about his message, or concern that his work might be undone. The phrase begins with two particles *mē* [μή] meaning “no” or “not” and *pōs* [πώς] meaning “how, somehow, or some way.” Paul was concerned that his actions both past and present might by some means come to mean nothing. The adjective “vain” [*kenos* κενός] means empty of content or action.<sup>35</sup> If Paul meant that he was uncertain about his message, then *kenos* may indicate that the content of what Paul spoke was empty due to his uncertainty; maybe he had misunderstood what Christ told him to speak and do. But Paul may be concerned that others traveling from Jerusalem might undermine what he has taught these new believers. Paul’s language in Galatians does not suggest that these others arrived and said Paul was wrong, but rather that

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<sup>35</sup> Three Greek adjectives indicate vanity or emptiness: *eikē* - empty of purpose or goal, *kenos* - empty of content or action, *mataios* - empty or outcome or result.

Paul had not told them everything. In this way, they could attach their message to what Paul had taught and use his authority to suggest adding law to their lifestyle. This would alter the content of what Paul had taught and this would agree with the adjective *kenos*. This would affect the places he had already taught, so, “had run.” They could also continue following him about and so “running.”

I think the latter of these two best fits Paul’s statements in Galatians. He established that he did not get his message from men. He received it directly from the Lord. Several times Paul speaks of himself as being entrusted by God with various messages: the good news about God, the good news about the happy God, the word he preached about godliness, his stewardship (1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; Tit. 1:3; 1 Cor. 9:17). To be entrusted means God had to have clearly revealed what Paul was to say and do. When this meeting ended, the leaders also recognized that God committed to Paul the good news for the uncircumcised, while Peter’s was to the Jews (Gal. 2:7). Certainly, these men were not declaring two ways of salvation. Most commentators recognize this. They simply apply the distinction to the audience. But the audience was not the question. The question was what the audience was to do. We might say that Paul wanted these leaders to call off any who misrepresented his teaching. The leaders composed just such a letter that Paul and Barnabas took with them, along with two prophets from the Jerusalem church. The prophets assured the other churches of the letter’s authenticity (Acts 15:20-30). As a result, if anyone tried to add to the gospel of freedom in Christ, the apostles could show the letter to the churches. Upon returning to Antioch they read the letter to the church and all

rejoiced (Acts 15:31). Paul's concern about whether he was running or had run in vain was about others undermining his teaching about Christian living.

**2:3** Paul points to Titus as an example of one who lived free in Christ. He was not compelled to be circumcised. The verb "compel" is passive. He never felt compelled to obey this Jewish ritual. Even the leaders of the Jerusalem church did not compel him to be circumcised, as they didn't view circumcisions as necessary. Titus was a Greek. This noun describes those who were ethnically Greek such as Timothy's father (Acts 16:2-4). Paul had Timothy circumcised for the sake of the surrounding Jews who knew he was a Greek, to remove a potential cause of offense. Titus was also a Greek, but Paul did not have Titus circumcised. After Titus was saved, he was also taught about our freedom in Christ.

**2:4-5** These two verses are one sentence in which Paul expresses his concern about living in a manner consistent with this freedom in Christ. The main verb of this sentence is *eikō* [ἔϊκω] "to yield." Paul did not yield even a little while (hour) (2:5). 2:4 explains the reason and to whom they did not yield. False brothers came into the meeting secretly. "False brothers" means they passed themselves off as believers in Christ. Paul does not tell us how these false brothers heard about this meeting. "Brought in secretly" is a noun, *pareisaktos* [παρείσακτος] related to the verb *pareisagō*, which meant to sneak and along with the active verb *pareisēlthon* "to bring in alongside" shows these false brothers entered of their own accord. While some English translations (NASB, ESV) have "brought in" as though someone else brought them in, the NIV and NET

Bible's rendering "had infiltrated" and "slipped in" is more consistent. If the meeting consisted only of Peter, James, John, and a few elders, these false brothers would have stood out. Their ability to slip in secretly indicates this was a larger meeting. Therefore "privately" simply means this was not an open public meeting. The leadership of apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church was likely large as the numbers recorded early in Acts may suggest about five to six thousand believers across the city.

The false brothers came to spy out the believers' liberty in Christ Jesus. Apparently, they heard about the controversy with Paul. The false brothers did not come to simply learn about it, but to enslave believers. Paul faced opposition in this meeting from Pharisees who believed (Acts 15:5). However, Luke used a perfect tense verb for "believe" and we should not question whether these were true believers. Neither should we confuse them with the false brothers.

The believer's freedom is **in Christ Jesus**. When believers operate in Christ Jesus, they experience this freedom in practice. Whenever we operate outside the sphere of who we are in Christ Jesus, we make ourselves slaves (cp 5:1; Rom 6:15-16. As we have demonstrated from Galatians, turning to law is not only enslavement to law, but enslavement to one's own sin nature. These unbelievers wanted others to keep law.

When Paul writes that he did not yield, it indicates that when the false brothers entered, they must have pressed Paul to come in line with the law. He did not yield so the truth consisting of the good news might continue. The truth may refer to a specific truth related to this good news about freedom in Christ. It is

more likely that Paul means specifically the Truth, that only God can accomplish His purpose. Believers who attempt to keep law, operate without God's work because He is not requiring law-keeping of us today. So in Christ Jesus is the only way God provides believers practical freedom in Christ.

## **2:6 The Jerusalem Meeting**

After presenting his gospel to the leadership of the Jerusalem church, the leadership formally acknowledge Paul and his God-given message. Paul refers to the leadership as "those seeming to be somebody" or "those being of reputation." This may be due to their deportment but was most likely due to how others in the church, perhaps even the elders looked to them for guidance or deferred to their opinion. The apostles do not seem to demonstrate any arrogance about their position. In whatever way Paul thought they were of reputation, he didn't think of anyone being more important than others. "Whatever they were then, it makes no difference to me. God shows no partiality." God views us all the same in Christ, and Paul attempted to live this same way.

During Christ's earthly ministry, the disciples argued among themselves about who was greater among them, and who would be great in the kingdom (Mk. 9:33-34). The Old Testament kingdom prophecies allowed for higher positions of authority. Jesus promised people would have different spheres of authority, such as over ten or five cities. In the body of Christ, all serve. Even James warned the Jewish believers against demonstrating any favoritism (Jas. 2:1ff). Paul did not exalt himself above others. He wrote 2 Corinthians due to unbelieving false teachers who



wanted believers to give attention to them. They tried to create doubt about Paul's authority. This forced Paul to boast about what he had seen and done (2 Cor. 12:11-12). His personal attitude was to spend himself for others rather than have them spend themselves for him (12:15). He preferred not to have to exercise his authority, but to appear weak and unapproved (2 Cor. 13:7-9). He had reminded them of the absolute equality and necessity of all believers in the body. Leadership does lead, but it does so as loving servants, not driving masters. Paul's comments on the leadership in Jerusalem were not intended to cast dispersions upon them, but to reinforce the truth that in the body of Christ, there are no somebodies (cp 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

**2:6-7** The leadership added nothing to Paul's ministry. They added no other requirements for Paul to teach the Gentile believers. They did not tamper with Paul's message. Rather they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised was committed to Paul just as the gospel to the circumcised was committed to Peter. Are these two distinct messages? James Montgomery Boice sees one message, "They recognized that all of them had been entrusted with the same gospel and that they differed only in respect to the different fields they had been assigned to preach it in."<sup>36</sup> Gerald Borchert agrees, "Not only did the leaders not add to Paul's gospel requirements, but they recognized that God had divided the responsibility for proclaiming the gospel (not two gospels) between Peter and Paul."<sup>37</sup> These commentators represent the consensus that these men

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<sup>36</sup> Boice, *op cit.* p

<sup>37</sup> Borchert, *Galatians in the Cornerstone Commentary.*

had the same message but different audiences. This is driven in part by the earlier failure to distinguish the gospel for Christian freedom in Christ from the gospel for eternal salvation. Because these writers understand Galatians to be about the latter, it is consistent to see Peter and Paul as having the same message. God was not saving Gentiles by a means distinct from the Jews. Both are saved by the same work of Christ, and by the same faith in Christ. But Paul is concerned about the good news entrusted him for Christian living, the gospel of freedom in Christ.

The account of Paul's early preaching in Acts was not met with skepticism by the believers in Damascus or Jerusalem. The disciples in both cities recognized Paul to be preaching "that Jesus was the Christ" and so they acted to protect him (Acts 9:22, 25). In Jerusalem, he was moving about the city with the apostles preaching boldly in the name of the Lord (Acts 9:27-28). If the questions about Paul's message involved a question about the gospel for initial/eternal salvation, then the apostles would certainly have heard it much earlier. Paul said that he spent fifteen days with Peter and also met James during that earlier visit (Gal. 1:18-19). Again, the facts do not square if the issue is the gospel we proclaim to unbelievers. However, the gospel the Lord commissioned Paul with was the gospel for Christian living free in Christ, and it differed from what Peter taught.

Peter's message for how the Jewish disciples were to live did not contradict the law. This can be seen by James' references to the Law in his letter to the dispersed Jewish believers (Jas. 2:8-11; 4:11-12). James wrote about the time of Acts 15. About seven to eight

years after Paul's visit in Acts 15, he returns to Jerusalem and is confronted by thousands of believing Jews who are still zealous for the law (Acts 21:20). James expresses concern over how they will react to the news that Paul was teaching Jewish believers to not circumcise their sons. James wanted Paul to demonstrate that he carefully walks and guards the law (21:24). James then distinguished the manner of life they asked the Gentiles to observe (21:25). All this demonstrates that believing Jews continued to keep the Law, including the rituals of sacrifices and offerings (21:24, 26).

While Peter and Paul announced the same message for eternal righteousness before God, Peter encouraged Jews to continue observing the Law, and Paul did not. Paul taught believers grace as a way of life involving a new work of the Spirit. This was the conflict. The resolution to the conflict was that Peter would continue working with the Jews and continue to teach law. Paul, however, would be allowed to teach the Gentiles a lifestyle different than the law. They asked the Gentiles to avoid certain activities for the sake of the Jews (Acts 15:20-21). The decision did not involve to whom they went, for Peter had already gone to the Gentiles and the Jerusalem church approved. The decision was about two distinct messages: Paul's good news of freedom in Christ, and Peter's message for Jewish living.

In Galatians two, Paul relates, and Peter's letters support, Peter did not continue teaching the Jewish believers to live by the law. God drew Peter to this new message of freedom in Christ.

In John 13-17, Jesus taught truth He taught

nowhere else. These five chapters relate unique truths. He revealed a new command to love based on a significantly higher standard than ever communicated. He promised to return, not to set up a kingdom but to take to Himself those who were His and to take them to a place in His Father's house that He prepared for them. He promised that He and the Father would send the Spirit and that the Spirit would indwell them, not simply be upon them or with them. He promised that He would be in believers and they would be in Him. He promised that believers could be at ease with these truths. He promised that they could ask what they wished and could ask the Father directly; they didn't have to ask Christ to ask the Father. The Spirit would begin a new work of convincing the world of their need for Christ. The Spirit would guide them into all the Truth. This synopsis of Christ's teaching at the end of His earthly life, comprises some of the apostles' doctrine to which the early church devoted themselves (Acts 2:42). Therefore, Peter taught Jewish believers new truths related to the new ministry of the Holy Spirit.

However, that ministry of the Spirit would never reach its full expression until believers learned who they are in Christ and how to live by grace. God entrusted that message to Paul (Gal. 2:7). The verb "committed" translates a perfect tense emphasizing a continued state (cp. Eph. 3:2, 9). The present work of the Spirit ties directly to grace as our way of life (administration, dispensation, or stewardship). Learning this way of life from Paul allowed believers to experience more fully the Spirit's present work. Part of the Spirit's work involves freedom in Christ.

God used Peter to reach the Jews with the gospel of initial salvation. He taught Christian living in keeping with the teachings of Jesus from John chapters thirteen through seventeen. However, this teaching did not contradict the law, and so these Jews continued observing the Law. God had also been working through Paul among the Gentiles. He **preached** the same good news to the unsaved but **taught** a distinct good news to those who turned to God from among the Gentiles, a good news about the Spirit's work in believers. God worked through both men. The word "worked" in both cases is *energeō* [ἐνεργέω] and indicates a direct work, in this case by God, apart from any intermediary.

### **2:9 The right-hand of fellowship**

The leadership of the Jerusalem church recognized God's grace in Paul's ministry. Recall Paul's defense in the last half of chapter one. He did not develop his gospel, he didn't receive it from men. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave Paul the message of freedom in Christ. The leadership knew this to be true. Paul calls this message, "grace" because he proclaimed grace for Christian living.

Because they saw this grace, they extended to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. This was a formal and visible recognition of unity. In the present, some churches still practice this visible ritual to demonstrate their recognition that new believers are part of the body of Christ. Sometimes we practice this after water baptism or upon believers formally joining a church. We have coopted a Biblical statement to a modern requirement, that we will formally extend fellowship to someone when they "join" our church. However, they recognized that God was working

through Paul. They asked these apostles to remember the poor, and Paul continued to do so. This request, by the way, argues against these verses referring to Paul and Barnabas's earlier trip in Acts 12, because they were carrying a gift for the poor saints. Paul continued to take up a collection for the poor and he mentions this in the letters he wrote after the Acts 15 visit (1 Cor. 16:3-4; 2 Cor. 9:10-14; Rom. 15:25-27). Paul was eager to participate and so he continued to remind churches of this need and opportunity (cp 2 Cor. 8:1-4).

### **2:11 Peter's visit to Antioch**

During the Acts 15 meeting, Peter came to Paul's defense (15:7ff). He questioned why anyone would put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which they experientially knew was impossible to bear (15:10). Peter was addressing a church made up of Jews who were raised under law and were continuing to keep law. God gave the law to Israel to prove what mankind cannot do, not to make men righteous before Him. These Jews knew all too well that the law was unbearable.

Modern Christians often do not realize the law burdened people. We select commands we think we can keep and foolishly convince ourselves we can do everything God asks in the law. Yet the Law imposed many minute commands for the very purpose of making Israel different from the nations around them. In this way, it demonstrated man's inability. We miss this point. David said he loved the law, but that was because God prescribed the law for Israel to approach Him. It provided Israel access to material blessings and physical health. It gave them access to God at the tent and later the temple. We operate under a lifestyle of

grace as opposed to Law. God extends to us access into His presence based solely on Christ, not our righteous deeds. For these reasons, we do not appreciate the nature of living under those rules to gain access to God. If we think it's doable, we need only read Peter's description that it was an unbearable yoke.

In his defense of Paul's message, Peter stated, "But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (Acts 15:11). But wait, wasn't Peter and the leadership already saved? Indeed, but Peter did not use "saved" of initial salvation, popularly designated "justification." He used it of present salvation, what we often call growth or maturity. The form of the Greek verb that is translated "saved" is an aorist infinitive that can refer to a future event [see the ESV]. This disagrees with many translations which represent it as a simple past as though Peter is thinking about initial justification before God. He isn't. As Peter listened to Paul describe this good news of God's grace as a way of life, he recognized that God would also make that true for the Jews. He saw the law as unbearable, so to hear of life under grace was indeed liberating in Christ.

When the Jerusalem meeting was dismissed, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and reported the conclusions (Acts 15:30). During their stay in Antioch, Peter arrived (Gal. 2:11). Though Paul does not state it, Peter likely wished to hear more of this message of life by God's grace. Indeed, Peter did live in keeping with God's grace for a time. This evidences that he came to understand some of this new lifestyle. He lived like the Gentiles but eventually compelled the Gentiles to live like Jews by the influence of his actions

(2:14). For this reason, Paul opposed him to his face (2:11).

**2:12** At some point after arriving in Antioch, Peter ate with the Gentiles. Paul means the Gentile believers in Antioch. In keeping with his recognition that God would be working with both Jews and Gentiles by His grace, Peter adopted this new way of thinking. Years earlier, God had directed Peter to make no distinction between Jew and Gentile with the gospel. Word of his actions reached the church in Jerusalem and they challenged him on this matter upon his return to Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-3). Peter related how he came to realize that God made no distinction and He even gave them the same gift of the Spirit as He gave to the Jews when they first believed (11:15-17). Peter's experience may have made him more receptive to Paul's message and eager to learn more. Further, he had less difficulty with eating with and sharing with the Gentile believers.

However, when certain men from James arrived Peter withdrew from the Gentile believers (Gal. 2:12). These were believers, as James would not have sent unbelievers to check on matters in Antioch. Peter was moved by fear of the circumcision. Though Paul does not mention Satan specifically, other texts associate Satan with manipulating people through means of fear. It is one of Satan's effective tools. Fear may be well-grounded from a human point of view, but often fear involves irrational unknown concerns. In this case, what would these men have done? They could have scolded Peter or reported him to James, but that issue should have been settled previously.

**2:13** The rest of the Jews in the Antioch church also joined Peter in his hypocrisy. The Greek word *hypokrisis*



meant to pretend to be something one is not. It was used for stage actors playing parts. In this case, Peter was a hypocrite living this new lifestyle by grace and then denying it by his actions of separating from the Gentiles. He did not reflect the grace he had been enjoying.

His actions influenced other Jewish believers in Antioch including Barnabas. They all withdrew from the Gentile believers. It is bad enough when a single believer acts in a manner inconsistent with God's design for our lives. But when his actions encourage others to do the same, the matter becomes more serious. Nearly every reference to divine disciple of New Testament Christians involves some activity that affects other believers, perhaps even modeling bad behavior.

**2:14** For this reason, Paul withstood him (2:11). Paul observed that they all were not acting straightforward or in keeping with the Truth of the gospel. The word "straightforward" [NASB] meant to be moving on a straight line and therefore, to move correctly or in the right path. The issue was the Truth consisting of the good news. This occurrence of "the Truth" (Truth with the definite article, though not always represented in our English Bibles) is the specific Truth which tells us there is only one true God (Jer. 2:10; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Jh. 5:20). It further communicates to us that only the True God can accomplish certain things. Cephas (Peter) failed to recognize that observance of separation commands between Jews and Gentiles as dictated in the Law did not result in Peter or any others receiving any better benefit from God. God has established the relationship of all New Testament believers to Himself.

They cannot alter that relationship nor improve it.

Paul addressed Peter publicly. He wished for all the believers in the room to hear what he had to say. All the Jews who separated needed this correction, but due to Peter's position as a "somebody", he bore greater responsibility. Peter was a Jew but was living like Gentiles. Elsewhere, Paul contrasts the lifestyle of Gentiles to Christian living (Eph. 4:17). In the church of Antioch, "living like the Gentiles" meant like the Gentile believers who were not governed by Mosaic law. Paul had never taught nor encouraged them to live by law. However, when Peter separated from the Gentiles, his actions compelled the Gentiles to live like Jews. He was encouraging them to keep law. The words "live like a Gentile...Jews" translate the adverbs Gentilely and Jewishly-awkward English but both are adverbs. The last word "live like a Jew" translates an infinitive verb "to Judaize." Again, the issue is about how believers are to live.

### **2:15 Justification**

We do not know where Paul's words to Peter end and he moves on to addressing the Galatians. The language seems to still be addressed to Peter, as he and Paul are both Jews by birth. Paul uses a common Jewish distinction of Jews for Gentiles. Jews viewed the Gentiles as dogs (Mt. 15:26). Simply because God gave Israel the law, they took that to mean they were OK with God (Rm. 2:17-24; 3:1-2). Though Jews did not view themselves as sinners as they did the Gentiles, 2:16 makes it clear that no one stands justified from law works.

"Is justified" translates the present tense verb

and refers to the moment one believes the good news of Jesus Christ (cp Rm. 4:5). When Paul looks to the past, he uses the verb believe in the aorist tense (Rm. 4:2; 5:1). This present tense extends justification into Christian living. At the point of initial salvation, an unbeliever confronted with his sin believes in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). Even in the Christian life, one can only do righteous works through faith concerning Jesus Christ. “Jesus Christ” are genitive case nouns and express the object of faith. Some Bible students take the genitive case to be possessive and like the Authorized Version, they understand “faith of Christ” as though Christ has exercised faith. The NET Bible translates the noun **ΠΙΣΤΙΣ** as “faithfulness” of Jesus Christ. “Faithfulness” is not an acceptable translation of the noun **ΠΙΣΤΙΣ**. Locations where it has been translated “faithful” can also be understood as “faith.” “Faithful” should be reserved for the masculine noun *pistos* **ΠΙΣΤΟΣ**. If it is Christ’s faith, we have to ask what promise Christ believed? The simpler interpretation is that we believe what Jesus Christ has done for us by dying on the cross and rising again. Therefore the ESV and NASB have “faith in Christ Jesus. Paul represents this idea for himself and Peter, that they had believed [aorist] into [eis] Christ Jesus.

**2:16** The purpose of believing in Christ Jesus is to be declared righteous from *the* faith concerning Christ. The passive verb “justified” indicates God’s act of declaring a person righteous before Him. This declaration of righteousness does not rest on our works, but on Christ alone. All we can do is to believe in who Jesus Christ is and what He has already done for us on the cross. When we believed in Jesus Christ, we

received Him or took Him (Col. 2:6). To “take” Christ Jesus is to accept who He is, rather than refusing Him, or remaking Him into a manageable deity or into someone who fits our understanding of who He should be. It is “through” [διὰ] faith as a channel from rejecting Christ to accepting Him. God declares righteous, those who believe (Rm. 4:5).

This divine declaration of righteousness is not from law works (2:16). The construction “law works” is also two genitive nouns like “faith concerning (in) Christ Jesus.” Yet we understand that the law is not doing works but delineating the type of works a person should do. When Israelis did works of the law, those works were their righteousness (Deut. 6:25). It was not righteousness that secured forgiveness and righteousness such as God extended to Abraham in Genesis 15:6. It was a practical righteousness that allowed Israelis to approach the tabernacle. Israelis could approach whether they were saved or unsaved because the ability rested on their practical obedience to the law. However, that law could not make a person eternally righteous before God. God alone takes ungodly people and declares them righteous (Rom. 4:5). David knew this to be true (Rom. 4:6-8). So nobody (no flesh) is justified, before God from performing law works.

