

# BORN FREE ... LIVE FREE ... STAY FREE

## Commentary on the Book of Galatians

by Paul G. Apple, Oct. 2001, rev. Oct. 2024

### NEVER SURRENDER THE LIBERTY OF OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST TO THE BONDAGE OF RELIGIOUS LEGALISM

#### OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST:

- ENTERED INTO BY FAITH (APART FROM ANY WORKS)
- ENERGIZED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
- EXPRESSED IN LOVING SERVICE TO OTHERS

**Galatians 5:1** *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."*

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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# **Born Free**

(Words by Don Black and Music by John Barry)

Oscar-winning title song from the 1966 film, Barry also won for soundtrack  
Charted in 1966 at # 7 by Roger Williams and # 35 by Matt Monro  
Soul version by the Hesitations hit #38 in 1968

**Born free**, as free as the wind blows  
As free as the grass grows  
Born free to follow your heart

**Live free** and beauty surrounds you  
The world still astounds you  
Each time you look at a star

**Stay free**, where no walls divide you  
You're free as the roaring tide  
So there's no need to hide

Born free, and life is worth living  
But only worth living  
'cause you're born free

(Stay free, where no walls divide you)  
You're free as the roaring tide  
So there's no need to hide

Born free, and life is worth living  
But only worth living  
'cause you're born free

# OUTLINE OF GALATIANS

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**OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST:**

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*"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."*

**(Galatians 5:1)**

**(1:1-10) SALUTATION – TRUE APOSTLE WITH THE TRUE GOSPEL**

**A. (1:1-5) LEGITIMATE DIVINE APOSTLESHIP PROMOTES THE ESSENCE OF THE TRUE GOSPEL = THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST**

1. (:1-2a) Author: Source of Paul's Legitimate Apostleship (and Authority)
2. (:2b) Recipients: Realm of Apostolic Authority
3. (:3) Greeting: Blessing from Apostolic Authority
4. (:4) Essence of the True Gospel – Significance of the Crucifixion
5. (:5) Ultimate Goal = Glory of God the Father

**B. (1:6-10) ANY PERVERSION OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF CHRIST DESERVES GOD'S STRONGEST CONDEMNATION**

1. (:6-7) Gospel Perverters Entice Gospel Deserters
2. (:8-9) Gospel Perverters Deserve God's Strongest Condemnation
3. (:10) Gospel Perverters Operate as Slick Politicians

**I. (1:11-2:21) PERSONAL: DEFENSE OF PAUL'S APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY**

**A. (1:11-24) PAUL'S AUTHORITY ESTABLISHED BY DIVINE REVELATION -- PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY CONFIRMS THE DIVINE SOURCE OF HIS MESSAGE AND AUTHORITY**

1. (:11-12) Thesis: The Divine Source of His Gospel Message

2. (:13-17) Personal Testimony of His Conversion Experience:  
Sovereignly Appointed to His Apostolic Mission
3. (:18-24) Personal Testimony of His Formative Years:  
Almost No Contact with Believers

**B. (2:1-10) PAUL'S AUTHORITY RECOGNIZED BY THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM -- PAUL'S INDEPENDENT MESSAGE AND AUTHORITY WERE STILL VALIDATED BY THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM**

1. (:1-3) The Voluntary Submission of Paul's Gospel Message for Review by the Leaders of the Church in Jerusalem
2. (:4-5) The Problem: False Teachers Who Were Promoting Their False Gospel of Legalism over Paul's True Gospel of Liberty in Christ
3. (:6-10) The Unqualified Recognition of Paul's Genuine Authority and Effective Ministry

**C. (2:11-21) PAUL'S AUTHORITY DEMONSTRATED IN REBUKING PETER'S ERROR -- JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR LIVING BY THE PRINCIPLE OF LEGALISM**

1. (:11-13) Peter's Hypocrisy Deserved Paul's Strong Opposition
2. (:14) Peter's Hypocrisy Compromised the Truth of the Gospel
3. (:15-21) Justification by Faith Unites us All (Jews and Gentile) to Christ so that We Can Walk by Faith

**II. (3:1-4:31) POLEMIC: DEFENSE OF THE CORE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (WHICH HAS SET US FREE AND MADE US HEIRS) -- JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH EXCLUDES ANY DEPENDENCE ON RELIGIOUS LEGALISM FOR SALVATION OR SANCTIFICATION**

**A. (3:1-14) JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PROVES THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO LIVE BY FAITH**

1. (:1-5) Argument from Personal Experience
2. (:6-9) Argument from the Example of Abraham
3. (:10-14) Argument from Freedom from the Curse of the Law

**B. (3:15-22) THE BLESSING OF JUSTIFICATION COULD ONLY COME VIA GOD'S UNCHANGING PROMISES RATHER THAN BY THE LAW**

1. (:15-18) God's Unchanging Promises Cannot be Superseded by the Law
2. (:19-22) The Purpose of God's Law Was Never to Provide Justification

**C. (3:23 - 4:7) THE COMING OF CHRIST ELEVATED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD TO THAT OF PRIVILEGED SONS AND HEIRS -- BEFORE AND AFTER FAMILY SNAPSHOTS**

1. (3:23-29) Privilege of Sonship Through Faith in Christ
2. (4:1-7) What's the Big Deal?

**D. (4:8-20) JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH MUST BE HELD ON TO DESPITE THE SEDUCTIVE DECEPTIONS OF ZEALOUS FALSE TEACHERS**

1. (:8-11) Exhortation: Don't Turn Back to a Lifestyle of Legalistic Bondage = Futility
2. (:12-16) Emotional Plea: Don't Reject the Loving Instruction of Your Original Discippler
3. (:17-20) Don't Be Deceived by Zealous False Teachers

**E. (4:21-31) THE OT ANALOGY OF ISHMAEL AND ISAAC PICTURES OUR FREEDOM -- ACCOMPLISHED BY THE SPIRIT ACCORDING TO GOD'S PROMISE**

- (:21) Attention Grabber – Key Question
1. (:22-27) The Key Distinctions in the OT Analogy
  2. (:28-30) The Key Applications of the OT Analogy
- (:31) Conclusion – Key Principle:  
We Have Been Born to Freedom, Not Bondage

**III. (5:1-6:10) PRACTICAL: APPLICATION OF LIBERTY = TO WALK IN LOVE BY THE SPIRIT**

**A. (5:1-12) STAND FIRM IN THE LIBERTY TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED**

1. (:1) Thesis of the Epistle: Stand Firm in the Liberty to Which You Have Been Called
2. (:2-6) Faith in the Law Cannot be harmonized with Faith in Christ
3. (:7-12) Standing Firm Requires Rejecting the Destructive Teachings of Those Opposed to the Message of the Cross of Christ

**B. (5:13-26) USE FREEDOM AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WALK IN LOVE BY WALKING IN THE SPIRIT -- (NOT AN OPPORTUNITY TO FULFIL THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH)**

- (:13) Thesis
1. (:14-15) Walk in Love
  2. (:16-26) Walk by the Spirit

**C. (6:1-10) DO GOOD -- 2 PRACTICAL WAYS TO WALK IN LOVE BY THE SPIRIT**

1. (:1-5) Humbly Help Your Brother in Need
2. (:6-10) Consistently Keep on Giving to Meet the Needs of Others

**(6:11-18) CLOSING SUMMARY / BENEDICTION --  
THE BRANDMARKS OF LOYALTY TO THE CROSS OF CHRIST  
- BOAST ONLY IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST  
- AND THE CORRESPONDING SCARS OF PERSECUTION**

## BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

Dr. Daniel Wallace: **Good Overview**

<https://bible.org/seriespage/galatians-introduction-argument-and-outline>

### GENERAL

Timothy George: Jerome once said that when he read the letters of the apostle Paul he could hear thunder. Nowhere in the Pauline corpus is such stormy dissonance more evident than in the Epistle to the Galatians. Though written from prison, Philippians is a love letter on the theme of joy. Romans reflects the considered objectivity of a master theologian reveling in the doctrines of grace. Ephesians is an uplifting commentary on the body of Christ. Even the Corinthian correspondence, though obviously written out of great personal anguish and pain, revolves around the great triad of faith, hope, and love, with Paul's hardships and concerns set over against his greater confidence in the God of all comfort who causes his children to triumph. In **2 Cor 13:12** Paul could admonish the believers in Corinth to greet one another with a holy kiss.

But Galatians is different. From beginning to end, its six chapters of 149 verses bristle with **passion, sarcasm, and anger**. True, there is a touch of tenderness as well; once in the midst of the letter Paul referred to the Galatians as "*my children*" (**4:19**). As the context reveals, though, this was the tearing tenderness of a distraught mother who must endure all over again the pains of childbirth because her children, who should have known better, were in danger of committing spiritual suicide. Paul was astonished and perplexed by their departure from the truth of the gospel. He feared that they had been "*bewitched*" (NIV 1984) and deceived. In frustration he dubbed them, as J. B. Phillips translates it, "*dear idiots*" (**3:1**).

Ray Stedman: Galatians comes to grips with the question of what real Christian life is like. The answer can be characterized by one word, "**liberty**." The Christian is called to liberty in Jesus Christ. The cry of this epistle is that Christians might discover the liberty of the sons of God in accordance with all that God has planned for man in the way of freedom and enjoyment. Its aim is freedom of our human spirits to the utmost extent, restrained only as necessary for us to exist in harmony with the design of God. Therefore, this letter has been called the "**Bill of Rights of the Christian Life**," or the "**Magna Carta of Christian Liberty**," the "**Emancipation Proclamation**" from all forms of legalism and bondage in the Christian experience.

Scot McKnight: **Legalism**, according to Galatians, was a religious system that combined Christianity with Mosaism in a way that demanded total commitment to Israel's law as the climax of one's conversion to Christ. This "deeper commitment to the law," according to Paul, was a subversion of the adequacy of Christ's work and an abandonment of the Holy Spirit as God's way of guiding Christian ethics. In other words, the legalism of the Judaizers is more than a problem: it has become a new message, a different gospel.

C. F. Hogg: In modern days there are no advocates of the circumcision of Gentile believers, indeed, but there are those who preach salvation through sacraments, baptism and the holy eucharist, through membership in some religious community, through keeping the law,

generally, or the fourth commandment, specifically, or through following an inner light, which may or may not coincide with the light of the Holy Scriptures. But in no case is faith in Christ, as essential to salvation, repudiated. There must be faith in Christ indeed, but there must be something besides. And that something invariably implies merit on the part of him who has it, or who does it. This, affirms the Apostle, is to make the Cross of Christ of none effect.

**Bruce Hurt:** **John Piper** told his congregation in 1983 (he retired in 2012) the reason he had "chosen to preach from Galatians over the next several months is that more than any other New Testament letter, this one is **alive**. I mean that in Galatians Paul is at his most vigorous. The sheer emotional force of the book has captured me again and again over the years. You can't read the first ten verses without feeling that something utterly important is at stake. You can't read Galatians and think, "Well this is an interesting piece of religious reflection"—any more than you can examine a live coal with your bare hands. Galatians is a virile statement of the central truths of Christianity. If we as a people can make these truths and this vigor a part of our thinking and our willing, the bones of our faith will be strong and not brittle, and the emotional force of our life in Christ will not be lukewarm but ardent and intense and undivided. The Scottish minister, **P. T. Forsythe**, said, "The secret of the Lord is with those who have been broken by his cross and healed by his Spirit." Galatians exalts these two things: the cross of Christ as the only way a person can get right with God, and the Spirit of Christ as the only way a person can obey God. Anything that diminishes the beauty and all-sufficiency of what happened on the cross of Christ is anathema to Paul. Anything that puts our willing or running where the Holy Spirit belongs is witchery to Paul. And the reason we sense a kind of compassionate rage running beneath this letter is that someone had bewitched the Galatians to put themselves where the Spirit belonged and the works of law where faith in the cross belonged. My hope is that you will study this great book with me. That you will marry it and that "the two will become one." There is nothing that I would rather be over the next several months than a spiritual cupid to help you fall in love afresh with the magnificent Christ of Galatians."

**Howard Vos:** The **contemporary relevance** of Galatians, then, is that it attacks the ever present desire of men to achieve salvation by their own efforts and the tendency of Christians to live the Christian life in their own strength or in a legalistic way. In stressing Christian liberty, Galatians does not open the door to lawlessness. It encourages believers not to be weary in well-doing (**Gal 6:9**) and reminds them that what a man sows he shall reap (**v. 7**). In short, the book admonishes believers to live by the power of the Holy Spirit and to walk in the Spirit. (**5:16, 25**). Further, Paul in this epistle makes it quite clear that the believer who seeks to live the Christian life in his own strength or in a legalistic fashion does not enjoy the power of the Holy Spirit to free him from his sinful self so he can live well-pleasing to God.

The small epistle to the Galatians has played a significant part in the history of the church and indeed of the entire Western world. In the early church it heralded a clarion call for the distinctiveness of Christianity with its message of justification by faith. **Tenney** declares, "Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written." Luther's Commentary on Galatians was the manifesto of the Protestant Reformation and its message the major theme of Reformation preaching. And Galatians has a relevant message of justification by faith for modern man, with all his cults and religious systems that seek to gain heaven by good works.

**GotQuestions.org: Summary:**

The fact that we are justified by grace through faith means we have **spiritual freedom**. We are not under bondage to the dictates of the Old Testament Law. Paul soundly condemns anyone who would denigrate the grace of God and attempt to change the gospel (**Galatians 1:8–10**). He gives his apostolic credentials (**Galatians 1:11 – 2:14**) and emphasizes that righteousness comes through Christ not the works of the Law (**Galatians 2:21**). The Galatians must stand fast in their freedom and not be “*entangled again with a yoke of bondage* (that is, the Mosaic law)” (**Galatians 5:1**). Christian freedom is not an excuse to gratify one’s sin nature; rather, our freedom is an opportunity to love one another (**Galatians 5:13; 6:7–10**). The Christian life is to be lived in the power of the Spirit, not the flesh (**Galatians 5:16–18**). The flesh has been crucified with Christ (**Galatians 2:20**); as a consequence, the Spirit will bear His fruit in the life of the believer (**Galatians 5:22–23**).

In the end, the issue is not whether a person is circumcised but whether he is a “*new creation*” (**Galatians 6:15**). Salvation is the work of the Spirit, and we must be born again (see **John 3:3**). External religious rites such as circumcision are of no value in the realm of the Spirit.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Galatians.html>

**David Malick:** His Big Idea for the book --

IN VIEW OF THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL VERACITY OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE THAT SALVATION AND SANCTIFICATION ARE ACQUIRED BY FAITH, PAUL URGES THE GALATIANS TO SEPARATE FROM THE FALSE TEACHERS WHO DESIRE TO ENTANGLE THEM, AND TO EXPRESS THEIR FREEDOM THROUGH LOVING SERVICE OF ONE ANOTHER UNDER THE ENABLEMENT OF THE SPIRIT.

**AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE**

**Chuck Swindoll:** Galatians has always been among those Pauline epistles least challenged on the issue of authorship. Paul wrote to the churches in southern Galatia after having a hand in starting them on his first missionary journey to Asia Minor. Paul’s close relationship to these churches helps to explain the extremely strong tone he took with them from the very beginning of the letter. Galatians exhibits Paul at his angriest, as he risked the good favor of the converts in those churches to make sure they were on the path of truth and not led off into deception. In fact, to emphasize the seriousness of his purpose, he took the pen from his scribe and wrote the end of the letter himself in large letters (**Galatians 6:11**).

**Bruce Barton:** Dating Paul’s letter to the Galatians depends for the most part on the question of its **destination**. Galatia covered a large area that extended almost from the coast of the Black Sea to the coast of the Mediterranean, through the mountains and plains of central Turkey. In Paul’s day, the word Galatia could be understood in two different ways. Geographically, it could refer to the northern territory inhabited by Celtic tribes. If Paul had visited this area, it would have been on his second or third missionary journeys. Thus, the letter to the Galatians would have been written around A.D. 57–58. . .



But “*Galatia*” could also be interpreted politically, referring to the Roman province in the south, which included Lycaonia, Isauria, and parts of Phrygia and Pisidia. Thus Paul’s Galatian letter would have been addressed to churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in the southern part of Galatia. These churches were founded on the first missionary journey (**Acts 13:3 – 14:26**).

Today, many scholars (including **Ramsey, Burton, Bruce, and Longenecker**) hold to the **south Galatian view** and the earlier dating of Paul’s letter. The reasons for this view are as follows:

1. Barnabas is mentioned in **2:1** and **13**. Barnabas accompanied Paul only on the first missionary journey. Paul’s traveling companions on journeys two and three were Silas and others. It is unlikely that Paul would mention Barnabas to the Galatians unless they knew him.
2. There is no account of specific churches being founded in North Galatia, even on Paul’s second missionary journey, and there is no certainty that churches existed there at the time of Paul’s writing. For example, no representatives from North Galatia accompanied the gift collected by Paul for the Jerusalem poor as did those from South Galatia.
3. The cities in South Galatia would have been more accessible to the Judaizers than those in the north. Thus the problems addressed by Paul could have arisen quickly after his departure from that area.
4. As a Roman citizen, Paul always used the provincial names of the areas under Roman control. Paul used the term Galatia only three times (**1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:2; 2 Timothy 4:10**), and all seem to refer to the Roman province.
5. There is no mention of the council at Jerusalem, which occurred in A.D. 50. The express purpose of this council was to confront the same issues addressed by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. The decision of the council favored Paul and his ministry among the Gentiles (**Acts 15:1-35**), so Paul certainly would have referred to the council’s decision, to bolster his case; after all, he did not hesitate, in his letter, to review a brief history of the controversy, even naming specific individuals involved (**2:1-21**).

**Thomas Schreiner**: Identifying the **recipients** of Galatians is important for Pauline chronology and history, but it is not determinative for the interpretation of the letter, and the meaning of the letter does not change dramatically whether we opt for a north or south Galatian hypothesis. On balance, it seems that a south Galatian hypothesis is preferable. . .

The **date** of the letter is determined by the question of the recipients. If one espouses a south Galatian hypothesis and places the letter before the events of **Acts 15:1–35**, then Galatians is the earliest Pauline letter and may have been written ca. AD 48. We have just noted, however, that one could support the south Galatian hypothesis and correlate **Acts 15:1–35** with **Gal 2:1–10**. In such a scenario, the letter could be dated in the early 50s. If one accepts the north Galatian hypothesis, the letter was likely written somewhere between AD 50–57.

### John MacArthur: Background and Destination

The name *Galatia* is derived from the barbaric Gauls, or Celts, who settled in Asia Minor after several centuries of plundering the Greek and Roman empires. Under Roman rule, the original region of Galatia was made part of a larger province by the same name in central Asia Minor (modern Turkey) that encompassed an area some 250 miles north to south and up to 175 miles from east to west.

In Paul's day the name Galatia was used for the original smaller region as well as the province. On the first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas established four churches in the southern part of the province, in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (**Acts 13:14 - 14:23**), and those churches apparently came to form something of a regional body of believers. The Galatian epistle itself does not identify the specific local churches, but they were churches in which Paul had personally ministered (**4:13-15**). The fact that the book of Acts mentions the four churches established by Paul in south Galatia and mentions none in the rest of the province makes it probable that the epistle was addressed primarily to those southern churches.

Also in favor of that theory is the fact that in Galatians Paul makes no reference to the Jerusalem Council or its momentous decision regarding the Judaizing controversy, a decision that would have given great additional weight to his argument against Judaistic legalism. Such an omission strongly suggests that the letter was written before the Council convened, which was shortly after Paul's first journey (see **Acts 14:24 - 15:6**) and therefore before he had opportunity to travel in northern Galatia. According to that chronology, the letter would have been written around A.D. 50.

While in Galatia, Paul nearly lost his life, having been stoned and left for dead by antagonistic Jewish leaders who followed him from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra (**Acts 14:19-20**). After establishing a church in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas revisited the other three cities, "*strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith*" (**14:22**). On his second journey Paul visited the Galatian churches with Silas, "*delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily*" (**Acts 16:1-5**)

**John Stott:** Since his visit to these Galatian cities, the churches he founded have been troubled by false teachers. These people have mounted a powerful attack on Paul's authority and gospel. They contradict his gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone, insisting that more than faith in Christ is needed for salvation. You have to be circumcised as well, they say, and keep all the law of Moses (see **Acts 15:1, 5**). Having undermined Paul's gospel, they proceed to undermine his authority also. "Who is this fellow Paul, anyway?" they ask scornfully. "He certainly wasn't one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. Nor, so far as we know, has he received any authorization from anybody. He is just a self-appointed impostor."

Paul sees the dangers of this two-pronged attack; so right at the beginning of the letter he plunges into a statement of his **apostolic authority** and of his **gospel of grace**. He will elaborate these themes later in the letter, but notice how he begins: "*Paul, an apostle [not an impostor]. . . . Grace and peace to you.*" The two terms apostle and grace were loaded words in that situation;

and if we understand their meaning, we have grasped the two main subjects of the letter to the Galatians.

**James Fowler: Map of the Area -- Roman Province of Galatia -- 25 B.C. - 137 A.D.**



Mention has already been made to the "sketchy" information available about the **contextual situation** that prompted this letter. Paul had obviously planted these churches (**1:8,11; 4:19,20**), and the Christians in the churches had a great fondness and appreciation for Paul as their founding father (**4:14,15**). Sometime (the interval of time is unknown, but it would appear not to be an extended period - cf. **1:6**) after Paul had departed from their cities, having left designated men in charge as teacher/leaders, some other teachers arrived with a modified belief-system that inculcated adherence to the Judaic law of the old covenant. It is difficult to reconstruct the precise identity of these interlopers, but it is obvious that they were advocating the necessity of religious observances (**4:10**), as well as male circumcision (**5:2; 6:12**), and attempting to seduce these new Christians into legalistic old covenant concepts (**3:2; 4:21**)...

So when Paul was informed that foreign infiltrators had influenced the young Galatian Christians to revert to the performance of religious legalism, he was so incensed that he was compelled to

write and set things straight. In this confrontational letter he delineates the dichotomous difference between the gospel of Jesus Christ that he had introduced them to, and the religious trappings of behavioral bondage that these subversive intruders were trying to impose upon them. The epistle is necessarily theological as Paul defends the ontological essence of Christianity in Jesus Christ, but whereas the epistle to the Romans explains Christian theology in logical sequence, Galatians defends Christian theology in the polemic "heat of the battle."

## **PURPOSE OF WRITING**

**G. Campbell Morgan:** Paul's purpose in writing to them was to emphasize that they are not a part of the legal system of the earthly Jerusalem, but are of the above Jerusalem, children free from the Law (4:21 - 5:1). He tells them to expect righteousness on the basis of faith and through love to use their freedom to serve one another (5:2-15). They are to walk by the Spirit and to have His fruit in their lives (5:16-26).

Paul instructs them to mutually bear one another's burdens and to recognize that they will reap what they sow (6:1-10). He explicitly says that there is no value in circumcision or uncircumcision, the only thing that counts is a new creature (6:11-18).

**James Fowler:** An underlying sub-theme of the epistle might be entitled, "The Gospel versus Religion." Though Paul does not use the word "religion" in the text of the letter, it is obvious that the performance-based "works" that the new Galatian Christians are being asked to add to the pure and simple gospel of grace in Jesus Christ is indeed the essence of all religion. This comprehensive theme thus becomes the lens through which the various details of the letter must be interpreted.

The abiding value of Paul's correspondence with the Galatians is that it perpetually reveals the propensity of mankind to revert to performance-based acceptance before God in religion, rather than accepting the ontological dynamic of God's grace in Jesus Christ to manifest divine character to the glory of God. Whenever a Christian begins to think that the performance standards of what they "do" or "don't do" is the basis of or the quality of their Christian life or their "spirituality," then they have lapsed into "Galatian thinking." "If only I didn't smoke, drink, swear, or fall into my besetting sin; If only I prayed more, read my Bible more, witnessed more, was more regular in church attendance, got along better with my spouse, or was a better parent..., then I would be a better Christian and would be more blessed by God." No! That is "Galatian thinking, that evaluates Christian life by achievement, merit, and reward, rather than by constant receptive trust in the grace-working of God in Christ. Such "Galatianism" is so pervasive and prevalent in the churches today as the religious legalists have duped Christians with the didactic declarations of "how-to" Christianity in prescribed procedures, formulas, techniques and duties which allegedly determine the distinguishing marks of a true disciple. Like Paul, we must reject such as a false-gospel, and clearly explain that the only distinguishing mark of a genuine Christian is the manifestation of the life and activity of Jesus Christ in his or her life by the dynamic of God's grace.

**Bruce Barton:** In addition to refuting the Judaizers and emphasizing the truth of salvation by faith alone, Paul also sought to show that with Christian freedom comes responsibility. In other words, believers should use their freedom in Christ to love and serve each other and to obey Christ by living under the control of the Holy Spirit and not giving way to the sinful nature (5:13-14, 22-23).

Even today, many Christians swing to either of those extremes: legalism or libertinism. That is, some, like the Judaizers of the first century, seek to find God's approval through doing good works—church attendance, Bible reading, “full-time” Christian service, tithes—and refraining from bad activities. They judge others who fail to meet their behavioral standards or their particular interpretation of devotion or dedication. In so doing, they become slaves to the law. Others, however, go to the other extreme, emphasizing their freedom and easily rationalizing self-indulgence and lack of commitment to the church. But Paul's message to us is the same as to the Galatians: “You are free from the law; salvation is by faith alone. But that means you are free to serve Christ. Don't leave the slavery of the law only to become slaves of sin!”

### **George Brunk: Contemporary Significance**

In Galatians, Paul is seeking the ultimate ground of true life. He is trying to identify the essence of life before God. Paul's convictions in this regard are what help him sort out the practical issues that he must address in the Galatian congregations. His writings in general—and certainly Galatians in particular—show the strategy of thinking through every question from foundational truths to their consistent expression in life practices. In Galatians, that leads Paul on a search for the essence of the gospel, from which alone can there be authenticity and coherence in life.

## **MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY**

**Martin Luther:** I have taken in hand, in the name of the Lord, yet once again to expound this Epistle of Paul to the Galatians; not because I desire to teach new things, or such as yet have not heard before; but as I have often forewarned you, lest Satan take from us this **doctrine of faith** and bring into the church again the doctrine of works and men's traditions. Wherefore, it is necessary that this doctrine be kept in continual practice and public exercise both of reading and hearing.

**Merrill C. Tenney:** Objectively, Galatians asserts that salvation is freely bestowed by God in response to faith which is founded upon His personal revelation through His gospel... Christian liberty originates in the revelation of God which define human weakness and which makes available God's saving power. In this truth man finds his true liberty, for liberty consists not in the ability to disobey God with impunity, but in the ability to obey Him spontaneously without effective hindrance...

Subjectively, the inner life of the Christian is discussed here in its relation to God. The destruction of sin, the creation of a new man, the exercise of faith, and the enjoyment of consequent liberty are all presented in the natural setting of actual experience, illustrated by biographical allusions. This book is a series of pictures of what spiritual life should be, not just a formulary of precepts. The writer was describing what he himself was enjoying after having

lived a large part of his life in legalistic bondage.... Inner fruitfulness of the spirit is more important than outward conformity of the flesh; and if the Holy Spirit is dominant within, the action of the outward man will be governed accordingly...

Objectively and subjectively, then, Galatians is the charter of freedom from externalism in worship and from frustration in personal spiritual life.

**David Croteau:** The main theological question of Galatians is, What is humanity's problem that Judaism and the Mosaic Law cannot fix? One of the keys to understanding Galatians is to observe the contrast between the old and new covenants, two different eras in salvation history. Paul never claimed the Mosaic Law should be abolished, and he emphasized aspects of continuity between the covenants to help the Galatians see God's redemptive plan in the Bible's story line. However, Paul did discuss aspects of discontinuity between the covenants. He argued that the Mosaic Law was intended to be a temporary phase in the history of salvation and that it had a different purpose from the Abrahamic covenant (**3:15-25**).

<https://www.bibles.net/book-background/background-of-galatians/> **KEY THEMES:**

1. In his sin-bearing death, Christ is a substitute for all Christians. He brings them into a new realm of freedom and life (**Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 3:13**).
2. The gospel of Christ comes from God alone—not from any human source. Paul himself is a living example of this. His conversion to Christ and his apostleship were not through human means. They came through direct revelation from Christ (**Galatians 1:1, 11–12, 15–20**).
3. Salvation comes not by works of law but by faith, which leads to justification (**Galatians 2:16**).
4. To require circumcision and other Mosaic laws as a supplement to faith is to fall back from the realm of grace and freedom and to come under the whole law and its curse, since perfect observance of the law is impossible (**Galatians 2:12–14, 16; 3:10; 4:10; 5:3**).
5. Old Testament Scripture itself testifies to the truth of justification by faith (**Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4**).
6. Believers have died with Christ to sin and therefore have renounced the flesh (**Galatians 5:24; 6:14**).
7. The Spirit is the source of power and guidance in the Christian life. He produces love and faith in the believer (**Galatians 5:6, 16, 18, 25**).
8. The Christian life is one of pleasing Christ. This requires willingness to suffer persecution for the sake of his cross (**Galatians 1:10; 6:12, 14**).

Bruce Hurt:

<b>CONTRAST OF GRACE AND LAW</b>	
<b>LAW</b>	<b>GRACE</b>
The law prohibits	Grace invites and gives
The law condemns the sinner	Grace redeems the sinner.
The law says DO	Grace says IT IS DONE.
The law says, Continue to be holy	Grace says, It is finished.
The law curses	Grace blesses
The law slays the sinner	Grace makes the sinner alive.
The law shuts every mouth before God	Grace opens the mouth to praise God.
The law condemns the best man	Grace saves the worst man.
The law says, pay what you owe	Grace says, I freely forgive you all.
The law says "the wages of sin is death"	Grace says, "the gift of God is eternal life."
The law says, "the soul that sins shall die"	Grace says, Believe and live.
The law reveals sin	Grace atones for sin.
By the law is the knowledge of sin	By grace is redemption from sin.
The law was given by Moses	Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
The law demands obedience	Grace bestows and gives power to obey.
The law was written on stone	Grace is written on the tables of the heart.
The law was done away in Christ	Grace abides forever.
The law puts us under bondage	Grace sets us in the liberty of the sons of God.

**F. F. Bruce:** Two dominant themes in Galatians which are given equal emphasis in Romans are the insistence on justification before God by faith, apart from legal works, and the presentation of the Spirit as the principle of the new life in Christ which believers enjoy as freeborn children of God. If there are features in Romans which have no parallel in Galatians, Galatians has features which are unparalleled in Romans, such as the autobiographical section in **Gal. 1:11 – 2:14**, with its defense of Paul's apostolic liberty. Romans must not be made the standard for interpreting Galatians: Galatians must be read and understood in its own right.

## **STRUCTURE**

**Ernest Burton: Outline**

### **INTRODUCTION (1:1-10)**

- a. Salutation, including assertion of the writer's apostolic authority (1:1--5)
- b. Expression of indignant surprise at the threatened abandonment of his teaching by the Galatians, in which is disclosed the occasion of the letter (1:6-10)

### **1. PERSONAL PORTION OF THE LETTER (1:11 – 2:21)**

The general theme established by proving the apostle's independence of all human authority and direct relation to Christ

- a. Proposition: Paul received his gospel not from men, but immediately from God (:11-12)
- b. Evidence substantiating the preceding assertion of his independence of human authority drawn from various periods of his life (1:13 - 2:21)
  - 1) Evidence drawn from his life before his conversion (1:13-14)
  - 2) Evidence drawn from the circumstances of his conversion and his conduct immediately thereafter (1:15-17)
  - 3) Evidence drawn from a visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (1:18-20)
  - 4) Evidence drawn from the period of his stay in Syria and Cilicia (1:21-24)
  - 5) Evidence drawn from his conduct on a visit to Jerusalem fourteen years after the preceding one (2:1-10)
  - 6) Evidence drawn from his conduct in resisting Peter at Antioch (2:11-14)
  - 7) Continuation and expansion of his address at Antioch so stated as to be for the Galatians, also an exposition of the gospel which he preached (2:15-21)

### **2. REFUTATORY PORTION OF THE LETTER (Chap. 3-4)**

The doctrine that men, both Jews and Gentiles, become acceptable to God through faith rather than by works of law, defended by refutation of the arguments of the Judaizers, and chiefly by showing that the "*heirs of Abraham*" are such by faith, not by works of law

- a) Appeal to the early Christian experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)
- b) Argument from the faith of Abraham, refuting the contention of his



opponents that only through conformity to law could men become "*sons of Abraham*" (3:6-9)

- c) Counter argument, showing that those whose standing is fixed by law are by the logic of the legalists under the curse of the law (3:10-14)
- d) Argument from the irrevocableness of a covenant and the priority of the covenant made with Abraham to the law, to the effect that the covenant is still in force (3:15-18)
- e) Answer to the objection that the preceding argument leaves the law without a reason for being (3:19-22)
- f) Characterization of the condition under law and, in contrast with it, the condition since faith came: then we were held in custody under law; now we are all sons of God, heirs of the promise (3:22-29)
- g) Continuation of the argument for the inferiority of the condition under law, with the use of the illustration of guardianship (4:1-7)
- h) Description of the former condition of the Galatians as one of bondage to gods not really such, and exhortation to them not to return to that state (4:8-11)
- i) Affectionate appeal to the Galatians to enter fully into their freedom from law, referring to their former enthusiastic reception of the apostle and affection for him (4:12-20)
- j) A supplementary argument, based on an allegorical use of the story of the two sons of Abraham, and intended to convince the Galatians that they are joining the wrong branch of the family (4:21-31)

### **3. HORTATORY PORTION OF THE LETTER (5:1 - 6:10)**

- a. Exhortations directly connected with the doctrine of the letter (5:1 - 6:5)
  - 1) Appeal to the Galatians to stand fast in their freedom in Christ (5:1-12)
  - 2) Exhortation not to convert their liberty in Christ into an occasion for yielding to the impulse of the flesh (5:13-26)
  - 3) Exhortation to restore those who fall, and to bear one another's burdens (6:1-5)
- b. Exhortations having a less direct relation to the principal subject of the epistle (6:6-10)

### **4. CONCLUSION OF THE LETTER (6:11-18)**

- a. Final warning against the Judaizers (6:11-16)
- b. Appeal enforced by reference to his own sufferings (6:17)
- c. Final benediction (6:18)

**Merrill C. Tenney: Outline -- Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty**

#### **INTRODUCTION: 1:1-9**

- A. Salutation: The Ground of Liberty 1:1-5
- B. Occasion: The Challenge to Liberty 1:6-9

#### **I. THE BIOGRAPHICAL ARGUMENT: An Independent Revelation 1:10 - 2:21**

- A. Independent of Human Teaching .. 1:10-17

- B. Independent of Judean Churches 1:18-24
- C. Independent of Judaizing Brethren 2:1-10
- D. Independent of Apostolic Pressure 2:11-18
- E. Independent of Selfish Interest 2:19-21

## II. THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT: The Failure of Legalism 3:1 - 4:31

- A. A. From Personal Experience 3:1-5
- B. From Old Testament Teaching 3:6-14
- C. From Priority of Promise 3:15-22
- D. From Superiority of Mature Faith 3:23 - 4:7
- E. From Danger of Reaction 4:8-11
- F. From Contrast of Motives 4:12-20
- G. From Contrast of Bondage and Liberty 4:21-31

## III. THE PRACTICAL ARGUMENT: The Effect of Liberty 5:1 - 6:10

- A. Introductory Statement 5:1
- B. The Consequences of Legalism 5:2-12
- C. The Definition of Freedom 5:13-15
- D. Individual Practice 5:16-24
- E. Social Practice 5:25 - 6:10

## CONCLUSION 6:11-18

- A. The Motive of Liberty: The Cross 6:11-16
- B. The Price of Liberty: Suffering 6:17
- C. The Benediction of Liberty 6:18

## Charles Swindoll: Theme -- Liberation Through the Gospel (1:1-10) INTRODUCTION

### I. (1:11 - 2:21) ISSUE OF TRUTH

- Personal Narrative
- The Gospel is Authentic (Its Source)
- The Authority of Paul's Apostleship
  - Confusion
  - Clarification
  - Correction

### II. (3:1 - 4:31) NATURE OF SALVATION

- Doctrinal Argument
- The Gospel is Superior (Its Defense)
- The Falsity of Legalism
  - Works versus Faith
  - Legalism versus Justification
  - Bondage versus Freedom

### III. (5:1 - 6:10) PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS

Practical Application

The Gospel is Liberating (Its Impact)

The Power of God's Spirit

- Don't be enslaved.
- Serve through love.
- Walk in the Spirit.
- Bear one another's burdens.
- Let us do good.

### (6:11-18) CONCLUSION

Bruce Hurt: [preceptaustin.org](http://preceptaustin.org)

SUMMARY CHART: EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS							
Gospel of Grace Defended		Gospel of Grace Explained			Gospel of Grace Applied		
Defense of the Gospel <a href="#">Gal 1:1-2:21</a>		Freedom from Legalism <a href="#">Gal 3:1-4:31</a>			Freedom to Love and to Serve <a href="#">Gal 5:1-6:18</a>		
Labor		Liberty			Life		
Authority Not Opinion		Freedom Not Bondage			Spirit Not Flesh		
Personal Autobiography		Doctrinal Accuracy			Practical Application		
Paul the Apostle <a href="#">(Gal 1:1-24)</a>	Paul's Authority <a href="#">(Gal 2:1-21)</a>	Justified by Faith not Works <a href="#">(Gal 3:1-9)</a>	Justified by Faith not the Law <a href="#">(Gal 3:10-4:20)</a>	Grace and Law Cannot Co- Exist <a href="#">(Gal 4:21-31)</a>	Position and Practice of Liberty <a href="#">(Gal 5:1-15)</a>	Power of Liberty <a href="#">(Gal 5:16-26)</a>	Performance in Liberty <a href="#">(Gal 6:1-18)</a>
Vindication		Exposition			Application		
Testimonial and Apologetic		Doctrinal and Argumentative			Practical and Hortatory		
Biographical Explanation		Doctrinal Exposition			Practical Exhortation		
Authentication of Liberty		Argumentation for Liberty			Application of Liberty		

TEXT: GALATIANS 1:1-5

TITLE: SALUTATION: TRUE APOSTLE WITH THE TRUE GOSPEL

**BIG IDEA:**

**LEGITIMATE DIVINE APOSTLESHIP PROMOTES THE ESSENCE OF THE TRUE GOSPEL = THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Bruce Barton:** The year was probably A.D. 49. Paul and Barnabas had just completed their first missionary journey (**Acts 13:2 – 14:28**). By their standards, it must have been a whirlwind adventure. Following a brief stay on the island of Cyprus, they had visited Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, cities in the Roman province of Galatia (present-day Turkey). In their travels they had met with both wholehearted response and deep-seated resistance.

Usually Paul and Barnabas would introduce the gospel in a new area by starting in the local Jewish synagogue, demonstrating from the Scriptures that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. But they would venture beyond the Jewish community to offer the promise of forgiveness and eternal life to the Gentiles. And that would get them in trouble. Declaring that God wanted to save Gentiles placed Paul and Barnabas under a cloud of suspicion by Jews and Jewish Christians. As a result of their preaching, however, many Jews and Gentiles converted to Christ. The success of Christianity also created deep resentment in those holding positions of leadership in society and in religious circles. The work of Paul and Barnabas threatened their standing.

Thrilled by the number of persons who accepted their message, upon arriving back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas “*gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*” (**Acts 14:27** NIV).

Shortly after their return to Antioch, some Jewish Christians arrived from Judea. These Judeans claimed that the Antioch church and its missionaries were **diluting Christianity** to make it more appealing to Gentiles, and they challenged Paul’s authority as an apostle. They disagreed with Paul’s teaching that Gentiles did not have to follow many of the religious laws that the Jews had obeyed for centuries. The resultant heated debate touched almost every church in the first century. The issue: **how to maintain a proper place for the Jewish root from which the vine of Christianity was flourishing. . .**

Legalism” is attempting to win God’s favor by our own determined efforts of dedication and obedience. In Paul’s time, Jews and many Jewish Christians believed that by faithful adherence to the law they could win God’s approval. By strict and rigid adherence to the Mosaic code, they could earn righteous standing with God.

“Labelism” is pride of ownership for having the “right” religion. Jews saw their commitment to the law (primarily the Jewish food laws and circumcision) as a badge of ownership, a symbol of their performance of the historic covenant between them and God. They felt superior for their religious correctness and for upholding the “right” religion. Too often this adherence to the law was in name only.

**John MacArthur:** One way to deny the truthfulness of a message is to deny the authority of the one who gives it. The Galatian church had received the true gospel of grace from Paul and had believed it until some false teachers came in after he was gone. They not only attacked the validity of the message but also that of the messenger. Apparently the Judaizers had convinced some of the Galatian church members that Paul was a self-appointed apostle with no divine commission. So at the outset of the letter Paul dispensed with the usual personal greetings and immediately began to establish the genuineness of his apostolic authority, which he later (1: 11 - 2:21) expands on in detail.

In this brief salutation Paul summarizes his authority (his right to speak), his message (the truths he speaks), and his motive (his reason for speaking).

**Richard Longenecker:** In the salutation of Galatians, Paul sets out the two main issues dealt with in the letter: the nature of his apostleship and the nature of the Christian gospel. And against those who were stirring up his converts to think otherwise, he enlists the support of, first, “*all the brothers with me*” (v 2), and then a confession drawn from the liturgy of the early church (v 4).

**David Jeremiah:** Paul omits his typical “thanksgiving” section—where he praises God for the faithfulness of the church—in his letter to the Galatians. This points to the urgency he felt in calling out the error of the Judaizers.

**Philip Ryken:** The Pharisees were hypocrites because they thought that what God would do for them depended on what they did for God. So they read their Bibles, prayed, tithed, and kept the Sabbath as if their salvation depended on it. What they failed to understand is that God’s grace cannot be earned; it only comes free.

There is a way out of Pharisaism. The way out is called the gospel. It is the good news that Jesus Christ has already done everything necessary for our salvation. If we trust in him, he will make us right with God by giving us the free gift of his grace. When we reject our own righteousness to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ, we become former Pharisees.

Most former Pharisees have a problem, however. It is hard for them to leave their **legalism** behind. Although initially they received God’s grace for free, they keep trying to put a surcharge on it. They believe that God loves them, but secretly they suspect that his love is conditional, that it depends on how they are doing in the Christian life. They

end up with a **performance-based Christianity** that denies the grace of God. To put this in theological terms, they want to base their justification on their sanctification.

This means that most former Pharisees—indeed, most Christians—are still in recovery. There is still something of the old legalist in us. Although we have been saved by grace, **we do not always know how to live by grace**. The gospel is something we received some time in the past, but not something we live and breathe. Galatians was written for people like us.

Paul's epistle to the Galatians has been called the **Magna Carta of Christian liberty**. Its theme verse is a declaration of independence: "*We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ*" (**Gal. 2:16**). Whenever the church has understood this gospel message, Galatians has brought life and freedom to recovering Pharisees.

**Thomas Schreiner**: The **unique features** in the greeting are particularly crucial, for the distinctive elements foreshadow important themes in the letter:

1. Paul's apostleship derives from God rather than from human beings (**1:1**), so that he is defending himself against the objections of the opponents.
2. Other believers concur with the Pauline gospel (**1:2**).
3. The new age of salvation has broken into time by Christ's death and resurrection, which has delivered believers from this present evil age (**1:1, 4**).
4. The Pauline gospel brings glory to God (**1:5**).

#### I. Introduction: Desertion from Paul's Gospel Is Desertion from the Gospel (**1:1 – 2:21**)

##### A. Greeting: Paul's Apostolic Authority (**1:1–5**)

1. Sender: Paul and fellow believers (**1:1–2**)
2. Prayer wish (**1:3**)
3. Purpose of Christ's death (**1:4**)
4. Glory to God (**1:5**)

##### B. Problem Explained: Desertion from the Gospel (**1:6–10**)

##### C. Paul's Gospel Derived from God, Not People (**1:11 – 2:21**)

**David Platt**: Main Idea: We cannot earn God's favor through legalism, for the gospel is free and freeing.

#### I. Legalism Defined

- A. Working in our own power
- B. Working according to our own rules
- C. Working to earn God's favor

#### II. Legalism Destroyed

- A. The gospel is free.
  1. God the Father has initiated our salvation.
  2. God the Son has accomplished our salvation.
- B. The gospel is freeing.

1. By His grace, we are free from sin in this world.
2. By His grace, we are free to share with this world.

Galatians is a book that was written specifically to counter legalism and to address the centrality of grace in the church. As we study this book, we should begin to see more clearly what grace is, to be saturated with it, and to know when it is being taught accurately. When we hear a false gospel, we should be discerning enough to recognize it. This is exactly what the Galatian church, a new church that was just beginning to grow, was in danger of missing.

## **I. (:1-2a) AUTHOR: SOURCE OF PAUL'S LEGITIMATE APOSTLESHIP (AND AUTHORITY)**

*"Paul, an apostle"*

**Ben Witherington:** What is mentioned in Acts is that Paul as a Jew was named after the first king of Israel - Saul (cf., e.g., **Acts 9.1**), a notion which certainly comports with what Paul tells us in **Phil. 3.5**, namely that he is from the tribe of Benjamin.

**Ronald Fung:** The writer identifies himself by his Roman cognomen "*Paul*" (Lat. *Paullus*) instead of his Hebrew birth-name "*Saul*" (**Acts 13:9**)—aptly so, since he is addressing predominantly Gentile readers.

**David deSilva:** The term "*apostle*" refers to an envoy or delegate who is sent to carry a message or enact a commission on behalf of another. The term calls immediate attention to an awareness of a **sender**. Paul claims this sender to be none other than the glorified Christ and the God who had previously sent the Christ.