**2:17** Those who seek to be justified in Christ find themselves sinners. Paul states this as the first part of a question. 2:17 is the turning point in Paul’s discussion. To this point, Paul has discussed initial salvation (justification). He now pivots from initial justification to present tense or practical justification as part of the Christian life.

That law does not produce our practical righteousness today is the theme of Galatians. “Seeking to be justified in Christ” is a Christian life issue. “In Christ” is not what we proclaim to unbelievers, but the foundation of Christian living. We are righteous in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). We are only able to perform righteous works as we relate to who we are in Christ.

So, in what way are we found sinners? A key issue in Christian living is that we still have sinful natures. Paul identified the sin nature as “the sin that indwells in me” (Rm. 7:20, 23). This sin nature wants its way. The indwelling Spirit intensely craves [lusts/ desires] in me and so does my flesh (Gal. 5:17). The intensity of this conflict interferes with our ability to do His will. Therefore, I can only be justified in my conduct, as I live in Christ. When I wish to be justified, I must remember that I am a sinner and incapable of practical righteous activity. Only the Spirit can produce righteous activity through me. Jesus said as much, “He who does the truth comes to the Light that it might be plainly seen that his works are **worked by God**” (Jh. 3:21). I am found a sinner because I must recognize my inability as a believer to produce righteous works aside from Christ.

The question Paul asks is, “is Christ then a servant of sin?” To which he answers a strong, NO. Christ does not promote sin. It is an errant conclusion to think He does. Reminding us of our inability apart from Him does not promote sin. Law proves we are sinners, but that does not make the law sinful (Rm 7:7, 13). Likewise, if we must recognize our sin nature and inability to accomplish God’s will ourselves, that does

not make Christ a minister of sin. The issue of the sin nature and justification as Christian life issues become clear as Paul mentions the issue of law.

**2:18** For if that which I destroy, I rebuild, I make myself a transgressor. When an individual believes in Jesus Christ, he believes in two promises that God will forgive his sins, and that God will declare him righteous (Acts 13:38-39). Paul added that God declares him righteous from everything from which one cannot be declared righteous through the law of Moses. Therefore, if one believes in Jesus Christ, he must also recognize that the law cannot make him righteous before God. He must take down (destroy) the law for this reason. But if a believer then turns again to the law to be justified in his Christian conduct, he rebuilds it.

In Romans 7, Paul relates his personal failure when he tried to live the Christian life by law. The sin nature came back to life, and Paul died (Rom. 7:9-11). In Galatians, Paul does not detail that miserable experience of trying to live by the law. He simply states that he makes or constitutes himself a transgressor if he should try to live by the law. He becomes a transgressor because he knows he will fail. Transgression is the violation of law and so it requires law (Rm. 4:15). The law was added to increase transgressions, proving man's failure (Gal. 3:19).

**2:20** Paul died to the law through the law. Under the law, if a woman's husband died, she was free to be married to another man (Rom. 7:2-3). She could not die and remarry, because a dead person cannot marry. That's ridiculously obvious. But in Romans 7, Paul used this principle of the husband dying and the woman being freed to illustrate how we have come to Christ.

Except in our situation, we are the ones who died. We not only died with Christ but live again with Him (cp Rm. 6:11). We are free from the law and able to be joined to Christ. Paul said, “You were caused to die to the Law through the body of Christ.” (7:4). Since Paul had not yet visited Rome, when he wrote them, he explained in greater detail how he died to the law. Ultimately the Spirit bore Paul along to provide us the thorough revelation in Romans. Paul visited the Galatian churches on at least three occasions and I assume he was able to reference these ideas briefly because they knew what he meant. This is why he expressed shock at the beginning of this letter, they knew better (1:6).

Like his statement in Romans 7, by dying to the law, he lives to God (Gal. 2:19). This also parallels his instruction for us to logically count ourselves to be dead ones to the sin nature but living ones to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11). Paul refers here to our standing in Christ, where we are alive to God.

**2:20** That he means our position or standing in Christ is seen in the phrase “I have been jointly-crucified with Christ.” This is our God-reckoned position. It is a God-reckoned position because He says this good thing<sup>38</sup> about us in Christ (Eph. 1:3). He logically counts this joint-crucifixion to be true of us (*logidzomai*) but in Ephesians 1:3, Paul also explains this as “saying something good about” us, which in our English Bibles is represented as “bless.” God counts it true and so He says it about us as a good thing.

**2:20** “I no longer live.” Paul does not see himself as

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<sup>38</sup> This word “bless” means to say something good.

having been erased or ended. He sees who he was as having ended with his joint crucifixion with Christ. But Paul lived. He had evangelized the Galatians, taught the Galatians, revisited the Galatians, and was now writing them. Paul certainly lives. He applies the phrase, "I no longer live" to his way of life by the Spirit. As a result, "Christ lives in me." Christ said we would have a twofold relationship to Him, us in Him and He in us (Jh. 14:20). Christ in the believer is a result of regeneration and how the believer has eternal life (1 Jh. 5:11-12; Tit. 3:5-7). Our crucifixion with Christ falls within the other side of our relationship with Christ, us in Christ. As we relate to our identity in Christ, Christ dwells in us. He spoke of this in John 15, that as we abide in Him, He abides in us (15:4). It is only as we abide in Christ that we can bear fruit (15:5). So, while we have or possess eternal life because Christ dwells in us, we get to use or live out eternal life as we set our minds to who we are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:23). This is what Paul means by "walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). It is because we have died with Him (i.e. crucified), that we can live together with Him (Rom. 6:8). This is what Paul means in Galatians 2:19-20. It is only as we relate to being jointly crucified with Christ and that we are alive in Christ, that we can live outwardly. When we live outwardly it is Christ who is seen, not us. It is Christ in us being lived out.

Paul continues to live and live in flesh. In 3:3 he uses flesh in a negative sense, that of relying upon his human ability. That human ability is marked by the works of the flesh, which he lists in 5:19-21. In 2:20, he does not mean "I live by means of flesh" but "in flesh" meaning the realm in which life must be exercised. We still exist in physical bodies. Our flesh is not yet



glorified and but it is only through this physical form that we act. However, we do not act with the mindset that the flesh wants us to have (cp. Rom 8:3-5). We are to act with the mindset that comes from the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-5). In Galatians, Paul states that while he lives in flesh, he lives by faith in the Son of God. First, “in flesh” and “by faith” both have the preposition *en* [ἐν], which I’ve chosen to translate “in” and “by” respectively. Proximity does not demand the preposition be translated the same. It is an interpretive issue. What does “I live **in** faith” mean? Is he living within a realm called faith, a location, a place, a mindset? It is better to understand it instrumentally or **how** he lived. Second, the faith is concerning the Son of God. “Son of God” emphasizes His deity (Jh. 10:36). By having or possessing the Son, we have eternal life (1 Jh. 5:11-12). Faith indicates we have a promise from God. The promise in the text appears to be that Christ will live through us when we relate to who we are in Him, especially that we are jointly-crucified with Him (cp Rom. 6:11). He promised this in John 15:4-5, “Abide in Me, and I *abide* in you.” The imperative “abide” sets up the first half of a condition, “You abide.” Jesus then abides when we meet that condition. Faith in that promise will result in Paul abiding and Christ then abiding in Paul, where “abide” means to remain or rest at ease. Paul further describes the Son as the one having loved [aorist participle] Him and having given Himself in Paul’s place. Christ loved Paul and all believers by laying down His life in our place and handing Himself over. This last participle may refer to His allowing the soldiers to take Him and to mistreat Him, but it could also refer to His giving Himself in dedication for us (cf. Eph. 5:2, 25).

**2:21** Paul did not displace or set aside *atheteō* [ἀθετέω]. God's grace and law are neither the same nor do they work together (Rom. 11:6; 6:14; Jh. 1:17). While God may display grace to one operating under law, the nature of grace cannot be in response to law. Law earns blessing or curse due to obedience or disobedience, while grace does not consider any merit or (in our case) lack of merit. Contrary to some popular Bible teaching, the Bible does not state that the law expresses God's grace. Law may form a contrasting backdrop to God's grace (Rom. 5:20).

If righteousness is achieved through means of law, that is, it can be earned by obedience, then Christ died for nothing. Righteousness may refer to either our standing before or our practical righteousness. It may refer to both and this seems likely in this context. Even our practical righteousness is not a result of law-keeping but of faith (cf. Php. 3:9-this is also practical righteousness). Christ's died to redeem [*lutroō*] us (Tit. 2:14), paying a price sufficient to secure our release from the penalty due our sins. As a result of redemption, He forgives us of our sin (Col. 1:14). Forgiven from our sins, God then declares us righteous before Him (1 Cor. 1:30). If we could achieve righteousness apart from Christ having to die to pay that ransom, His death had no purpose, it was nothing. "Nothing" translates *dōrean* which can also mean "a gift." Here it is not a gift, but an act that has no result or benefit. Thanks to God, Christ's death did pay our penalty and has secured our freedom.

**3:1** In 1:6 Paul expressed amazement that they would turn to law and away from the Spirit who called them. He calls them "mindless" [*anoētos*] from the

negative prefix *a* and the noun *nous* meaning mind. Together it expresses mindless activity or senselessness. He asks if someone bewitched them or cast the evil eye on them. He is not suggesting any confidence in bewitching someone, or that the Galatian believers had no minds. Rather, this extreme language expresses Paul's bewilderment, his lack of explanations for how these believers could turn away to a system of law. Paul had portrayed with vividness Jesus Christ as crucified. The verb *prographō* occurs four times in Scripture (Rom. 15:4; Eph. 3:3; Jd. 4). It refers to something that was already written, either Scripture or another written statement. Paul had publicly made clear the death of Christ and its effects. Paul had no question that he had laid out the work of Christ before the people. He omitted no detail necessary for faith. He was confident the Galatians had believed in Christ. In this passage, "crucified" occurs in the perfect tense, emphasizing not that Christ remained on the cross but that His crucifixion has a continuing result, sufficient not only to save initially from the penalty of sin but sufficient to carry believers on in Christian living to maturity. For this reason, it was strange that they were moving away from the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

**3:2-3** Paul asks them about their past, their initial salvation, and draws that through to their present salvation. He wished to learn from them how they started. Did they receive the Spirit as a result of law works or as a result of hearing from faith (3:2)? "Received" is in the aorist tense because the believer does not receive the Spirit repeatedly, nor is it a growing experience such that the believer receives the Spirit in increasing measure. Rather, the believer

received the Spirit. The matter is settled. Paul writes to believers and knows they have received the Spirit. They did not receive the Spirit by obeying law. Law has no definite article and refers to any kind of law. Whatever law others may impose on the believers, it is not how they began.

Paul again asks if they are mindless to think that while they began by the Spirit they can now be matured by the flesh (3:3). The goal of maturity is that Christ is formed in the believer (4:19). They began by the Spirit because He is the person who called them. He puts believers into Christ at the moment of faith and joins Himself, the Father and the Son to the believer. To be matured by flesh reveals that if one turns to the law, he relies upon his flesh. Why? Because the Spirit does not direct the lives of believers by, or into law. He directs believers to our life in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 8:2). So, if the Spirit does not use law, a believer who attempts to live by law is not living by the work of the Spirit but by his own efforts and that involves his flesh. The flesh and law do not result in Christ-likeness (5:25).

When the Galatians became believers in Christ they suffered. They suffered “so much” [*tosauta*]. Believers have been given to suffer (Php. 1:29). Paul suffered persecution because he did not proclaim circumcision (5:11). Those who compelled the Galatians to be circumcised did so with the goal of not being persecuted for the cross of Christ (6:12). Did they suffer these things for no reason, even in vain? “In vain” translates the adverb *eikē*, which indicates that which has no goal or purpose. If they could rely on law and circumcision to become what God intended, there was no purpose for their suffering. His final phrase, “if

indeed in vain” may throw out the possibility that some of the readers may not have been believers. However, Paul nowhere else hints that he doubts their salvation. Rather, “if indeed in vain” like many first-class conditional clauses in Paul’s writing, draws his readers to respond and their response would have been, “No.”

**3:5** In 3:2, he asked if **they** received the Spirit through law works, and here if God supplied the Spirit. The difference is they are the subject in 3:2 and God is the subject of this last phrase. The two similar statements are merely emphasizing, what we had to do, and to what God responded.

Paul adds on this verse, “and in working power in you.” This may refer to God’s power that changes our lives (cp Eph. 1:19) or to His works of power that we popularly call miracles. The verb “working” or “in working” [*energeō*] occurs four times in Galatians. In 2:8 Paul uses it twice for the apostleships of Peter and Paul being worked. God gives each believer a gift but He must also personally work in the believer for that gift and its avenue of service to work properly. “In work” is also how faith operates through love (5:6). Faith needs a way to work itself out inactivity as God’s promises become real. Paul has already established that no one is declared righteous from law works (2:16). In this same way, God does not provide any benefits of salvation as a result of our doing law works but as a result of our hearing with faith. Hearing of faith is hearing that consists of faith. One can hear truth, can hear a promise from God but not believe that promise. That would be a hearing not consisting of faith. When we hear the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ, we also believed (exercised faith).

**3:6** Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed in the God, and it was logically credited to him for righteousness.” The quotation begins with the adverb *kathōs* [καθὼς] a comparative adverb meaning “according as.” It does not communicate fulfillment or identity but makes a comparison. The extent of the comparison is determined in the context. Paul is comparing God giving us benefits of salvation due to our faith and God counting Abraham righteous from faith.

Though God called Abraham in Genesis twelve, 15:6 and its quotations in the New Testament are clear that Abraham was not a true believer or righteous before God until this point, which is several years after the Genesis twelve call. God made Abraham to promises: he would have an heir who is his biological descendant and he would have innumerable descendants (Gen. 15:4-5). This was the promise Abraham believed and upon which God declared him righteous. The verb *logidzomai* is a logical attribution or crediting of something to another.<sup>39</sup> Abraham did not act right by believing. God credited his faith to be righteousness for him.

**3:7** Paul charges the Galatians to know, where *ginōskete* may be either an imperative mood or indicative. Paul must tell the Galatians that this is true, therefore, they have not already known it, but are charged to know it now. The inferential “therefore” [*ara*] points believers to the conclusion that those who

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<sup>39</sup> “reckon, calculate—a. count, take into account...credit” F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 119.

are from faith (i.e. they have believed), these are sons of Abraham. “Sons” is anarthrous, indicating that we are not **the** sons of Abraham but a kind of son. Abraham had biological sons: a son of promise, and many sons in terms of descendants. We are sons in so far that we have faith as Abraham had faith.

**3:8** The Scriptures (Old Testament) foresaw that God would declare the Gentiles righteous as a result of faith. “Foresee” is not related to the Greek word translated “foreknowledge.” Foreknowledge means to be fully familiar with something, built on the Greek *gnosis* that indicates experiential not just factual knowledge. To foresee is built on the verb *horaō* meaning to see or view. Foreknowledge reflects God’s full familiarity with His plan (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20), while foresee is not attributed to God but Scripture or David and they look ahead to something (Acts 2:25, 31).

Scripture looked ahead to God declaring Gentiles righteous as a result of faith when He announced good news to Abraham, “all nations will be blessed by you.” Paul references, but does not quote Genesis 18:18. “Preached the gospel” [NASB] translates a form of the word we normally associate with the gospel or the act of announcing the gospel. However, this word does not refer to the same gospel in all its uses. Context always determines the content of the good news or gospel. Saying, “all nations will be blessed in you” is not equivalent to telling people that Jesus Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose again, which both Peter and Paul announced as the good news.

The verb “preached...” is prefixed with the preposition *pro*-before, meaning that God announced a good news

ahead of time. It was ahead of time because God was not dealing with the “nations” at that time. He singled out Abraham and His descendants as the object of His attention for about 2,000 years. During that time, Gentiles did hear about God’s work through the people of Israel (Abraham’s descendants). So Jesus said that salvation is from the Jews (Jh. 4:22). Jesus said of the Roman (Gentile) centurion’s faith, “Truly I say to you, with no one have I found such great faith in Israel.” (Mt. 8:10). This may illustrate well Paul’s point (he does not quote this text) because Paul’s point involves living by faith not how one initially becomes righteous.

**3:9** Those who are from faith, Jews or Gentiles alike, are blessed with faithful Abraham. Paul does not specify who is blessed aside from the identifying characteristic of faith. The word “bless” as in 2:8 translates *eulogeō* “to speak well of” someone or something. God says something good about those who believe just as He does with faithful Abraham.

Nearly all English translations represent the adjective *pistos* as believing or having faith. “Faith” should represent the Greek feminine noun *pistis*, while *pistos* is a masculine adjective indicating faithfulness or dependableness. In this context, it seems to mean that Abraham was dependable by believing God’s promise.

**3:10** Paul turns from those who are from faith to those who are from works of the Law. While faith brings blessing, law brings a curse. As many as operate from the works of law, they are under the law’s curse. Paul references Deuteronomy 27:26, which lists twelve curses for Israel under the Law. The curse is for the one who does not cause the word of the Law to stand by



doing them. Law was best supported by doing it.<sup>40</sup> While Paul refers to himself as blameless regarding the righteousness of the Law (Php. 3:6), he also states that he learned about his sin nature<sup>41</sup> by his failure under the law (Rom. 7:7). He craved (coveted) so much that the law demonstrated his sin nature to be excessively sinful (Rom. 7:13). So Paul acted contrary to law. His blamelessness meant he followed the law's proscription for his violation (transgression) of that law. Due to man's sinfulness, man fails and comes under the curses stated in the law. No one was able to abide or remain at ease in all the Law required, so all came under the curse.

**3:11** God does not declare anyone righteous by means of law. Paul spoke of being justified **from the source of** law or law works, by using the preposition *ek* with the ablative form of "law" [*nomou*] (2:16). Here, Paul uses the first of two instrumental forms of law [*nomō*] to indicate the instrument or means which believers might employ to achieve practical justification. Remember, the Galatians were believers who knew they were saved by faith. The present issue was about how they were to live. They were resorting to law rather than the ministry of the Spirit to live righteously. "Before God" [ESV, NASB] is *para tō theō*

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<sup>40</sup> Paul's quotation may be his own translation. It does not represent Rahlfs' version of the Septuagint, but the earliest copy of the LXX is from the first century AD.

<sup>41</sup> "Sin nature" is our interpretation of "the sin" ἡ ἀμαρτία, where Paul looks at the noun sin to refer not to an act but a principle that dwells in us (Rom. 7:17, 20). It is not an entity, but a nature with cravings contrary to what is righteous.

“by, alongside God.” The preposition *para* with the dative (locative) case indicates “at or by the side of.”<sup>42</sup> Such a believer has a twisted view of his position at God’s right hand in Christ, thinking obedience to law adds justification to that place. We are righteous in Christ alone (2 Cor. 5:21). This is plain because righteous people live from faith. Quoting Habakkuk 2:4, righteous Jews could go on living by faith in the face of God’s impending judgments on their nation. Faith was the source of their righteous actions. We too expect practical righteousness, as faith works itself out through means of love (5:6). Love is an attitude expressed in actions towards others. Faith sees God’s promise to do such acts by the Spirit.

**3:12** Though the righteous live by faith, the law is not from faith. Faith does not produce law. “Of law” translates *ek pisteōs* so that faith is the source. God gave the law through Moses, so Paul is not addressing the source of law. Paul is referring to the kind of life one lives from faith; faith does not drive one to live by law. Faith drives one to live in God’s promises. Elsewhere, Paul states that the righteousness from faith does not ask anyone to do what God alone can: ascending or descending (Rom. 10:6-7). The law is about doing (Gal. 3:12). The one who does the things of the law lives by obeying those commands. “Lives” is present tense life, not spiritual salvation or justification. If one disobeyed law, the death penalty was required for breaking seven of the commands, and also for certain cases in two other commands: bearing false witness when someone would have died if found guilty and stealing a person. If one wished to live, he needed to go on keeping the law.

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<sup>42</sup> Gingrich, *op cit.* p. 147.

**3:13** Christ purchased those under the curse of the law out from under the law's curse. The verb redeem [*exagoradzō*] meant "to buy out of the hands of a person; to redeem, set free."<sup>43</sup> As a result, one can remove a person from a realm of authority. Paul uses this verb twice in Galatians, both times of Christ buying the Jews out from the authority of the Law (4:5). When Paul says He bought "us," he meant Jews who were under the Law and therefore under its curse.

Christ secured this redemption by becoming a curse in place of [*huper*] of those Jews, "us." As He bore everyone's sins in His body (1 Pet. 2:24), so He bore the curse of the law on behalf of the people of Israel who had lived under the Law for 1,500 years. Certainly, Paul is urging the Galatians, who were primarily Gentiles, to wonder why they would willingly put themselves under the very law from which Christ had to redeem the Jews? Everyone is not under law, but the Jews only and they served to demonstrate that all are guilty before God (Rom. 2:12; 3:19) Jesus became a curse by dying on a wooden staff. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23, which spoke of a body being suspended upon a pole or in a tree following being stoned by others. The suspended body served to act as a curse and so warn others to not break the Law. When Moses wrote Deuteronomy, the practice of crucifixion did not exist or was not well known. Fifteen hundred years later, the Jews turned Jesus over to the Romans who used crucifixion as a drawn-out form of capital punishment. Therefore, by being crucified, Jesus became a curse and by the curse was able to redeem those who lived under that law. Having dealt with the transgressions done under the

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<sup>43</sup> Mounce, op cit. p. 1146. See also Gingrich, op cit. p. 68.

first covenant, God can move on to deal with Gentiles (Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 9:15).

**3:14** By redeeming the Jews from their law, The blessing of Abraham can come to the Gentiles in Christ. The aorist subjunctive verb “might come” lays contingency on the Gentiles to respond in faith. Only those who believe are placed into Christ and receive the blessing. God has not rejected Israel, as Paul argues against in Romans eleven. However, today, God is not focusing on Israel as a nation but on individuals from Israel in the same way that He focuses on individuals from the Gentiles. Paul will eventually state that regardless of one’s identity before being in Christ, that identity is gone and Christ has created us into a new man (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:15).