**John Stott:** Paul claims for himself the very title that the false teachers were evidently denying him. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is the title Jesus used for his special representatives or delegates. From the wider company of disciples he chose twelve, named them "*apostles*," and sent them out to preach. Thus they were personally chosen, called, and commissioned by Jesus Christ and authorized to teach in his name. The word apostle was not a general word that could be applied to every Christian like the words believer, saint, brother, or sister. It was a special term reserved for the Twelve and for one or two others the risen Christ had personally appointed.

Paul claimed to belong to this select company of apostles. Notice how he clearly distinguishes himself from other Christians who were with him at the time of writing. He calls them "*all the brothers and sisters with me*." He is happy to associate them with him in the salutation, but he unashamedly puts himself first and gives himself a title that he does not give to them. He alone among them is an apostle.

**Scot McKnight:** Paul, then, writes as an apostle—as one who has been called personally by Jesus Christ, who therefore represents Jesus Christ, and who has a crucial role in the history of the church. He claims at least that much in the second word of this letter. He

expects the Galatians to listen; he knows that disagreement is no longer dialogue; disagreement is heresy when it comes to the essentials of the gospel as made known through the apostles and prophets. Even Paul himself must submit to his own gospel (1:8, 10).

**Timothy George:** The word “*Paul*” in Greek literally means “small,” or “little.” The earliest physical description we have of Paul comes from *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a second-century apocryphal writing that describes the apostle as “a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.” Although written many years after his death, these words may well reflect an authentic tradition about Paul’s actual likeness.

#### **A. Not Mediated by Man**

##### 1. Directly -- "not sent from men"

**Howard Vos:** His commission came not from men. Probably he meant to imply that his apostolic commission was not from the Twelve. Or he may have meant that it did not come from the church of Antioch (Ac 13:1-3), which some may have thought to be inferior to a Jerusalem commission. Moreover, his commission came not through or by means of man.

**David deSilva:** One of the goals a speaker would seek to achieve from the outset of a speech was to establish his or her credibility, often by demonstrating his or her authority to address a particular issue and commitment to the well-being of the audience whom the speaker was trying to lead toward making a particular decision. Paul addresses the issue of his authority head-on and up front as he expands his self-designation as the sender of the letter. He emphasizes his direct authorization by God to act as an apostle of the gospel, denying that he relies on any human authorization.

##### 2. Indirectly -- "nor through the agency of man"

What were Paul's detractors charging him with?

What types of false accusations were they making to seek to promote their own legitimacy and agenda?

**David deSilva:** The two phrases “*not from human beings*” and “*not through a human being’s agency*” are mutually reinforcing but not entirely redundant. With the first, Paul denies that human beings are the point of origin of his apostolic mission; with the second, that any human being was instrumental in sending him out on this mission.

**George Brunk:** Paul’s intent is to exclude humans both as the originating cause and as the intermediate means through whom another agent acted (God, in this case).



## B. Mediated by God

### 1. God the Son -- "*but through Jesus Christ*"

**Timothy George:** Who is Jesus Christ? By so directly linking Jesus Christ and God the Father in such an unqualified, absolute, and intimate way, Paul was making a stupendous claim about a specific Jewish teacher who had lived and died in Palestine just a few years before these words were written. His brother James was still alive as were hundreds of other friends who had known and seen him (**Gal 1:19; 1 Cor 15:6**). Paul was saying that the life and work of this Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth, transcends the bounds of all human categories—rabbi, prophet, guru, miracle worker, religious genius, philosopher, and statesman. When we consider who he was and what he did, we can only say that this one, Jesus, is God, the eternal Son of God, who freely came to earth to accomplish the Father's plan of redemption. He came into the thick of our humanity, as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but God has vindicated his shameful death on the cross by raising him from the dead and exalting him to his right hand in heaven. He is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, now worthy to be worshiped and glorified by all who are his.

**George Brunk:** The particular form of the expression appears to be determined by the fact that in early Christianity, apostleship is linked directly to a commission of the risen Jesus (and such was Paul's conviction, based on his own experience). Therefore Jesus Christ is mentioned first. But Paul wants to acknowledge the ultimate source as *God the Father, who raised [Jesus] from the dead (1:1c)*. His apostleship has its ultimate cause in God the Father and its intermediate cause in Jesus Christ. Paul may also want to express the unity of Father and Son (Christ) with one preposition (cf. the same pattern in **1:3**).

### 2. God the Father -- "*and God the Father*"

**Ben Witherington:** The fatherhood of God plays an important role in Galatians (cf. **1.3, 4; 4.2, 6**), and as **Betz** says this is in part because Paul wants to speak about adoption (**3.7, 26; 4.4–7, 22–31**). In fact he wishes to assert the paternity of God in regard both to Jews and to Gentiles through the agency of Jesus Christ. As we will see this is in contrast to the notion of paternity in relationship to only one particular ethnic group – Jews. In Paul's view, one does not have to become a Jew to be a son or daughter of God, indeed a son or daughter of Abraham. All that is required is having the same faith and faithfulness as Abraham.

**Thomas Schreiner:** His is a divine appointment and a divine commission, and hence the gospel he proclaims is authoritative and true. The text also suggests that Jesus Christ and the Father are both divine beings, for Paul was not called merely by human beings. To say that Jesus Christ is divine, of course, does not deny that he was also human. Indeed, the name "*Jesus*" points to his humanity, as does the title "*Christ*."

**John MacArthur:** The apostle's frequent mention of God and Father in relation to Jesus Christ throughout the New Testament marks an emphasis that should not be missed.

The intent is not for us to understand God as our Father (although that truth is mentioned in 1:4) but the Father in relation to the role He has in the Trinity, particularly His relation to the Son. The intent is to emphasize the significance of the relationship between the first and second members of the Trinity as to essential nature. The title is to express equality of deity between the two, a Father and Son who share the same nature (cf. **Matt. 11:27; John 5:17-18, 22; 10:29-33; 14:9; 17:1-5; Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 John 3**). It asserts that Jesus Christ is the One who is of the nature of God and that the true God is the One who is the Father of Jesus Christ.

### **C. Essence of the True Gospel -- Significance of the Bodily Resurrection**

*"who raised Him from the dead"*

Paul had been set aside by God to communicate the truth of the true gospel of God.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Only here in an introduction does he mention that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. What is the **significance of the resurrection** here? The resurrection signifies that the new age has dawned (cf. **Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:1-14; Dan 12:1-3**), in which God will fulfill all his saving promises to Israel and to the entire world. One of the major themes of the letter emerges here. The Galatians were turning the clock back in salvation history by submitting to circumcision and the Mosaic law. Since Jesus has been raised from the dead, **believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant**. Once again Paul anticipates one of the central themes of the letter (the fulfillment of God's eschatological promises).

### **D. Affirmation of Authority**

*"and all the brethren who are with me"*

Not operating as some type of Lone Ranger.

**Nijay Gupta:** In **Galatians 1:2**, Paul widens the perspective on who this letter is from to include a community of Christians surrounding him: *"and all the brothers and sisters with me."* Paul often mentions co-senders of his letters, including his coworkers such as Timothy or Silas. But it is extraordinary for Paul to inform the Galatians that not only is he the sender but also a whole community of fellow Christians! It is probably the case that he wanted to dispel any notion that he was a rogue apostle, a loner who preaches an incomplete or aberrant gospel. Quite the contrary, he was tied to a wide network of fellow believers across Asia Minor, and on the matters about which he teaches in this letter, they were *"with"* him, supporting the truth and freedom of the gospel.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** Paul makes it clear that the letter is not from him alone, but at this point he does not name his companions. Later he will mention two of his coworkers: Barnabas and Titus (**2:1**). That he has some who are with him may have a corollary: there are some who are against him.

## II. (:2b) RECIPIENTS: REALM OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

*"to the churches of Galatia"*

**Ben Witherington:** This letter is intended as a **circular letter**, and this also means that Paul assumes that the agitators' message has infected and affected not just one congregation but several. The situation is all the more grave in Paul's view because of the scope of the problem.

**Philip Ryken:** One good reason for thinking that Paul was writing this circular letter to churches in the south is that he had planted churches there himself. The main cities in the southern part of the province of Galatia were Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—the very cities Paul visited on his first missionary journey.

## III. (:3) GREETING: BLESSING FROM APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

### A. 2 Key Ingredients:

1. Grace -- "*Grace to you*"

2. Peace -- "*and Peace*"

**Ralph Martin:** "*Peace*" reflects the outcome in God's plan to restore men and women to wholeness (Heb. *shalom*) of living.

**Craig Keener:** Here Paul offers what is sometimes called a "wish-prayer," a prayer for the Galatians to receive well-being (*peace*) and God's generosity (*grace*).

**George C. Findlay:** **Grace** is the sum of all blessing bestowed by God; **peace**, . . . the sum of all blessing experienced by man. Grace is the Father's good will and bounty in Christ to His undeserving children; peace, the rest and reconciliation, the recovered health and gladness of the child brought home to the Father's house, dwelling in the light of his Father's face. Grace is the fountain of redeeming love; peace is the "*river of life proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb*," that flows calm and deep through each believing soul, the river whose "*streams make glad the city of God*."

**George Brunk:** *Grace* expresses the ground of gospel reality, and *peace* states its fruit. But the ultimate source is God, seen once again as *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3; cf. 1:1)*. What is new is the title *Lord* for Jesus Christ, which was the common confession of the first believers. It points to Jesus exalted to the right hand of God after the resurrection (**Rom 1:4; Phil 2:9-11**, esp. v. 11) and affirms his authority over the church and potentially over the world.

### B. 2 Key Providers:

1. God the Father -- "*from God our Father*"

2. Lord Jesus Christ -- "*and the Lord Jesus Christ*"

#### IV. (:4) ESSENCE OF THE TRUE GOSPEL -- SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRUCIFIXION

##### A. Provision of Salvation -- Substitutionary Atonement

*"who gave Himself for our sins"*

cf. the gospel summary in **1 Cor. 15:3-4**.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The Galatians are only entranced by circumcision because they have forgotten the significance of the cross (**2:20–21; 3:1, 13; 4:4–5; 5:11, 24; 6:12, 14, 17**). A right relationship with God is not obtained by circumcision but only through trusting in the cross of Jesus Christ. The term “gave” (δόντος) anticipates **2:20**, where Paul speaks of the Son of God as the one “*who loved me and gave (παραδόντος) himself for me.*” The love of Jesus manifests itself in his voluntary death on behalf of his people. Jesus’ death was necessary because of human sin, and he gave himself so that those who trust in him would receive forgiveness of sins. The death of Christ is also substitutionary, for death is the consequence of sin (**Rom 6:23**), but Jesus Christ surrendered his life to atone for sins, and hence believers are spared final separation from God.

**Douglas Moo:** Central to Paul’s attempt to woo the Galatians back to the true gospel is his insistence throughout the letter that the cross of Christ is the decisive and uniquely sufficient means to rescue sinners from death. Embracing Christ’s cross through faith is all that is needed to effect this rescue and to bring believers into the “*new creation*” (**6:15**). The law program advocated by the agitators effectively underplays the decisive turning point in all of human history.

**Timothy George:** We also glimpse in these words the **radical character of sin**, another major theme Paul developed throughout Galatians. So serious is the breach between us and God caused by our sins that nothing less than the substitutionary atoning death of God’s Son can reconcile us to the Father. We are not sure which Greek preposition Paul used in the phrase “*for our sins.*” Some manuscripts read *peri*, which means simply “concerning” or “in regard to.” Other manuscripts read *hyper*, “on behalf of,” “for the benefit of.” Paul used the latter word in **1 Cor 15:3**, “*Christ died for [hyper] our sins.*” This is likely the intended reading here as well since Paul used *hyper* twice again in Galatians (**2:20; 3:13**) when speaking of Christ’s death on our behalf. In either case, however, his meaning is clear: there is an **intrinsic connection between our sins and Christ’s death**. The only avenue to a right relationship with God is the path that leads to Calvary.

**Ronald Fung:** It can be seen, therefore, that the point of departure for Paul’s thought is not the individual’s need and experience, but **Christ’s epoch-making redemptive work**, the primary significance of which is objective: it rescues believers out of the present evil age or aeon and brings them into a new aeon, a new order of existence, subject to a different power. Its subjective significance for believers consists in the fact that, having been thus objectively delivered out of the present aeon, they need no longer

be dominated by the evil spiritual powers of this age, but may (and must) live in newness of life in the new order of existence, in the power of the new life given by God.

In this one verse Paul has described several aspects of the redemption wrought by Christ: its cause (“for our sins,” that is, because of them), its means (Christ “sacrificed himself”), its purpose and effect (“for our sins,” that is, for their expiation; “to rescue us”), and its origin (“the will of our God and Father”). Thereby Paul has in fact touched on the chief argument of the letter, and succinctly announced in anticipatory fashion the main contents of its doctrinal section, inasmuch as the point of the controversy between Paul and his Galatian opponents lies precisely in the significance of Christ and his redemptive work and more specifically in the bearing of this work on the law. Paul will argue that since Christ has, according to God’s will, already rescued believers out of the present aeon (where the law belongs), it is plainly unnecessary for them to add anything—including circumcision and observance of the Torah—to the redemption already accomplished for them by Christ.

## **B. Purpose of Salvation -- Freedom from Sin**

*"that He might deliver us out of this present evil age"*

**John Stott:** Christianity is a **rescue religion**. From what does Christ rescue us by his death? Not from the evil world but from this evil age. Christian conversion means being rescued from the old age and being transferred into the new age, “the age to come.” The Christian life means living in this age the life of the age to come. The purpose of Christ’s death, therefore, was not only to bring us forgiveness, but that, having been forgiven, we should live a new life, the life of the age to come.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The intellectual worldview that controls the mindset of unbelievers is limited to this age (**1 Cor 1:20; 3:18**), and Satan rules as the god of this age (**2 Cor 4:4**). The present evil age is not the only reality, for the “fulfillment [ends] of the ages” (τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων) has now dawned in Jesus Christ (**1 Cor 10:11**). The cross of Christ represents the intrusion of the new age, or as Paul says in **Gal 6:14–15**, the **new creation**. Indeed, the reference to the new creation at the close of the letter functions as an inclusio with the text here, so that at the beginning and end of the letter the arrival of the last days in Christ is featured. The world in its present form is passing away (**1 Cor 7:31**). Jesus reigns in the present evil age, and his rule will reach its climax in the age to come (**Eph 1:21**; cf. **1 Cor 15:24–28**), so that in the coming ages all will marvel over the grace of God displayed in Jesus Christ (**Eph 2:7**).

Again a major theme in Galatians is foreshadowed, for Paul clarifies in **Gal 3–4** that the law belongs to the old age, and the promise of Abraham is now being fulfilled in Christ. Hence, those who receive circumcision fall back into the old evil age after being delivered from it through Christ’s death. We see as well here the **eschatological tension** of Paul’s thought, for even though the new age has come in Jesus Christ, the old age has not vanished entirely. **Believers live in the interval between the already and not yet.** God’s promises are already realized in Christ, but “the present evil age”

still exists, so that believers must remain vigilant and keep putting their trust in the cross of Christ.

**Richard Longenecker:** The deliverance spoken of here is not a removal from the world but a rescue from the evil that dominates it.

**David deSilva:** The notion of living at the end of one age and the inauguration of another is foundational to Paul's argument against the continued observance of Torah and, thus, against the perpetuation of the distinction between Jew and gentile that is so much in the foreground of his dispute with the rival teachers (3:26–28; 5:6; 6:15). The death and resurrection of Jesus marks a decisive turning point in God's dealings with humanity and, indeed, the whole of God's creation, with the result that the powers that have dominated human beings have come to the end of their term (3:23–25; 4:1–5, 8–11), with Jesus liberating people from those powers and ushering them into a new era of freedom and righteousness.

**F. F. Bruce:** Here, then, is Paul's '**realized eschatology**'. Temporally, the age to come, the resurrection age, still lies in the future; spiritually, believers in Christ have here and now been made partakers of it, because they share the risen life of Christ (cf. 2:19f.), who has already entered the resurrection age. They have thus been delivered from the control of the powers which dominate the present age. As 1 Cor. 7:31 puts it, '*the form of this world* (τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) *is passing away*', and therefore believers in Christ should manifest a spirit of detachment from it. The indwelling Spirit not only helps them to look forward in confidence to the life of the age to come (cf. 5:5); he enables them to enjoy it even while in mortal body they live in the present age. Thanks to the work of the Spirit, applying to believers the redemption and victory won by Christ, the 'not yet' has become for them the 'already'.

It is particularly relevant to the argument of this letter that the law, to which the Galatian Christians were being urged to submit, belongs to this present age: it is associated with '*the elemental powers of the world*' (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) under which they were enslaved before they came to faith in Christ (4:3, 9).

### C. Plan of Salvation -- Divine Plan

*"according to the will of our God and Father"*

**Philip Ryken:** This verse shows the origin of the cross. Christ died "*according to the will of our God and Father*" (Gal. 1:4). The execution of Jesus of Nazareth was not an unforeseen tragedy, a mere accident of history; it was part of God's plan for the salvation of sinners. The apostle Peter said as much to the very men who nailed Jesus to the cross. In his famous sermon in Jerusalem, he declared, "*This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men*" (Acts 2:23).

**John MacArthur:** Specifically, every rescued believer is delivered because of the sovereign, gracious will of God. "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the*

right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). Salvation is thus removed from the will of man and is buried deep in the sovereign decree of God.

## V. (:5) ULTIMATE GOAL = GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER

*"to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen"*

**Douglas Moo:** The **doxology** is best seen, then, as a natural addition to the christological/soteriological assertion of **verse 4**. It is quite natural to ascribe glory to God for planning and putting into effect the rescue of sinners from this present evil age (e.g., **Lightfoot** 1881: 74; **Bruce** 1982b: 77).

**Ronald Fung:** God’s “glory” (*doxa*) in general denotes his divine and heavenly radiance, his loftiness and majesty, but since it appears here with the article it may refer to that unique glory which belongs to God alone; interpreted by its context “*the glory*” (RSV) may be more specifically taken as God’s fatherly character and the union of perfect wisdom, holiness, and love manifested in the redemption of mankind through Christ according to his will. The description of this glory as being “*for ever and ever*” implies that in the eternity which is comprised of endless successive generations<sup>41</sup> that union of wisdom, holiness and love will continue to be a fundamental aspect of God’s glory (cf. **Eph. 2:7**).

**John MacArthur:** *Amen* expresses the affirmation fitting the worthiness of God to receive glory for such a wondrous provision of eternal, gracious salvation. **Alan Cole** writes of this word: “When the old-fashioned Cantonese-speaking Christian says at the end of a prayer *shing saw. shoh uen* (“*with all my heart this is what I wish*”) he approaches very nearly the original Hebrew meaning” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], p. 37).

**Timothy George:** The inclusion of this **exclamation of praise** is no mere formality. To contemplate who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ is to fall on our knees in worship, thanksgiving, and praise. We study the Bible and the great doctrines of the Christian faith not out of vain curiosity, or merely to increase our intellectual acumen and historical knowledge, but rather that we might come more fully to love and enjoy the gracious God who delights in our praise. As **Calvin** put it so well, “So glorious is his redemption that it should ravish us with wonder.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we have a sense of being uniquely gifted directly by God to accomplish a specific role in the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ? How does this sense of mission impact our decisions regarding how to spend our time and what types of

ministries to engage in? How are we developing this gift and giving it priority?

2) Are we careful to stick close to the basics of the gospel message = the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ? Is our gospel message God-centered in that we are seeking His glory, or is it man-centered?

3) What type of "*deliverance*" does Paul have in mind in vs. 4? (Compare **Ephesians chapter 1** to get a glimpse of God's master plan in this regard.)

4) What are some of the current manifestations of just how evil this "*present evil age*" is?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** Paul defends the authority that he has from the Lord. He has three sources of authority:

**1. His ministry**

- called directly by God
- had personally founded the churches in Galatia

**2. His message**

Christ paid the price to deliver sinners from bondage

**3. His motive**

the glory of God, not his own personal glory

**Robert Gromacki:** The apostle was under attack by his religious enemies and under suspicion by his supposed friends. The Judaizers, who taught that a sinner was justified by God through faith in Christ plus obedience to the Mosaic law, claimed that Paul was not a genuine apostle and that his message omitted the necessity of circumcision and legalism as an accommodation to pagan Gentile culture. Paul was accustomed to such false charges. What disturbed him greatly was that the very churches which he had founded on his first missionary journey were questioning his apostolic credentials. In fact, these Pauline converts began to wonder whether the apostle had communicated only partial truth to them.

These slanderous attacks had to be repelled. To Paul the authenticity of his apostleship and the integrity of his message were inseparably joined. He had to defend both in order to rescue the churches and to turn back his critics.

**Clark Pinnock:** Already at this early point in the letter, Paul has introduced us to his major themes. The gospel must not be tampered with because it is Christ's, not Paul's. Christ is also the center of the message. There is good news because Christ died in the sinner's place. We see three steps in the theology of this introduction. God has provided objective salvation for mankind in the finished work of Christ. He is announcing the gospel through His apostolic messengers. The subjective benefits of



salvation He freely offers to bestow on those who trust Christ. Is it any surprise that Paul closes with a doxology? ... in the last analysis the issue at stake in his controversy with the Galatians is the glory of God. By their insistence on human achievement, the false teachers were downgrading and minimizing what God had done. By pointing to the all-sufficiency of Christ and His finished work, Paul was magnifying God's grace.

**Bob Deffinbaugh:** The **structure** of the Book of Galatians is the outflow of the claim of apostleship which Paul has made in this first verse.

1. **Chapters 1 and 2** contain Paul's defense of his apostleship, a fact denied by the Judaizers and now doubted by some of the Galatian saints.
2. Having defended his authority in the first two chapters, Paul reiterates the message of the gospel in **chapters 3 and 4**. Paul's gospel exposes the error into which some have fallen, by placing themselves under the Law after having been saved by grace.
3. **Chapters 5 and 6** spell out the practical outworkings of the gospel of God's grace, which enable the saint to live a godly life in a fallen world.