The “blessing” of Abraham extends to the promise of the indwelling Spirit. The noun *eulogia* means to speak well of someone or something (cp Eph. 1:3). Here it represents the Hebrew *barach* that could refer to a good word spoken about someone or a good thing given or promised. We have received the Spirit through faith, where faith looks back at initial belief in the gospel. In response to faith in Christ Jesus, God has given us the Spirit (3:5; 4:6). The Spirit is no longer just upon us, but now indwells believers (cp Jh. 14:17).

### **The Abrahamic Promises and the Old Covenant**

**3:15** Paul introduces God’s covenant promises to Abraham. He explains the nature of a covenant. A Covenant is a contract and contracts have rules. Once a covenant is ratified or made authoritative [*kuroō*], the rules go into effect. Paul lists two rules of human covenants. First, no one sets the covenant aside or

chooses not to fulfill it. Second, no one adds to a covenant. Adding may include adding a condition, a promise, or a party. These conditions mean that people do not normally change a covenant once it is made. God who is faithful does not make changes to His covenants.

**3:16** The promises were spoken to Abraham and his descendants. These promises form God's covenants to Abraham. God made a land covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, two covenants in Genesis 17, one regarding land and one regarding who could be Abraham's family, and a fourth covenant regarding the multiplication of the seed and victory over the seed's enemies in Genesis 22. This fourth covenant is only identified as a covenant in the New Testament (Gal. 3:15-18; Lk. 1:72-73; Heb. 6:13-14).

These promises were made to Abraham and his descendants. "Descendants" translates the Greek word seed [*sperma*]. Paul points out that the covenant promises were made to Abraham's seed singular, not to seeds, where Paul contrasts the singular *tō spermati* to the plural *tois spermasin*. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word "seed" is naturally plural even in the singular; it is a singular plural. Therefore, "seed" occurs in the singular in all God's promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:7-10, 12, 22:17-18). However, in every occurrence of "seed," the pronouns that refer to "seed" are plural, such as "theirs", "them" and "they" in Genesis 15:13-14, 16 and "their" in 17:7, 9, but in 22:17-19 the pronoun is singular "possess the gate of **his** enemies." Paul refers only to this fourth covenant in Genesis 22 because only this covenant emphasizes the singular seed.

God's fourth covenant to Abraham promises

blessing, a multiplied seed, and that the seed will possess the gates of his enemies (Gen. 22:17). In Galatians three, Paul focuses on this singular seed and states that it is Christ. He is the singular seed who possesses the gates of His enemies. To possess the gates of one's enemies is to control or defeat one's enemies. Christ defeated death, the world, and Satan.

**3:17** God's covenant having been established is not rendered idle by the law which was introduced four hundred thirty years later. If the law could nullify the covenant, then God who imposed the Law on Israel had violated His own faithfulness and the basic principles of covenant law. Paul uses two verbs to indicate that the Law did not change the covenant promises: nullify [*akuroō*] and abolish [*katargeō*]. The former is the same word used here and in 3:15 for ratifying a covenant, except that it has a negative prefix. It means "to deprive of authority, annul, cancel."<sup>44</sup> The second verb means to render something inoperative or ineffective. The first word is the main verb and the second is an infinitive expressing the goal: deprive of authority so as to render it idle. The authority of God's promises was God and His faithfulness. Law would have moved that authority to Israel's obedience. Since Israel failed under the law, the promises would have become ineffective. The Law did neither to God's promises. God imposed the law when Israel presumed they could do all God asked (Ex. 19:1-8). They overestimated their ability rather than believing God's covenant promises to Abraham, though they doubted God's ability to care for them and protect them when leaving Egypt.

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<sup>44</sup> Mounce, *op. cit.* p. 1076.

**3:18** The Law did not introduce a new means of inheriting. If the Law was the source of inheritance, then the inheritance is no longer from a promise. This means that the blessings and curses under law were not considered promises but contrary to the promises. God's promises to Abraham were unconditional. God was gracious with Abraham. The ESV, NASB, and HCSB simply render the verb *charizomai* "give" or "grant," while the NET and NIV represent the involvement of God's grace in His giving Abraham the promise. The verb is in the perfect tense, which emphasizes a past act that has continuing results. God acted toward Abraham with grace and that grace continued. Grace reminds us that Abraham did nothing to earn the promises.

### **The Purpose of the Law**

**3:19** Since the Law is not the cause or channel of the promise from God, Paul asked why the Law exists. Though he devotes more time to this question in Romans, his answer is much the same. It is also a question the Galatian believers should ask. If others told them they needed to keep the Law in order to go on in their salvation, but this was contrary to the Truth, it should spur them to ask what God's purpose was for the Law.

The Law was given for the sake of transgressions. Many English Bibles represent the Greek noun *carin* as simply "because." *Carin* is a form of the word *caris* which means "grace." Therefore, *carin* means that law provides a benefit for the sake of transgressions. It provided a means by which transgressions could be increased. "Transgression" translates *parabasis* the noun of *parabainō* which meant

to step over or beside. It translates the Hebrew verbs *pisha* and *abvar*, the former meaning to act in rebellion specifically against the Mosaic law and the latter to step or cross over. Both words communicate something of intentionality, an act of stepping over a defined boundary and rebelling against an established rule or command. Transgression and sin are not identical. Sin is a defiant act that refuses to recognize any requirement of God and therefore misses the mark by intentionally shooting at the wrong target (1 Jh. 3:4). Sin does not require law, which relates to the issue in this letter that we are not under a law today. Transgression is the overstepping of law and requires the presence of some law (Rom. 4:15). Under the Mosaic Law, one transgressed and sinned because the Law defined God's boundaries for His people Israel, therefore, their transgressions were because of their sins (Lev. 16:16).

Romans 5:12-14 indicates that all mankind sinned with Adam, therefore, all are spiritually dead (the death) from birth. Until God gave the Law, God did not tally people's individual acts of sin against them, even though they were doing those kinds of actions (Rom. 5:13). One of the chief reasons God gave Israel the Law was to increase transgressions, to demonstrate to all of us that we are sinners (cp Rom. 7:7, 13). Paul saw this as a good thing (Rom. 7:12). The Law was set apart (holy) and intended to set people apart. It was also righteous as it did not require anyone to sin but to obey its commands (Rom. 7:12). This work of the Law demonstrates to both unsaved and saved alike our inability and what God alone can do. This is why God added the Law, it increased transgressions so people should have seen where they failed.



The Law served until the Descendant (Seed) came (3:19). The Descendant is Christ (3:16). Christ was born under the Law (4:4). He upheld the Law and did not come to destroy it (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, “until [*achri*] the Descendant” does not mean until He was born or until He was speaking. The Law stood until Christ introduced something new, a life by grace (cp Jh. 1:17). However, He did this through His apostles, and Paul in particular (cp Eph. 3:2, 9).

The promise was made to this Descendant. The promise was part of the covenant Paul mentioned in 3:16. That covenant involved a singular descendant, and only Genesis 22 involves a singular descendant. That covenant promised a singular descendant that would be many (22:17). It also promised that the descendant would possess the gates of His enemies (22:17). The 19th Century commentator George Bush provides a lengthy note on possessing the gates of His enemies. “The meaning plainly is, that they should subdue their enemies. As gates were in ancient times the principal place of resort, as not only their markets were held there, but also their courts of justice and their deliberative assemblies, hence it is common for the scriptures to speak of the power of a city being concentrated in its gate or gates. The possession of the *gates* was, therefore, the possession of the cities to which they pertained; ... the gate is emblematic of authority dominion;”<sup>45</sup> Bush adds, “The true construction, however, embraces not only the temporal conquests of Israel under Joshua, David, Solomon, and others, but also the higher spiritual victories to be

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<sup>45</sup> George Bush, *Notes on Genesis, Vol. 1*, (Minneapolis: James & Klock Publish Co., reprint 1976) p. 15.

achieved by him who was preeminently the seed of the woman as well as the seed of Abraham; and of whom it is elsewhere predicted that he shall reign till all his enemies are put under his feet.”<sup>46</sup>

The Descendant is Christ and God promised that He would be many and He would control His enemies, He would be the victor. Paul will shortly explain how Christ is many. Of more significance is the promise of being the victor. An aspect of being victor involves freeing us from the domination of the Flesh and that rests on His freeing us from the Law, the very issue Paul addresses in this letter.

The Law was placed in order through angels. When God gave the Law to Israel and then reiterated it forty years later, Moses states that it was written by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10). Moses wrote some of the words and God wrote the law and commandment (Ex. 24:4, 12; 32:15, 16). After Moses broke the first tablets, God told him to cut two new tablets and God would write on the tablets (Ex. 34:1). Exodus 34:27-28 seems to demonstrate that God wrote the ten commands (words) as the conditions of this covenant (not the one to Abraham) and Moses wrote down the other commands of the Law. The book of Leviticus indicates that the LORD continued to appear and speak with Moses (Lev. 1:1). The present statement as well as Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2 states that angels also played a role in giving orders [*diatassō*] about this law. Hebrews 2:2 states that the Law was spoken by angels with the verb *laleō* which emphasizes the movement of the mouth. So, in some way, the angels verbally spoke to

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, p. 16.

Moses. The writer of Hebrews compares “what we heard” to what was spoken by angels (2:1) and connects ours with “such a great salvation” (2:3). Our message and that of the Law are distinct. New Testament teaching is not the unveiling of the Old but something new.

Moses was the mediator through whom God gave Israel the Law (cp Jh. 1:17). A mediator means that the Law was not given in its entirety directly from the lips of God. God wrote the ten commands by His own finger. He conveyed some words to Moses. Angels also conveyed some of the Law. God is one, and in brief, Paul states in Galatians 1:20 what he says in Hebrews 1:2, “in these last days, He (God) has spoken to us by His Son.”

**3:21** Is the Law contrary to the promises of God? Paul assures us it is not. Paul expresses the negation with the expression, “Let it not come to be.” The verb is an optative mood expressing a wish. Paul does not want this to be true.

Paul explains that if a law was given that was able to make alive, the truly the righteousness would have been from law. Paul uses the word “law” without the definite article twice to indicate law in general not specifically the Mosaic Law. The importance of this is that he has already established that righteousness before God is not achieved by law (3:11). Paul indicates that the Law of Moses would have been such a law.

**3:22** The Scriptures have shut all under sin. The verb “shut up” [*sugkleiō*] means “to close up together, hem in, enclose” and so “confine imprison.”<sup>47</sup> Fritz

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<sup>47</sup> Op cit., Gingrich and Danker, p. 187.

Rienecker adds, “The verb indicates there is no possibility of escape.”<sup>48</sup> In Romans, Paul stated that God spoke the Law to Israel to silence the whole world and all would be guilty, in this way they were a proxy for the rest of humanity (Rom. 3:19). Therefore, “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23).

Since all are under sin, the promise regarding Christ comes from faith not obedience to law. In Greek, the form of the word faith<sup>49</sup> indicates the source from which we get the promise. “Jesus Christ” is again an objective genitive form as the object of faith. We can say “from faith concerning Jesus Christ.

By locking all up under sin, the promise can be given to those who believe. Believing is not a work (cp Rom. 4:4-5). It is the mental act that makes a promise from God real to the individual. This promise of liberty is only experienced by those who are believing (a present participle).

**3:23** God has promised liberty and that promise is an object of the believer’s faith. “The Faith” refers to the collection of God’s promises that make up the Christian life. Liberty is part of the Christian life. Before the faith came, “we were being guarded under law as ones locked up like prisoners to the faith that was about to be revealed. Paul uses “we” of Himself and other Jews.

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<sup>48</sup> Fritz Rienecker ed. Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) p. 510. Rienecker gives Donald Guthrie credit for this idea in *Galatians in the New Century Bible Commentary*, (London: Oliphants, 1969).

<sup>49</sup> Faith is in the genitive/ablative case πίστewς preceded by the preposition ἐκ. Most English Bibles have “by faith.”

Gentiles were not locked up as prisoners under law. Paul will state that Gentiles didn't know God and served weak and poor basic principles when they worshipped those things which are not gods (4:8-9). So, Paul continues to single out the Jews as an example of the problem or foolishness of turning to the law. "Being guarded" is an imperfect verb that communicates ongoing or continued activity in the past. In this case, the past is before the Faith came. The Jews were locked or shut up to the faith. While they were under the law, they could not arrive at the promises that constitute our lifestyle. Most of these promises are unique to our time (i.e. Acts 2 until the Lord returns from us). When they were locked up, it was to the faith that was about to be revealed. The participle is present tense but refers to the ongoing situation at the time they were guarded. The Faith had not yet been revealed, and this matches how Paul describes some of these promises as mysteries (Col. 1:27; Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:9-10). At that time the Faith was hidden or veiled, as "revealed" meant to unveil or show something that was hidden. The Jews did not know about our way of life.

**3:24** At the time they were locked up under law, the law functioned as a guardian. A guardian [*paidagōgos*] was an individual a father hired to lead his son to school and home. This individual assured that the son was attentive to his instructor and that was responsible for teaching the son proper behavior and avoidance of those with questionable character. The perfect tense verb "has become" means it acted this way with the continuing result. It does not continue to the present but "to" or "until" Christ. When Christ came and became the grounds of many of God's promises, the law ceased being this guardian.

Lenksi views the law as ceremonial, not the moral law or Ten Commandments. “The American Committee seems to have confused the past historical fact which Paul presents to the Galatians, that during the period from Sinai to Christ the Mosaic law functioned as a *paidagogos* for the Jews, with the doctrinal statement which we formulate when we now adopt Paul’s language about a *paidagogos* and call the moral law, no matter in what formulation, in that of the Ten Commandments or in any other, a means for directing or driving us to Christ. Paul is speaking of the ceremonial contents of the Mosaic law which were completely abrogated when Christ came, which had fulfilled the purpose for which they had been given when the faith was revealed (v. 23).”<sup>50</sup> However, the guardian was not concerned with ceremony but a son’s morality. The whole law was being pressed on the Galatians. Paul refers to the guardian to illustrate the morality of the law governing their behavior. The divisions of civil, ceremonial, and moral are artificial. For Israel from Moses to Christ, the Law acted as a tutor and led them by the hand to assure their behavior was righteous. It was not leading them to Christ.

Keeping Israel under a guardian assured us that we are declared righteous from faith. Probably the “we” still refers to Israel. The verb “justify” or “declare righteous” likely refers to present tense justification, or righteous living as part of the Christian life. If it is initial or eternal justification, then the statement in 3:24-25 would mean that no one while under law was

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<sup>50</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 182.

saved. In 3:25 we have “but when the faith came, we are no longer under a guardian.” If this is about initial salvation, then once a person believed, such as David (Rom. 4:6-8), he was no longer under law, but that is not true. Believing Israelis still had to keep the law as part of daily life. They had to keep all the law, not just ceremonial or civil or moral. If by law, Paul meant the ceremony, then David could have ceased going to the temple and observing the rituals of the temple following his personal faith in God. That also is false. Believing Israelis still observed the ceremony because that was how God designated for them to approach Him in daily life.

**3:25** But when the faith came. Paul does not mean individual faith in Christ, but “the Faith” or the collection of Divine promises for our Christian life. If the faith refers to initial saving faith for eternal justification before God, then, again, this would mean two things: no one under the law ever believed and was justified before God, or anyone who believed ceased to live under law. Neither were true. The Faith refers to our current or modern Christian way of life. This is the Galatian issue: do we live by faith and the ministry of the Spirit, or do we continue to live by law?

When the faith came, we (a Jew) is no longer under the guardian. The Law was the guardian. That means when our Christian way of life arrived, we (a Jewish believer) no longer lives by the Law. The Law is no longer our guardian. It does not lead us about by the hand nor guides our moral life. God’s promises for believers instruct us and guide our moral life. The law as a guardian instructed the Israelis that they should not murder or commit adultery. It threatened them

with the death penalty for doing so. Our present way of life charges us to “walk by means of the Spirit and we will not fulfill the cravings of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Walking by means of the Spirit involves setting our minds to truths from the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5). The Spirit now acts as our guide. He leads us (Gal. 5:18).

**3:26** The status of believing Jews changed. They are all sons of God through the Faith. To be a son is distinct from being a child. A child [*teknon*] results from birth from God (1 Jh. 5:1). A son is one God has advanced within the family. He will explain this in 4:1-5. A son [*huios*] is considered mature to represent the family. A son is contrasted to a *napios* a child who cannot articulate sufficiently to represent the family. In God’s application, believers become children and sons at the same moment that a believer hears and believes the gospel. We are sons in Christ Jesus. “In Christ Jesus” does not indicate the object of our faith. The object of faith is nearly always expressed by the object in the genitive case which would be  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon \text{ } \text{'}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon$  while we have here the dative or instrumental form  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omega \text{ } \text{'}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon$ . Our sonship exists by God’s reckoning rather than by birth. The new birth causes us to have the Father’s seed (1 Jh. 3:9). Adoption cannot pass parental traits to children. Biblical adoption confers on us a status, not a family.

**3:27** As many as were baptized into Christ. This is not water baptism. Water baptism places an individual into water. This baptism places people into Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit at the moment one believes (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12). This baptism involves no experience. This baptism results in the Father logically counting us to be in Christ. In Christ we are



sons.

In the Roman world, a child advanced from childhood to sonship with a toga ceremony. A toga was a wrap worn over the robe. It marked one as both a son and a citizen. Since we have become sons of God in Christ, we also wear clothing of maturity—Christ. In Him, we wear Christ as the dress of maturity. He defines our identity as sons and citizens of a new relationship.

**3:28** This change of identity involves the end of our previous identity. In Christ “there is not.” The verb *eneimi* [ἐν εἰμί] is “in” and “to be.” Paul uses this verb three times to emphasize the present reality that “In Him is not...” where “Him” is supplied from the context. So, in Christ, there is no Jew or Greek. Sometimes, the “Greek” refers to Jews who adopted the Greek language and lifestyle (cf. Acts 6:1). In the present passage, “Greek” refers to anyone who is not a native Hebrew speaker whether of Jewish background or Gentile background. This former racial/religious identity is gone in Christ. There is not in Him a slave or a free man. This former social caste identity is gone in Christ. There is not in Him male or female. There is not in Him a male or female. This sexual identity is gone in Christ.

**3:29** Rather than identifying us by these earthly measurements, we are now considered to be one in Christ Jesus. We are one seed, the singular promised seed of Abraham from 3:16 and Genesis 22. That seed is Christ and since we are all one in Him, we corporately make up this singular seed that is at the same time many. As this seed, we are heirs according to God’s promise. The inheritance is the freedom in Christ as Christ possesses the gates of His enemies. Being an heir leads to the explanation in the following verses (4:1ff).

## Sonship and Adoption

### Galatians 4:1-7

In this present time, all believers are sons of God in Christ (Gal. 3:26). The opening verses of chapter four, explain how God has placed us as His sons. It involves an idea translated “adoption” in our English Bibles. The present text explains what Paul means by adoption. While under law, Israel could not become sons. Their guardian the law led them about as children. Paul explains how God addresses this issue and the effect on our relationship with God.

**4:1** Paul sets out to explain how God has made all believers sons, and Israelis in particular. "As long as the heir is a child," means this individual is already the heir. He is not an impoverished child from a different family. He is the child of the one who will give to him an inheritance. Of the Greek words for “child” the present word, *nāpios*, designates a child incapable of articulating, from two words that meant “not speaking” and was “one below the age of manhood, a minor... unlearned, simple.”<sup>51</sup> As a minor, the term meant that though a child might speak, the child could not speak to represent the family in business. The child may be the heir, but is not yet able to make decisions on behalf of the family. With perhaps the exception of this passage, Paul always uses this description in a negative context. It criticizes people who ought to be doing better or are succumbing to the misleading teaching of others who

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<sup>51</sup> *νήπιος* Thomas Sheldon Green, *A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) p. 128.

do not have their best interests at heart. At that age, the heir was no different than a slave in the household. He is lord of all, again, something not said of the child or another person but reserved for one who is part of the family. The child is under guardians and managers until the time appointed by the father (4:2). Both words are distinct from the term guardian in 3:25. The former refers to those in charge of the care and feeding of minors, and the latter of those in charge of managing the household, including minors. Both convey an aspect of the law for the pre-cross Israeli and are similar to the guardian of 3:26. Lenski states that under Roman law, such a child was under versions of these individuals until the age of twenty-five.<sup>52</sup>

The child remained in this position until time set by the Father. The adverb *achri* brings a sense of time to the word *prothesmia*, which refers to something determined or set in place beforehand. The father of a household appointed the time at which his own child would become his son.

**4:3** Paul applies this illustration to himself and other believing Jews. Notice that he includes himself, “in the same way, **we**.” He didn’t consider himself to have been better than the rest. So when Paul spoke of himself as excelling beyond his contemporaries, this was not a compliment in light of this designation as “children.” Paul refers to them as these inarticulate children. They cannot represent God’s family and struggle to understand even their relationship with God.

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<sup>52</sup> Lenski, *op cit.* p. 193.

In this state of childhood, the Jews were enslaved under the basic elements of the world. Some modern translations represent this as elemental spirits or powers of this world. The noun “elements” [*stoicheia*] meant anything ordered in a row such as an alphabet. From this, the Greeks used the noun *stoicheia* for the basic ordered parts of our physical world such as earth, fire, wind, and water. Peter uses it for the physical components of the universe that will burn (2 Pet. 3:10, 12). It indicates the beginning basic instruction for children (Heb. 5:12). Twice, Paul uses it in Colossians, first of the basics of the world that others use to deceive and lead believers astray (Col. 2:8). These are not basic elemental spirits, for Paul identifies the basics as “don’t touch, don’t taste, don’t handle (fiddle with)” (Col. 2:20-21). This text demonstrates the meaning Paul intends in Galatians 4. The law constituted a basic principle or teaching related to the world. The law and even the world, instructs people, especially children, on what is off-limits, on what they cannot touch or eat. The law designated certain activities and foods as off-limits so that Israel would be different than the nations among whom they lived (Lev.11:44-45; 19:1ff; 20:26). Paul also uses the word in 4:9 of the Gentile Galatian believers, stating that if they turned to the law it was like returning to the poor basic elements, not elemental spirits, because Paul speaks of their previous idolatry (4:8). However, even the Gentiles’ idolatrous religions have basic elements such as activities or rituals required and forbidden for their followers. Religions mimic the law in this way. Understanding that *stoicheia* [basic elements or principles] of the world refer to the law agrees with Paul’s words in 3:26 that

the law was the guardian for the Jews. It restricted and governed their behavior until the time of Christ.