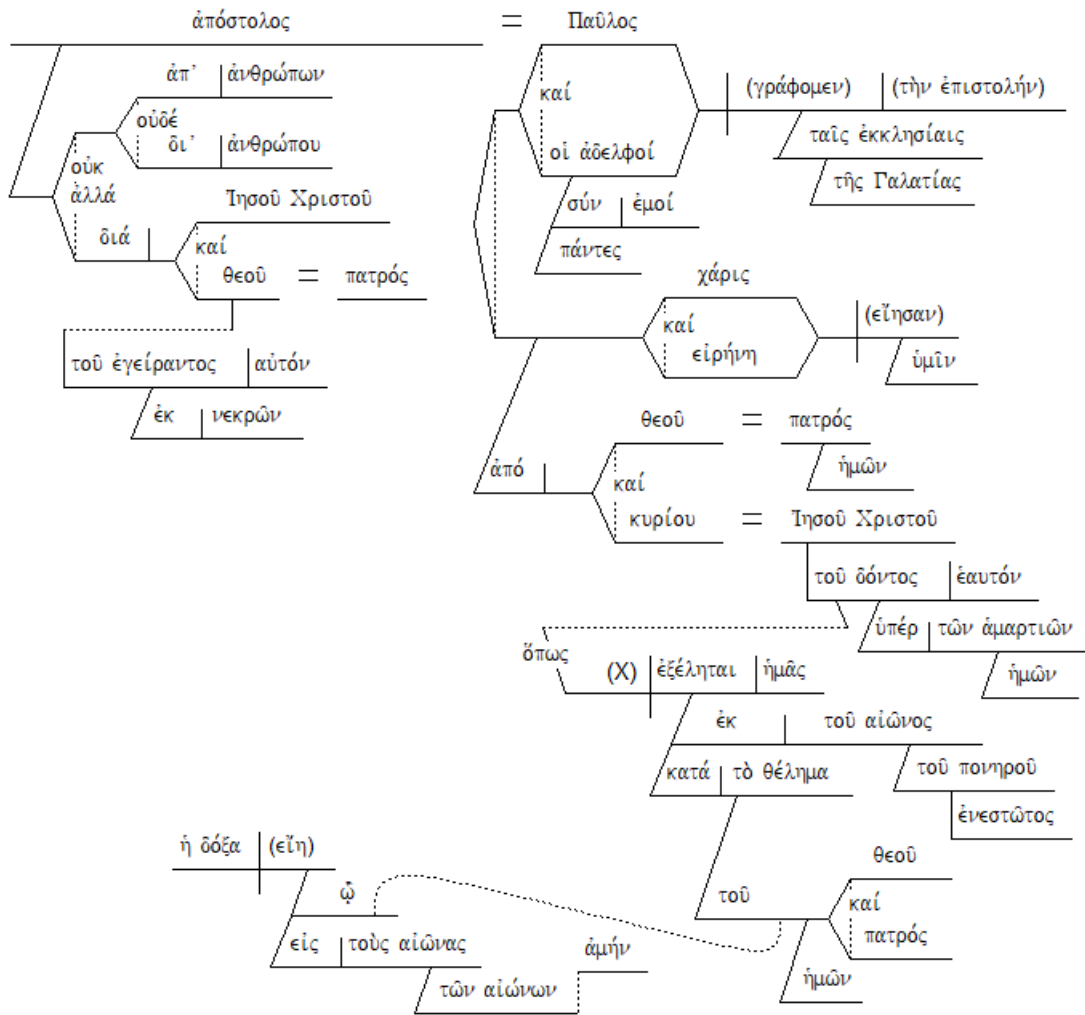
**W. A. Criswell:** By the very tone of the language, by the very spirit of the word, one can see that Paul is passionately moved and deeply troubled. What is the trouble? It is twofold. First, the churches founded by the apostle are in **danger of apostatizing**. They are in danger of turning aside from the truth of God as it is revealed in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are in danger of going back to the beggarly elements of the law. There had been teachers who said to them that one could not be saved by trusting in Christ alone; but he was saved only by believing in Christ and keeping the law.

The second thing that troubled the apostle was the **personal attack** that was made upon him. The enemies who came in to subvert these churches said that Paul was a pseudo-emissary of Christ. He did not belong to one of the Twelve, nor was he a member of the original apostolic band, but, rather, he was a self-appointed apostle. He never saw Christ in the flesh. He was not commissioned by the Lord Jesus or ordained by Christ, but, rather, everything he knew he learned from the Twelve. Everything that he preached he got from other men, and he preached that in a perverted form. He was a false apostle.

**Homer Kent:** This rescue does not refer to some future deliverance at death or the second coming of Christ, but should be understood as already accomplished by the forgiveness of sins and the bestowal of eternal life.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

Gal 1:1-5



TEXT: GALATIANS 1:6-10

TITLE: CONDEMNATION OF GOSPEL PERVERTERS

**BIG IDEA:**

**ANY PERVERSION OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF CHRIST  
DESERVES GOD'S STRONGEST CONDEMNATION**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**George Brunk:** In our section (**1:6-10**) Paul wastes no time in getting straight to the point. He indicates his state of mind, clarifies what is at stake in the problem, and says what the Galatians need to do about it. The verses therefore serve to introduce the main body of the letter. The author is deeply disturbed and strongly moved by the situation in Galatia. The problem is that persons from outside the congregation are seeking to persuade the believers to revise their previous understandings of the gospel. Paul is convinced that this is no mere revision: instead, it amounts to an abandonment of the gospel! Paul's approach in responding to the crisis is

- (1) to set the issue in stark terms as incompatible options;
- (2) to clarify the true nature of the gospel; and
- (3) to defend his own person as a servant of Christ.

**David deSilva:** If Paul were to have opened with some thanksgiving or blessing or other such device at this point, he would have put himself in the position of trying to please people, speaking so as to win them over by the customary practice. Instead, he opens the body of his letter in a manner that could not be understood as guided by such considerations, but rather that demonstrated the opposite, namely, his freedom from people-pleasing and thus his ability to be constant in standing up for God and God's interests in any given situation. The opening is thus consistent with the claim Paul will make at the end of this paragraph about his absolute integrity as one who seeks to please him who had commissioned (even conscripted!) Paul for this work.

**David Platt:** Main Idea: Amazed by the Galatian believers' turn from the gospel of Christ, Paul explains why such a decision is problematic.

- I. The Galatians' Departure (**1:6-7a**)
  - A. The nature of turning from the gospel
  - B. What we learn about the gospel
- II. The False Teachers' Distortion (**1:7b**)
- III. The Universal Warning (**1:8-9**)
- IV. The Apostle's Ambition (**1:10**)

**Timothy George:** The transition from doxology in v. 5 to rebuke in v. 6 is especially harsh, almost unparalleled in its jarring dissonance. However, Paul reserved his heaviest fire not for the Galatian defectors but rather their pernicious seducers. They were the real perverters of Christ's gospel. Against them he hurled an uncompromising

anathema. Where we would normally expect to find an apostolic blessing, we hear instead an apostolic curse.

**John MacArthur:** In **Galatians 1:6-9** the apostle gives three features involved in his strong opposition to that grave and damning heresy [of the false teachers = Judaizers]: his wonder, his wisdom, and his warning.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The body of the letter commences with an expression of astonishment (“*I am astonished*” [θαυμάζω]) that the Galatians are departing so quickly from the gospel of grace for another gospel (**1:6**). **Verses 7–9** explain, starting with a relative clause, why the new gospel is not a gospel at all. The intruders into the Galatian churches are not proclaiming the gospel truly but are altering the gospel. Nevertheless, Paul dogmatically insists in **1:8–9** with two conditional clauses that the gospel cannot be changed. Indeed, even if Paul or an angel were to proclaim a new gospel, they would be cursed by God. **Verse 10** represents a **transitional verse** in the argument and functions as an inference from vv. **8–9**. The pronouncement of a curse on those who proclaim a false gospel demonstrates that Paul does not please people. In **1:10c** Paul explains why it is clear that he is not pleasing people, for if such were his goal, he would never have become a slave of Jesus Christ.

## **I. (:6-7) GOSPEL PERVERTERS ENTICE GOSPEL DESERTERS**

### **A. The Susceptibility to Fundamental Error is Shocking**

*"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you"*

"*Deserter*" is a nasty label; religious turncoats

Note the emphasis on the sovereignty of God in the concept of "*calling*".

**Bruce Barton:** The verb is in the **present tense**, “*are . . . deserting*” (*metatithes*), and was used in military circles to indicate that a soldier was AWOL (absent without leave). The process of desertion, of turning away from the faith, was happening as Paul wrote. This desertion connoted **apostasy**. Those who turned to this different gospel would no longer be Christians. Because it was in process, Paul was warning them against apostasy. Paul hoped to stop it immediately because desertion from the faith held dire consequences. Part of Paul’s astonishment focused on how quickly the believers were deserting—that is, so soon after Paul’s last visit and/or so soon after the false teachers had begun their destructive work. Apparently, it wasn’t taking much for the Galatians to be led away from the faith and to become enthusiastic about this different gospel.

**Philip Ryken:** The British have a good expression for Paul’s attitude. They would say that he was “gob-smacked.” “Gob” is slang for “mouth.” To be smacked is to be slapped with an open hand. So someone who is “gob-smacked” opens his mouth, claps his hand over it, and lifts his eyebrows in amazement. Paul was gob-smacked. He was amazed and astonished. He was shocked and outraged. Thus the body of his letter seethes with righteous indignation.

**Timothy George:** We are reminded here of how fragile young believers are, how susceptible to the blandishments of the evil one. Nothing delights the devil more than to disrupt and destroy, insofar as he can, a true work of God. Whenever there is a genuine moving of God's Spirit or a major advance in missionary outreach, we can be sure Satan and his minions will have a vested interest in casting doubts, sowing discord, and wreaking havoc.

**Nijay Gupta:** There is, perhaps, a hint in Paul's tone here of a Jewish theme of adultery, God's people playing the harlot in their idolatry. How could you leave joy and power and freedom behind, in pursuit of another gospel of fear and weakness and slavery?

**David Platt:** The Galatians were in the process of switching teams. **John Stott** notes that the word turning means "*to transfer one's allegiance.*" It was used of soldiers in the army who would go fight for the other side, or of politicians who would transfer to the other political party (*Message of Galatians*, 21). Can you imagine a Cowboys fan wearing a Redskins shirt, or a Red Sox fan wearing a Yankees cap? That is serious turning. In my world, it is amazing to think that Rick Pitino, former coach of the University of Kentucky, now coaches Louisville. But at an infinitely more important level, it is an amazing thing for Paul to think that the Galatians, who had heard the truth of the gospel, were putting on a different jersey. The Galatians had come to Christ and put on the robes of righteousness and were now trying to turn back to the trash can to retrieve their old clothes of works-based religion.

## **B. The Defining Characteristic of the True Gospel = The Grace of Christ** *"by the grace of Christ"*

**John MacArthur:** Because of their deception, false teachers such as the Judaizers are even more dangerous than those who openly deny "*that Jesus is the Christ*" and thereby clearly participate in the work of the antichrist (**1 John 2:22**). False systems labeled as Christianity always distort the nature and work of Jesus Christ. Those who deny Christ altogether are easily seen as the unbelievers they are; but those who claim to teach and follow Christ while undermining the gospel of His **grace** are immeasurably more dangerous—because they give the appearance of leading people to Christ while they are actually erecting barriers to salvation by grace.

**Douglas Moo:** The word χάρις (*charis, grace*) appears only seven times in the letter (**1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18**) but nevertheless touches on a key issue in Paul's argument. God has decisively manifested himself in Christ, thus sidelining the law, and his saving work in Christ is completely a matter of grace, to which humans can only respond with faith, not works of any kind. The positive assertion that the Galatians have been "*called to live in the grace of Christ*" matches, as **Silva** (2003: 17) notes, the twofold warning in the rhetorical climax of the letter: "*You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace*" (**5:4**). "*The grace of Christ*" is the touchstone of Paul's argument against the agitators.

**David Platt:** Turning from the gospel is like stepping onto a performance-religion treadmill. Do you like treadmills? I don't. I do not enjoy running for three miles only to end up exhausted and in the same place 30 minutes later! Works-based religion is a system that gets you nowhere and only leaves you worn out. While works certainly matter, we should note they are the result of true faith, not the basis for it.

**Van Parunak: Grace of Christ Defined in 2 Cor. 8:9.**

Four components:

- 1) Christ's wealth (of righteousness)
- 2) Our poverty (no merit)
- 3) He sacrifices himself
- 4) We profit from it.

### **C. There is Really Only One True Gospel**

*"for a different gospel; which is really not another"*

really no such thing as "another gospel"

Greek word means **another of a different kind**

**Max Anders:** In fact, a works-based, human-effort driven gospel is no gospel at all. How is a demand for impossible human achievement good news? Anyone who presents a way of salvation that depends in any way on works, rather than God, has contaminated the gospel message. They confuse honest, sincere believers. They have no gospel, no good news.

**Bruce Barton:** The false teachers, Judaizers, taught that to be saved, Gentile believers had to follow Jewish laws and customs, especially the rite of circumcision. Faith in Christ was not enough. Note that they may have included in their teachings the need for faith in Christ for salvation, but they taught that additional requirements had to be met before true salvation could occur. Their message was "**faith plus.**" This infuriated Paul because the Judaizers' message undermined the truth of the good news that salvation is a gift, not a reward for certain works.

**F. F. Bruce:** The message which the Galatian Christians are disposed to accept in place of that which they received from Paul is so different from Paul's message that it constitutes ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, 'a different "gospel"'—and therefore, in fact, no gospel at all, since there can be no 'other gospel' (ἄλλο εὐαγγέλιον) in the proper sense of the word 'gospel' than the proclamation of justification by faith, apart from works of the law.

**Timothy George:** Here in Galatians Paul asserted that his fickle followers had embraced a *heteros* gospel, one drastically different in kind from what they had received from him, for there is, in fact, no other (*allos*) genuine gospel to be placed alongside the real thing. Perhaps the NEB comes closest to the original: "*I am astonished to find you . . . following a different gospel. Not that it is in fact another gospel.*"

## D. Two Serious Problems Caused by Gospel Perverters

### 1. Disturbing the Brethren

*"only there are some who are disturbing you"*

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** The teaching of those who “*confuse*” results in spiritual and moral deformity in the Galatian churches (**5:16–21**; cf. **1 Tim. 6:3**).

### 2. Distorting the Gospel

*"and want to distort the gospel of Christ"*

**George Brunk:** Both of the verbs, **confuse** and **pervert**, come from the political setting, carrying overtones of agitation and subversion.

**David deSilva:** Paul begins to create prejudice against the rival teachers by referring to them as “*agitators*” or “*troublemakers*” in the Galatians’ midst and as people whose goal is to “*pervert*” the good news about Christ (see also **Gal 5:7, 10**). He casts them as disturbers of the peace, the equivalent of rabble who stir up trouble among an otherwise harmonious and prospering community. Paul follows the convention of not naming these rivals or opponents, referring to them only in vague—and therefore disparaging and discounting—terms (here, “*some people*”). Creating distance between the hearers and these rival speakers, undermining the credibility of the latter, is a major goal throughout Galatians (see esp. **4:17–18**; **5:7–12**; **6:12–13**).

**Timothy George:** Paul leveled two charges against them: one, with reference to their disturbance of the Galatians; the other, relating to their subversion of the gospel. The Greek verb translated “*troubling you*” (*tarassō*) means to “shake, agitate, or to excite to the point of perplexity and fear.” Here again is an indication of how vulnerable the new Christians of Galatia were to evidently impressive presentations of the false teachers. Paul’s second charge against them was that they were perverting, or rather, wanted to pervert, the gospel of Christ. As **J. Stott** wisely observed:

“These two go together. To tamper with the gospel is always to trouble the church. You cannot touch the gospel and leave the church untouched, because the church is created and lives by the gospel. Indeed the church’s greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it, but those inside who try to change the gospel.”

The Greek verb for “*distort*” (*metastrephō*) means “to reverse, to change to the opposite, to twist into something different.” In the early church **Jerome** observed that this word carried the literal meaning of “setting behind what is in front and putting in front what is behind.” Applied to Paul’s opponents in Galatia, we can say that the gospel they preached implied a reversal of salvation history.

What they failed to realize was the decisive character of who Jesus was and what he had accomplished in his atoning death on the cross, though their Christology may have been formally correct. To Christ’s completed work they wanted to add something of their

own. But the gospel of Christ is like a chemical compound to which no mixture can be added. It stands on its own. It needs no props or helps. It only asks to be its own free, unhindered, disarming self. For only then can it be good news to lost men and women imprisoned in the tyranny of sin and self.

**Craig Keener:** Early Christian expressions such as “good news of peace” (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17; 6:15), “good news of salvation” (Eph. 1:13; cf. Rom. 1:16), and “good news of God’s kingdom” or “reign” (e.g., Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Luke 8:1; Acts 8:12) evoke Isa. 52:7, presumably the original source of this language.

## II. (:8-9) GOSPEL PERVERTERS DESERVE GOD'S STRONGEST CONDEMNATION

### A. (:8) Pronouncement of the Curse

#### 1. Universal in Scope

*"But even though we, or an angel from heaven"*

**Craig Keener:** Many Jewish visionaries claimed to receive revelations from angels, and claims of such experiences would not be surprising in the intensely charismatic milieu of early Jewish Christianity. Claims of connections with angels also seem to have caused problems among Christians elsewhere in Phrygia (Col. 2:18). Many scholars thus suggest that these teachers claim to have received some angelic instruction, although others demur.

**Richard Longenecker:** The reference to ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, “an angel from heaven,” carries a note of irony. Probably it is in response to the Judaizers’ claim either (1) to have impeccable credentials as members in good standing in the Jerusalem church, or (2) to have the authority of the Jerusalem apostles supporting them—or both (cf. Paul’s rather ironic references to the Jerusalem apostles in 2:6–10 and his opposition to Peter in 2:11–14). Paul saw the preacher’s authority as derived from the gospel, and not vice versa. So he was not prepared to allow any change in the focus or content of that gospel on the basis of someone’s credentials or by an appeal to some more imposing authority.

#### 2. Measured Against a Known Standard = the Gospel Preached by Paul

*"should preach to you a gospel  
contrary to that which we have preached to you"*

**John MacArthur:** Paul was, of course, speaking hypothetically. He would never have changed his teaching, and an angel who was truly from heaven (and therefore set apart from the fallen angels identified with hell) could not teach anything contrary to God’s revealed truth. But the apostle was reaching for the most fanciful possibilities imaginable to make his point that absolutely no messenger, no matter how seemingly godly and good, should be believed or followed if his teaching does not square with God-revealed apostolic doctrine. The truth outranks anyone’s credentials, and every teacher or preacher must be evaluated on the basis of what he says, not who he is.



Many false systems are attractive because they emotionally appeal to love, brotherhood, unity, and harmony. Many false teachers are popular because they seem to be warm and pleasant and claim to have great love for God and for others. It is because distortions of the gospel by such deceptive personalities are so appealing that “*Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*” (2 Cor. 11:14).

3. Unwavering in its Execution  
*"let him be accursed"*

**Bruce Barton: The Curse**

Paul’s repeated use of the condemnation “*let that one be accursed!*” (1:8-9 NRSV) conveys the most severe penalties imaginable for distorting the truth of the gospel. In the larger biblical context, “*accursed*” (*anathema*) relates to the extreme curses that were invoked and carried out against blatant sin in the Old Testament (see **Exodus 17:13-16; Numbers 21:2-3; Joshua 6:17; 7:12**). The deliberate repetition by Paul indicates that the curse was no angry outburst. His intent was deadly serious. And he included himself as liable to the same judgment of God if he were to be guilty of preaching an altered gospel. The matter was of such importance that Paul was willing to endure the same measure on himself that he invoked for others (**Matthew 7:1-2**).

**Ronald Fung:** The severity of the anathema is thus the measure of the significance which Paul attaches to the principle of righteousness by faith: for if any teaching at variance with the original apostolic preaching involves the messenger in the divine wrath, then only the message of justification by faith is the divinely sanctioned message, the one gospel worthy of its name.

**Timothy George:** To be **anathematized** then means far more than to be excommunicated. It means nothing less than to suffer the eternal retribution and judgment of God. The GNT comes close to capturing the essence of Paul’s tone in this passage, “*May he be condemned to hell!*”

**John Stott:** To many it is inconceivable that we should desire false teachers to fall under the curse of God and be treated as such by the church. But if we cared more for the glory of Christ and for the good of people’s souls, we too would not be able to bear the corruption of the gospel of grace.

**B. (:9) Emphasis by Repetition**

*"As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed"*

**George Brunk:** It needs to be emphasized that this type of curse turns the person over to the action of God for judgment. This is not Paul’s own act of revenge (cf. **Rom 12:19**). At the same time the curse-threat is a form of **disciplinary action**. Paul is exercising his apostolic authority. Paul’s response here anticipates the implied command in **4:30** that the Galatians take action to expel the false teachers from the congregations.

**Scot McKnight:** Let us be careful to understand that tampering with the gospel is not Christian experimentation with new ideas. The gospel is a sacred trust that remains, like Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Society and culture change; applications change; Christian lifestyle and even specific doctrinal formulations change; but the gospel of Jesus Christ does not change. We are given every freedom to explore the vast domains of life and reality that are still unknown frontiers to us.<sup>11</sup> We are given every freedom to explore the implications of the gospel for our world today. But we are never given any freedom to alter the original gospel of the grace of God in Christ.

**David deSilva:** It is of special interest in these curses that Paul does not claim himself to be the final authority: the message that he had brought to the Galatians when he evangelized them, the message that the holy God confirmed by working wonders and sharing his Spirit with those who listened with trust, is the final authority. The Galatians should hold on to what they received as people who have been well grounded in the experience of Christ's love and God's acceptance. If a new group of teachers or Paul himself or a shining angel from heaven comes along now to tell them differently, they should not be swayed from the course on which they began, on which God himself had set them (3:1–5).

**Timothy George:** Most commentators, however, believe Paul repeated the **anathema** in order to emphasize its severity and further impress upon the Galatians the utter folly of their flirtation with false doctrine (thus **Bruce, Fung, Moo, Martyn**).

### **III. (:10) GOSPEL PERVERTERS OPERATE AS SLICK POLITICIANS**

#### **A. Paul is No Slick Politician = a Man-Pleaser**

*"For am I now seeking the favor of men"*

*"Or am I striving to please men?"*

*If I were still trying to please men"*

**Douglas Moo:** Probably, then, "*persuade God*" is Paul's own way of saying in other words what he says in the second part of the verse and elsewhere in his letters: in his ministry, he seeks not to curry favor with people but to **find approval from God himself** (see esp. **1 Thess. 2:4–6**; and see, for this view, **Lightfoot** 1881: 79; and esp. **Martyn** 1997: 138–40).

**Van Parunak:** He sets forth the relation that he holds both to man and to God. In obedience to God, he persuades men what God says, rather than calculating a message to please men, and then persuading God that it is right. Contrast much modern theology, designing a message to please men, then twisting the Scriptures to try to get it to fit. (This verse may be better as a heading to the next section; at any event, it is strongly transitional.)

**Timothy George:** This verse, in which Paul's emotions are seething just beneath the surface of the text, serves as a transitional bridge from the introductory sections

(salutation and exordium), which it concludes, to the long autobiographical account that follows (1:11 – 2:14). Up to this point Paul has mentioned himself only once: his self-introduction as an apostle of Christ in 1:1. Now the spotlight falls squarely on him as he wards off the insinuations and false charges leveled by his opponents. Obviously they have attacked not only Paul’s message but also his **motivation for ministry**. . .

Paul set forth a vindication of his true motive for ministry: he sought to please God and not any human beings. Already in these opening verses the two key concepts in the letter have surfaced -- gospel and grace. Against every inclination of disloyalty to the truth, Paul would recall for the Galatians these twin peaks of divine revelation. Paul’s concern for the grace of God and the truth of the gospel, not an obsession with peevish self-interest, led him next to recount to the Galatians the story of his conversion, calling, and early ministry.