They were enslaved under these basic principles or elements. “Enslaved” is a perfect tense participle, emphasizing their having been made slaves and remaining slaves under those elements. 4:1-2 states that as a child, the heir is no different than a slave and is under the authority of others. So Israel too was enslaved while they operated under the law. They could not function as heirs or grown sons but were always treated as children, and that continued as long as they were children.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, God had to remove these children from under their guardianship and make them sons.

**4:4** The fullness of time refers to God’s plan marked out and reaching the time He appointed. In this context, it compares to the time purposed by the father (4:2). Though Christ was only manifested to die for sins recently, God foreknew Him as a lamb slain because God has planned it (1 Pet. 1:19-20). At God’s appointed time, God the Son entered the world as a man, as one of us. God sent Him.

He came to be (in His human nature) from a woman. This assured He was genuinely human, not just a likeness of humanity. He also came to be under law. He is the law-giver, but He entered the world while God was imposing the law on Israel. He submitted Himself to that law and obeyed it. Despite human efforts, no one could find legitimate fault in His having ever broken a

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<sup>53</sup> Paul uses the imperfect tense of “we were” ἦμεν for ongoing activity in the past. During that time frame, the perfect tense of “enslaved” δεδουλωμένοι existed.

command (Jh. 8:46). Jesus not only obeyed the commands but upheld them and warned others against not obeying the commands or teaching others to do so (Matt. 5:17, 19). He accused the Jewish religious leaders of putting their traditions ahead of the commandments (Mk. 7:8-9).

**4:5** Christ's coming and death accomplished many things, one of which is redemption. Our English word family "redeem" translates at least five Greek words. This verb is *exagorazō* built on the verb *agorazō* which meant to purchase in a market. It is not used of paying for sins, but of Christ buying us (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). *Exagorazō* meant to buy out, free, or remove from an area of authority (see notes on 3:13). Christ **bought** the Jews **out** from under law. Law has no definite article in Greek and means that Christ bought them out from anything considered law. He didn't remove them from the Mosaic law only to make them children under another law system. 3:13 states that Christ became the curse of those who did not obey the law so He could buy them out from that curse. Today, believing Jews are not under law and are not to be taught to live under the law.

Because the law kept Israel in spiritual immaturity, Christ removed them from the authority of the law so they could become sons. The noun "adoption" in most English translations meant to place as a son. Darby has "receive sonship."<sup>54</sup> Vine clarifies

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<sup>54</sup> John Nelson Darby, *The Holy Scriptures A New Translation from the Original Languages*, (Hampton Wick, Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1961) Galatians 4:5. This edition is based on the 1890 edition.

this word, “God does not adopt believers as children; they are begotten as such by His Holy Spirit through faith. Adoption is a term involving the dignity of the relationship of believers as sons; it is not a putting into the family by spiritual birth, but a putting into the position of sons.”<sup>55</sup> Darby’s “sonship” indicates that God takes His child, born from Him (1 Jh. 5:1-2), and advances that child within the family to the status of a son. It ends the situation of a child under guardians and managers (tutors) and allows the child to represent the family. God removed Israel from Law so they could be sons.

**4:6** Our change of status as sons changes our relationship to the Holy Spirit and God our Father. Because believers are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Paul distinguishes our being sons from “His Son.”

The Son is Son by His very nature. He has eternally been the Son. Jesus’ claim that God is “My Father” (Jh. 10:29) and to be “one” with the Father (Jh. 10:30) is a claim to be the Son of God (Jh. 10:36) and a claim to be God (Jh. 10:33). We are sons (plural). Second, the New Testament writers refer to God as “our Father.” (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:3). They do not speak of God as “my Father.” Such a claim was unique and required the authority of one who is God, namely the Son.

“**Of** the Son” expresses an ablative of source, meaning the Spirit came from the Son. God sent the Spirit, but Jesus said He also would send the Spirit, so the Spirit is from the Father and the Son (Jh. 15:26; 16:7). Paul referred to the Spirit as “the Spirit of

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<sup>55</sup> Vine, op cit. p. 34.

promise”, (3:14) because Jesus promised the Spirit would be “another Helper” (Jh. 14:16). “Another” is the adjective *allos* that emphasizes a similarity. Therefore, the Spirit would be like the Son, though He is a distinct person. The Son and Spirit are the same God but different persons.

The Spirit indwells believers in the time of the Church. This was not always true. Prior to the beginning of the Church, the Spirit was “with” [*para*] some people but Jesus promised that the Spirit would be “in” the disciples (Jh. 14:17). Jesus calls Him the Spirit of the Truth (Jh. 14:17), because He brings “the Truth” to light and makes it possible for believers to live out the Truth. The Spirit taught all things and reminded the disciples of all the things Jesus had said (probably referring to John 13-17, Jh. 14:26). In this way, the Spirit taught the disciples the Truth and reminded them of the things Jesus said in this upstairs room as the foundation of the Truth. The Spirit of the Truth makes it possible for the disciples to be witnesses about Christ (Jh. 15:26-27). The Spirit also guides them in “all the Truth” (Jh. 16:13). “The Truth” is that teaching that explains how God alone can accomplish meaningful work in our lives. The Truth explains how we cooperate with God so He does the work in us (Jh. 3:21). This is the Spirit God has sent.

God sent the Spirit because only by the work of the Spirit can we live as sons on a practical level. We can walk by the Spirit. We do so by following the Spirit’s lead. When we do so, we are sons (Gal. 5:18). That does not mean we become sons only when we live properly. Rather, while we are sons, we only live as sons as we follow the Spirit’s leading. The Spirit leads us to



who we are in Christ, to our life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2). He extends and upward call in Christ Jesus (Php. 3:13). As we abide in Christ, Christ also abides in us (Jh. 15:4-5).

Because we are sons, the Spirit cries, “Abba! Father!” Abba was the Aramaic for Father. The Spirit is not stuttering in two languages. Some suggest that Paul interprets Abba to these Greek-speaking Galatians with the word *pater*, perhaps because the Galatians churches were bilingual. Others think Abba Father was used in liturgy. Abba may also have lost some of its original sense becoming more a term of endearment, like our “daddy.” Three Fourth Century fathers claim that young children used abba in this way.<sup>56</sup>

**4:7** Jesus used this expression in Mark 14:36 when He prayed to the Father and demonstrated His special relationship with the Father. Jews did not address God as Father. They were even reluctant to use God’s title Jehovah/Yehowah. Both Jesus and Paul introduce Jewish and Gentile believers to this intimate relationship with God. Slaves never addressed their master as “father.” Naming God as our Father is the privilege of a son.

Since we are sons, we are heirs through God. We are heirs because we are Christ’s and therefore Abraham’s seed (3:29). Paul referred to the Jews under the law as heirs but without adult privileges (4:1). They could not receive the inheritance we have while under the law because the inheritance does not derive from the law (3:18). Now, both Jewish and Gentile believers

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<sup>56</sup> Boice, op cit., paragraph 9639. Boice lists Chrysostom- 4th C, Theodore of Mopseustia 4th C, and Theodoret of Cyprus 5th C.

are heirs. Part of this inheritance is the kingdom of God (5:21). While believers are in the kingdom of God, we will inherit a new aspect or version of the kingdom of God in the future. Since the kingdom of God is the sphere of salvation (for mankind), this future form of the kingdom that we will inherit involves future aspects of our salvation. Our souls will be saved when our faith comes to its culmination (1 Pet. 3:9). The soul is the interpretive center of our senses and involves sensory emotions. At the same time, our bodies will be saved when we see Christ as He is (1 Jh. 3:2; Php. 3:21). In the present time, our spirit has been saved by being born from above by the Spirit's work (Jh. 3:3, 5; Tit. 3:5). The Spirit continues to indwell us and works out this aspect of our salvation. The Spirit gives us the ability to use our soul and body properly before they are completed (Col. 3:23; 1 Cor. 6:18). That inheritance has nothing to do with keeping law. It has everything to do with being and living as sons.

### **The problem of resorting to the law for Christian living**

**4:8** Having established how God has made us sons and heirs, Paul compares the Gentiles' former manner of life to life under the law. His comparisons surprise many since we tend to think the law as the epitome of knowledge and conduct. The law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good (Rom. 7:12). That does not mean the law was perfect or would be eternally in effect. It meant that the law set Israel apart, promoted practical righteousness, and resulted in a sense of well-being. God did not give the law to Israel's fathers, but to Israel at the time of Moses (Deut. 5:1-4; Jh. 1:17). Man lived without law for 2,500 years

(Rom. 5:13-14). Christ has ended the law for us (Rom. 10:4). Yet many persist in keeping the law for salvation and as a way of life.

Before believing the gospel, the Gentiles did not know [*oida*] God. They had no objective knowledge [*oida*] for false gods are not even close representations of the true God. They slaved to those things that are not gods. Idolatry is a work of the flesh (5:20) so it is slavery to the sin nature (Rom. 6:17). Man's nature replaces God with creatures or things (cp Rom. 1:21-23). God mocks idolatry as foolish, replacing Him with things that cannot see or know (Isa. 44:8-17; Jer. 10:5). This was the pre-salvation life of the Galatians.

**4:9** Now they have come to know God in their experience [*ginōskō*]. Believing in Jesus Christ is more than a mental assent to facts. It involves an experiential knowledge of God. For this reason, we often speak of salvation as involving a relationship with God. God initiates salvation (cp Jh. 6:44), so Paul changes the active participle “knowing” to the passive participle “being known” by God. While knowing God is important, being known by God is more so. Jesus will tell those who are consigned to the lake of fire, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” (Mt. 7:23). Like Paul, Jesus used the verb *ginōskō*, for He had no experiential knowledge or relationship with them. They never believed in Him. Apart from faith in Him, they do not have eternal life (1 Jh. 5:10-12). Eternal life is God's life and when we use it, we know [*ginōskō*] God in our experience (Jh. 17:3). They do not.

Paul asks how they could turn to the law. He speaks of the law as weak and the poor basic elements. Some object to Paul describing the Law like this. Yet, he

uses “basic elements” [*stoicheia*] of the law in 4:3 and Colossians 2:20. [see notes on 4:3]. It was weak for it could reveal the problem of the sin nature, but not the means to overcome that sin nature. It was poor as it lacked the resources for victory. Paul has already laid this case in chapter three. It seems shocking that Paul would compare the Galatians’ slavery to idols to living by the law. Yet, Paul has explained that the Israelis were like slaves when they were under the Law. Sin is not a master over us, because we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). Living under law brings us into slavery to the sin nature. It does not liberate.

**4:10** He points out their observance of the Mosaic Law’s calendar. Though the opening issue is the push to be circumcised, this demonstrates that the teachers’ goal is to get them to become devotees to law-keeping. They did not see the law as ceremonial, civil, and moral. It was just one whole Law in the eyes of Israel.

**4:11** Paul feared that he had labored among them in vain. Vain [*eiké*] meant without a goal. Did Paul have no purpose when he worked among the believers? NO. He wanted to see them free for freedom allows us to serve. By serving, Christ can be seen in our lives. If however, Paul had labored and yet believers turn to slavery under the law, and this did not produce Christ-likeness. Paul viewed his labor as having a lasting result [perfect tense], but he now questions this. Living by law was not his objective. Paul wished to help believers learn to live liberated by the Spirit.

**4:12** Paul calls the Galatian believers to be like him. “Be” or “become” translates a present middle imperative verb, urging them to action. He points out that he became like them. In what way were they to be

like Paul and in what way had Paul become like them? Paul has just drawn upon his Jewish background (chapter 3ff) to demonstrate some negative aspects of the Law and what it could and could not do. In saying, “I have become even as you,” Paul ceased living under Law. The Galatians were Gentiles who had not been under the Law. In this way, Paul became like them. He was not living under the Law. He criticized Peter for living like a Gentile and then compelling Gentile believers to live like Jews (2:14). Like Peter at Antioch, Paul had been living like a Gentile. Paul is not calling the Galatians to return to their idolatrous way of life but to their Christian life free of the Law.

**4:13** Paul reminds them of how they responded when he first arrived in their cities. The cities of Lystra and Derbe were part of Lyconia and Antioch part of Pisidia. Lyconia and Pisidia were regions of southern Galatia. In Lystra, the opposition to Paul and Barnabas ended in a crowd stoning Paul (Acts 14:19). Because of [*dia*]<sup>57</sup> weakness, Paul evangelized the Galatians. J.B. Lightfoot suggests, “St Paul seems to have been detained in Galatia by illness, so that his infirmity was the cause of his preaching there.”<sup>58</sup> Lightfoot thinks Paul arrived in Galatia after Acts 15, while I think his first visit was in chapters 13-14. Lightfoot thinks Paul’s problem is his thorn in the flesh and possibly a result of something violent. I take that violent act to be his stoning. Often a stoning concluded with an individual dropping a large

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<sup>57</sup> διὰ used with the accusative tense means “because of” or “on account of.” It is a challenge to understand how Paul’s illness was the cause of his evangelization in the Galatian communities.

<sup>58</sup> Lightfoot, op cit. p. 174.

stone from chest height on the victim's head. This would have caused tremendous damage and scarring to Paul's head and face. As Lightfoot suggests, the severity of Paul's injuries may have caused Paul to stay in the region longer than he anticipated.

**4:14** Paul's injuries became the cause of a temptation<sup>59</sup> for the Galatian believers. They did not despise, presumably Paul, nor did they reject him. "Despise" is to make or treat Paul as a nobody. "Reject" is a word meaning to spit out, perhaps having the sense of those who spit to express the distaste for someone or something. It may simply mean that they did not vomit at the sight of Paul's severely bruised and marred face.

The Galatians' response might cause us to consider how much emphasis we put upon the outward appearance of a person speaking God's Word and the surroundings in which we gather to present God's Word. The message should be paramount. Surroundings and appearance cannot make the message more or less acceptable.

Rather than rejecting or being repulsed by his appearance, they welcomed him as God's messenger [*angelos*]. They respected the messenger because he brought a message from God. They welcomed him even as they would welcome Christ Jesus. The message trumped any external reasons for accepting or rejecting.

**4:15** Though the Galatians had started with such interest in the message, now Paul wants to know what

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<sup>59</sup> πειρασμός is the test that expects failure or a negative result. It is often "temptation."

happened to their happiness. Happiness describes their response to Paul and his message. Paul defined this happiness as their willingness to dig out their eyes and give them to Paul. This further indicates that something had damaged Paul's facial appearance and had affected his eyes. Some think that Paul simply uses a cultural expression of the ultimate sacrifice for a friend. Whether a literal wish to give Paul their eyes due to his weakness or figuratively, the idea is that of a caring sacrifice.

**4:16** That happiness is now gone. Paul has become their enemy for speaking truth to them. The perfect tense verb "become" emphasizes a lasting result of something that happened. Paul spoke and acted toward them with truth and it appears it was not received well. Translators and Bible students disagree on whether 4:16 is a question, "Have I become" or a statement, "I have become." Though the question would be easier in this context, Paul seems to anticipate a backlash to his accurate explanation about the Law and its limitations. Since we have no reason to think that Paul has previously dealt with or written the Galatians on this issue, it seems best to understand Paul addressing their response in advance. It is common for one who speaks truth in the genuine interest of others to be considered an enemy or troublemaker for such actions. The believer who steps in to help one caught in a trespass (6:1), may face a similar response.

**4:17** Paul anticipates this attitude toward him because he knows the motives and purposes of those who were presenting the false gospel. They wanted to shut up the Galatians away from Paul so the Galatian believers would pursue them. It is a dangerous habit to

keep people away from others for fear that one will lose the other's allegiance or interest. Cults often isolate their members from families and previous associates, making them dependent exclusively upon the cult leadership. The law-teachers wanted the Galatian believers to zealously pursue them. They were trying to keep the Galatians isolated from Paul or other believers who might encourage true freedom in Christ as opposed to living by the law. Sadly, this methodology happens among believers too. These other "leaders" likely suggest to the Galatians that Paul is the enemy and that he wishes only to undo the "freedom" they have found by becoming law-keepers and pursuing circumcision. We have teachers even today who suggest that God in His grace gave the law and that real freedom is found in keeping the law. Both claims are contrary to plain statements of Scripture.

**4:18** Paul agrees that it is good to be zealous for someone as long as it is for a good thing. Both times "good" translates *kalos*, a beautiful or appreciable good, recognized by others. When writing the Corinthians, Paul warned against loyalty to individual Christian leaders (1 Cor. 3:4). He told the Corinthians that they should look at themselves and other leaders as mere workers in God's plan. They could benefit from any of these workers. To maintain an isolated loyalty to one leader would likely mean that a believer misses out on something God may accomplish through another leader. With that kind of mindset, Paul did not mind the Galatians being zealous toward him. He further encouraged them to this zeal even when he was not present with them. It is common when a notable personality is present in a group, that the group will demonstrate a kind of loyalty to that individual. Later



in their absence, they may tend to turn against the same person.

**4:19** Paul feels as though he is experiencing the pains of childbirth all over again. This time his experience is not to see the Galatians come to faith in Christ but to see Christ formed in them. This again reminds us that the issue of the letter is Christian growth and living, not initial salvation (justification). God's purpose is for believers to be conformed to the image of His Son. The verb "conformed"<sup>60</sup> comes from the same root as the adjective "conformity" in Romans 8:29 and the verb "transformed" in 2 Corinthians 3:18. "Transformed" (2 Cor. 3:18) is the same word used of Christ's transfiguration. It has the idea of demonstrating outwardly an inward reality. Believers have the indwelling Christ and Spirit. Paul taught the Galatians to live by the work of the Spirit. This is how God is presently making this outward form a reality.

**4:20** Paul admits he has taken a tone (voice) with the Galatians that he does not wish to have. He wishes he were present so that he could change that tone. He is perplexed about how the Galatians have chosen to depart from the ministry of the Spirit and turn to the law. In 1:6 he stated his amazement at their turning to this different gospel. That gospel is circumcisions and law-keeping. Our good news for Christian living is that we can and are to live by the ministry of the Spirit and not by the law. We too may share this mental perplexity when we see believers who have experienced true God-given freedom and then they

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<sup>60</sup> This is a passive form of μορφόω. In Romans 8:29 the adjective is σύμμορφος. The verb in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is μεταμορφώω.

turn to the law as a means of living the Christian life. It makes no sense.

**4:21** Some of the Galatian believers wanted to be under the law. If the teachers presented circumcision and law-keeping but no one showed any interest, Paul would not have had to write this letter. Why they desired [*thelō*] to be under law, we do not know. With Paul's explanation about life under law in chapter four and his following explanation, it appears that they did not understand the law and the consequences. He told Timothy that those who wish to be law teachers do not understand what they say or about which they make firm assertions (1 Tim. 1:6-7). So Paul asks if they listen to the law.

**4:22** He illustrates the issue with the account of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and their sons. This account "stands written" [perfect tense], meaning it stands established as God's written truth. Abraham had two sons. One son was born from the slave woman Hagar and one son was born from the free woman Sarah. The word "bondwoman" [NASB] translates *paidiské* which means a slave **girl** or a **young woman** slave. Paul's use of this term reminds us of the problem that Sarah could not conceive. She passed that age for conception. Hagar was Sarah's personal servant who attended to her needs. Paul's choice of this word emphasizes that Hagar was much younger and therefore of child-bearing age.

**4:23** The child born from the slave girl was born [perfect tense] according to the standard of flesh. Though God promised Abraham a descendant and specifically an heir (Gen. 15:4), it was clear that Sarah could not conceive, therefore, she and Abraham conspired to accomplish God's promise themselves

(Gen. 16:1-2). Abraham had believed God's promise of numerous seed in Genesis 15 but he and Sarah doubted that God could produce the seed through Sarah. So they resorted to their own efforts to make it happen and Sarah gave Abraham her slave girl so that she could bear Abraham the son God promised. It was not uncommon for a man and woman to have children through slaves. Abraham's grandson Jacob had sons through both of his wives Rachel and Leah but also through the slave girls of both women. To our modern sensibilities, this is offensive, but it was common in their culture.

Despite it being culturally common, it was not God's plan. God never plans to accomplish His will through the efforts of our flesh. God's work is most often done when it is obvious that we cannot do it ourselves. He is the God of the Truth, the one true God, and the only one who can accomplish the most necessary works. That was true then and remains true. Therefore, the son who came through Sarah, the free woman, was born through the promise of Genesis 15:4 that Abraham would have an heir that would come from his own body.

**4:24** Paul does not deny that this was an historical event, or that any of the characters were imagined. However, he uses this account for an allegory. The participle *allēgoreō* means, "to say what is either designed or fitted to convey a meaning other than the literal one."<sup>61</sup> Paul uses this historical story to represent another principle, to function symbolically for the problem of living by law versus living by God's promise.

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<sup>61</sup> Mounce, op cit,

Paul takes each woman to represent a covenant (two covenants). The first covenant came from [apo] mount Sinai. That covenant bore children [gennaō] to slavery and that is Hagar. God gave Israel the Law while they camped at the base of Mount Sinai. The Law did not produce free people but slaves.

**4:25** So Hagar corresponds to the literal mountain Sinai in Arabia where Israel received the Law, but in the present (at the time Paul wrote Galatians), Hagar corresponds to Jerusalem enslaved with her children. At the time Paul writes this letter, the people of Jerusalem were predominantly Jewish and were living under the Law that God had given 1,500 years earlier. They had added traditions to it but it is not the traditions with which Paul is concerned but the very law itself.

**4:26** Sarah, the free woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above. The Jerusalem above will be our home. One day our Lord and Savior will write the name of that city upon us, for it will be our home (Rev. 3:12). The Church consisting of firstborn ones<sup>62</sup> is present on the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb. 12:22-23). That city is free. That city is our mother. Paul applies this allegory of Sarah as the free woman and mother to the New Jerusalem. The Old Testament personified Jerusalem and Zion as a mother and the

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<sup>62</sup> The adjective “firstborn” is a genitive plural πρωτοτόκων not a singular as though it refers to Christ. Here it refers to the entirety of the Church.

inhabitants as her daughters (Isa. 1:8-9; Zech 9:9).<sup>63</sup> Being residents of the New Jerusalem, it is our free mother, the home of the free.

**4:27-28** Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 which records Judah's condition upon their return from exile. They returned with few descendants, like a barren wife. Paul has compared Sarah and Hagar, where Hagar bore Abraham a child while Sarah could not. So the Gentile believers were few. The Church began with Israelis. It took a few years for those first Israelis in the Church to take the good news to the Gentiles. At first, when Gentiles heard and believed the good news, they were few. Within a few decades, Gentiles believers outnumbered Jewish believers in the Church.

Paul compares Isaiah's prophecy of the barren woman, and her children being more numerous to Gentiles coming into the body of Christ. Her Gentile children are children of promise. This may imply that the law teachers indicated that only those keeping the law are children of promise. However, the Galatians who are primarily Gentile believers, are children of the freewoman apart from keeping the law. They are children of promise. God promised Isaac. God produced Isaac. Isaac was not born through human effort. Isaac was not a child of the flesh. Likewise, the Galatians came into the body through the work of the Spirit and not the flesh (cp 3:2-3). This was also true for Jews in the body.

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<sup>63</sup> In Isaiah 1:8, "daughter" refers to people left unprotected outside the city walls. Those left after a siege would be survivors. Daughters refers to the people or residents. In Zechariah the people their king and are called to shout.

**4:29** When Isaac was born and weaned, Ishmael the son of the flesh laughed (Gen. 21:9). “Laugh” is an intensive verb, “really laughed.” Further, it is the verbal form of Isaac’s name.<sup>64</sup> It may be implied that Ishmael was mocking Isaac’s name. Paul represents this activity as Ishmael persecuting Isaac, therefore, “laughing” is a derogatory, negative, mocking derision.

Paul compares Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac to the present. The one born by the standard of flesh persecutes the one who is by the standard of the Spirit. One who lives by law and teaches others to live by law will persecute others who live by the work of the Spirit. It annoys the legalist to see one who does not live by the outwardly observed standards of the Law. Galatians 5:19-21 lists works that characterize the flesh. Among those works are zeal (jealousy), strife, and hostility, all traits of one who persecutes another. Contrast these to the fruit that the Spirit produces and we find no character that would encourage a believer to persecute another. No matter how noble our motives may be persecuting, mocking, or using guilt to motivate others to action should never characterize our behavior. Our motives should be love, joy, and peace. Persecution is the action of those who wish to live by the law.

**4:30** Sarah told Abraham to throw the slave woman and her son out of their camp. Her son would not share his inheritance with Hagar’s son (Gen. 21:10). First, unbelievers who pursue law, whether of Jewish or Gentile background do not inherit with believers. Second, and this issue is more serious, because believers

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<sup>64</sup> Isaac’s name is יִצְחָק and the piel stem “laugh” is יָצַח. Notice the underlined letters.

who pursue the Law, and Paul's letter would make no sense if some of the Galatians were not doing so, they miss out on our present inheritance. Inheritance, as was seen in 3:26-4:7, is not only a future matter but also includes promises related to our present life. Our present inheritance involves freedom and the use of eternal life. Eternal life can only be used as we live by grace in the Spirit's work. It is not possible if we try to live by the law.

**4:31** Paul assures his readers, for he is writing to believers in Galatia, that we are not children from the slave but the free. We need to recognize this, for as he is about to say that we need to stand in that freedom.

**5:1** Christ freed us for the sake of freedom. This understands the form τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ as a dative of advantage "for the sake of." Paul wrote to warn Christians against turning to law as a way of life, specifically for maturing (3:3-4). This freedom exists when believers operate "in Christ" (2:4). To operate in Christ is the way I communicate Paul's idea of setting our mind on things above in Christ (cf. Col. 3:1-3). God promises us no freedom when we choose to operate outside of Christ, such as setting our minds to things of the flesh (cf. Rom 8:4-5; 6:16-18).

Because Christ has freed us, we should stand implying freedom and not become entangled again in a yoke of slavery. Remember, the Galatians were primarily Gentiles and had been enslaved to idols (4:8). Paul warns them away from becoming entangled or held [ἐνέχω] in a different slavery, slavery to law. His use of "yoke" may reflect Peter's description of the law,

as a yoke that neither Israel's fathers nor Peter's generation could carry (Acts 15:10). Peter's verb *bastadzō* meant to carry a heavy load. Those who wish to be under law need to see how those who lived under the law referred to it as a heavy, unbearable yoke. Furthermore, Paul calls it a yoke of slavery, not the freedom for which Christ had freed them. How does turning to the law honor Christ who acted to free us? It does not.

**5:2** Paul calls the Galatians to pay attention, "Look:" (ESV). He does not want them to miss what he means by yoke of slavery, for it is the law and it begins with being circumcised. If they should choose circumcision, Christ will not be any benefit (future tense of ὠφελέω) to them. Their freedom exists in Christ. If they choose to live by law, they are not living in Christ, and so He does not provide them a benefit. This is not a loss of salvation. This benefit is maturity and stability in their relationship with God.

**5:3** Paul was a Jew raised under the Law, in fact, a Pharisee or one who looked out for the proper teaching of the Law and charged others to keep the Law. With this background, Paul witnesses what the law requires of one who becomes circumcised. Whether the false teachers understood this, Paul wants it clear that under the umbrella of law, circumcision is not sufficient. One is obligated [ὀφειλέτης] to do the whole law. Moses called all Israel to keep and do the statutes, judgments, and commands from God (Deut. 4:5-6). Like the Galatians, most modern Christians do not appreciate what it is like to live by law. While we may not emphasize circumcision, many press the ten commandments as a summary of the Law. However, the



text in Exodus that follows the commands or the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy illustrate the minute details that made up life under Law. Life under Law differs greatly from what most Christians think. A Jew such as Paul knew those details.

**5:4** The believer who turns to life under law renders himself unproductive or idle. Paul starts this sentence with the verb *katargeō* [καταργέω], which means “to make ineffective, powerless lit. use up, waste.”<sup>65</sup> Luke 13:7 illustrates this verb well, in a story of a landowner who has not found fruit in a vineyard for three years. In the final clause, the landowner tells his workers to remove the vineyard and concludes, “Why does it even **use up** the ground?” [NASB] or “Why should it continue to **deplete** the soil?” [NET]. As long as the vineyard remained it made the land or soil idle or ineffective because the land could not be used for any useful purpose. Paul uses the verb in a passive form, “You are made idle.” Believers who turn to life under law likely think they are very busy in all their service. However, they are idle from God’s perspective. They are not accomplishing God-given service in the body of Christ.

Paul addresses believers who are attempting to be righteous by keeping law. Paul uses the present middle form of the verb “justify.” In this context, the present tense emphasizes their ongoing activity and the middle voice emphasizes their personal interest and attempts to be justified by law-keeping. That is not God’s desire for the believer today. Christ ended the law as a means of righteousness (Rom. 10:4). As

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<sup>65</sup> Gingrich, op cit. p. 104. Thomas Sheldon Green has, “to render useless or unproductive, occupy unprofitably.” op cit. p. 96.

evangelicals, we often understand the verb “justify” or the noun “justification” as referring to initial salvation. However, context, not the word itself, determines its meaning. This is one location where “be justified” does not indicate initial salvation. Paul is writing to believers. They know they are believers. The false teachers did not enter and convince these believers they are not saved because they lacked something. They entered and taught Christian living or present tense salvation by law. If they follow this teaching, it results in idleness.

The idleness is not absolute but “away from Christ.” Many of our English Bibles have “severed,” “cut off from,” or “alienated” from Christ. Recall that the verb means to make idle. It does not mean to sever, cut off, or alienate. Rather, when a believer turns to law to be justified in his daily conduct, he is not relating to who God says he is in Christ. In Christ, he stands as one who is already righteous, who is a free son. Paul calls believers to walk “in Him” (Col. 2:6), and he wanted to be “found in Him” (Php. 3:9). Yet a believer seeking to live by law does not view his life and activities through that perspective. Since he does not operate “in Christ,” he is idle regarding the activities God desires for us. He may be very active in religious duties, even to the point of being able to boast about himself or that others who compelled him to live by law can boast in him. However, he is idle from God’s point of view.

Our place in Christ is because of God’s grace. “He has graced us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). Our failures or sins cannot cut off or sever us from Christ. We can fall from God’s grace. Neither falling from grace nor being rendered idle away from Christ describe a loss of

salvation. If falling from grace means it is possible to lose one's salvation, the very nature of grace is ruined. If at initial salvation we were not worthy of God's work, how could our unworthy actions cause us to lose God's work in the present? If Paul is speaking of unbelievers trying to attain righteousness before God by works, they were never in Christ. They cannot be severed from Christ because they were never united with Christ. Neither have they experienced God's grace, therefore they cannot fall from it. However, a believer who does not live or operate in Christ (see the previous paragraph), is not only idle because they operate apart from Christ, but they also are not consciously operating under God's grace and in practice have fallen from grace. In a similar situation, the Hebrew believers were warned not to lack God's grace (Heb. 12:15). The Hebrew believers had never stopped living under the Law and its rituals. They knew some benefits of grace but risked fully operating apart from grace, and this resulted in bitterness that would cause many more troubles not only for themselves but many others. So Paul also warns the Galatians of falling from grace, which will also impact how they live towards others, a point which Paul develops in the following verses.

**5:5** We believers are eagerly expecting the hope of righteousness by the Spirit. They began by the Spirit (3:3). The Spirit cries out, "ABBA, FATHER." in their hearts (4:6). The Spirit is the believer's down payment on our full salvation in the future (Eph. 1:13-14). The Spirit is a first fruits or provides us a sample of our completed salvation (Rom. 8:23). The Spirit works to produce character in our lives that matches what our final salvation will be. In this way, He produces in believers the eager expectation that we can do

genuinely righteous acts from faith. They are from [ek] faith because God has promised us that He will work out righteousness in us. Our righteous works involve acts of love towards other believers (5:6; 1 Jh. 3:10). That promise produces hope. Faith makes that hope substantial so we act upon it. As a result, we love another and this is righteous.

**5:6** In our standing in Christ Jesus, our earthly status as circumcised or uncircumcised provides us no strength. Our English versions and many lexicons represent the verb *ischuō* as having validity or meaning something. However, Paul is speaking about righteousness in actions. Those actions do not spring from the strength that arises from a physical mark (circumcision) in the flesh or the lack of that physical mark. Rather, faith works in us through means of love, that is acts being done through an attitude of love. Faith as seen in 5:5 rests on the hope that by the Spirit we can have practical righteousness, but not from law-works or a law-related ritual. It rests solely on God's promise.

**5:7** "You were running well." Paul acknowledges that the Galatian believers had been living as God planned and as the Spirit led. This again supports the proper understanding that the problem that precipitated this letter was teachers telling believers that circumcision and law-keeping are necessary for Christian growth or present-tense salvation. If these Galatians had bought into a different gospel for initial salvation, we have to question whether they truly believed. If this were the problem, could Paul have said that they had run well? But, if the problem is Christian life teaching, then it makes sense to claim that they had

been living well but their Christian life had been hindered by the imposition of law standards.

Paul wished to know who hindered the Galatian believers from obeying the truth. The verb “hindered” [*engkoptō* ἔγκόπτω] meant to “cut in” and to hinder by cutting into one’s path so as to impede progress. The Truth is that body of doctrine that reveals that God alone accomplishes through us His works (Jh. 3:21). The Truth stands opposed to life by law because a law lifestyle implies that we think we can achieve righteousness by obeying the Law. However, the Truth teaches us that we cannot. The Truth explains how we rely on God to allow Him to accomplish His work in us. Therefore, these other teachers hindered the Galatians by convincing them that they could obey the Law and could achieve righteousness before God by doing so.

**5:8** Someone had persuaded them to live by the Law and Paul asserts that it wasn’t the One who called them. The One who called them is the Holy Spirit. They began by the Spirit (3:2-3). He called them, placed them into Christ (baptized), joined them to Christ (regenerated), and now leads. He called them to freedom in Christ by placing them in Christ. The Spirit did not give us this freedom in Christ and then persuade us to live by Law.

**5:9** A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Christ referred to leaven as corrupting teaching. Though leaven is small, it can leaven three measures of meal, perhaps a hint at the corruption of the doctrine of the Trinity (Mt. 13:33). He warned of corrupting teaching of the Jewish religious leaders (Mt. 16:6, 11-12). Paul viewed the idea that the church can tolerate sin among its members as subtle leaven that corrupts the whole church, meaning it will negatively influence the

conduct of other believers (1 Cor. 5:6-8). The teaching that believers should be circumcised to grow, seemed subtle, even harmless. Indeed, Paul circumcised Timothy, but he did so for the sake of the Jews. He did not do so to advance Timothy in the Faith. What the false teachers presented minor neglect by and a small matter to rectify has grown into a serious departure from the Christian life. The leaven has worked and is permeating the whole.

**5:10** Despite having to address this problem, Paul expresses His confidence about them in the Lord, that they will not set their minds [future of φρονέω]. Interestingly, that “other” is ἄλλος which normally indicates an other that is similar. We would expect other that is different or distinct. Probably Paul recognizes that even a slight deviation from the proper frame of mind, like leaven, can have a huge impact. So, setting their minds to the proper truths of who they are in Christ is much better.

The one continuing to press this issue in the local churches will have to bear the burden for doing so. In chapter one, Paul asked that he be benched or sidelined (accursed). Here, Paul takes up the metaphor of a heavy weight of the law—a yoke—and places that weight on this individual. Paul uses a verb for bearing a burden, but rather than use a word for burden or weight he calls it judgment. If a believer is pressing this teaching, his judgment may be chastening. If it is an unbeliever, his judgment would be more severe. Whoever, it is (Paul is uncertain), there will be consequences for pressing believers to resort to their flesh by pressing them to observe the law.

**5:11** It has been suggested a few times in this letter that the false teachers may be suggesting that Paul agrees with them and may have omitted this detail by accident. Paul corrects any such implication. He was suffering persecution largely by resistance from Jews. He asks why he is still being persecuted if he proclaims circumcision. He does not. He teaches freedom from every facet of the law and that includes circumcision. He was also teaching the new identity of believers in Christ. That new identity did not connect us to Abraham by being his genetic descendants, or by being circumcised. We are descendants of Abraham only as we are in Christ, and He is the promised descendant. So, we have no requirement for circumcision in that way either. Today, some teach that we come into the covenant relationship with God by water baptism. They teach that water baptism has replaced the ritual of circumcision. This is also false. It is not taught in Scripture. It is a theological deduction without Scriptural support. Paul did not herald circumcision or a replacement. He heralded Christ and who we are in Him.

The cross was a stumbling point for the Jews. They anticipated a King who would liberate them from Gentile dominion. They could not put together the Scriptures that foretold His death with those that foretold His throne, reign, and glory. Therefore, when the apostles proclaimed the cross, the Jews stumbled over it (1 Cor. 1:23; 1 Pet. 2:8). A “stumbling block” [*skandalon* σκάνδαλον] was a foot trap or snare or sometimes a large object that halted the progress of another. For many Jews, the cross stopped that progress. They were unwilling to accept that their Anointed King should first suffer.

The cross was also about Christ bearing the sins and curses of the people. If He has borne them, why is it necessary for us to follow some ritual to achieve what He alone achieved? In this way, the cross is also an impediment because it confronts people with what we cannot do and what God alone can do and has done. Attempting any kind of standing before God by law is one of those we cannot do and which we do not need to do because He has achieved righteousness for us through the cross.

**5:12** Paul uses strong harsh language to express his wish for these false teachers. He wishes they would cut off their male organ. The word circumcise means to “cut around.” It translates the Greek περιτέμνω [peritemnō] that also meant to “cut” [τέμνω] “around [περί]. Paul plays off this idea with stronger terminology to “cut off” [αποκοπτῶ ἀποκόπτω] where ἀπό is “off” and κόπτω is “cut.” So rather than making a small cut to remove some skin, he wished for them to remove the whole member. In Philippians 3:2, Paul plays directly off the Greek word circumcise with κατατομή [katatomé] where the prefixed preposition κατα means “down” and the noun τομή means “a cut.” So rather than cutting around, it was the more drastic cutting down. This reminds us that while Paul encourages us to let our speech be with grace and seasoned, he found times in which stronger language was necessary to communicate the seriousness of the matter.

Whereas Paul has referred to these as “troublers” from *tarassō* to share or agitate, Paul uses the verb ἀναστατώ [anastatoō] that means to incite,



to make people stand up and come out of their homes in a commotion.<sup>66</sup> Unbelievers accused Paul of this, as though Paul was trying to stir the first believers in various cities to riot—he was not—(Acts 17:6; 21:38). By this term, Paul may be implying that these individuals were rousing the Galatian believers to revolt against God. Certainly moving to life by law would have been contrary to God’s plan. Such actions called for a harsh wish, that they would be “cut off.”

**5:13** You were called to freedom. Paul established that this freedom is in Christ (2:4). Only as we live in Christ, as we set our minds to who we are in Christ do we experience this freedom. Outside of Christ, we make ourselves a slave of our sinful nature (Rom. 6:16). “You” refers only to believers for they alone have freedom being the only ones in Christ where this freedom exists.

Paul warns us against misusing this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. The noun *aphormé* translated “opportunity” in the NASB was used for “a place from which a movement or attack is made, a base of operations”<sup>67</sup> or “a starting point; means to accomplish an object; occasion, opportunity.”<sup>68</sup> In this letter, Paul uses “flesh” [*sarx*] of people (1:16), of our physical nature (2:20), but also of our bent nature, corrupted and contrary to God’s purpose (3:3; 4:23). Paul will speak of the flesh as having cravings that are against the Spirit (5:16) and that the flesh has works, which are inappropriate for believers (5:19-21). Paul is

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<sup>66</sup> Cp. Mounce, op cit. entry G415

<sup>67</sup> Thayer, op cit., 874.

<sup>68</sup> Mounce, op cit., G929.

concerned that people will misunderstand this freedom and think that it includes freedom to engage in activity that rises from this corrupted part of our being. Does freedom mean that sexual immorality, idolatry, or drunkenness are OK because we are free? No. That misses the point of freedom. This also means that other works of the flesh are equally unacceptable for accomplishing God's will, such as hostility, arguing, or anger. Christians justify our becoming hostile towards error and sin, arguing for a particular truth, or getting angry with sinful matters. We even speak of righteous indignation. God and Jesus Christ can exercise anger without it tipping into sin. They have no fallen nature, therefore their attitudes are always righteous. We, however, still have a sinful part of our nature, and resorting to any attitude associated with that nature is a dangerous slippery slope. Paul wrote, "Be angry,<sup>69</sup> and do not sin, do not let the sunset on something provoking your anger." (Eph. 4:26).

The point of freedom from the law is to serve other believers through love. God freed us so we can present ourselves to Him and serve Him (Rom. 6:13). Several texts tell us that we serve God by serving other believers (cp. Rom. 12:1-8). "Serve" translates *douleuō* "to be a slave, serve, do service."<sup>70</sup> Being a slave to others means we do what they need, rather than pursuing our interests and agendas. This freedom is also freedom from our selfish agenda.

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<sup>69</sup> The verb is an imperative, interpreted as an imperative of permission. It may then have the sense, "Go ahead and be angry..." and probably has a sarcastic sense.

<sup>70</sup> Thayer, op cit., 1398.

**5:14** Paul uses the law as an illustration of the role of love. He means the Mosaic Law, that God gave Israel through the agency of Moses (Jh. 1:17). All the law, every command, is fulfilled by one statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not avenge, or bear a grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." Beginning in Leviticus 19:9, God commands Israel to consider the needs of other Israelis and not act against them. "Neighbor" refers to "the sons of your people" (19:18). "Sons" can refer to the male descendants but metaphorically extends to all descendants of Israel. A neighbor was not just any person in the world, but another Israeli. For us, a brother or neighbor refers to another believer, not just anyone in the world. If Israel attended to loving each other, they would not violate the commands out of loving care for others. Many of the Law's commands forbid acts against others. Even idolatry could bring judgment on the nation and therefore affect others. Similarly, if we love by serving other believers, we avoid actions of our corrupt sinful nature termed the flesh.

**5:15** Paul warns believers against the consequences of fighting with other believers. He warns that if they are biting one another and eating each other, they should beware of being eaten by others. This is a conflict between saints pictured as people snapping at each other. When we begin to act towards others in a hostile manner-and we always have justification for our actions-we may find that we become the victim having incited others to the same actions.

Paul's warning demonstrates that a result of turning to the Law for Christian living is that we resort to our corrupt nature. When we resort to our corrupt nature; we act from our flesh towards others. We determine that others need a good dose of righteous indignations (anger) to motivate them, so we bite at each other. This fails and only produces more problems and more hostility. Biting incites more biting, or anger incites more anger. James states that our anger does not produce God's righteousness (Jas. 1:20). We might suggest that God can give us righteous anger, but we do not find anger in the list of fruit that the Spirit produces.

**5:16** Paul calls the Galatians to walk by the Spirit instead of resorting to the law and the flesh for accomplishing God's purposes. The Spirit refers here to the Holy Spirit, not our human spirit. The word "spirit" [*pneuma*] occurs seventeen times in Galatians. 6:1, 18 likely refers to the believer's human spirit. 3:2, 5, 14; 4:6 surely refer to the Holy Spirit we received from faith, and as the Spirit God supplies and promised, and the Spirit of the Son. The remaining occurrences must be determined by context. Because 3:2 refers to the Holy Spirit, 3:3 also refers to the Holy Spirit as the person of the Godhead by whom we began; the Spirit regenerating us upon our faith in Christ (cp Jh. 3:3-6). Because Paul has been contrasting life by the flesh to life by the Holy Spirit or life by our own human efforts versus life by the work of God, it makes no sense in our present text to understand spirit to refer to anything but the Holy Spirit. Paul calls us to walk by the Divine Spirit.