**Craig Keener:** Grammatically, one could possibly answer Paul’s opening question four different ways:

1. Paul seeks to please both humans and God (cf. **Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 8:21**);
2. Paul seeks to persuade just humans (God not needing persuasion);
3. Paul seeks to persuade God alone (human opinion being unimportant; cf. **Gal. 2:6; 2 Cor. 6:8–9**); or
4. Paul, disdaining human rhetoric, seeks to persuade neither.

**Max Anders:** Paul's critics accused him of preaching “easy believism” because he did not include the law as grounds for salvation and Christian maturity. They claimed Paul watered down the gospel, by omitting the law, to increase his popularity among the Gentiles. Through two rhetorical questions, Paul adamantly denies the charge and states clearly that his motive is to please only God. He was concerned with preserving truth not increasing his approval ratings. To please people is to desert Christ. You must choose: serve people's fickle pleasures or serve the faithful Christ.

**George Brunk:** Paul’s passion for the truth and his willingness to condemn unfaithful messengers (vv. 6-9) gives him the opportunity to defend the integrity of his motivation as a servant of Christ. The sudden intrusion of this matter is evidence that Paul assumes his audience will understand why this point fits the present situation. The rhetorical character of the questions (the answer is assumed to be clear) indicates the same thing. Paul is countering a charge that someone has leveled against him. The previous curse-threats allow him to develop the counterargument at a moment of vulnerability in the reader/listener. After those strong assertions, the audience is likely wondering whether Paul is not unduly harsh with his opponents. They are not predisposed in this moment to think of Paul as a people pleaser, as his accusers apparently claim!

**David deSilva:** The second half of this verse expresses Paul’s clear denial of the suggestion that he is motivated by a desire to please or accommodate people, such that he either seeks their approval or, probably more to the point here, would alter the message with which he has been entrusted so as to gain a better or an easier reception among human beings. It makes the most sense to read the first half of the verse as

articulating a related denial that Paul seeks to “*persuade*” people in the sense of “saying whatever is necessary so as to gain their support.” The verb essentially means “to persuade” or “win over by argument,” but often it carries the negative connotations of “crowd-pleasing,” “placating,” even “campaigning for favor and support.” Coupled with “*people-pleasing*” (1:10b), Paul gives us the picture of a speaker who will say whatever is necessary to achieve his or her ends, rather than saying only what aligns with truth—and he is not that speaker.

**David Platt:** If your goal in life is to be liked, then you will not be a faithful and fruitful Christian. I am not implying you should be a jerk. I am merely pointing out that followers of Jesus experience opposition. If people despised Jesus, some will despise you as His follower (see **John 15:20; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-19; 1 John 3:13**). You need to aspire to something greater than being cool. Aspire to being faithful.

**B. Paul is a True Bond-servant of Christ = a God-Pleaser**

*"or of God?"*

*"I would not be a bond-servant of Christ"*

**George Brunk:** Of particular significance is Paul’s reference to his status as a **servant of Christ**. This is an early signal of how the major theme of freedom, appearing later in the letter, is to be qualified. In fundamental ways the believer is no longer a slave (4:7), yet each believer is a servant (lit. *a slave*) of Christ and of other believers (5:13). In other places in Galatians, Paul gives positive definition to freedom. Here he offers a negative qualification of it. Freedom is not self-centered self-determination.

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) How would you characterize Paul's tone in this opening section? Would modern day critics accuse him of being unloving and harsh? What ever happened to the modern virtue of tolerance?
- 2) What particularly shocks the Apostle Paul? Have we become calloused so that very little shocks us anymore?
- 3) What type of modern cults preach a different gospel that perverts the grace of Christ? How are these cultic leaders characterized by political manipulation rather than integrity?
- 4) What type of curse is Paul pronouncing? What does it mean to be "*accursed*"?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**William Hendriksen:** The question might be asked, 'But was not Paul too severe in his denunciation and in his rebuke? Is it not true that even now the Judaizers believed in Jesus Christ for salvation, the only difference between Paul and those who differed with him being that to this required faith the latter *added* strict obedience to certain Mosaic regulations?' The answer is that the '*addition*' was in the nature of a complete repudiation of the all-sufficiency of Christ's redemption. Read **Gal. 5:2**. A beverage may be very healthful and refreshing, but when a drop of poison is added to it, it becomes deadly. Christ, too, used severe language in condemning the hypocrites of his day (**Matt. 23** especially **verses 15** and **33**). Pharisees and Judaizers had much in common, were in fact closely related (**Acts 15:5; Luke 11:46; cf. Gal. 6:12, 13**).

**Warren Wiersbe:** Paul was not a politician; he was an **ambassador**. His task was not to 'play politics' but to proclaim a message... We have noted three steps Paul took toward engaging these false teachers in battle: he explained his authority, expressed his anxiety, and exposed his adversaries. But how is he going to attack his enemies? What approach will he use to convince the Galatian believers that all they need is faith in God's grace? A quick survey of the entire letter shows that Paul is a master defender of the Gospel...

- 1) His first approach is *personal* (**chaps. 1-2**)... The autobiographical section of the letter proves that Paul was not a 'counterfeit apostle,' but that his message and ministry were true to the faith...
- 2) **Chapters 3 and 4** are *doctrinal* and in them Paul presents several arguments to establish that sinners are saved by faith and grace, not by works and law...
- 3) The **final two chapters** of the letter are *practical* in emphasis, as Paul turns from argument to application... in this section, Paul explains the relationship between the grace of God and practical Christian living. He shows that living by grace means liberty, not bondage (**5:1-12**); depending on the Spirit, not the flesh (**5:13-26**); living for others, not for self (**6:1-10**); and living for the glory of God, not for man's approval (**6:11-18**). It is either one series of actions or the other -- law or grace -- but it cannot be both.

**David Platt:** "But those who follow a different religion are sincere," some would argue. "Shouldn't sincerity matter?" I would not say that people following false religions are not sincere, but I will point out the biblical truth that sincerity cannot save. There is such a thing as "*zeal . . . not according to knowledge*" (**Rom 10:2**). In sincerely trying to reach heaven through any path other than salvation through Jesus, a person disregards righteousness from God and attempts to establish his or her own. He or she fails to submit to God's righteousness (cf. **Rom 10:3**). Think of it this way: A racer may run fast but still fail to reach his destination because he was headed in the wrong direction! There is only one valid alternative to works-based righteousness, and that is trusting in Christ.

### **Bruce Barton: ON GUARD!**

People pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ in many ways. Some are blatant; some are more subtle. Be on guard against the following strategies of those who pervert:

- Weakening: those who undermine or deny the foundation of Jesus Christ and faith in him. They say, for example, that the Bible isn't true and that the Resurrection is a myth.
- Diluting: those who allow half measures to stand instead of absolute moral claims. They say, for example, that sex outside of marriage is all right for consenting adults.
- Distorting: those who misrepresent what the Bible says in order to make it either "more palatable" or to make it appear to say what it does not. They say, for example, that the Bible only applied to people at the time it was written.
- Blending: those who readily admit as authoritative the teachings of sources other than the Bible. For example, the Mormons regard the Book of Mormon as authoritative in addition to the Bible.
- Poisoning: those who deliberately mix dangerous error and lies in with their teaching. They say, for example, that you should leave your spouse if you're not being fulfilled in your marriage.
- Deflecting: those who ricochet off of key words to promote their own ideas. They use the "church of Christ" to promote their own empire.

**W. A. Criswell:** This message is a sermon on dogmatism, on finality, on authoritarianism, which is an unusual message to hear today in the midst of our studied broad-minded liberalism... The revelation of the Lord is not double-faced nor is it deceptively speculative. It is not as though we were selecting opinions. It is not as though we were in dilemmas choosing theories. It is not as though we were listening to blind, metaphysical gropings. The sound of the trumpet is clear in the Word of God. It is final. It is superlative, never comparative. **The authoritarianism of the Gospel!** *'My brethren, though I or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than ye have heard, anathama esto. Let him be accursed.'* One faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father for us all, one Book, one way -- just one!

### **Charles Swindoll: Re vs. 10 -- The Conviction: Nonconformity of the Christian Upheld**

#### **A. Those who seek to please only God become invincible within.**

When we serve the Lord diligently, our minds and hearts will not wander or become victimized by spiritual counterfeits. Our souls will become like steel, firmly cemented in the foundation of the Christian gospel. How solid is your foundation? Is it reinforced with a commitment of steel, bent on pleasing God only? Can it withstand

the weight of counterfeits? Or does it crumble under pressure? If so, maybe you need to take an engineer's look at your life to determine whether pleasing God is truly an undergirding motivation (2 Cor. 5:9).

**B. Those who stop striving to please people are not intimidated by them.**

There will always be those who try to lead us astray. But if our lives are centered on pleasing God rather than people, we will be able to stand strong when the lures come our way. Are you able to look intimidation in the face and stare it down?...

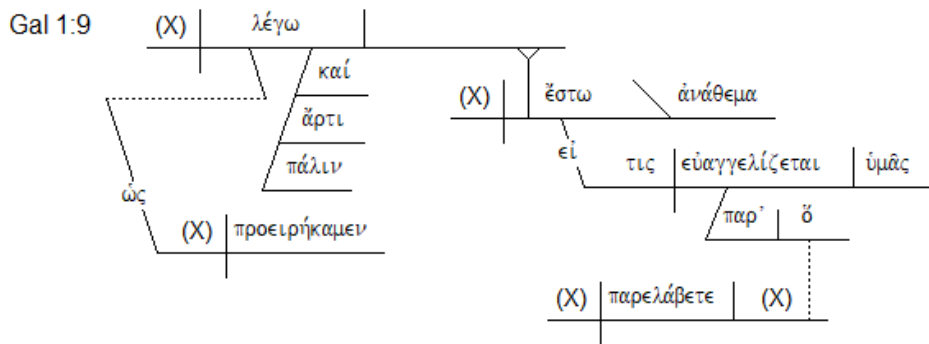
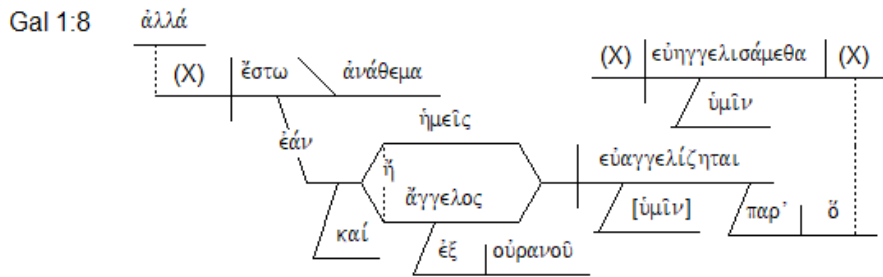
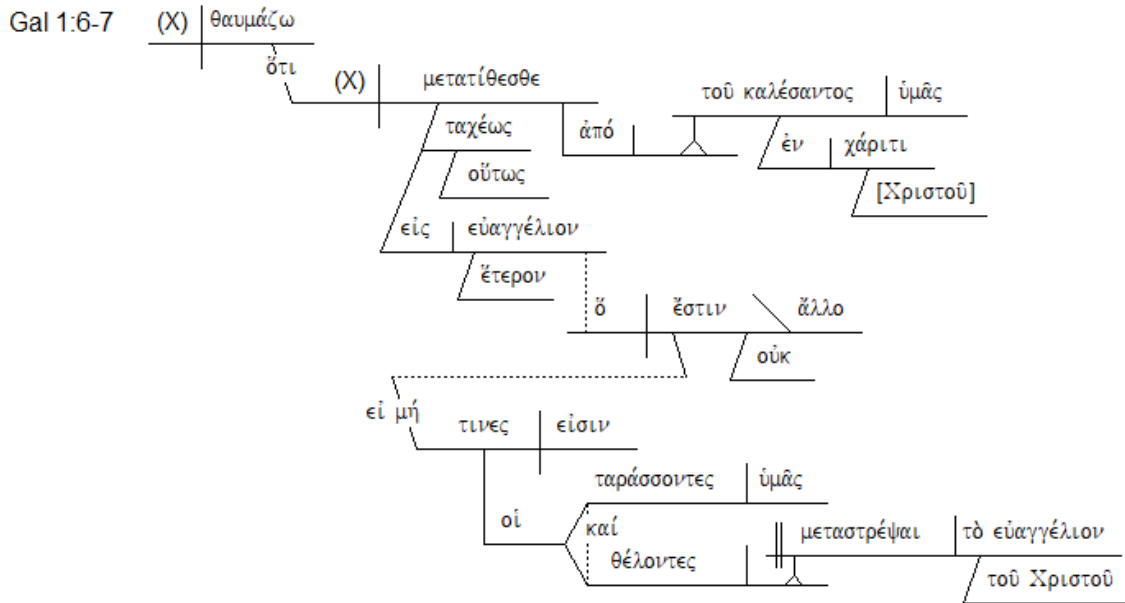
**C. Those who are true servants of Christ think and act independently.**

**Philip Ryken:** **Raymond Ortlund Jr.** has tried to imagine the church without the gospel. "What might our evangelicalism, without the evangel, look like?" he asks. "We would have to replace the centrality of the gospel with something else, naturally. So what might take the place of the gospel in our sermons and books and cassette tapes and Sunday school classes and home Bible studies and, above all, in our hearts?" **Ortlund** lists a number of possibilities:

- a passionate devotion to the pro-life cause
- a confident manipulation of modern managerial techniques
- a drive toward church growth
- a deep concern for the institution of the family
- a clever appeal to consumerism by offering a sort of cost-free Christianity Lite
- a sympathetic, empathetic, thickly-honeyed cultivation of interpersonal relationships
- a determination to take America back to its Christian roots through political power
- a warm affirmation of self-esteem

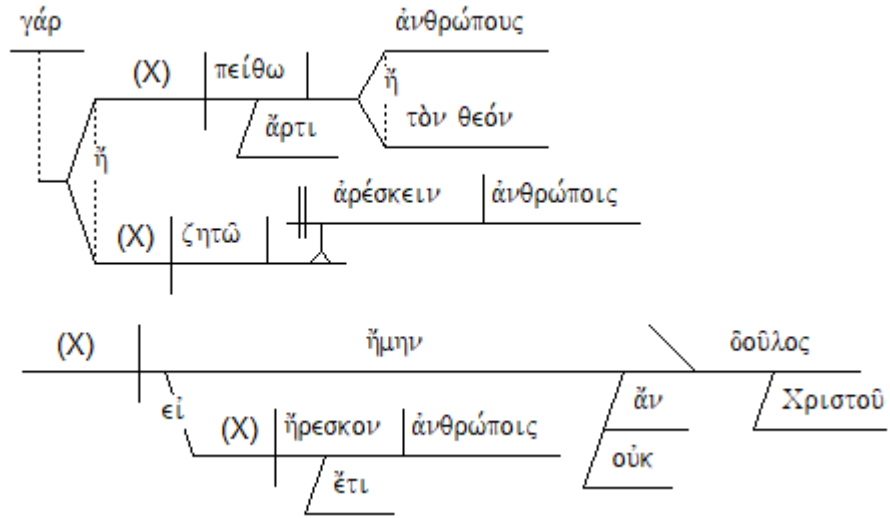
In other words, the church without the gospel would look very much the way the evangelical church looks at this very moment. We cannot simply assume that we have the gospel. Unless we keep the gospel at the center of the church, we are always in danger of shoving it off to one side and letting something else take its place. **Martin Luther** rightly warned that "there is a clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions."

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:





Gal 1:10



TEXT: GALATIANS 1:11-24

TITLE: AUTHENTICATION OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND GOSPEL MESSAGE

**BIG IDEA:**

**PAUL'S AUTHORITY ESTABLISHED BY DIVINE REVELATION --  
PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY CONFIRMS THE DIVINE SOURCE OF  
HIS MESSAGE AND AUTHORITY**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Philip Ryken:** Before going any further, it will be helpful to have the **outline of Galatians** clearly in mind. The letter falls neatly into three sections—biography, theology, and ethics—each two chapters in length.

In the first two chapters Paul recounts his spiritual autobiography. His life story shows that he is a true apostle who preaches the true gospel of free grace. The first section of the letter may be summarized like this: “*For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (**Gal. 1:11–12**). Paul understood that people had to accept his apostleship before they would accept his gospel.

The theology of the one true gospel is expounded in chapters 3 and 4. Essentially, it is the theology of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. A good theme verse for this section of Paul’s letter comes in the middle of the third chapter: “*Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith’*” (**Gal. 3:11**).

Finally, the book concludes with two chapters of ethics. Paul takes his theology—as he does in all his letters—and applies it to daily life, where “*neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love*” (**Gal. 5:6**).

This is the logic of Galatians: live by the gospel that you can receive only by faith. What God has done (the biography of chapters 1 and 2) teaches us what we should believe (the theology of chapters 3 and 4) and how we should live (the ethics of chapters 5 and 6).

**George Lyons:** That Paul offers his autobiographical narrative in **1:13 - 2:21** as substantiation of his claim in **1:11–12** concerning the nature and origin of his Gospel suggests he considers himself in some sense a representative or even an embodiment of that gospel. As in the ancient philosophical lives, the consistency between his ... ‘conduct’, and ... ‘deeds’, and his ... words demonstrates the truth of his philosophy, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is a paradigm of the Gospel he preaches to the Gentiles. The formulation of Paul’s autobiographical remarks in terms of ‘formerly-now’ and

‘[hu] man-God’ serves the paradigmatic function of contrasting Paul’s conversion from Judaism to Christianity with the Galatians inverted conversion, which is really nothing other than a desertion of the one who called [them] in the grace of Christ (1.6) and a surrender of Christian freedom for the slavery of the law (see 2:4; 3:28; 4:1–9, 22–31; 5:1,13).

**Nijay Gupta:** In this first major section of his letter to the Galatians, Paul carefully recounts some key events in his personal story, from persecutor to apostle to the gentiles. He states his primary concern right away: “*the gospel I preached is not of human origin*” (1:11). Paul needed to make it clear that he has consistently preached the same gospel from the beginning, and this is not his own personal interpretation of the gospel of Christ but rather a message and ministry that came directly from above. Throughout these fourteen verses, Paul is insistent that he received no formal instruction in the faith or any official commissioning from human leaders. His work has been consistent, his ministry independent, and his story legendary. He provides here particular events, specific time periods, the names of those involved, and a renowned reputation. He has been transparent and consistent. It is crucial from the beginning of this letter that Paul demonstrates himself trustworthy and genuine. And time and time again he challenges the Galatians to test him, to check his story, and to ask around. He has nothing to hide and stands firm in his gospel. The autobiography and self-defense is crucial for Paul’s wider concern to convince the Galatians they were right all along to trust him and to find the “*truth of the gospel*” in his teachings (Gal 2:5, 14).

**John Stott:** Having made his startling claim to a direct revelation from God without human means, Paul goes on to prove it from history, that is, from the facts of his own autobiography. The situation before his conversion, at his conversion, and after his conversion were such that he clearly got his gospel not from any human being but directly from God.

**George Brunk:** The section begins with a thesis-like statement affirming the divine origin of Paul’s gospel. A series of experiences and episodes follows. These are selected and recounted for the purpose of proving the thesis. Paul is not interested in recounting his story for its own sake. Paul selects only the events that contribute supporting evidence to his claim that Christ’s direct revelation to Paul and Christ’s call on Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles provide all the authority and truth necessary to support his ministry. No human relationships or structures—not even apostolic ones—can contribute to or challenge that truth or Paul’s authority to preach that gospel. While the narrative focuses on Paul’s life, the intent of the section is to give evidence that the gospel Paul preaches is based on divine revelation. In this way, Paul’s gospel, which moves from the exclusiveness of a Law orientation to a gospel open for all people, including Gentiles, is shown to be according to the will of God. Here Paul is defending his apostolic role as the means of defending the gospel and not as an end in itself.

**Max Anders:** In summary, false teachers in Galatia were teaching that to be saved and mature in the faith Gentile believers had to follow Jewish laws and customs, especially

the rite of circumcision. Faith in Christ was not enough. This message was undermining the good news that salvation is a simple gift based on faith in Christ and not a reward for certain good deeds. This false message was in direct opposition to the gospel of grace that Paul preached. Additionally, in order to discredit Paul's message, the false teachers sought to discredit Paul. Thus, to defend himself and his gospel of grace, Paul argues convincingly that the gospel of grace is true because it came directly from God and it dramatically changed his life.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul's Gospel Derived from God, Not People (1:11–2:21)

1. **Thesis:** Source of His Gospel Was Revelation (1:11–12)
2. **Thesis Support (1:13 – 2:21)**
  - a. His Past Hostility (1:13–14)
    - i. His persecution of the church (1:13)
    - ii. His zeal in Judaism (1:14)
  - b. His Call from God (1:15–17)
    - i. A work of God's grace (1:15)
    - ii. Purpose: proclamation among the Gentiles (1:16)
    - iii. No need for validation (1:17)
  - c. His Relative Obscurity in Judea (1:18–24)
    - i. Relatively unknown to apostles (1:18–20)
      - (1) Limited contact with Peter (1:18)
      - (2) Limited contact with James (1:19)
      - (3) Oath formula (1:20)
    - ii. Relatively unknown in Judea (1:21–24)
      - (1) Limited contact in Judea (1:21–22)
      - (2) Known by report only (1:23–24)

The truth Paul communicates is that his gospel is **divine in origin**. It cannot be dismissed as merely a human gospel. Paul's statement here probably reflects an accusation made against him by his Jewish opponents. They contended that Paul's gospel was human in nature and that it had no independent authority or validity. Hence, according to the intruders who had entered the Galatian churches, Paul's gospel was one that pleased people by omitting some of the essential elements of the gospel, i.e., the need to be circumcised and to keep the OT law. As noted previously, from the first verse of the letter Paul defends the divine origin of his gospel, something he does not do in such explicit terms in any other letter.

**David Platt:** Main Idea: Paul describes how his gospel came not from man but from God and then shares how Jesus transformed his life.

- I. The Origin of Paul's Message (1:11-12)
- II. The Transformation of Paul's Life (1:13-24)
  - A. His pre-conversion: In need of grace (1:13-14)
  - B. His conversion: God's work of grace (1:15-16a)
  - C. His post-conversion: Faithfulness to Jesus (1:16b-24)

## I. (:11-12) THESIS: THE DIVINE SOURCE OF HIS GOSPEL MESSAGE

**Ben Witherington:** Verses 11–12 are clearly **transitional** and show that despite the passion behind Paul’s arguments here, Paul is attending to what will make for a rhetorically effective communication. The narratio proper does not begin until **vs. 13**. It was the mark of a good orator that his transitions from one part of a speech to another were smooth and natural ones. Paul here links together a theme already briefly touched on in the prescript in **1:1**, which he plans to elaborate on in detail in the narratio which follows in **1:13 – 2:14**. Paul will present his life and actions as a paradigm of his Gospel of grace. This is not because his Christian life and experiences or his apostleship were being questioned but because his Gospel was being challenged or at least supplemented by the agitators.

### A. Importance of the Subject = Source of Gospel Message

*"For I would have you know, brethren"*

**John MacArthur:** *I would have you know* is from *gn riz*, a strong Greek verb that means to make known with certainty, to certify. It was often used, as here, to introduce an important and emphatic statement that immediately followed. In vernacular English the phrase could be rendered, “Let me make it perfectly clear.”

### B. Negatively: Gospel Not Sourced According to Man

#### 1. Summary

*"that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man"*

**Max Anders:** The Judaizers knew that if they could undermine Paul's apostolic authority they could defeat his message of liberty. So Paul now defends his apostleship and message. The Judaizers said Paul perverted the gospel by omitting the Law of Moses; in reality, the Judaizers perverted the gospel by adding legalism. Paul now presents the first reason the Galatians should listen to him and not the false teachers: the gospel is not man-made (compare **v. 1**). No human mind apart from God's revelation would dream up a plan of salvation wholly dependent on God's grace and the death of his Son.

#### 2. Details

a. Not received directly from man

*"For I neither received it from man"*

b. Not received indirectly from man

*"nor was I taught it"*

### C. Positively: Gospel Received By Divine Revelation

*"but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ"*

**John MacArthur:** *Revelation* is from *apokalupsis* and means an unveiling of something previously secret. Jesus Christ is best understood as the **object of that very revelation**. It was not that he had no previous knowledge of Jesus. It was for the very reason that he did know something of Him and His work that he had fiercely persecuted those who believed in Him. He obviously had known that Christians believed Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, because it was for those claims that Jesus was most criticized and eventually crucified (**Luke 23:2, 35; John 5:18; 10:30**). Paul had known that Christians believed Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He also knew that Jesus not only dispensed with the rabbinic traditions but even with the ceremonial laws of Moses. Before his conversion Paul could have accurately stated many of the central teachings of the gospel. But he did not believe those teachings were true and thus had no grasp of their spiritual meaning and significance.

It was only after he himself at Damascus (**Acts 9:1-16**) came personally to encounter and to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that he received the supernatural truth of the gospel through divine revelation. As he explained to the Corinthian church, it is only when a person turns to the Lord that the veil of spiritual ignorance and separation from God is removed (**2 Cor. 3:14-16**), so that the truth received can be understood. And for Paul the details and distinctions of that gospel truth came by special revelation directly from God (cf. **v. 16**).

**Craig Keener:** Here God is the **direct source** of the revelation (**1:15**) and Jesus is the **content** (**1:16**). Jesus usually appears as the content of the revelation (although **2 Cor. 12:1** and **Rev. 1:1** are debatable), as is usual with nouns in the genitive following “*revelation*” in Paul.

## **II. (:13-17) PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF HIS CONVERSION EXPERIENCE: SOVEREIGNLY APPOINTED TO HIS APOSTOLIC MISSION**

**Scot McKnight:** The first argument in our section (**vv. 13–17**) concerns Paul’s **independence from human teaching**. God’s call came to Paul directly; he says that he “*did not consult any man*” (**v. 16**). His pre-Christian history in no way prepared him to be an apostle. Rather, his past was marked by two features:

- (1) he was a persecutor (cf. **Acts 9:1–2; 1 Cor. 15:9**), and
- (2) he was extremely zealous for the law and its national distinctives (**1:13–14; cf. Acts 22:3; 26:4; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:4–6**).

Paul’s description of his past focuses on the sacred traditions that were passed on in Judaism (“*zealous for the traditions of my fathers*”), the very element Paul is arguing against in this chapter.

His persecution of the church and his advancements in Judaism came to a screeching halt when God chose to make himself known to Paul in Christ. So when God’s call came upon him, he had two options: either to go to Jerusalem to gain an authoritative

interpretation of his visionary call or to be instructed elsewhere. Paul chose elsewhere, going immediately to Arabia and Damascus (v. 17). Thus, in his pre-and post-conversion experiences he was not prepared for the gospel of grace to go to the Gentiles, nor was he simply another Jerusalem-based apostle. Paul often focuses on the Gentile target of his apostleship (**Rom. 15:14–21; Eph. 3:1–13; Col. 1:24–2:3**), and he knows that it was only by the grace of a sovereign God that he was given such a glorious ministry (**Jer. 1:5; 1 Cor. 15:9–11; Eph. 3:7–13**).

#### **A. (:13) Pre-Conversion Persecution of the Church**

*"For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it"*

**Bruce Barton:** But militant Judaism was in Paul's past—it was his "previous" way of life. When he met Jesus Christ, his life changed. He then directed all his energies toward building up the Christian church.

**Ben Witherington:** Notice that while Paul says that his audience knows about his former life as a Pharisee and persecutor, it is clear enough that they do not know enough about his life during the years immediately after his conversion and call. This is why the former period of his life can be summed up in two verses but the post-conversion period must be given much fuller treatment, with the correction of possible misperceptions along the way as to where Paul got his Gospel and how much contact he may have had with the Jerusalem authorities.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Before Paul was converted, he was convinced that his persecution demonstrated his zeal for God and his righteousness (**Phil 3:6**). But he came to understand that what he thought was righteousness was actually the climax of his sinfulness, so that he was unworthy to be called as an apostle (**1 Cor 15:9**; cf. **Eph 3:8**). He designated himself as "*a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man*" (**1 Tim 1:13**) and as the "*worst*" of sinners (**1 Tim 1:15**). Hence, God demonstrated his merciful grace in saving him (**1:13–16**) and calling him to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

**David Platt:** For us, Paul's is a story that shows us that **God loves to save bad people**. No one is beyond the reach of His amazing grace! This message only comes from God. The gospel is not good advice from man; it is good news from God. Rejoice in this gospel. In Christ, you find what your heart has always longed to find. No other love is this great. No other hope is this secure. No other forgiveness is this complete. No other joy is this deep. No other freedom is this liberating. No other peace is this sweet. All of it is found in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Do you know this Savior, the fountain of saving grace? Come and drink!

#### **B. (:14) Pre-Conversion Loyalty to Jewish Traditions**

*"and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."*

**John MacArthur:** *Ancestral traditions* refers to the body of oral teachings about the Old Testament law that came to have equal authority with the law. Commonly known as the **Halakah**, this collection of Torah interpretations became a fence around God's revealed law and all but hid it from view. Over a period of several hundred years it had expanded into a mammoth accumulation of religious, moral, legal, practical, and ceremonial regulations that defied comprehension, much less total compliance. It contained such vast amounts of minutiae that even the most learned rabbinical scholars could not master it either by interpretation or in behavior. Yet the more complex and burdensome it became, the more zealously Jewish legalists revered and propagated it.

### C. (:15-16a) Sovereign Conversion

**Richard Longenecker:** As for his conversion to Christ and his commission to minister among Gentiles, Paul seems to be rebutting in vv 15–17 certain suggestions to the effect (1) that his Christian profession can be explained along the lines of human motivations and events, and (2) that his subsequent activity included instruction under the Jerusalem apostles, from whose teaching he then deviated. To such assertions, Paul answers that it was God who called him in prophetic fashion to minister to Gentiles and that he had no contact with his Christian predecessors at Jerusalem until much later.

#### 1. Sovereign Election to Salvation and Ministry -- Emphasis on Sanctification / Holiness

*"But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul continues to emphasize that his transformation was wholly the **work of God**, for God had destined him from the time he was in his mother's womb to be an apostle, and he called him to be such at a particular time in history, i.e., on the way to Damascus. It has been noted previously that Paul was both called and converted on this occasion, but the emphasis here is on Paul's call as an apostle, since the teachers in Galatia questioned the legitimacy of his apostleship.

The language Paul uses here alludes to the calling of Isaiah and Jeremiah as prophets. Isaiah declares that the Lord called him from the womb of his mother (**Isa 49:1**). Further, the Lord knew Jeremiah before he was in his mother's womb, and he appointed and set him apart as a prophet before his birth (**Jer 1:5**). Just as Isaiah and Jeremiah were called to be prophets, so too the Lord appointed Paul to be an apostle. Paul emphasizes that he was divinely appointed, for the Lord had appointed him to such a task before he was born (cf. **Rom 1:1**).

Further, God "*called*" (καλέσας) him "*through his grace.*" The word "*calling*" here clearly means a call that is effective, a call that convinces the one who is summoned. The reference to grace confirms such an idea. Paul did not volunteer to serve as an apostle, but he was summoned by God in a compelling way. Hence, his service as an apostle can be ascribed only to the grace of God, pointing to the forgiveness of his sins committed before his conversion.



2. Sovereign (Effectual) Calling to Salvation and Ministry -- Emphasis on  
Grace  
*"and called me through His grace"*

**David Platt:** Man did not invent the gospel. It comes from God. It is therefore the standard by which we measure every other set of ideas and every other religion and philosophy.

If you think about it, you have to admit that we would not make this gospel up. If we were given the power to determine how one earned God's favor and a place in heaven, we would make up a scoring system, something that emphasized human works. Why? Because the natural default mode of the human heart is works-righteousness. The **message of grace**—that the work has already been done—is counter-intuitive. Grace offends our natural sensibilities. Works-righteousness is motivated by unbelief. We do not naturally trust grace. We want control. This supports the reality that people did not make up the gospel of grace; **it came from God.**

The gospel of grace is like water: people did not invent it, and people cannot live without it. We are spiritually thirsty creatures in need of the living water of the gospel. As believers, we need to keep drinking from this well of grace. Many Christians think they should move on from the gospel—as if there is something more important than Christ's work. No, keep drinking more of grace; keep working the gospel into your heart.

**John MacArthur:** Paul did not initiate the choice to be saved, much less the choice to be an apostle. He was "*called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*" (**1 Cor. 1:1**). The phrase when He who had set me apart refers to the **elective purpose of God** before Paul was even able to consider a choice. No person is saved or called to leadership in the church except by such sovereign and predetermined divine will. "*He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved*" (**Eph. 1:5-6**; cf. v. 9).

**Timothy George:** Christianity is a **historical faith**. It is based on certain specific, irreversible, and irreducible historical events. Jesus was born during the imperial reign of Caesar Augustus. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day, and was taken up into heaven forty days later. Christianity is not a philosophy of life, or yet a set of moral precepts, or a secret code for mystical union with the divine. At its core Christianity is the record of what God has once and for all done in the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. Among these mighty acts of God, we must include the **calling of the apostle Paul**, for it too belongs among the foundational events of salvation history.

3. Sovereign Revelation of Salvation -- Emphasis on a Personal Relationship  
with Christ  
*"was pleased to reveal His Son in me"*

Christ in him became the power for his ministry

**Craig Keener:** Some interpreters today respect Scripture yet insist on a religious experience that is exclusively textually focused, devoid of further experience. Paul honored the biblical text (see **Gal. 3:6 – 5:1**), but he insisted also on the reality of experience with God to which biblical texts bear witness. Paul thus appeals to both his own experience (**1:13–16**) and that of his hearers (**3:1–5; 4:13–14**; cf. **1 Cor. 2:1–5; 2 Cor. 3:1–3**).

**Nijay Gupta:** First, we have Paul's appeal to the **work of God**. Notice that he did not say that he came to a new realization one day while contemplating spirituality. He did not read a good book or hear a fine philosophical message and then change his ways. He was suddenly and powerfully struck with a divine bolt from the blue, as it were. Before elaborating on the content and purpose of this divine revelation, Paul makes a backgrounding statement that God had already set him apart from birth and called him by grace.

**Bruce Barton:** This revealing of God's Son included several aspects:

- A new confirmation of the Resurrection: Paul heard the voice of the resurrected and living Jesus Christ (**Acts 9:4-6**), confirming for him the fact of the Resurrection.
- A new understanding of Jesus Christ: In his appearance to Paul, God revealed who Jesus really was—the Jews' promised Messiah, the Savior.
- A new strategy for mission: The revelation of Jesus carried with it the command to go with the message to others. This included a law-free gospel to the Gentiles.

#### **D. (:16b) Sovereign Appointment to His Apostolic Ministry to the Gentiles**

*"that I might preach Him among the Gentiles"*

very specific mission

**Thomas Schreiner:** Concentrating on the Gentiles never meant for Paul the exclusion of the Jews. Indeed, as **Romans 11** indicates, Paul believed the two missions were interrelated (**Rom 11:11–32**). The proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles is bound up with the Pauline understanding of the gospel, and in particular the truth that the Gentiles were not required to observe the law in order to be saved. Paul's law-free gospel was revealed to him on the road to Damascus. He did not derive his gospel from any human authority.

**Philip Ryken:** This verse summarizes Paul's whole life. He preached Christ to the Gentiles. He preached Christ crucified and Christ risen, and the Christ he preached was the very same Christ that God had revealed to him.

#### **E. (:16c-17) Initial Isolation from Church Tutelage**

##### 1. No Immediate Contact with Other Believers

*"I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood"*

the believers would have been hesitant to receive him anyway because of his prominent opposition to the church

## 2. No Immediate Consultation with Church Leaders

*"nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me"*

Including himself in the same class with the other apostles

**Timothy George:** What Paul was arguing in Galatians was not that his gospel was different from that of the other apostles but rather that he had received it independently of them. Indeed, as we will see, he went to great lengths to demonstrate the basic consistency of his message and theirs. Even when he confronted Peter in Antioch (2:11–14), it was not because Peter was preaching a different gospel from Paul but rather that he had acted inconsistently with the one gospel they both accepted and proclaimed. . .

Let us note here five essential elements of the gospel made known to Paul.

- (1) God has raised from the dead Jesus, the crucified Messiah, vindicating his claim to be one with the Father.
- (2) Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father but is still vitally connected to his people on earth. The shattering insight Paul saw on the Damascus Road was this: in persecuting the Christians, he was in reality torturing Christ himself. Paul's doctrine of the church as the body of Christ undoubtedly grew out of this profound insight.
- (3) The risen Christ will come again in power and glory to fulfill all the messianic prophecies of the old covenant, bringing history to a climactic closure in a display of divine judgment and wrath.
- (4) In the meantime, God has opened the door of salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul himself had been commissioned to herald this good news to all persons but especially to the Gentiles.
- (5) The basis for acceptance with God, for Jews and Gentiles alike, is **justification by faith apart from the works of the law**. The futility of legal righteousness is seen in a true appreciation of Christ's atoning death on the cross. The revelation of Jesus as Messiah requires a radical reorientation in how the law is seen and applied in this "*dispensation of the fullness of times*" (Eph 1:10 KJV).

## 3. Private Isolation -- for Personal Development and Ministry Foundation

*"but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus"*

**Bruce Barton:** Although the sequence of events making up this part of Paul's life appears clear, fitting it into the chronology of the book of Acts presents some challenges. Luke did not mention a three-year time period similar to Paul's account. The primary accounts covering this time period are **Acts 9:1-31** and **Galatians 1:13-24**. The following presents a suggested chronology:

- On his way to Damascus to imprison Christians, Saul was confronted by Christ and converted.
- Journeying on into Damascus, Paul waited until he was contacted by Ananias, who prayed for his healing and arranged for his baptism.
- Two events are given description as “*immediate*:”
  - “*Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues*” (Acts 9:20 NRSV), and
  - “*I went immediately into Arabia*” (1:17 NIV).

The point of reference, however, for each immediate action is different. Luke described the prompt beginning of Paul’s public ministry in relation to his conversion, while Paul was emphasizing to the Galatians how much time had elapsed between the beginning of his ministry and his first encounter with the other apostles in Jerusalem. Paul was saying, “Instead of immediately seeking confirmation from those in Jerusalem, what I did first was spend time alone in Arabia.” The first “*immediate*” accents the overnight transformation of Paul’s life. He left clear evidence of his conversion before he went into Arabia. The second “*immediate*” points to Paul’s retreat into solitude in order to consolidate and integrate the central change in his life with the rest of his experience and training.

- Three years pass. During that time, Paul left Damascus twice: first to spend time alone in Arabia, second to avoid plotters against his life and visit Jerusalem. Paul’s escape from Damascus fits better at the end of the three-year time period than shortly after his conversion. The Pharisees were probably upset by Paul’s desertion from their ranks and the effect that he had on their numbers within the city after a while. As Luke described it, “*After some time had passed*” (Acts 9:23 NRSV). By then, Paul had “*disciples*” (NRSV) or “*followers*” (see Acts 9:25 NIV).

**John Stott:** Paul produces a series of **three “alibis”** to prove that he did not spend time in Jerusalem having his gospel shaped by the other apostles.

Alibi 1. He went into Arabia (v. 17). According to Acts 9:20, Paul spent a little while in Damascus preaching, which suggests that his gospel was sufficiently clearly defined for him to announce it. But it must have been soon afterward that he went into Arabia, likely for quiet and solitude. He seems to have stayed there for **three years**. During this period of withdrawal, as he meditated on the Old Testament Scriptures, on what he already knew about Jesus, and on his experience of conversion, the gospel of the grace of God was revealed to him in its fullness.

Alibi 2. He went up to Jerusalem later and briefly (vv. 18-20). Paul is quite open about this visit to Jerusalem, but he makes light of it. It was not nearly as significant as the false teachers were obviously suggesting. For one thing, it took place after three years, which almost certainly means three years after his conversion. By that time his gospel would have been fully formulated. Next, when he reached Jerusalem, he saw only two of the apostles, Peter and James. Third, he was in Jerusalem for only fifteen days. Of course in fifteen days the apostles would have had some time to talk about Christ. But

Paul's point is that he had no time to absorb from Peter the whole counsel of God. Besides, that was not the purpose of his visit. Much of those two weeks in Jerusalem, we learn from **Acts 9:28-29**, was spent in preaching.

Alibi 3. He went off to Syria and Cilicia (vv. **21-24**). This visit to the extreme north corresponds to **Acts 9:30**, where we are told that Paul, who was already in danger for his life, was brought by the believers to Caesarea and then sent off to Tarsus, which is in Cilicia. Since he says here that he went to Syria as well, he may have revisited Damascus and called at Antioch on his way to Tarsus. The point Paul is making is that **he was up in the far north, nowhere near Jerusalem**.

As we will see in **Galatians 2:1**, not until fourteen years after his conversion did Paul revisit Jerusalem and have a more prolonged consultation with the other apostles. By that time his gospel was fully developed. During the fourteen-year period between his conversion and this consultation, he had paid only one brief and insignificant visit to Jerusalem. The rest of the time he had spent in distant Arabia, Syria, and Cilicia. His alibis **proved the independence of his gospel**.

### **III. (:18-24) PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF HIS FORMATIVE YEARS: ALMOST NO CONTACT WITH BELIEVERS**

**Thomas Schreiner**: Verses 18–24 continue to support the theme that Paul did not please people and that his gospel was independent of the apostles. When he finally came to Jerusalem, the only apostles he saw were Peter and James (**1:18–20**), and he did not seek out the approval of the apostles. Further, most of the churches in Judea did not even know Paul face-to-face, which shows that he did not spend much time in Israel. They heard only about the remarkable change God had accomplished in him (**1:21–24**).

**Richard Longenecker**: The Judaizers were evidently claiming that Paul was dependent on and subordinate to the apostles at Jerusalem. Paul's defense is to lay out an account of his career since Christ's encounter with him on his way to Damascus, with particular attention to his contacts with the Jerusalem leaders. So in the narrative of **1:18 – 2:10** he uses *ἔπειτα* to assure his readers that there are no gaps in his account. And so in **1:18–24** he tells of his first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian (vv **18–20**) and of his return thereafter to Syria and Cilicia (vv **21–24**), continuing the alibi type of argument ("*I was not there*") begun in vv **16b–17**.

#### **A. (:18-19) First Contact with the Apostles**

##### 1. Met with Peter -- Getting to know you

*"Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days."*

**Douglas Moo**: The chronological indicators in **1:18** and **1:21** mark out the next stages in Paul's travelogue. Two specific movements are noted, each introduced with *ἔπειτα* (*epeita, then*): a visit to Jerusalem (**1:18**) and a move to "*the regions of Syria and*

*Cilicia*” (1:21). Paul spends no time describing his ministry during these years (the events he narrates in this paragraph may have covered as many as ten years). He concentrates, rather, on the negative point that he introduced in **verse 17a**: his minimal contact with Jerusalem and the apostles resident there.

2. Only Other Brief Contact = James (not officially one of the twelve)  
*"But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother"*

**B. (:20) Aside: Veracity of His Testimony**

*"(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)"*

**Ronald Fung:** Here Paul takes the voluntary oath (*iusiurandum voluntarium* as “a forceful and even dramatic means to emphasize both the seriousness of the issue and his own truthfulness.” It is with good reason that Paul took his own statements so seriously, for the very truth of the gospel as he understood it was at stake in the veracity of his narrative. The vehemence of his language also implies, probably, that a different account, which misrepresented the nature and purpose of his visits to Jerusalem, was current among the Galatian churches, and that he was eager to counter this with his statement of the facts.

**C. (:21-24) Interaction with the Church**

1. (:21) Spent time Preaching in outlying regions  
*"Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia"*

not exactly hotbeds of early church activity

**Darroll Evans:** Why would Paul be sent to Cilicia? It is my opinion that it was for his protection and growth. Paul deserted Orthodox Judaism and needed someplace to study in relative safety. To this day hatred for Paul is pervasive among Orthodox Jews. One of the cities in Cilicia is Tarsus. That was Paul's hometown. In Tarsus, Paul would be safe from those who were trying to take his life.

2. (:22-24) Known Only by Reputation to the Churches of Judea
  - a. (:22) Not Known by Sight  
*"And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ"*

**Howard Vos:** Since Paul had carried on his ministry for a decade or more at such a great distance from Jerusalem, he was obviously independent of the mother church.

- b. (:23) Known by Reputation  
*"but only, they kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy'"*

**Nijay Gupta:** Looking back on Paul’s wider message in **1:11–24**, he wanted to tackle the accusation that his rivals had Jerusalem credentials and he did not. Instead of conceding this as some sort of weakness, **Paul proudly rehearsed his own story**. No, he did not come up through the Judean apostolic ranks as a rising star (not the way he did as a Pharisee); Paul was an outsider. But his authority came directly from Christ (remember **Gal 1:1**); he was handpicked to be an apostle. He wanted to take advantage of the wisdom of Cephas (and James), so he visited them on their turf, but his own calling came directly from above. He preached boldly in the diaspora (places he knew well in Syria and Cilicia), lives turned to God, and many believers were encouraged—even in Judea. That’s Paul’s story, which he took extended space to narrate at the beginning of this important letter.

c. (:24) Positive Reception  
*"And they were glorifying God because of me"*

**F. F. Bruce:** During the years which followed Paul’s brief visit to Jerusalem, as in the shorter interval which preceded it, he was actively engaged in preaching the gospel, without requiring or receiving any authorization to do so from the leaders of the mother-church.