Paul says, “walk” in the imperative mood, expressing urgency. “Walk” [*peripateō*] can refer to the act of walking, or metaphorically refer to how we live our lives. Romans 8:4-5 connects walking with how we frame our minds or on what we set our minds [*phroneō* and *phrēn*]. Therefore, we walk by the flesh or by the Spirit by setting our minds on the interests of the flesh or the interests of the Spirit respectively. Romans 8:2 indicates that the Spirit wants us to relate to our life in Christ Jesus. This is the believer’s position in Christ where God counts us to have shared in Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom. 6:2-4, 11). When we set our minds to our life in Christ Jesus, we are walking by means of the Spirit. Paul holds out the promise that if we walk by means of the Spirit, we will not fulfill the cravings of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). “Fulfill” translates *teleō*, “to bring to a close, to finish, to end...to perform, execute, complete fulfill.”<sup>71</sup> The flesh has cravings expressed in the works listed in 5:19-21. It has cravings for sexual activity, for worship, for self-integrity and preservation, for personal comfort, and pleasure. Of themselves, these cravings were built into Adam and Eve by God. When Adam sinned, he bent his nature so that those cravings now seek satisfaction in ways contrary to God’s plan. For example, sexual immorality satisfies a craving God planned to be met with one’s spouse, and idolatry seeks to fulfill one’s craving for worship with the worship of alternatives to God. When we walk by means of the Spirit, setting our minds to our life in Christ Jesus, we do not act upon the cravings as the flesh desires.

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<sup>71</sup> Thayer, op cit., 5055.

**5:17** Both the flesh and the Spirit have cravings. The Holy Spirit desires good things for us, things that glorify God. Jesus stated that the Spirit would glorify Him, taking things about Christ and announcing them to His disciples (Jh. 16:13). The Spirit has united believers as one in Christ and it is God's will that we guard that unity (Eph. 4:1-2).<sup>72</sup> However, the flesh craves against the Spirit, so that, while the Spirit desires unity, the flesh craves division with any who do not agree with one's individual choices (5:20). As a result, we cannot do what we desire. God produces/works the desire in believers (Php. 2:13). As a result of God's work, believers have desires for good things. However, apart from the work of the Spirit, the believer cannot accomplish such things (Rom. 7:18-19).

**5:18** "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." The verb *agō*, often translated "lead" or "go," refers to someone taking the lead as they travel. So often it involves a physical movement, therefore a physical leading. The present passage is a non-physical leading. As God's kindness leads a person to a change of mind (Rom. 2:4) or a person may be led by a variety of lusts, the Spirit's leading involves a way of thinking. The context encourages us to think of this as a mental leading. Some take the "leading of the Spirit" as a catchall for decision-making, "Why did you do \_\_\_\_\_?" However, the leading of the Spirit occurs in only two passages, and neither involves a matter of determining God's will in the popular sense (Rom. 8:14). Both texts refer to "walking by the Spirit." (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 4:4-5). (For "walking" see notes in 5:15.) The context of

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<sup>72</sup> This is not a unity at any cost, but a unity related to being in Christ.

Galatians points to the Spirit leading the believer's mind to consider who he is in Christ. The same is true in Romans 8. Romans 8:2 states that the Spirit frees us with reference to our life in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:5-6 states that this involves a frame of mind with truths from the Spirit.

When the believer follows the Spirit's lead, which also means he is walking by means of the Spirit, he is not under law. The law proscribed the life of Israel for about 1,500 years. It addressed details of life from cooking, and sanitation, to moral interactions. Rather than having a detailed set of commands to define our lives, the Spirit leads us to who we are in Christ, and what God says about us in Christ becomes the framework that affects how we will respond to the cravings of our flesh, or from Satan or the world. The preposition "under" [ὑπὸ] describes direct agency rather than an intermediate agent as expressed by *dia* or an impersonal means or tool expressed by *en*. The Law acted as the direct agent for their way of life. It no longer does. Not only is the Mosaic Law not the standard of Christian living but no law is. The noun law has no definite article in this passage. This is a theme and concern in this letter: the Spirit's work versus the law.

### **5:19-21            The Works of the flesh.**

Paul contrasts the works of the flesh in 5:19-21 to the fruit from the Spirit in 5:22-23. The "works" of the flesh are what the flesh does. When a believer resorts to law-keeping, he also resorts to his flesh. However, when a believer walks by the Spirit, the Spirit produces fruit. The fruit emphasizes something good that the Spirit does. The flesh, being under law, works.

To this point, Paul has used the noun “works” six times and always “works of law” [ἔργων νόμου] (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). Believers doing works of law think they are doing something good. The present text, by using “works of the flesh” brings out the real problem. The believer chooses to operate by the flesh and so the flesh is really working not the Spirit. However, when the believer walks by the Spirit, the emphasis is not on works but on fruit.

The works of the flesh are plainly visible [φανερὰ ... ἔστιν]. They are not hard to identify.

**Fornication** refers to sexual activity outside the boundary of marriage of between a man and woman. It frequently referred to sexual intercourse but may include other acts. The marriage bed is undefiled regarding these activities (Heb. 13:4). Immorality selfishly seeks this outside marriage. The Textus Receptus and the Majority (Byzantine) text list adultery prior to fornication, but a variety of texts omit it. Even if the word adultery is absent, it is included under the larger term fornication.

**Uncleanness** is also related to sexual immorality but encompasses chiefly the attitude which may influence other actions. A man may be kind to a woman but with less than pure thoughts (Eph. 4:19; 5:3). Paul encouraged Timothy to relate to the younger women as sisters in all purity (1 Tim. 5:2). One may obey the Law’s commands while thinking inappropriately about others.

**Lewdness** also designated sensuality, describes inappropriate sexual activity, specifically overt, public, shameless activity, which is considered outrageous.



Louw and Nida suggest, “behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness.”<sup>73</sup> It is paired with “sexual intercourse” in Romans 13:13 and with fornication and uncleanness also in 2 Corinthians 12:21. What is appropriate between a husband and wife in private is not appropriate before others. This is true in many situations. Talking about or bragging on such matters with someone other than one’s spouse is an example.

Though such unrighteous sexual actions and attitudes seem abhorrent to a legal moralist because Paul has demonstrated that one who turns to law resorts to his flesh, such people may be shocked to find what they are capable of doing, even such actions and attitudes.

**Idolatry** is any act that replaces God with an alternative to worship or give allegiance. Twice Paul tells us that covetousness is idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). The New Testament word translated covetousness [πλεονεξία] has the idea of having more as though what one has is not enough and more will bring fulfillment. Rather than being satisfied with God, one makes “more” an idol.

**Sorcery** or **superstition** involves the idea that we can affect outcomes by some means such as uttering words, perhaps in a spell, using drugs or potions, going to a special location, or performing certain rituals. The problem is that we Christians have our own

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<sup>73</sup> *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Editors (NY, the United Bible Societies, 1988). Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.

superstitions by which we attempt to affect our lives or those of others. In the future, the great prostitute, a religious, political, and commercial city will use superstition to lead astray all nations (Rev. 18:23). Believers can lead themselves astray thinking we can affect things apart from God alone.

The person who attempts to live by law, resorting to his flesh, may find himself craving more and lacking contentment in what God has provided. While one may never bow to a carved image, they will bow to those things they think will bring fulfillment. When God does not provide what they desire, they may resort to superstitious ideas in an attempt to acquire them.

**Hostility** involves the animosity between individuals or groups. Herod and Pilate had been hostile towards each other (Lk. 23:12). The related form *echthros* means enemy (Lk. 1:71, 74). Paul viewed the Law as a wall that caused hostility between Gentiles and Jews because the Law drew a sharp distinction between the two groups (Eph. 2:14). The flesh's (sin nature's) frame of mind is not neutral toward God but hostile (Rom. 8:7).

**Strife** is an argumentative demeanor. Paul places strife between "debate" and "fighting," as arguing for a certain way of thinking or acting fits with debate and fighting (Tit. 3:9). The matter in Titus 3:9 involves people wishing to argue for and prove that the Law is valid for Christian living. Titus is warned against engaging in such arguments. Arguing is not limited to Biblical subjects but is as diverse as individual interests.

**Zeal**, often translated "jealousy," refers to the drive to succeed at any cost, not caring for how one's actions

affect others. We may be reluctant to translate this “zeal” as Christians often reserve zeal for its positive uses (Tit. 2:14). A person with righteous zeal pushes themselves to be better but always in consideration of others’ needs. Paul had a negative zeal that drove him to persecute the Church (Php. 3:6). He was never satisfied and so pressed himself to an obsession with riding Judaism of those of the way (Acts 9:2). People may be zealous but not properly [*kalōs*] (Gal. 4:17-18). Such zeal can be bitter (Jas. 3:14).

**Anger** is used for two keywords. Here it is *thumos* while in other texts we find *orgē*. Both occur together demonstrating they have distinct ideas (Eph. 4:31; Rev. 16:19). *Orgē* is the more overt explosive form of anger. Trench referred to the Stoics’ understanding that *thumos* was the beginning of *orgē*.<sup>74</sup> In Revelation 16:19 the cup of the wine of God’s anger [*thumos*] is characterized as His overt settled anger [*orgē*]. *Thumos* (our word) is then the simmering heat of anger.

These four works of the flesh are easily seen in the attitudes and actions of the legalist. Paul was consumed with hostility, zeal, and anger in his pursuit of early Christians. Paul told us that just as the son of the slave persecuted the one born of the Spirit, so it is today. The one who turns to law persecutes the one who lives in freedom in Christ, freedom produced by the Spirit (Gal. 4:28-29).

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<sup>74</sup> R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Associate Publishers and Authors) p. 124, §37.

**Selfish ambition** describes “the service of a party, party spirit; feud, faction.”<sup>75</sup> Whatever may be said or pretended, selfish ambition is the pursuit of actions to further what may benefit one’s self without regard to how it affects others. In this way, it is the opposite of love and goodness as part of the fruit in 5:22. Self ambition is behind the actions of all people apart from God (Rom. 2:8). Paul said that some people even proclaim Christ from selfish ambition wishing to make Paul’s imprisonment worse (Php. 1:17). Actions done from zeal and selfish ambition will result in disorderliness and worthless activity (Jas. 3:16). A believer living by law lives by his flesh and so acts from selfish ambition. Selfish ambition taints everything a law-keeping<sup>76</sup> believer does.

**Dissensions** or **divisions** indicate a division within a group, but not necessarily that two separate groups result. So, Paul charged the Roman believers to mark those believers who were causing divisions and tripping points contrary to what they were taught and had learned (Rom. 16:17). Such individuals are driven by selfish ambition as seen in Paul’s statement in 16:18 that they do not serve Christ but their own bellies. These people were dividing immature/weak believers from strong not wishing to give up their “right” to eat

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<sup>75</sup> Mounce, op cit. entry G2249.

<sup>76</sup> A law-keeping believer is trying to live daily righteousness before God and others by means of the Law. Paul kept law when around immature believers and unbelievers so that his behavior was not a tripping point in his communicating the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Note, that he also matched his character to lawless people for the same reason.

whatever they wish (belly becomes more literal). The group stays together, but the one group likely bullies the others into not inconveniencing them.

**Factions** or **heresies** follow closely with dissensions as the former can become the basis of the latter. Heresies are misapplied doctrines due to personal choice rather than the plain teaching of God's Word. So, God's Word states that we are not under law and that Christ is the end of law for righteousness (Rom. 6:14; 10:4). However, some choose to be under law rather than listening to these plain statements. Paul stated that one who wished to argue over the law was to be avoided after two warnings (Tit. 2:9-10). Paul calls this person a "heretic" [AV] or "divisive." "Heretic" pronounces the Greek word but does not interpret it. "Divisive" only gets part of the emphasis, as the word also focuses on choosing what truths one will hold. So a believer who wishes to pursue the Christian life by law and to teach others to do so is making a choice contrary to the plain statement of Scripture. Some have stated that a heretic is an unbeliever, but Titus 3:10 seems to indicate that what Paul considered a heretic is a believer who doesn't wish to stay with the doctrine he taught them. Luke applied the term to the "sect" of the Sadducees, as they chose to reject certain teachings such as the resurrection and the angels (Acts 5:17). He also applies it to the "sect" of the Pharisees among the believers as they held strongly to the law even as changes were being introduced to the Church (Acts 15:5). The Jews identified the Way as a sect of Judaism because it held to doctrines distinct from Judaism (Acts 24:14). Factions or heresies marked the Corinthian church as they were not in agreement on truths and conduct and deviated from the truth Paul taught and the conduct he demonstrated (1 Cor. 11:19).

**Envy** is similar to our idea of jealousy. Envy experiences pain and anger at the experience another person has or an object another obtains, while the first person does not. The religious leaders handed Jesus over to the Romans because of envy (Matt. 27:18). They were angry and hurt over the attention He garnered among the people. Certain believers who wished to teach the law for Christian living, did so because they envied and thought that honoring God (godliness) was a means of gain (1 Tim. 1:7, 6:4-6). They were hurt by what others had and experienced that they did not. In just a few verses after listing the works of the flesh, Paul warned the Galatians against envying other believers, for it was a trespass (Gal. 5:26-6:1). In the body, we should rejoice with those who rejoice, not envy their honor or benefit.

**Murder** does not occur in all Bibles. The Greek word for envy is *pfthonoi* [φθόνοι] and the murder is *phono* [φόνου]. They are one letter different. It is understandable how a copyist missed the *th* in murder and when looking back at the document they were copying thought they had already copied it and so did not copy the second word. Murder should be in this list. Murder is the violent senseless killing of another human being. Murder is not killing. God has killed and ordered others to kill in certain situations. Murder is when men take it upon themselves to kill out of selfishness, anger, hatred, zeal, envy, idolatry, divisions, riotous partying, drunkenness, and sexual immorality. In other words, killing due to some conflict involving the works of the flesh is murder. Jesus called Satan a “murder” but He used a word meaning something closer to manslaughter. People have died as a result of Satan’s actions though that was not his intent. He,

however, did not care, as his purpose was all he cared about.

**Drunkness** is the consumption of alcohol to the point that one's senses do not function well (Eph. 5:18). God has saved us and part of that salvation involves the birth from above in our spirit (Jh. 3:3, 5). God has given us the ability to think clearly about His truth. Drunkness impedes this ability. Drunkness characterizes an evil servant (Lk. 12:45). Drunkness often accompanies riotous partying (Rm. 13:13).

**Partying** or **Riotous Partying** described drunken parades often made at night. Sometimes these parties were classified as orgies involving a sexual or unrestrained element. The idea of a wild party agrees with Peter's placing it between drunkenness or flowing wine and drinking parties. Thus the riotous or wild unrestrained character distinguishes it from the other two.

**Things like these** indicates that Paul's list is not exhaustive. However, there is not a complete other list. Additional works would be classified as works like these. So while drunkenness often involves alcohol, there is impairment of the senses that may accompany gluttony or the eating of too much food. Though this list does not single out a wide variety of unrighteous sexual works, they can be classified among the three or four works in this list. Paul ties covetousness with idolatry twice, so that it would fall amid these works. Paul lists one variety of anger [*thumos*] but *orgé* would also be included. This list includes "strife" or argumentativeness, but in other texts, Paul talks about arguing or debating and connects it with the present age (1 Cor. 1:20). Yet the age is like this world (Eph.

2:2-3) and it holds out appeals for our fallen sinful nature (1 Jh. 2:16). Fighting over words, which happens often among Bible students, is helpful for nothing and leads to ruin for those who hear the arguing (2 Tim. 2:14; 23; Tit. 3:9). Paul also speaks of divisions with the Greek *schism*, which means to rend or split in two. In Corinth that split was along party or loyalty lines to various leaders, all of whom were only doing their God-given job and not intending to draw anyone after themselves (1 Cor. 1:10). Those divisions also rent the rich from the poor (11:18), and those with showy gifts from those with less showy but equally important gifts (12:25). These works find many variations in man's activity.

### **Consequences**

Paul had previously warned the Galatians that those who practice [*prassō*] such things do not inherit *the* kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21). Paul makes a similar statement in Ephesians 5:5 but says they have no inheritance in that kingdom. Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 6:10 concludes a list of unrighteous people with the reminder that they will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul then adds, "such were some of you; but you washed yourselves, were set apart, but you were declared righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God." (6:11). This last phrase reminds us that Paul is not claiming that believers may be saved and escape hell but may not inherit the kingdom or have an inheritance in it. Rather, in each statement, he reminds believers that the unsaved people who live like this do not share in our inheritance. Paul is attempting to get the believers to realize that when they do these works they are living



like those who have no inheritance. It is like asking why they would want to live like those people. Some have understood Paul to be suggesting that not all believers will be in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the sphere of salvation (Jh. 3:3-6). The kingdom of God has a practical aspect in present tense salvation (1 Cor. 4:20; Rom. 14:17).

### **5:22-23 The Fruit from the Spirit**

When Jesus introduced Christian living truths in John 13-17, He spoke of fruit. He described our relationship to Him as branches growing from Him, the vine. He instructed believers to abide or be at ease in Him and He too would be at ease in us (Jh. 15:5). This results in a branch bearing fruit. Whereas the flesh produces works, for the nature of the flesh is to work, the Spirit produces fruit. When believers abide in Christ, when we live in appreciation of who God says we are in Christ, the Spirit produces fruit in us. It is not work because we are not endeavoring to produce something, we are simply resting in who we are in Christ. In that frame of mind, we indeed are productive by the Spirit's work in us.

Many, including myself, have attempted to find groups of fruit that contrast to groups of the works of the flesh. This can be done, but in this present study, I will consider only what Scripture teaches about each part of the fruit.

The fruit is singular, though we often treat it as a plural, comparing apples and oranges. The singular can lend itself to a collective fruit such as the segments of an orange or a bunch of grapes. Grapes may be an

appropriate image in light of Jesus' metaphor of the vine and branches. Fruit can occur in the plural, such as Jesus' charge that people could recognize the correct teachers (e.g. Himself versus the Pharisees) by their fruits (Mt. 7:16-20). Jesus also used the plural for the conduct of those who would receive the kingdom instead of the rebellious generation to which He came (Mt. 21:43). James uses the plural of the good fruits that result from the wisdom from above (Jas. 3:17). James immediately refers to one of those fruits in the singular as the fruit consisting<sup>77</sup> of righteousness (Jas. 3:18). In the case of our text, fruit is singular because Paul considers it a collection of attitudes that form the spiritual believer's way of thinking about life and events. It is not a set of distinct traits that can be developed independently of one another. If the Spirit produces one, He produces them all. This does not mean that all spiritual believers use these nine traits equally in all situations, as, for example, some situations may call for more goodness than patience. Further, the immature believer may not appreciate or understand the best use of each part in various situations. That comes with maturity, so Paul could speak to the Philippians of their love abounding more and more in full knowledge and discernment to approve the excellent things (Php. 1:9-10). They could love, but they could love in ways that are more fitting to the need. This is a result of maturity.

I say spiritual believer because these nine qualities are characteristic of those who are walking by the Spirit as opposed to walking by the flesh. "Spiritual"

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<sup>77</sup> I take δικαιοσύνη as a genitive of description, in this case defining

is an adjective that describes, in this context, those who are following the Spirit's lead, so walk by the Spirit, live out the fruit, crucify the flesh with its cravings, and walk carefully by the Spirit. Paul applies the term spiritual to some in the Galatian churches in 6:1. They can help those who are not spiritual but caught in a trespass. Some dislike the description "spiritual" thinking it divides the body of Christ into those who are good versus those who are bad or "fleshly," [A.V. carnal]. Paul applies the word "carnal" or "fleshly" to some of the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 3:1, 3). Schreiner says, "The 'spiritual' do not constitute an elite group of Christians, nor does Paul restrict himself to a portion of the congregation."<sup>78</sup> It seems he defines spiritual as those who have the Spirit and says this is "all of the Galatians."<sup>79</sup> If spiritual means that they have the Spirit, then yes, they all have the Spirit. But all are not walking by the Spirit or Paul would not have to charge them to do so (5:16, 25) nor would he have to warn them against unrighteous activities (5:26). They are distinguished from those believers who have engaged in a trespass.

We confuse this issue by thinking that some believers are spiritual all the time or at least most of the time while others are never or seldom spiritual. The truth is that at any given moment, a believer may be walking by the Spirit and so is spiritual at that moment but in a few moments, he may walk by his flesh. Both qualities are moment-to-moment issues, as the believer chooses moment-to-moment to what standard she or

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<sup>78</sup> Schreiner, *op cit.* p. 358.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

he will walk. Hogg and Vine state regarding the word spiritual, "...nor when it is attained is it always maintained. ... Such as are led by the Spirit are spiritual, but of course, spirituality is not a fixed or absolute condition, it admits of growth; indeed growth..."<sup>80</sup>

Though nearly all English versions of "the fruit of the Spirit," I prefer "the fruit **from** the Spirit" for clarity. This understands the form *tu pneumatos* [ΤΟΥ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣ] to be an ablative of source. The New Living Translations has "the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit." Though this is certainly an interpretation, I do think it communicates the general idea Paul intends. The believer does not work on developing the fruit. The Spirit produces the fruit. The believer can mature in how he uses the fruit, so that a mature believer may see it is appropriate to rejoice in suffering while the immature find it unnatural. That it is unnatural demonstrates why we need the Spirit to produce this fruit in us.

**Love** is the attitude that acts in the best interest of another without regard to personal cost. No greater love exists than one lays down His life for his friend (Jh. 15:13). We think of this primarily as dying for another. However, when Jesus gave the new kind of command to love as He **loved**, He spoke of His love in the aorist tense probably as a simple past tense (Jh. 13:34). He had not yet gone to the cross, but as the master, He moments before washed His disciples' feet (Jh. 13:4ff). We do not appreciate this activity because we do not practice it and live at a times and in places where feet

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<sup>80</sup> C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, in *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine*, Vol. 2, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) p. 258.

washing is unnecessary. In Jesus' time, indoor plumbing and waste management did not exist in most locations. People threw waste into the streets and then, wearing only sandals, walked through this dried filth. A master did not wash the filthy feet of his guests. He required his lowly household slave to do so. So Jesus demonstrated that we love by doing even the lowliest and most dishonorable tasks for other believers. It is not part of human nature to serve in this way. The Spirit produces this kind of attitude in those who follow His lead, that is, they walk by means of the Spirit. This kind of love carries others' burdens (Gal. 6:2). It provides for the needs of others (1 Jh. 3:17-18).