**John MacArthur:** Paul’s point through all of this detailed autobiography was that the charges of the Judaizers was absurd on the surface. The church in Jerusalem, which was still overseen by the other apostles and James, the Lord’s half brother, had long since recognized his apostolic office and authority and glorified God because of him. James, Peter, and John—the three leading apostles among the Twelve—had specifically acknowledged that the grace of God had been given to Paul and they enthusiastically gave him *“and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship”* (**Gal. 2:9**). In his second letter Peter not only acknowledges Paul’s divine authority but asserts that his epistles even at that early date were already recognized as scriptural (**2 Pet. 3:15-16**).

**Timothy George:** The crisis Paul was facing in Galatia likely had its roots in a certain type of Jewish Christianity that claimed allegiance to the primitive Christian community in Jerusalem, its leaders, and its ethos. Paul wanted to show that from the beginning it was not so. The Jerusalem church leaders welcomed him as a colleague and blessed his ministry. The churches of Judea, including some Paul himself had formerly persecuted, rejoiced in the great reversal they heard about in Paul’s life. While Paul wanted to assert as strongly as possible his independence from the Jerusalem church, he also wanted to claim a vital partnership with them in the service of a shared gospel and a common Lord.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What type of direct revelation does Paul claim to have received from Christ? How

would we respond to someone today who claimed to have the same type of experience as Paul?

2) Describe some of the dramatic conversions that you have been privileged to witness? Were there some individuals whom God chose to save that you had written off as a lost cause?

3) How important is it in our devotional reading that we first allow God to speak directly to us rather than be too quick to rely on outside commentaries and helps? Do we have a good balance in our use of outside resources (such as this devotional guide)?

4) How cautious should we be about encouraging relatively new converts to take any type of active teaching or preaching role? How long did Paul take for his preparation and what do you think was happening during this time period?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Robert Gromacki:** The call of God to salvation is both sovereign and gracious. God '*called*' (*kalesas*) Paul, and He did it '*by his grace*.' This is not the general invitation to the world to repent; rather, it is the efficacious call of God whereby He graciously secures the assent of man's will to believe. God does not force salvation on an unwilling sinner. Every person that God sovereignly calls will accept Christ as his Savior, but every one who believes does it because he wants to. The call is gracious in that no sinner deserves to be called to salvation. The sinner who has not been efficaciously called has no right to complain because he simply gets what he deserves.

**William Hendriksen:** The immediate purpose of this separation and calling is here said to have been '*to reveal his Son in me*.' To reveal, that is, 'to remove the scales from the eyes of my heart, as the scales were removed from my physical eyes' (Acts 9:18). Moreover, Paul does not say '*Jesus*' or '*Christ Jesus*,' but '*his Son*,' for God wanted him to see that the Jesus whom in his disciples Paul had been persecuting, was indeed God's only Son, partaker of God's very essence, himself God! Yet, the words '*to reveal his Son in me*' mean vastly more than 'to my intellect.' The phrase has reference to illumining grace ('to reveal') which is at the same time transforming. Cf. **II Cor. 3:18**. The more Paul sees that it was this very Son of God whom he had been persecuting but who, nevertheless, had taken pity on him, and in his infinite and tender love had sought him, had stopped him in his tracks, and had changed him into an enthusiastic ambassador of the mysteries of grace, so much the more he also loves and adores this Christ! And the more he adores him, so much the more his own mind, his inner disposition, is patterned after that of his Savior (cf. **Phil. 2:5**). It is thus that God's Son '*was revealed*' in Paul!

**Herman Ridderbos:** Re vs 24 -- The final thought, namely, that these churches glorified God in Paul, incidentally suggests that these churches did *not* doubt the genuineness



and integrity of Paul's calling and preaching. And that, if you please, from those who had suffered so much on his account! How different the attitude in the churches of Galatia, even though these had experienced only good from him, and had not the slightest reason to doubt his apostolic calling and authority!

**W.A. Criswell:** Not only was his call independent, and not only was his message -- his gospel -- independent, separate from the Twelve, but the work that he did was an independent work. Compare **Romans 15:18-21** ... His ministry flowed in no wise in the channel and in the form and pattern of the original Twelve.

**David deSilva:** [Paul] carefully selects episodes from his past and, especially, his interactions with the Jerusalem apostles to construct a narrative that communicates the following major points:

1. Paul's commissioning and message come directly from God, and so his presentation of the gospel must be deemed more authentic and authoritative than that now preached by the rival teachers.
2. His authority is not dependent upon, or derivative from, the Jerusalem apostles, and therefore he is not ultimately answerable to them or to their position.
3. Nevertheless, Paul has worked collegially with the Jerusalem apostles, and they have recognized his apostleship as valid.

**Timothy George:** The **doctrine of election**, which Paul touched on in this verse, has been much abused and misunderstood throughout the history of the Christian church. Some have denied its biblical basis altogether, preferring to believe that one's standing before God is determined by religious activity, good works, or some other form of moral striving. The agitators of Galatia were not far from this heresy, advocating their gospel of Christ plus law. Others, though, have used the doctrine of election as a pretext for a do-nothing approach to missions and evangelism. If God has chosen some to salvation before the foundation of the world, they reason, then why preach the gospel, go to church, send missionaries, or do anything?

No one was more committed to the doctrines of grace than **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**; but when he encountered such distorted teaching in his own day, he lamented the fact that it had "chilled many churches to their very soul," leading them "to omit the free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus." Such hyper-Calvinistic construals of the doctrines of election and predestination ignore the fact, everywhere attested in Scripture, that the God who calls to salvation by his sovereign grace also ordains the means, including the preaching of the gospel to all peoples everywhere, which will lead his chosen ones to repentance and faith. Seen in the wider context of biblical revelation, the doctrine of election is no cause for either presumption or laziness. It is neither a steeple from which to view the human landscape nor a pillow to sleep on. It is rather a stronghold in times of temptation and trials and a confession of praise to God's grace and to his glory. . .

In sum, we can say that **God revealed Christ in Paul** in order to reveal him through Paul. **What was the content of this revelation?** Of course, it was Jesus Christ himself

and the gospel he entrusted to Paul. **Fitzmyer** has listed six characteristic aspects of the gospel Paul proclaimed: apocalyptic, dynamic, kerygmatic, normative, promissory, and universal. All six of these characteristically Pauline emphases are evident throughout Galatians.

First, the gospel is an apocalyptic revelation, the unveiling of good news previously unknown in the same way it has now been manifested. The whole argument of Galatians is in essence an unpacking of the confessional statement with which Paul opened the book: Christ “*gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age*” (1:4). The revelation “*through*” Paul is an integral part of the rescue mission of Christ himself.

Second, the gospel is a dynamic force in human history, not merely a doctrinal formula to be memorized or a code of ethics to be obeyed. The gospel has a life of its own, so to speak: it relativizes the old structures of human existence, liberates believers from the principalities and powers that tyrannize them, and creates a new community of love and forgiveness.

Third, the gospel is not merely a personal testimony but a kerygmatic message that conveys the good news of God’s salvific work in Christ. Several confessional texts are imbedded in Galatians reflecting the liturgical practice and worship patterns of the early church (cf. Gal 1:3–5; 3:26–29; 4:4; 6:18).

Fourth, the gospel had a normative role in Paul’s thinking as can be seen from the dreadful adjuration he hurled against those who would pervert it (1:7–9). The gospel is not information to be politely presented as one option among many. The gospel is to be listened to, welcomed, obeyed, followed, and lived out. For this reason it can brook no rivals and will not tolerate adulteration, contamination, or dilution.

Fifth, the gospel of Christ revealed through Paul, while truly a new unveiling, was not invented out of thin air. The promissory nature of the gospel is a major theme in Galatians as Paul showed in his discussion of the Abraham narrative and the Hagar and Sarah allegory.

Sixth, the gospel Paul proclaimed was universal in scope, not restricted to any one class, nationality, race, gender, or social grouping for “*through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus*” (3:26). The heart of the controversy in Galatia was related to this characteristic. Paul stubbornly refused to accept that any one culture had a monopoly on the gospel or that any particular ritual, such as circumcision, could be made a prerequisite to its reception. The salvation Jesus has brought is intended for Jew and Gentile alike.

### **Nijay Gupta: Know Your Story, Tell Your Story**

Part of living the story of God is being able to tell your story of faith. Sometimes we feel that it has to be overly dramatic, with plot twists and lightning and thunder. Or we might feel like it has to be like Paul’s story, where his whole life changed virtually

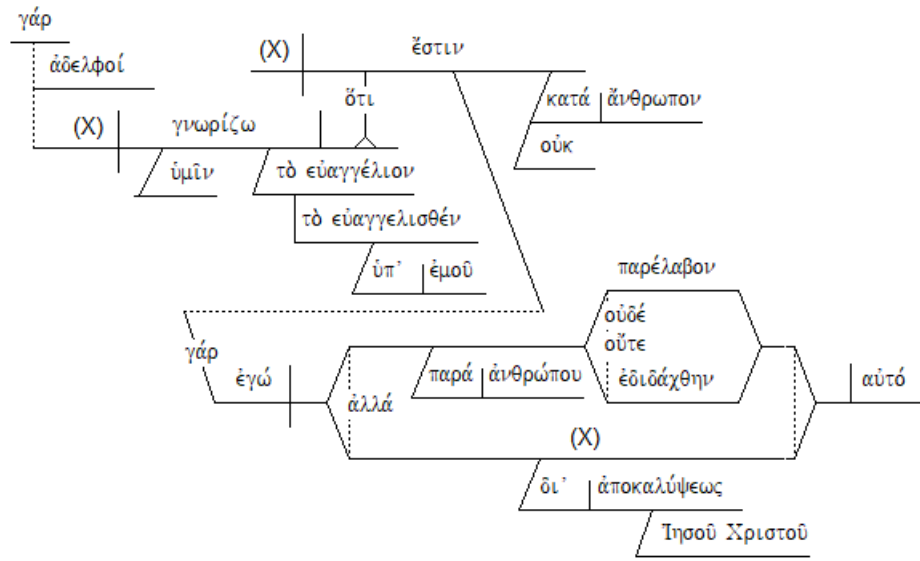
overnight. But everyone has a different story of good news and, whatever it is, it testifies to the good news of Jesus Christ. It is not important to have a flashy story—what is most important is knowing your story and telling your story. Paul tells his story in **Galatians 1:13–24**. According to Luke, Paul told his story many times, as often as people would listen to it! (**Acts 9:1–18; 22:6–16; 26:12–18**).

Many Christians feel bashful about or unprepared to share Jesus with their friends. Perhaps part of this intimidation is because they feel like they cannot articulate the gospel with theological perfection. I remember having the same fears and hesitations when I was new in my faith. What comforted me was when someone told me to remember the (formerly) blind man who couldn't answer specific questions about Jesus: "*Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!*" (**John 9:25**). The healed man had a simple story to tell—**Jesus changed my life!** Sometimes we assume others have the perfect testimony, but we must remember that all of our stories can point to the good news of Jesus. Rarely do people turn to Jesus because of pure intellectual investigation. Even Paul didn't turn to Jesus through research and study. His life was turned upside down by Jesus, but in reflection he would say it was turned right side up.

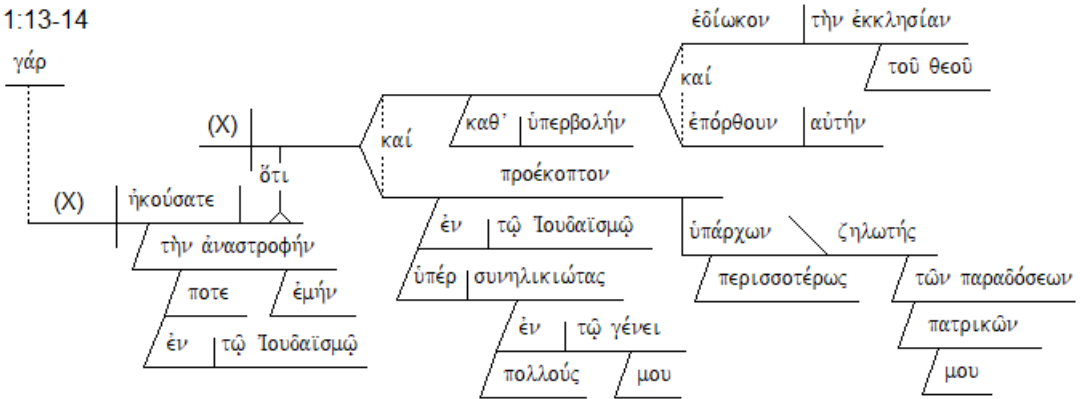
To honor Paul's story of faith and his coming to know and trust Jesus, we can sit down and think through our own story that we can share with others. When we share Jesus, we are not trying to be coercive, proselytizing, or acting like a salesperson. We are sharing how God brought joy, peace, healing, love, and wholeness to our lives through Jesus Christ. Notice for Paul his personal story is not that long. I am sure he sometimes shared longer accounts of his life (and we can have different ways of telling our personal story too). But knowing our story of God's gospel work in us and being able to share it in a few minutes can be a powerful thing, even if sometimes we use it to remind ourselves of grace.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

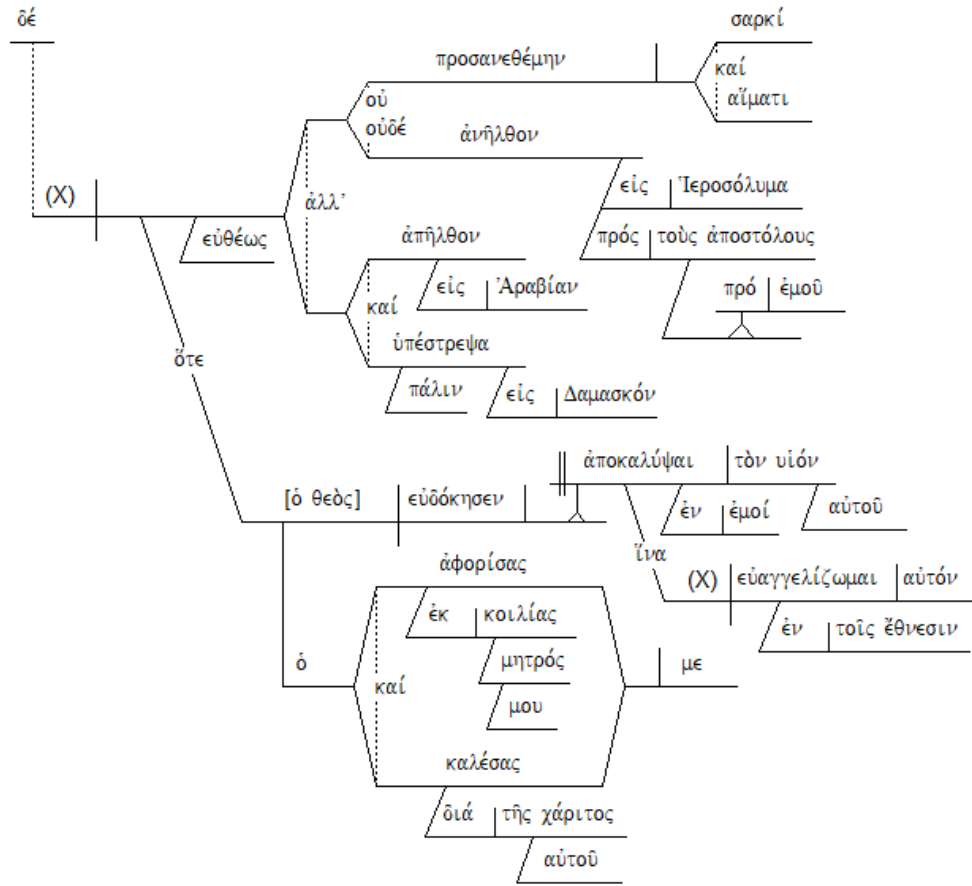
Gal 1:11-12



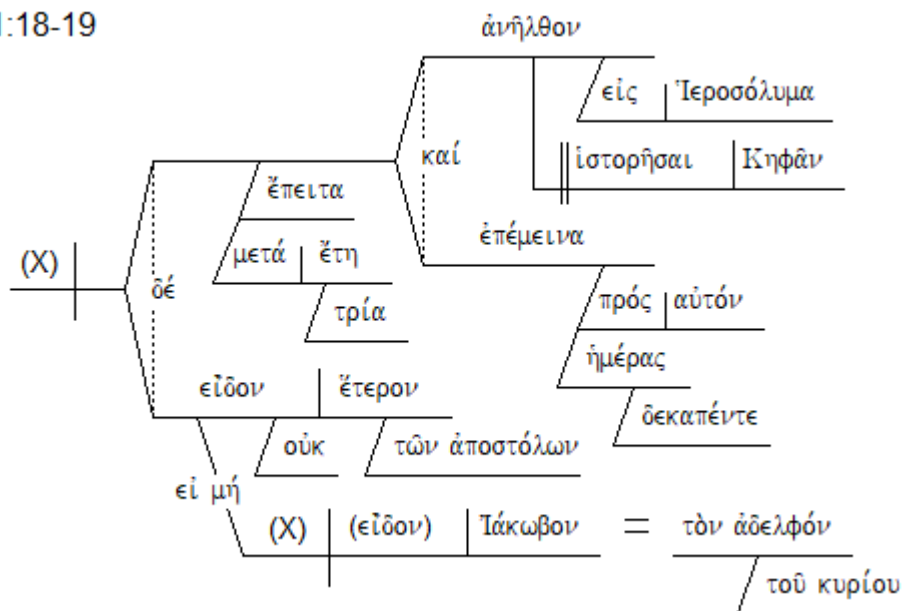
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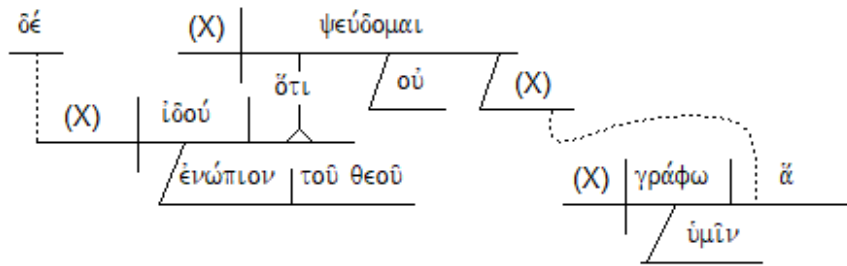
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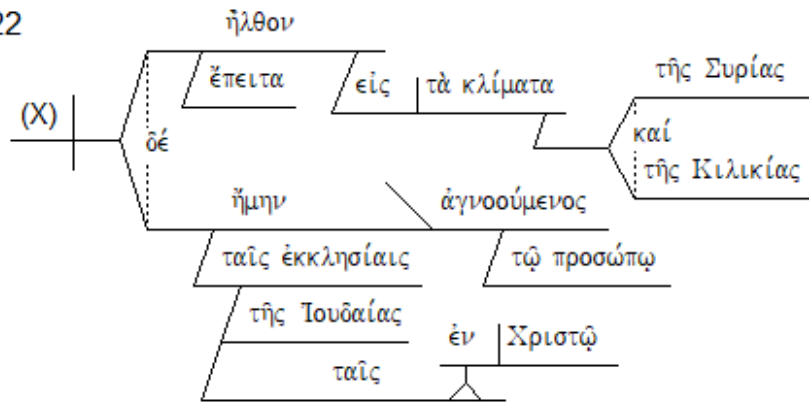
Gal 1:18-19



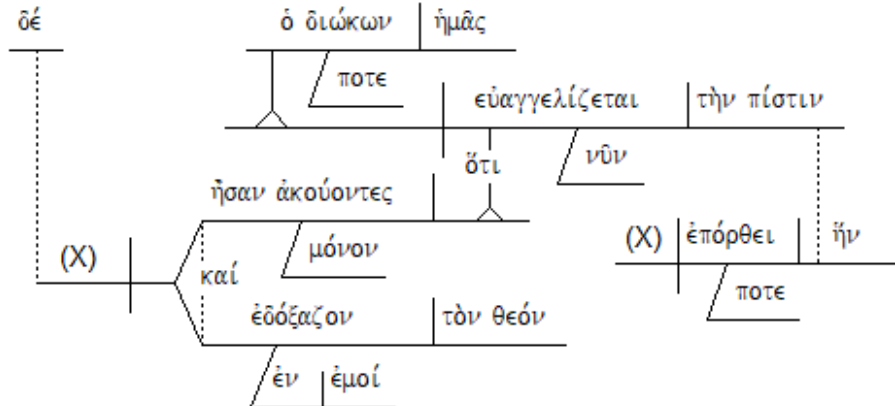
Gal 1:20



Gal 1:21-22



Gal 1:23-24



TEXT: GALATIANS 2:1-10

TITLE: THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP

**BIG IDEA:**

**PAUL'S AUTHORITY RECOGNIZED --  
PAUL'S INDEPENDENT MESSAGE AND AUTHORITY WERE STILL  
VALIDATED BY THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Philip Ryken:** So **where does Galatians fit in the chronology of Acts?** At first glance, Galatians 2 seems to describe the events surrounding Paul's third visit to Jerusalem—his attendance at the Jerusalem Council in **Acts 15**. However, not all the facts seem to match. Furthermore, there are some important similarities between **Galatians 2** and **Acts 11**, Paul's second visit to Jerusalem.

There is one more thing to consider. Remember that the Jerusalem Council settled the Gentile question once and for all. At the end of the council, an official decree was issued about the status of Gentiles in the Christian church (**Acts 15:23–29**), a decree that was distributed to all the churches (**Acts 16:4**). If **Galatians 2** refers to **Acts 15**, then Paul wrote to the Galatians after the Jerusalem Council. But if that is so, why did he not mention the decision that was made there? This would have ended the argument and stopped the Judaizers from claiming that Jerusalem was on their side.

All things considered, it seems likely that **Galatians 2** refers to Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, and not to the Jerusalem Council. If so, we can offer a rough chronology for Paul's life to this point. He was converted not long after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, possibly in A.D. 32. He then spent up to three years in the region near Damascus. Sometime around A.D. 34 he made a short trip to Jerusalem to get acquainted with the apostle Peter. This is the visit described in **Galatians 1:18–19**. Paul did not return to Jerusalem until A.D. 45. His main purpose for going was famine relief. While he was there, however, he consulted privately with the other apostles about his gospel for the Gentiles, as we read in **Galatians 2:1–2**.

Not long afterwards, the apostle embarked on his first missionary journey, during which he planted the major churches of Galatia. But the Judaizers continued to oppose his mission, especially in Antioch (**Acts 15:1; Gal. 2:11–14**). The conflict grew so fierce that eventually the church held an official council to resolve it, the minutes of which are recorded in **Acts 15**. And sometime before that council was held in Jerusalem, Paul wrote his famous pastoral letter to the Galatians.

Alternate View:

**John MacArthur:** It seems probable, as many scholars believe, that this trip of Paul's again to Jerusalem was for the council (**Acts 15**) called to resolve the issue, and that again does not linguistically denote a second visit. (For a thorough treatment of the

viability of that view of **Acts 15** compared with the view that this text refers to Paul's second visit to Jerusalem for famine relief recorded in **Acts 11:27-30; 12:24-25**, see **William Hendricksen's** *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971], pp. 69-77.)