This love, a translation of *agape*, is distinct from *phileō* and *philaelphia* which indicates a fond love but not specifically self-sacrificial. The latter may be elicited by a quality in the object or individual loved. So the love of money is certainly drawn out by the appreciation or promise that money suggests is available (1 Tim. 6:10). The world loves its own but not those unlike it (Jh. 15:19). Jesus said that the Father loves [*phileō*] His disciples because they loved [*phileō*] Him (Jh. 16:27). The former is to be added to the latter (2 Pet. 1:7), thus distinguishing the two, the latter adding a certain friendly warmth to those acts done in the best interest of others. This does not mean that *agape* has no warmth, but a father's love for his child, exercised in discipline may not appear warm (cp Heb. 12:6). It also stands in contrast to forms of *philostorgé* where *storgé* refers to a family affection or love (Rom 12:10), though twice this latter word includes the alpha privative to describe people having no natural family love (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3).

**Joy** is the appreciation for a person, a thing, or an act because it recognizes a benefit or the place it has. For believers, joy sees the place these have in God's plan and purpose. Joy should not be confused with happiness [*makarios*] or giddiness [*agalliaō*] (Mt. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:6). Therefore, we can rejoice when we are tempted when we share in Christ's sufferings, or have one's property seized (Jas. 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:13; Heb. 10:34). We should always rejoice because we can always appreciate that God is accomplishing His plan despite the harshness of circumstances (1 Thess. 5:16). We are to rejoice in the Lord, for who we are in Him gives context to these various circumstances (Php. 3:1; 4:4). When we see a brother return to health after being deathly sick, it is normal to rejoice (Php. 2:28-29).

**Peace** is a calm settledness of mind. As part of the Spirit-produced fruit, the believer can experience this peace regardless of circumstances. Peace was considered the opposite of war or conflict (Acts 24:2; 1 Thess. 5:3). Jesus promised His disciples peace in Him while having trouble in the world (Jh. 16:33). Despite the trouble the world brings when the believer sets their mind to who they are in Christ, they have peace.

The Father and our Lord Jesus Christ are the source of our peace as the Spirit uses the believer's nature from the Father and the life from the Son (Rom. 1:7). We have peace facing God because God has declared us righteous (justified) (Rom. 5:1). Christ made peace between believers by taking believing Jews and Gentiles and creating them into one new man, a new creation (Eph. 2:14-17). Both situations become a basis of the peace the Spirit produces.

The believer can experience this peace by setting their mind to who they are in Christ as the Spirit leads them to frame their minds (Rom. 8:6, 2, 4-5). This ties to Paul's point in the letter to the Galatians. In this same vein, those who live their lives by the standard of who God says all believers are in Christ experience peace, while those who focus on a law identity need mercy (Gal. 6:16).

We should use peace in relationships with others, as it characterizes the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17-19). Peace should characterize the gatherings of the Church (1 Cor. 14:33). We should choose to guard the unity in the body of Christ in peace (Eph. 4:3). When conflicts arise between believers, they should let the peace of the Christ<sup>81</sup> act as an umpire in their hearts (Col. 3:15). This kind of peace comes only from the Spirit as we follow the Spirit's lead to our position in Christ.

**Patience**<sup>82</sup> is the ability to not become angry with others, regardless of the basis for the anger. The Greek *makrothumia* in its parts meant *makro*-long and *thumia*-heat or anger, and therefore, meant "long anger." The word did not mean to have anger for a long time, but rather that it took a long time for one to become angry. Older translations had "longsuffering" because the

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<sup>81</sup> (all believers joined as one body under the headship of Jesus Christ)

<sup>82</sup> For a long time I attempted to maintain the use of "patience" for *hupomoné* and "longsuffering" for this part of the fruit. However, because so many modern translations use patience for this part of the fruit, I have chosen adjust and explain Biblical patience.

Greek word had the idea of suffering for a long time with some cause for anger but not becoming angry. The older translations reserved “patience” for the noun *hupomoné* which meant to maintain a proper attitude under adversity. Modern translations use variations of “endurance” for this latter word and “patience” for *makrothumia*.

Patience [*makrothumia*] is directed at people while “endurance” [*hupomoné*] often involves circumstances. God was patient with Paul because of his former character (1 Tim. 1:13-16). God is patient with the unsaved (Rom. 9:22). He is patient with us, believers (2 Pet. 3:9, 15). God could have been angry with Paul, with the unsaved, or with us, and in that anger, He could have punished us. But He exercises patience allowing each time to change their minds for some form of salvation.

When believers follow the Spirit’s lead, we can be patient with others as we use our spiritual gift in love (1 Cor. 13:4). Teaching should be done in patience (2 Tim. 4:2). Becoming angry with someone we teach will not encourage them to learn. We can use patience to maintain unity in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:2). Unity is not promoted by bursts of anger. Paul calls us to put on patience for that very relationship (Col. 3:12). A believer is to have patience with all men. It is appropriate to avoid becoming angry even with the wrongs of unbelievers. James reminds us that man’s anger does not produce God’s righteousness (Jas. 1:20). Paul experienced persecutions and sufferings, from people, and demonstrated patience in them (2 Tim. 3:10-11). This patience was an example for Timothy (3:10) and Paul revealed to Timothy the type of people



he would face (3:8-9). Upon reading the characteristics of these people, the need for patience is obvious. Not just any patience but Spirit-produced patience.

**Kindness** is the attitude or demeanor that puts others at ease by being non-abrasive or approachable. Jesus used this word [*chrēstotēs χρηστότης*] to describe old wine as **better** or **kinder** than new wine (Lk. 5:39). New wine's bitterness mellows as the fermentation and resting process finishes. Like an aged, mellow wine, a kind person is not off-putting. A yoke was a large, heavy timber placed on the neck of oxen to pull a burden. Jesus viewed the teaching of the Jewish religious leaders as a heavy yoke. He called His teachings a kind yoke.

God's kindness brings unbelievers to faith in Christ (Rom. 2:4-5; Tit. 3:3-4). God expresses His grace to us by the use of His kindness (Eph. 2:7). He says we are sitting together in Christ, which means we are at His right hand (Eph. 2:6). There, He is approachable. This is the foundation of our bold access to God in Christ (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). God does not make us feel uncomfortable to be in His presence but is kind. That's grace. Our experience with His grace encourages us to crave His Word (1 Pet. 2:3).

Kindness should not confuse kindness with compromise. God does not desire us to confuse truth. Bad doctrine and association corrupt kind habits (1 Cor. 15:33). However, God does not wish that we engage in battles over truths as fighting contrasts with kindness (2 Tim. 2:14, 24).

Kindness promotes a proper relationship among believers. It is characteristic of the love in which we

serve others with our spiritual gift (1 Cor. 13:4). We should demonstrate kindness to others as opposed to fighting, being angry, and using harsh language (Eph. 4:32). This promotes the unity the Spirit has formed by placing us together into the body of Christ.

**Goodness** involves a sense of well-being and contentment that may express itself in happiness and the desire to seek the same for others. We tend to connect the word good with morality or righteous activity, think: “Be good.” However, that is not the meaning of the Greek *agathos* [ἀγαθωσύνη]. Jesus said that only God is good (Matt. 19:16-17). God is the happy [*makarios* “blessed”] God (1 Tim. 1:11). God created all things good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 24, 31). God has acted for the well-being of His creation, even if that creation pursues disaster [evil] rather than goodness. So, God providing food for man expresses His goodness (Acts 14:15-16).

Believers need Spirit-produced goodness for we are called to overcome evil with good rather than allow evil to overcome us (Rom. 12:21). We should pursue goodness with all men (1 Thess. 5:15). The exercise of our gifts are good works that God has prepared for us, and in this way, we can do good when we serve others (Eph. 2:10). A properly motivated believer will refuse to steal but will work to have a good thing to give to another’s need. (Eph. 4:28-29). Similarly, materially rich believers are to be rich in good works (1 Tim. 6:18). Since God alone is good, a believer can only exhibit this goodness by the work of the Spirit producing this fruit.

**Faith** is the mental response that accepts a promise from God to be true without seeing evidence (Heb. 11:1). Many modern translations represent the

feminine noun *pistis* as “faithful” a translation better reserved for the masculine adjective *pistos*. Faithful means to be dependable while faith is an attitude directed at God’s promises to believers. Timothy was to be an example to the faithful [*pistos*] by his exercise of faith [*pistis*] (1 Tim. 4:12). The leader of the church in Pergamum did not deny the faith [*pistis*] when the Lord’s faithful [*pistos*] witness was killed (Rev. 2:13).

Faith as part of the fruit from the Spirit is part of the Christian life. It is faith for living. We are saved through faith in the gospel and then we go on to a life of faith in God’s promises to us (Rom. 1:16-17). We are to live by faith, not sight (2 Cor. 5:7). This again points out that faith is not in visible evidence but in God’s promises which we cannot see. Therefore, our way of life (plan, dispensation, house rule) operates by faith (1 Tim. 1:4-5). By faith, believers can serve others in love (Gal. 5:6). Believers can be strengthened by faith to love the whole body (all the dimensions) of Christ (Eph. 3:17). Faith in God’s promises allows the believer to use eternal life to produce godliness or activity that honors God (Tit. 1:1-2). God promised believers many things. Collectively this constitutes the Faith, necessitating our use of faith.

**Gentleness** translates *prautēs* referring to that which is tame or controlled such as a fierce horse.<sup>83</sup> Vine notes the translation “meekness” suggests weakness and a child-like timidity and that people often consider

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<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, abridged*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985). p 929.

someone meek because they lack strength, “...but the Lord was ‘meek’ because he had the infinite resources of God at His command.”<sup>84</sup> He concludes that it is the opposite of being self-assertive or acting in self-interest. Of people, *prautēs* or “gentleness” is the valued attribute as opposed to a harsh demeanor. Paul contrasted love and meekness to metaphorically beating people with a rod (1 Cor. 4:21). When one brother helps another who is caught in a trespass, he must do so with an attitude of meekness, rather than harsh anger (Gal. 6:1). Paul charged Timothy and other teachers to not engage in arguments with those who wish to deviate from Biblical truth. Rather they are to exercise a gentle child-training for those who are opposing themselves (2 Tim. 2:25). They do not need a harsh argument.

The danger of the legalism being pressed upon believers in the Galatian churches does not lead to gentle treatment of others. Legalism leads to harsh, argumentative, pressure. It stirs trouble by judging others for their lack of conformity to a legal standard. It taunts others by pointing to those who have conformed to their standards. Paul will warn against provoking one another in Galatians 5:26. The flesh motivates others in these ways. The Spirit produces this gentle character towards others.

**Self-Control** translates *engkrateia* or inner [*eng*] might [*kratos*]. That inner strength is to bring one’s appetites and needs under control so they do not interfere with our service or run roughshod over the sensitive consciousnesses of perhaps a believer weak in the faith.

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<sup>84</sup> Vine, op cit, p. 738.

Paul notes that a lack of self-control may be cause for two people to marry, though Paul personally encouraged people to remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:9). The area of self-control appears in this context to involve physical cravings. He also stated that an athlete exercises self-control so he might win a victor's wreath (1 Cor. 9:25). The larger context considers putting others' needs ahead of one's wants, needs, or rights. Paul pictures this self-control as treating his body with severity so that its cravings did not drive him to act in his own interest and do damage to other believers. The lack of self-control in that setting could lead to being unapproved, that is, not winning that race. It is a quality that should be in those who will serve as teaching leaders (Tit. 1:8). How can a teaching leader properly care for and feed believers if they put their interests or strong desires ahead of others?

**23** "Against such things, there is no law." In 5:16 we learn that we can deal with our flesh by walking by the Spirit not by obeying law. In 5:18 we see that if we follow the Spirit's lead, we are not under law. Now, having listed the character traits of those characterized by the Spirit's work, we learn that no law is against such traits. No one forbids love or peace. Legislation against joy and kindness does not exist. At least, we should say, no reasonable law. We acknowledge that someone may suggest or press such a ridiculous law out of a desire to be obnoxious, but normal religious and civil laws do not forbid this character. Paul's point is that living by the Spirit is better than living by the Law and the results are not contrary to law.

**24** Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and cravings. The genitive *tou christou*

is treated by most English translations as possessive, the ESV, CSB, NASB, NET, NIV, and NLT even adding the verb “belong” to Christ. Several Greek manuscripts have “Christ Jesus” though good support exists for just Christ.<sup>85</sup> If this means “those who belong to Christ,” then Christians who are struggling with their passions and cravings are not Christ’s. However, the genitive case not only indicates possession or relationship but may also describe something by way of character.<sup>86</sup> God tells Ananias that Paul is “a **chosen** vessel,” where chosen is a genitive case noun (Acts 9:15). We may represent this idea as “those of the character of Christ.” This further explains the fruit from the Spirit as being Christ-like character. Such character only exists in those who have crucified<sup>87</sup> the flesh. In 2:20, Paul stated that he was crucified with Christ. When the believer sets their mind to their position as crucified and dead in Christ to the sin, by means of the Spirit’s work, for that moment, we are putting the deeds of the body (flesh?) to death (Rom. 8:13). So Paul can speak of putting to death our members on this earth (Col. 3:5). This is walking by the Spirit for He leads us to our life in Christ but the route to our life in Christ goes through our crucifixion or death with Christ (cp Rom. 6:11; 8:2).

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<sup>85</sup> “Christ” is supported by Papyri 46, several other manuscripts, the Byzantine text type, and several church fathers.

<sup>86</sup> H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957). 27. They give several clear illustrations of this “adjectival” use that they says is “not infrequent.”

<sup>87</sup> ἐσταύρωσαν is a simple aorist, looking only at the act accomplished though saying nothing about its duration.

Not only have such crucified their flesh, but also their passions and cravings. Passion [*pathama*] derives from *pascō* meaning “to suffer.” The passions are works of the flesh that have been practiced so long that to cease causes suffering. Drunkenness is among the works and illustrates well the nature of an addiction to alcohol that causes suffering when one attempts to cease drinking. What is true for an alcoholic could be said for all the works. One may be addicted to immoral sexual activity, idolatry, greediness, anger, and so on. I have known people who have suffered when letting go of their anger, due to being accustomed to living daily or even being driven daily by anger. When people believe in Christ, those passions do not automatically end though God has given us the means of experiencing freedom, a means previously beyond the unbeliever’s ability. Cravings or lusts are the perverted cravings rising from the originally good desires God created in Adam and Eve. These too are crucified with Christ when we set our minds to our crucified state with Christ.

**25** The Spirit caused our new birth (Jh. 3:5). He enacted regeneration when we believed (Tit. 3:5). He joined us Christ so that we have eternal life (1 Jh. 5:11-12). He also placed us in Christ so we share in Christ’s resurrection life (Eph. 2:5-6). We can say that we live by the Spirit. Paul’s “if we live” assumes his readers will all say, Yes.

Since we live by the Spirit, we should also walk by the Spirit. In 5:16, Paul used *peripateō* but here he uses *stoicheō* which also means to walk but emphasizes very cautious and careful steps. Souter adds, “in a

straight line, in rank.”<sup>88</sup> It was used of soldiers marching carefully in rank so as not to step on the heels of those in front which could cause soldiers to trip and fall over each other. Having just mentioned the passions and cravings, we may find that we must not only walk in a general sense but sometimes with carefully taken steps, each step being directed by the Spirit. This also precedes other situations Paul is about to warn against.

**26** Not every unrighteous activity is a sin. John tells us that all unrighteousness is sin (1 Jh. 5:17), but John is talking about its quality, not its identity. The present verse warns against being the following types of people, though none are sin. We may easily move on to sin if we live in this way. First is one who is conceited or engaged in vain glory [*kenodoxos*]. The adjective *kenos* means empty of content. This person is conceited about something of no worthy substance, perhaps becoming circumcised. We should also not be those who provoke one another (i.e. other believers). This provoking is a calling out before others as if to egg them on to what we want them to do, again to become circumcised and begin keeping the law. Finally, we should not be those who envy other believers. Paul included envy among the works of our flesh. It is the hurt, pain, or frustration that another experiences something good that we think we deserve. Envy can lead us to compromise God’s will so as to acquire what we want. It can also move us to cruelly treat others.

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<sup>88</sup> Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960) p. 242.



**6:1** Rather than pursuing the law as a means of righteousness, biting at one another, and resorting to their flesh to be righteous by law, Paul calls the Galatians to love one another (5:13). In 6:1, he gives a practical exercise of that love, helping believers caught in the wrong teaching.

He addresses them as brothers. At no time has he questioned their salvation. Recall that their problem is not how to be forgiven and eternally righteous with God but how to live their daily life with God. We are to live by the continuing ministry of the Spirit and God's grace, not by the Law. Paul is writing them because others have taught them that they should be living by the Law and cannot be saved or grow without circumcision and law-keeping.

When believers accept the false gospel of growth by law, they offend God. This offense is expressed by the noun "trespass" a translation of the Greek *paraptōma*. Some Bibles have sin, transgression, or wrongdoing, none of which gives the sense of this noun (in my opinion). To be certain, a trespass is a wrongdoing, but that misses the emphasis of the noun. It is not the noun "sin" for that would be the Greek *hamartia* and "transgression" represents *parabasis*. A sin is an overt act of rebellion, a refusal to recognize that God has any boundaries for our lives, (lawlessness; 1 Jh. 3:4). Trespass is grammatically distinguished from "sin" in Ephesians 2:1, where Paul writes (in Greek), "**the** trespasses and **the** sins." Two nouns, each with a definite article and joined by the conjunction *kai* "and" represent two distinct though perhaps related things or ideas.

A trespass is an unrighteous attitude or action that we think or convince ourselves is acceptable or excusable despite what we have been taught. Lenski is correct in saying, “The idea that παράπτωμα means only a slight ‘fault’ (A.V.), and that the word is chosen because of this mild meaning, cannot be upheld;”<sup>89</sup> Galatians 5:26 illustrates three potential trespasses. Believers who live by the law can think it is acceptable to boast in their law-keeping. (See notes on 5:26). Legalistic believers also tend to provoke others thinking they must get others to keep the law. Israelis were called to “keep” or “guard” the Law by not only monitoring themselves but also their fellow Israelis (e.g. Dt. 13:6, 8; 19:13). Since we are not under law and are to follow the Spirit’s lead rather than the law, to provoke other believers to keep the law including circumcision is wrong. It is a trespass because a believer can convince himself he is doing the right thing, though he has heard clearly that we are not under law. Though envy comes close to coveting, envy involves some pain or grief because of what one does not have and another does. The law promised prosperity for obedience. Envy is a logical response when one expects their obedience to be rewarded with prosperity but it is not. Perhaps one who is not keeping law may experience some prosperity and envy ensues. God has not promised us prosperity for righteous living under grace (1 Tim. 6:5-10).

When one brother sees another brother taken or caught by surprise<sup>90</sup> it is proper to help him. Only “the

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<sup>89</sup> Lenski, *op cit.* p. 295.

<sup>90</sup> προλαμβάνω in Mounce, *op cit.*.

one who is spiritual” is capable of helping. Christianity has many who reject the dichotomy of spiritual believers and carnal or fleshly believers. Schriener writes, “The ‘spiritual’ do not constitute an elite group of Christians, nor does Paul restrict himself to a portion of the congregation. All of the Galatians received the spirit when they heard the message of the gospel (3:2, 5).”<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, Schriener cites certain Spirit-related facts that Paul calls believers to do, indicating they are not automatically true of all Christians. He is correct that the spiritual are not an elite group. Spiritual describes the believers who are following the Spirit’s lead. Lenski recognizes that not all believers are spiritual but should be, however, he does not connect “spiritual” with the Holy Spirit but our human spirit, “who walk, are led and keep in line with what is spirit.”<sup>92</sup> Bruce Demarest understands Scripture to teach that all believers are spiritual and carnal, concerned that it would damage believers if they were “branded a ‘carnal Christian.’”<sup>93</sup> However, such believers need help, and denying their problem does not help.

Hogg and Vine note the context of Galatians 5, “The spiritual man is one who walks by the Spirit both

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<sup>91</sup> Schriener, *op cit.* p. 358.

<sup>92</sup> Lenski, *op cit.* p. 296. He defines spirit in 5:16, “The entire analogy of Scripture shows that we never use the Spirit as a means (see v. 5), but we do use our own ‘spirit.’ So here Paul bids the Galatians in their walk and conversation to use what is spirit in its nature, i.e. the reborn, new man.” p. 279.

<sup>93</sup> Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997) p. 416.

in the sense of v. 16 and in that of v. 25, and who himself manifests the fruit of the Spirit in his own ways.”<sup>94</sup> It should be noted that Hogg and Vine’s following comments confuse spirituality with maturity as though spirituality is attained by diligence and over time. They are correct when they say, “Such as are led by the Spirit are spiritual, but, of course, spirituality is not a fixed or absolute condition...”<sup>95</sup> By failing to understand this, many reject the spiritual or carnal designations. However, these two states are a moment-by-moment matter. We may walk by the Spirit and one point in the day and not at another. When we walk by the Spirit, we are spiritual- characterized **at that moment** by the works and fruit of the Spirit. Buy, if we walk by our flesh-the other alternative in 5:16-we are fleshly or carnal.

The task of restoring a believer caught in a trespass requires the fruit the Spirit produces in the believer. Paul says one needs “a spirit of meekness” or focused gentleness and gentleness is part of the fruit in 5:22. If a believer is not following the lead of the Spirit but of his flesh, he will produce works from his flesh and make the overtaken believer’s circumstances worse.

The spiritual believer is to restore [*katartizō*] the overtaken believer. “Restoring” is the act of adjusting, fixing, or preparing. It describes the disciples “mending” nets (Mt. 4:21), the adjusting of the ages

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<sup>94</sup> C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine, Vol. 2*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) p. 258.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

(Heb. 11:3), saints (Heb. 13:21), and the faith of believers who lack teaching (1 Thess. 3:10). The believer caught in a trespass needs adjustment. Specifically, he needs help remembering who he is in Christ, what God has done to save us, and how Paul has taught the believers to live by the ministry of the Spirit.

We should never assume a believer does not need to be reminded of his salvation. Peter chose to always remind believers of their salvation and its practical application even though they knew all this (2 Pet. 1:12-13). Paul and Peter use the word *sōphroneō*, which meant to think or act prudently. The word begins with the root *sō* for salvation prefixed to *phroneō* -to frame or set one's mind with a sphere of facts that affect how one thinks about and concludes the events of life. A Greek used this word chiefly for an attitude of physical safety in daily life. For the believer, spiritual salvation adds another dimension of safety. We are to not only think about our general safety but have a prudent mind about relating to and serving other believers (Rom. 12:3). Grace trains us to live with this kind of attitude viewing life through the framework of our safety, which includes our spiritual salvation (Tit. 2:11-12). An overtaken believer needs to be reminded of the truth with which they should frame their mind.

The Word of God has four areas of value: teaching that does not govern our conduct, truth that helps us see when we are unrighteous, truth for correcting our inappropriate attitudes and actions, truth that governs our righteous conduct (2 Tim. 3:16). A believer overtaken in a trespass needs to see those Scriptures that contrast their attitude or actions to revelation for New Testament believers. They also need

to see how to correct that attitude and how God has provided for our righteous living. They need to be reminded who they are in Christ where Christ has taken the law out of the way (Eph. 2:5,6, 14-16). They need to see themselves as free in Christ from the law and their flesh (Gal. 2:4; 5:1).

This is to be done in meekness or gentleness (see notes in 5:22). It is easy to be aggressive with such believers, but the spiritual one is equipped to remain focused and gentle.

**6:2** Legalism brings with it a host of problems. Jesus criticized the religious leaders of His day for loading the people with heavy burdens but not even moving a finger to help them (Lk. 11:46). A legalist can tell people all the things they must do or avoid but as Paul speaks to the legalist, he suggests that they are guilty of the very things they teach others not to do (Rom. 2:21-24). In just a few more sentences, Paul will remind the Galatian believers that those who press the law and circumcision on Christians do not guard the law themselves (Gal. 6:13).

Paul calls believers to carry the burden [*baros* βάρος] of other believers. Believers who listen to the false teachers and have turned to the Law and become circumcised have become entangled under the yoke of the Law (Gal. 5:1). Paul warned them not to do so but some had. Peter described the Law as a yoke that his generation and their ancestors were unable to carry (Acts 15:10). The council in Jerusalem determined not to lay the burden [*baros*] of the Law on the shoulders of the Gentile disciples. Note that Paul uses the same word

that the council in Jerusalem used and in both cases, they apply the word to the Law. In this context, believers bear others' burdens by helping them adjust their thinking regarding their actions and attitudes described as a trespass in 5:26-6:1. They bear this burden by helping them remember who they are in Christ. Paul is not thinking about just any burden a believer may have in life. He is speaking specifically of the unbearable burden of the law that others have laid upon their shoulders.

Helping restore a believer fulfills the law of Christ (6:2). The Law of Christ is contrasted to the issue of the Mosaic Law which is a burden. We love God by doing and guarding His commands (1 Jh. 5:2-3). John then adds that His commands are not burdensome. In Galatians 6:2, Paul spoke of the burden with the noun *baros* and John uses the adjectival form [βάρος]. If by "His commands" John meant to refer to the Mosaic Law or the ten commands specifically, then John and Paul disagree because John says those commands are not burdensome while Paul states that the Law is. Rather, the Law of Christ and the commands in question is/are Christ's command to love as He loved (Jh. 13:34). Both Christ and the apostles restated this command in various forms so that a single command quickly became commands. Further, the outworking of that command, say by meeting the material needs of others (1 Jh. 3:16-17), constitutes not an altogether different command but another similar command. Collectively these restatements form a positive law. The Law of Christ is a law only to be fulfilled. It is not a law that can be broken as it contains no, "You shall not..." type of commands. Because the Spirit produces this love as part of the fruit (Gal. 5:22), the command to love other

believers is not a burden. We love others by serving them. The one who has been drawn into the insidious teaching of the Law needs others to love them by helping them get their thinking straightened out.

**6:3** Paul addresses those who do not wish to help the brother who is caught in a trespass. Some may be of the opinion that they are somebodies. By this is meant that they consider themselves to be above serving others. In 5:13, Paul called the Galatians to use their freedom to serve one another through love. In reality, one who thinks he is a somebody and above serving is nothing. Further, he has deceived himself. The verb [*phrenapataō φρεναπατάω*] is built on the noun *phrēn* which refers to the frame of one's mind related to his attitude and the verb *apataō* which meant to deceive by giving a false impression. Such a person has falsely convinced himself that he is a somebody and has no responsibility to serve others. Paul identified this problem attitude as conceited or an empty opinion in 5:26. We are all part of the body and we all have roles of service to fulfill. God has not placed anyone in a somebody category of the body. Every member is important but every member has a function of service.

**6:4** Paul calls believers to prove their own work. The one who does this will have (future) a boast in himself as opposed to a boast in somebody else. To prove, translating the verb *dokimadzō*, meant to subject something to a test looking for value. Paul has asked them to consider whether they are going on by the Spirit or by their flesh and law (3:2-3) They are to subject their own works to this proving test, not the works of others. In verse thirteen, Paul states that the legalizers wanted the Galatians to become circumcised



for the purpose of boasting in the Galatians' flesh. They would boast in another's work, in what they were able to get another person to do. However, they themselves do not guard the law. Guarding the law would at least be their work rather than another's. In 6:4, "another" does not translate *allēlōn* "one another" as in 6:2 but *eteros* a different one. Paul uses this adjective as a pronoun to draw attention to their act of boasting in someone else's work, to which they were able to coerce that person. If the legalist or the believer who thinks he is above serving others would focus on proving their own works, they would have a boast.

Boasting seems inappropriate for many believers, but Paul tells us that if we boast, we should boast in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31). Every believer can boast in the Lord. Every believer can do a work that God will do through them (cp Jh. 3:21; Php. 2:13). If a believer walks by the Spirit, then the believer can do something that God desires and in that they can boast, just like any other believer in Christ. This boast may be in the present but it may also refer to the future when each believer gives an account (a word) about himself (Rom. 14:10-12). I do not give a word about your works and you do not give a word about mine. We each speak for ourselves. Further, any work that remains is work accomplished by God through us and that is grace. Therefore, any work that remains is a work for us to boast about because it was something God accomplished through us. In the end, we are boasting in God, not ourselves.

**6:5** Believers who load themselves with a burden [*phortion*] must bear that burden. Note that Paul has changed the word burden from *baros* in 5:2. The noun

*phortion* looks at a load like the cargo of a ship<sup>96</sup> or the heavy pack of a traveling soldier.<sup>97</sup> This new word derives from the verb *pherō* to bear or carry and refers to that which one does carry whether personally or as cargo. By switching nouns, Paul may be indicating that this latter person intends to hold onto the burden of the Law for the long haul. Like a ship traveling, they will take this load with them rather than offload it. They must carry it. They refuse to give up the burden of the Law but choose to persist in carrying it. It is his **own** [*idios*] burden, for he has made law-keeping his life. For the legalistic believer, Paul does not call others to share their burden. The verb “bear” [*bastazō*] is the same in both verses but the load is different. Believers are only called to bear the burdens of those being drawn into legalism but have not yet sold themselves fully to that lifestyle. The legalist must bear it alone. If one refuses to let go of law-keeping as a way of living, they must bear that burden. Others are not called to help one who chooses to live in this way.

**6:6** Paul focuses on the difference between those teaching God’s truth and those who are misleading believers. Paul uses the verb *katechō* [κατηχέω] for “teaching.” This verb describes the act of speaking truth and the learners repeating the instruction back to the teacher. Paul’s custom was to interact with those listening as He taught, indicated by the verb *dialegomai* translated “reasoning” (Acts 19:8). The verb *katechō*

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<sup>96</sup> Abbott-Smith, op cit., p. 473.

<sup>97</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, op cit., p. 217.

does not present authoritarian teachers enforcing the Law on the believers. Such teachers are open to talking through truth with other believers. They are approachable for questions and discussion to help others grow.

Those who have received this type of instruction of the Word, are to fellowship in all good things. This is one of several texts that communicate a similar idea of providing for their spiritual leaders. The apostles received material support not only for themselves but even for their believing wives (1 Cor. 9:3-6). Such provision allowed them to not work and dedicate themselves to worship and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). The elders are worthy of double honor, especially if they organize *their families well* and work at how to express teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). This fellowship involves sharing possessions designated “all good things.”

**6:7-8** Paul warns the Galatians to not be led astray. They need to know that God is not mocked. This mockery may be verbal or by action. Teaching believers that God will honor His promises and curses made under the Law is error. It is mocking God because God has ended the Law as a source of righteousness for believers.

Those teaching the Law for believers are in error. They are sowing to the flesh. Paul has already established in chapter three that if one chooses to live by law, he is attempting to mature by his flesh (3:2-3). This is why Paul delineated the works of the flesh in 5:19-21. If one chooses to live by the Law, one is living by his flesh and he cannot choose what direction he may go in his flesh. A “good work” driven by fleshly

zeal may lead to anger (considered necessary) and this may end in a violent act or another obviously unrighteous work of the flesh.

Those who sow to their own flesh by trying to live by the law will reap from the flesh. Their flesh will not produce something righteous. The Spirit will not take the unrighteous activities of the flesh and produce something righteous. They reap corruption. Thinking they can bring about a better life by obedience to the Law actually will end in something horrible. It will not be God's will. The works of the flesh are like corrupt or rotting fruit compared to the good fruit of the Spirit.

The one who sows to or because of (causal *eis*) the Spirit, reaps from the Spirit eternal life. They sow to the Spirit by walking by means of the Spirit, by following His lead (5:16, 18). They follow Him to their life in Christ Jesus and experience freedom (Rom. 8:2). The result is eternal life. This is not how one gets eternal life. Reaping eternal life refers to using eternal life. One cannot live by the Law and use eternal life at the same time.

**6:9** Knowing the results of how one serves, should motivate believers to not lose heart [*engkakeō*]. This verb is built on the root *kakos* often translated “evil,” and it describes something as not being what one should expect. One would not expect a believer who is walking by the Spirit to give up and comply with the demands of the legalists. Just because one does the right thing the right way does not mean they may not become mentally exhausted. The legalists may pressure believers to conform to their rituals and standards and believers who continue walking by the Spirit may be tempted to consider fitting in with the others.

However, if one does not slack off [*ekluō*] in following the Spirit allows one to reap (eternal life) in its appropriate time.

**6:10** So Paul encourages the Galatians to make use of the time and do good to all. “Time” translates *kairos* and refers to time as a season or opportunity. The good is that which is beneficial and may result in a sense of well-being for the object of one’s actions. The objects are all *people* but is specially for the household of the faith. The household of the faith consists of New Testament believers to whom God has made many promises. The household of the faith directs faith at these promises from God, hence “the faith.” The household is the body of Christ (cp 1 Tim. 3:15). “Especially” reminds us that God distinguishes between the body of Christ and the unsaved. This also reminds us that Christ left us with the command to love one another where the pronoun refers to others of the same kind, that is, other believers. He did not call us to love unbelievers. Though the present text calls us to do God. “To all” reminds us that God does not discourage but encourages us to do good even to unbelievers. Note, that Paul told the church in Ephesus not to use its resources for any widow but for those who were believers and had a good testimony (1 Tim. 5:9-10). This sets a precedent that the Church has never been called by God to spend itself for the world. Individual believers, however, can and are encouraged to do good to all. Following the Spirit’s lead results in love and service and doing good is a natural product.

**6:11** Paul asks his readers to see how large of letters he is writing with his own hand. Some think Paul used larger letters for emphasis, WISHING TO DRIVE HOME

HIS POINT. Others understand Paul to be referencing that he has written either the whole letter or the following ending by his own hand. He normally attached a greeting written by his hand. I would suggest that both are true. Due to his failing eyesight, Paul likely wrote in large print to make it easier to see what he was doing. In the introduction, I attempted to make the case that Paul wrote this letter on his last apostolic trip in Acts. He was joined by a group of men, some from cities in Galatia. They travel by sea but he walks the distance alone meeting them at Assos (Acts 20:13-14). He writes to the Galatians rather than travel to see them, because he has determined to be in Jerusalem for a Jewish feast, an event at which he violates the very principle he pressed in Galatians chapter one about “another gospel.” Alone, Paul may have written this entire letter without a secretary. The size of the letters showed it to be his handwriting, but it also demonstrated his concern and the urgency he felt for their situation. Whether he wrote the whole letter or just these last verses, Paul’s large handwriting stresses his grave concern over this false teaching.

**6:12-13** Paul points out three motives of the false teachers: to make a good outward display, to avoid persecution, to boast in another’s flesh. They first wish to impress people. The fruit from the Spirit is inner attitudes that can be expressed outwardly through actions, (e.g. love). However, not everyone can recognize the fruit. He that is spiritual evaluates all things but is not evaluated by anyone (1 Cor. 2:15). Those operating by their flesh can only evaluate what they see outwardly, therefore they wish to put on an outward display to impress others with their “righteous” activity. Their righteous activity is

circumcision. Law keepers and teachers operate by the flesh according to Paul (3:2-4). They are most concerned with outward, visible conformity to the law.

Second, they do not wish to be persecuted for the cross of Christ (6:12). We need to ask why a good law-keeping Jew would be persecuted for the cross of Christ? It was those who preached Christ crucified that were persecuted not those who taught the law. This sheds some light on the identity of the Judaizers, a term coined by Bible students for those who taught believers to live like Jews. As I stated in the notes in chapter one, these people may include both believers or unbelievers. Many do not accept the former because they understand Galatians to be about initial or eternal justification, though the letter deals largely with Christian living and maturity. Paul's statement about avoiding persecution supports the idea that at least some of these people are believers. They believe in Christ but do not wish to be persecuted for the cross so they think that enforcing law, especially circumcision, even for the Gentiles will get the unbelieving Jews to stop persecuting them. I find many commentators to be unclear as to why these Judaizers should worry about persecution. However, Robert Gromacki understands these Judaizers to have falsely identified themselves as believers in Jesus Christ. He thinks their problem arose when the gospel reached the uncircumcised Gentiles. To avoid persecution from other Jews they began to teach circumcision to these Gentiles.<sup>98</sup> It is best to understand both believing and unbelieving Jews to have taught circumcision for the Gentile believers. But I think the situation favors identifying the Judaizers as]

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<sup>98</sup> Gromacki, op cit. p. 191.

believers. Recall that in Acts 15, Luke says that the Pharisees who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised were believers.

**6:14** Though the false teachers wished to boast in what they could compel others to do, in this case: get circumcised, Paul did not wish to boast in anything except the cross of Christ Jesus. "May it never be" [NASB] represents an optative mood of the verb *ginomai* - "to be." The Greek optative mood expresses a wish. In this case, Paul desires not to boast in what he could get someone else to do as the false teachers did. Paul did boast in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:30). All believers can boast in the Lord because we all share in Him. All believers can boast in the cross of our Lord because by the Father's logical reckoning we were all crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). We were all put into Christ's death and burial and are all alive to God in Christ (Rom. 6:2-4, 11). We share this identity in Christ.

In Romans 6 Paul writes about our death to the sin nature. In Galatians 2:20 our death is to the Law. Here it is to the world. The world is Satan's system organized to oppose and replace God. By it, Satan occupies his children with order, pursuits, and boasts. By it, he also distracts believers from loving God (1 Jh. 2:15-17). Among the things John identifies as part of the world is the boast of life (1 Jh. 2:16). John uses the Greek *ἀλαζονεία* [*aladzoneia*], which referred to a huckster's outrageous boast or claims for a product. John attaches this word to bios or physical life. John warned believers of loving the opportunity to make outrageous boasts about their earthly life, perhaps what they had achieved or acquired, matters of no lasting



consequence. For the idea of "boast," Paul used the verb **καυχάομαι** [kouxaoimai] a term often used negatively by the Greeks and concerning which Bromiley states that philosophers warned against it. Boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is acceptable to Paul because it is what Jesus Christ did. It is not what we made or coerced Him to do. His death on the cross was the act of the Savior - Jesus, who is now risen and exalted - Christ, and is Lord - the Deity who along with the Father and Spirit who planned it.

The world was crucified to Paul and he was crucified to the world. The elements of the Mosaic Law are basic elements of the world and enslave those who live under the Law (4:3; cp Col. 2:20ff). In response to Israel's arrogant assertion that they could do all God asked, God imposed on them the Law (Ex. 19:3-9). That law demonstrated that they could not do all He asked. That law organized the massive family of Israel into a nation with commands, a religious system, and religious leaders. It spelled out socio-religious activity for Israel for their religion could not be separated from their civil society. Satan, likewise, has organized his people under laws. When God gave Israel the Law, it fit this system of the world that organizes people by means of laws. The problem is that the people under those laws still have sin natures. These people foolishly turn the law into a means of being eternally right with God. So Satan organizes people in his world system and substitutes law-righteousness for a righteousness from faith in Christ (cp Php. 3:9). His ministers are ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Whereas the Law was to demonstrate what man cannot do and prove we are all

sinners, Satan, along with man's arrogant sinful nature, has turned the Law into a means of achieving righteousness (Rom. 3:19; 7:7; Gal. 3:19-21).

Therefore, we are crucified to the world. When we set our minds to who we are in Christ, we recognize that we died to a system that pressures us to achieve a self-righteousness in which we may boast. Christ is no longer in the world (Jh. 17:11). Though we live in the world, God also sees us in Christ so "as He is, so also are we in this world." (1 Jh. 4:17). God sees us separated from this world in Christ. Being crucified to the world and it to us means that we are released from craving worthless achievements about which we might boast. Others achieve something in the world and then boast in it. This encourages others to pursue the same and have something equally boast-worthy. So, if we turn to the Law and make our boast in what we achieve under Law, it encourages other believers to pursue the same, and all this is contrary to God's will for New Testament Christians.

**6:15** Whereas the world system categorizes people by nationality, sex, or social caste, for believers, there is no circumcision nor uncircumcision. Those defining qualities are gone in Christ. What exists now is the new creation. The new creation is not the new me or you but the new us. It is all believers united in Jesus Christ. In that relationship, He graciously shares with us His identity and what He has accomplished. Altogether we make up the new creation or the new man that He has

created in Himself (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:15-16).<sup>99</sup> Believers are to focus on who we are together with this new identity rather than the old diverse identities that divide people all over the world.

**6:16** Paul adds [*kai*] that as many as walk orderly by this rule or standard, they experience peace. *Osoi* is a legitimate indefinite pronoun or adjective, unlike many “whosoever’s” that are supposed to be translations of relative pronouns and participles (cp Jh. 3:16). The importance of this pronoun is that it limits the experience of peace to as many as operate by this rule. Those believers who choose to live by the divided identities associated with the Law and the world system, do not experience this peace. The rule or canon derives from canon the Greek word for a reed that one broke at a standardized length and used to establish a measurement. So here believers can take their carefully ordered steps [*stoicheō*] by the measurement of this new creation where previous identities are gone. Such believers see themselves and others as God sees us. They enjoy this peace. This peace is upon [*epi*] them.

The next phrase begins with the *kai* in which Paul adds a second group, the Israel of God. Nowhere in the New Testament are believers referred to as Israel. The title Israel is always used of literal Israelis, that is, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sadly, many go to great lengths to try and make Israel the people of God and conclude that the Church has become the Israel of God or has been joined to the Israel of God. None of this is defensible based on Biblical evidence.

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<sup>99</sup> In Ephesians 2:15, the NASB has “He might **make** the two one new man.” The word “make” is κῑτζω [*kitzō*] to create.

When believers choose to live under the Mosaic Law and specifically choose circumcision as a religious light, they are making themselves the Israel of God. They are not functioning as part of the new creation. To them, Paul writes, “and (*kai*) mercy also (*kai*) upon the Israel of God.” Mercy, also known as pity, is God’s goodness expressed in response to suffering due to sin. This suffering may exist simply because we live in a fallen world, ie. Adam’s sin, because of another’s sin against us, or because of our sin. Often, people describe grace as providing and mercy as God withholding. Yet, an examining the occurrences of mercy, we find that God also provides from mercy. Grace provides without regard to our lack of merit. Grace provides to relieve our suffering. By His mercy, He regenerated us due to suffering associated with our state of spiritual separation from God (Tit. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 1:3). Though we were children of wrath, an unpleasant condition, God’s mercy made us alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4-6). The Jewish religious leaders neglected mercy toward the suffering focusing only on keeping commands (Mt. 23:23). We can find mercy and grace at God’s throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Mercy eases the pain of separation and hostility being felt by the Hebrew believers at the hands of their unsaved fellow Jews. Understanding that mercy addresses our suffering indicates that the Israel of God is suffering due to sin or unrighteousness. In the context of Galatians, the unrighteousness is turning to law and away from the ministry of the Spirit. Because of their willful disobedience to God’s plan to live free of the Law, these believers need mercy in addition to God’s peace.

**6:17** Paul charges the believers to not cause [an imperative verb] him trouble or labor [*koptō*] anymore.

This situation of believers following the law-teaching has labored Paul emotionally and mentally as can be seen by his responses in the letter, see especially his comments in chapter four. He already bears the mark or burns caused by a brand in his body. He was stoned, beaten, and whipped on many occasions. These left scars both physical and emotional. The word “bear” is *bastazo* to carry as a heavy burden. Paul’s lasting scars were hard for him.

**6:18** Paul closes, as in most of his letters, by reminding them that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **is** with their spirit. With their spirit, they could appreciate and apprehend this grace for their challenges. Whatever their problems, they remain His brothers in Christ.