**Craig Keener:** Scholars debate whether **2:1–10** reflects the events of the Jerusalem Council reported in **Acts 15** and, if so, to what extent. A significant minority of scholars (including such respected authorities as **Ramsay, Bauckham, Bruce, and Trebilco**) identify it instead with Paul's trip to deliver famine relief mentioned briefly in **Acts 11:30** and **12:25**; the “*revelation*” of **Gal. 2:2** would then correspond nicely with the prophecy in **Acts 11:28**. Taken as a whole, however, the correspondences between this passage and **Acts 15** are more numerous, and I believe that the problems of the famine-visit view outweigh its advantages. With the majority of scholars, therefore (including **Lightfoot, Barrett, Betz, Fee, and Kistemaker**), I believe that **Gal. 2:1–10** and **Acts 15** reflect the same events, although from the standpoint of different interests.

**Howard Vos:** In previous verses Paul has been careful to underscore the divine origin of his message and his independence from the apostolic company, the churches of Judea, and Christian brethren elsewhere. Paul might successfully establish himself as a loner. Could he also win the full approval of the apostles and the mother church? Could he prove that his ministry and message flowed in the main-stream of Christianity? This fact he now sets about to demonstrate.

It is clear from previous verses that Paul's contacts with the apostles since his conversion had been few and brief. Now finally “*fourteen years after*” (**2:1**), he has some sort of official confrontation with church leaders in Jerusalem.

**Douglas Moo:** But if Paul in **Gal. 1** shows that he did not learn his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles, he now demonstrates that those apostles did not add anything to his gospel (**2:6**; see, e.g., **Silva** 2000: 55; **Tolmie** 2005: 71–73). In fact, there was unanimity on the matter at issue both in this Jerusalem meeting and in the churches of Galatia—the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God without the law. Paul's independence was not the independence of a maverick or a cultist. His sphere of ministry might have differed from that of the Jerusalem apostles, but there was no fundamental difference among Paul and the others over the essence of that gospel.

**Thomas Schreiner: Recognition of Paul's Authority by Pillars (2:1–10)**

- i. Gospel explained to pillars (**2:1–2**)
  - (1) Fourteen years after Paul's conversion (**2:1**)
  - (2) Visit in accord with revelation (**2:2**)
- ii. Circumcision not required (**2:3–5**)
  - (1) In the case of the Gentile Titus (**2:3**)
  - (2) Issue raised by false brothers (**2:4**)
  - (3) Rejected to maintain gospel's truth (**2:5**)



- iii. Nothing added to Paul's gospel (2:6–9)
  - (1) By those of reputation (2:6)
  - (2) Because Paul's calling was recognized (2:7)
  - (3) Because Paul's apostleship on same level as Peter's (2:8)
  - (4) Because they recognized Paul was endowed with grace (2:9)
- iv. Request to remember the poor (2:10)

Main Idea: When Paul traveled to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion, the Jerusalem leaders did not require Titus to be circumcised, even though some false brothers tried to insist on it. Indeed, the Jerusalem pillars added nothing to Paul's gospel. On the contrary, they ratified it and gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the Gentiles.

**John MacArthur**: Recounting his most significant trip to Jerusalem after his conversion, Paul shows by his coming, his companion, his commission, and his commendation that he was of one truth and one spirit with the other twelve apostles.

**David deSilva**: Paul seeks to strike a delicate balance between

- (1) affirming the recognition by the pillars of his apostolic mission and message and
- (2) not affirming that they have authority over the same.

The selectivity of Paul's narrative is especially evident when one considers that he compresses a decade or more of missionary work in Syria and Cilicia into a single verse (1:21) but then gives ten verses to a single episode (2:1–10) followed by at least another four verses to a subsequent episode (2:11–14). This is an additional indication of the specific argumentative purposes behind Paul's autobiographical narrative.

**Bruce Barton**: Paul gave four significant aspects of his visit that established his credentials:

- (1) the companions on his journey;
- (2) the content of his message;
- (3) the confirmation of his ministry; and
- (4) his commission to come to Jerusalem.

First, his **companions**: Paul was escorted by a recognized leader (Barnabas) among the Christians in Jerusalem and accompanied by a living product of his ministry (Titus). Paul brought living credentials to endorse his ministry. Second, his **content**: Paul spelled out the content of his message, inviting correction by the other apostles. He interacted with them as apostolic peers, exercising the same divine authority to preach the same unique message. Third, his **confirmation**: Having heard the gospel Paul was preaching, the apostolic band recognized it as true and identical to theirs. They recognized his mission to Gentiles as valid and parallel to their mission to Jews. And fourth, his **commission**: Paul went to Jerusalem in response to divine revelation and at the request of the Jerusalem authorities.

## **I. (:1-3) THE VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION OF PAUL'S GOSPEL MESSAGE FOR REVIEW BY THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM**

### **A. (:1-2a) The Occasion -- Paul's Second Visit to the Church in Jerusalem**

#### 1. Time Interval

*"Then after an interval of fourteen years"*

No question that Paul had been ministering on an independent basis, rather than dependent on the Church in Jerusalem for the content of his message.

**Ben Witherington:** The word ‘*again*’ would seem to support the view that the fourteen years is since Paul’s last visit to Jerusalem, a view which would also seem to be supported by the fact that the main issue in both the preceding and present paragraph is the duration and nature of Paul’s visits to Jerusalem.

**Richard Longenecker:** His purpose in the use of these temporal adverbs, as we have seen, is to lay out in successive fashion his contacts with the Jerusalem apostles and to assure his readers that he has omitted nothing.

**Timothy George:** First, what did Paul mean by the expression “*fourteen years later*”? In considering the similar expression “*after three years*” (**1:18**), we noted that in the NT era an **inclusive method** of reckoning periods of time was often used. By this method any portion of a given year could be counted as a whole year. Thus 2025 would be “three years” after 2023, even though conceivably by this method no more than thirteen months might have elapsed between the two dates. This means that in **Gal 1:18** the “*three years*” could have been slightly more than one, and the “*fourteen years*” of **Gal 2:1** possibly could have covered only twelve.

Another chronological issue concerns the benchmark from which Paul was gauging the time of his second visit to Jerusalem. **Fourteen years after what?** His first visit to Jerusalem (**1:18**) or, as seems more likely, his conversion encounter with Christ? If we assume the latter, and factor in the inclusive reckoning of years, we can place the date for Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem around AD 44–46, with the terminus a quo of his conversion occurring in AD 32 or 33. This would mean the events of **Gal 2:1–10** parallel the “*famine visit*” Paul and Barnabas made to Jerusalem as recorded in **Acts 11:25–30**.

#### 2. Voluntary Initiative

*"I went up again to Jerusalem"*

Not summoned by some church council; his hand was not forced by man.

#### 3. Bold Approach

*"with Barnabas, taking Titus along also"*

Not ducking the central issue of circumcision and Jewish legalism.

**Scot McKnight:** **Barnabas**, originally named Joseph, was a Levite who grew up in Cyprus. As a result of his ministries the apostles named him “*Son of Encouragement*,” i.e., Barnabas (**Acts 4:36**). We later learn that he was the “cousin” of John Mark (**Col. 4:10**). His obedience (**Acts 4:36–37**), reconciling manner, and encouraging temperament (**9:26–30**), along with his dependence on the Holy Spirit, earned him a prominent ministry alongside Paul (cf. **11:22–26**). If the order of names says something, it seems likely that Barnabas held the early lead in his ministry with Paul, but that leadership was eventually surrendered to Paul’s apostolic gifts (cf. **13:1–15:41**; but see also **14:14**; **15:12, 25**). Paul had two known disagreements with Barnabas:

- (1) over Peter at Antioch (**Gal. 2:11–21**) and
- (2) over John Mark at the beginning of his second missionary journey (**Acts 15:39–40**).

It is more than likely that their breach was healed since later Paul ranks Barnabas as an equal minister (**1 Cor. 9:6**). Barnabas accompanied Paul to Jerusalem in **Galatians 2:1** because he was a significant and respected person with the Jerusalem churches. His track record of healing discord and arbitrating between factions made him a suitable companion.

**Richard Longenecker:** Titus was a Gentile (v 3) who seems to have been converted by Paul (cf. **Titus 1:4**) evidently at Syrian Antioch. The fact that he is mentioned in Galatians suggests that he was known to believers in Galatia, either personally or by name. Perhaps he had been with Paul and Barnabas on their first foray into the area. In **2 Cor 2:12–13**; **7:5–16** he appears as Paul’s representative to the Corinthian church, and in **2 Cor 8:6–24**, **9:3–5**; **12:18** as the chief organizer for the Jerusalem collection. Somewhat surprisingly, he is not referred to at all in Acts. **William Ramsay** and **Alfred Souter** postulated that Titus was Luke’s brother and so was omitted by Luke from Acts, as is Luke himself (W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 390; **A. Souter**, “A Suggested Relationship between Titus and Luke,” *ExpTim* 18 [1906–7] 285; *idem*, “The Relationship between Titus and Luke,” *ibid.*, 335–36). More likely, Titus was omitted because of his close association with the Jerusalem collection, which, except for its mention at **24:17** in Paul’s defense before Felix, also finds no place in Acts (cf. **C. K. Barrett**, “Titus,” 2; also the comments on Luke’s omission of the Jerusalem collection in my “Acts of the Apostles,” 519). **2 Tim 4:10** speaks of Titus going to Dalmatia, the southern part of the Roman province of Illyricum; the letter to Titus presents him as Paul’s delegate to Crete.

**Timothy George:** Paul took Titus with him as a **test case for the principle of Christian freedom**. In some sense this was a deliberate act of provocation although, as **John Stott** once said, “It was not in order to stir up strife that he brought Titus with him to Jerusalem, but in order to establish the truth of the gospel. This truth is that Jews and Gentiles are accepted by God on the same terms, namely, through faith in Jesus Christ, and must therefore be accepted by the church without any discrimination between them.”

**Ben Witherington:** Paul's plan was to press the issue of the status of Gentiles in the church and raise the issue of what was necessary for them to have full participation with Jews in the body of Christ. He would be presenting Titus as a test case to the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

4. Divine Summons

*"And it was because of a revelation that I went up"*

**Ralph Martin:** Paul clearly states that his second visit to Jerusalem was not due to the Jerusalem leaders' invitation or his own ambition to have a direct confrontation with them concerning his Gentile mission.

**David deSilva:** We cannot be certain in what form this revelation came to Paul, whether as a prophetic utterance tested and accepted in the assembly or as a private prompting of the Spirit within Paul. Certainly the phenomenon of a revelation as one of the Spirit's manifestations is well attested in Pauline Christianity (**1 Cor 14:6, 26, 30; Acts 13:1–3**), one of the many "wonders" worked by God's Spirit in the midst of a congregation (see **Gal 3:5**). Paul is not concerned to elaborate on this detail, but only to prevent any impression that he and Barnabas went as lackeys of the Jerusalem apostles, either summoned by the apostles to give a report on their preaching and activities or as persons aware of needing to give an account to their superiors. Rather, Paul went because God—the God who gave him his commission—directed him to do so.

**B. (:2b) The Review of the Gospel Message**

1. Respectful Approach -- But Not Submissive as an Inferior to Superiors

*"and I submitted to them"*

2. Objective Approach -- Consistent Content

*"the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles"*

**Robert Gromacki:** He declared or laid before them his message for their consideration. He did not go to find out what to preach or to be corrected.

**Douglas Moo:** On our understanding of the sequence of events, then, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem because Agabus had predicted a famine and the church at Antioch wanted to provide help for the believers there. While he was at Jerusalem, and perhaps in response to some concerns about the way Jews and Gentiles were mixing in the church in Antioch, Paul "*laid before*" (ἀνεθέμην [*anethemēn*]; cf. also **Acts 25:14**) the apostles the "*gospel that I preach among the Gentiles.*"

**George Brunk:** Paul is therefore saying that his gospel is not dependent on Jerusalem for its authorization, but rather that he is open to mutual discernment and coordination. At the same time, Paul's willingness to discuss matters with the leaders in Jerusalem shows his respect for the position and role of these persons. The wording makes it clear

that the subject of the consultation was the innovations Paul had worked out in his mission for the Gentile practice of the gospel.

### 3. Wise Approach

*"but I did so in private to those who were of reputation,  
for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain"*

**Douglas Moo:** His fear is not that his gospel will be voided of its power if the decision in Jerusalem should go against him; what he fears, rather, is that a negative verdict will create a fissure in the church between its Jewish and Gentile wings. And the seriousness of such an eventuality explains the strength of the language Paul uses here. The good news has power only as it fulfills the single plan of the biblical God, who made promises to his people in the OT (cf. **Rom. 1:2–3; chaps. 9–11**). Cutting Gentiles off from the spiritual root that nourishes them (**Rom. 11:17–24**) would endanger their continuing experience of God's blessing and favor. And a split between Jewish and Gentile Christians could lead, Paul fears, to just such a situation.

**Ralph Martin:** This phrase refers to James, Peter, and John (**2:9**), who were the influential persons in the Christian community in Jerusalem. The first was a member of the family of Jesus; the latter two were part of the original apostolic band.

**Richard Longenecker:** The unity of the church even amidst its diversity was of great importance to Paul, as his strenuous efforts with regard to the Jerusalem collection clearly indicate (cf. **Rom 15:25–32; 1 Cor 16:1–3; 2 Cor 9:12–15**). And it was for this unity that he feared, even while having no doubts about the divine origin of his Gentile mission or the truth of his own proclamation.

**Craig Keener:** His ministry would be pointless if his converts did not persevere in the true gospel for eternal life (**Gal. 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:2, 10, 14, 58; 2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:5**; for running in vain, see **Phil. 2:16**).

### **C. (:3) The Proof of the Approval**

*"But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek,  
was compelled to be circumcised."*

**Richard Longenecker:** The emphasis in the sentence is on οὐδέ before Titus (“not even Titus”), which is more in line with the view that Titus was not circumcised. Furthermore, while Paul was indeed a master of practical concession without disturbing theological principles, it is extremely difficult to hear him say that “we did not give in to them even for a moment” (v **5a**, note the discussion on οὐδέ) and that he had preserved “the truth of the gospel” for his Gentile converts (v **5b**), if he had already—whether voluntarily or under duress—conceded the Judaizers’ main point of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile believers. The view that Titus was circumcised but not because of any external compulsion, therefore, rightly deserves to be called “an artificial construction” (so **Betz**, Galatians, 89).

**Timothy George:** Verses 3–5 constitute a **digression** in Paul’s narration of his second visit to Jerusalem. This reflects what was likely an actual interruption in his private conference with the Jerusalem church leaders. The entire passage is fraught with syntactical difficulties and textual uncertainties, leading **J. B. Lightfoot** to call it “this shipwreck of grammar.” For example, in the Greek text v. 4 lacks both a proper subject and verb, “this matter arose,” being supplied by the CSB translators in order to make sense of Paul’s broken syntax. Paul obviously wrote these verses under great emotional stress, thinking both of the incident at Jerusalem and also of the contemporary situation in Galatia. The intensity and unevenness of his language here has given rise to diverse interpretations of the Titus episode. . .

**Circumcision** is the act of removing the foreskin of the male genital, a rite practiced among various peoples of the ancient world as a sign of initiation at puberty or marriage. Among the Jewish people, however, circumcision originated in the special covenant God made with Abraham (**Gen 17:1–27**) whereby every male child, whether freeborn Israelite or household slave, would be circumcised on the eighth day after birth as a sign of participation in the chosen people of God. In the tradition of the great prophets of Israel, circumcision is extended metaphorically to refer to the act of repentance and total consecration demanded by the Lord. Thus Jeremiah could deliver this word from the Lord for the people of his day, “*Circumcise yourselves . . . , and take away the foreskins of your heart*” (**Jer 4:4** KJV). Obviously the children of Israel were guilty of overreliance on the external rite of circumcision and the sacrificial system of the temple to the neglect of what Jesus would call “*the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness*” (**Matt 23:23**). There may well be, as some scholars have claimed, a line of continuity between Jeremiah’s spiritualizing of circumcision in terms of a genuine response of the heart and Paul’s use of the term as a metaphor for the Christian life.

**David deSilva:** The fact that Titus walked away from a meeting with the Jerusalem apostles uncircumcised should also cast serious doubt upon what the rival teachers are claiming now in regard to the importance, even necessity, of circumcision.

**George Brunk:** Paul’s emphasis on *compel* indicates that his protest against circumcision for the Galatians is not directed to the act itself, as if it were itself evil, but to the absolute value the teachers were attaching to it. The opponents were teaching that circumcision and other practices of the Law were necessary to be acceptable to God.

## **II. (:4-5) THE PROBLEM: FALSE TEACHERS WHO WERE PROMOTING THEIR FALSE GOSPEL OF LEGALISM OVER PAUL'S TRUE GOSPEL OF LIBERTY IN CHRIST**

### **A. (:4) Identifying the Troublemakers**

#### 1. Their Counterfeit Nature

*"But it was because of the false brethren"*

**John MacArthur:** The Judaizers were marked as *false brethren* (*pseudadelphos*), a phrase that has also been translated “*sham Christians*” (NEB) and “*pseudo-Christians*” (Phillips). Those professing Jewish believers had developed a hybrid faith that was true neither to traditional Judaism (because it claimed allegiance to Christ) nor to apostolic Christianity (because it demanded circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law for salvation).

## 2. Their Deceptive Methodology

*"who had sneaked in to spy out"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul also uses two words that suggest that the false brothers had insidiously entered into the church. The word “*sneaked in*” (παρεισάκτους) indicates that these men had snuck into the church, and the word “*slipped in*” (παρεισήλθον) suggests that they were interlopers. We find a similar reference to the false teachers in **Jude 4**, where the verb “*crept in*” (παρεισδύω) is used to denote the crafty work of opponents in worming themselves into the life of the congregation. So too in Jerusalem the false brothers had infiltrated the church, but they were not authentic Christians, and their presence created dissension.

**Richard Longenecker:** Thus οἱ τινες here has as its antecedent the “*false brothers*” just mentioned, and does not have in mind any other group brought in by them. The false brothers not only “*infiltrated*” the church but also “*intruded*” (παρεισήλθον) into its ministry. Such pejorative terms, of course, are Paul’s, and not those of the agitators themselves. In their eyes—as also in the self-evaluation of the Galatian Judaizers, with whom Paul compares them—they were orthodox and conscientious Jewish Christians, who were concerned both for the purity of the Christian message amongst Gentiles and for the welfare of Jewish believers amidst the rising tide of Jewish nationalism (see Introduction, “Opponents and Situation”). For Paul, however, they were **false brothers**, since they could not accept Gentile Christians as true brothers apart from circumcision and so denied the universality of the gospel.

**F. F. Bruce:** The ‘*spying*’ (κατασκοπήσαι) of the false brothers had no friendly purpose, in Paul’s judgment: they wished to put an end to this freedom, to make those who enjoyed it exchange it for bondage. More particularly, those who now lived in a fellowship where ‘*neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision*’ (**6:15**; cf. **5:6**) were to be compelled to accept circumcision. It may be that the ψευδάδελφοι claimed the right to exercise ‘*supervision*’ (ἐπισκοπή), but Paul defines their activity not as authorized ἐπισκοπή but as unauthorized κατασκοπή, ‘*spying*’ (see **E. Fuchs**, s.v. κατασκοπέω, TDNT VII, 417 with n. 1).

## 3. Their Point of Stumbling

*"our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus"*

Why should this have been such a problem for them?

**John MacArthur:** The Judaizers could not tolerate a gospel that was not tied to Mosaic ritual and law, because their view of salvation was centered in what they could self-righteously perform to earn favor from God rather than in what God could do for them.

In Christ Jesus believers have liberty from the law as the way of salvation and liberty from its external ceremonies and regulations as the way of living. Because Christ has borne that curse (**3:13**), they also have liberty from the curse for disobedience of the law, which God requires all men to obey but which no man is able to perfectly keep. Christians are under an entirely different kind of law, “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [that sets them] free from the law of sin and of death*” (**Rom. 8:2**).

**Freedom** is a much-repeated theme of the New Testament. In Christ believers “*have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter*” (**Rom. 7:6**), because “*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*” (**2 Cor. 3:17**). “*If therefore the Son shall make you free,*” Jesus said, “*you shall be free indeed*” (**John 8:36**).

Christian freedom is not license. When we become free in Christ we lose our freedom to sin, of which we were once a slave. In Christ, “*having been freed from sin, [we] become slaves of righteousness*” (**Rom. 6:18**). “*For you were called to freedom, brethren,*” Paul explains; “*only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh*” (**Gal. 5:13**). Peter expresses the same truth in these words: “*Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God*” (**1 Pet. 2:16**).

#### 4. Their True Agenda

*"in order to bring us into bondage"*

### **B. (:5) Refusing to Exchange Liberty for Legalism**

#### 1. Not Giving in to their Pressure (to fall back into Legalism)

*"But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour"*

**Nijay Gupta:** Paul refused to budge on the circumcision-free nature of the gospel he preached to gentiles (see **Gal 2:5**). When Paul refers to the preservation and purity of the “*truth of the gospel*” (**2:5**; cf. **v. 14**), he has in mind here the full freedom, joy, and hospitality of the gospel message. The essence of the gospel, for Paul, was all about uniting with God through Jesus Christ and participating fully in the empowering life of Christ by his grace (**vv. 19–20**). Such a transformative relationship means that dividing lines like Jew and gentile are insignificant when it comes to the family of God in Jesus Christ (**3:28**). Paul firmly believed that the gentile Titus was as secure in his relationship with God as Cephas, James, or Paul himself, not because of circumcision (**5:6**; **6:15**) but because of being one with Jesus Christ by faith. Or, as **Gordon Fee** puts it, “Gentile believers in Christ must be identified only by the markers that are specifically Christian: Christ and the Spirit. Otherwise, the gospel is for naught.”



2. Maintaining the Truth of the Gospel (a life of Liberty in the Spirit)  
*"so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you"*

**Douglas Moo:** The end of the verse indicates the purpose for which Paul refused to yield to the false brothers: *in order that the truth of the gospel might remain with you*. Paul succinctly summarizes what, for him, was at stake in this Jerusalem meeting: *"the truth of the gospel."* The genitive in the underlying Greek phrase is one of those that defies simple classification. Perhaps it is loosely possessive: the truth that belongs to, that is part of, the gospel. As **Silva** (2000: 54) has argued, both words in this phrase, which is unique to **Gal. 2** in Paul's writings (see also **v. 14**), are important: truth is upheld only by the gospel; and the gospel is truly the gospel only if it corresponds to the truth. The particular aspect of the *"truth of the gospel"* in view here is its power both to bring Gentiles into relationship with God and to maintain them in that relationship right up through the judgment day. Titus, the test case before the council, is a Gentile who has believed the gospel, and he need not add circumcision (or by derivation, obedience to the law of Moses) to that step of faith. By extension, then, the *"truth of the gospel"* refers to the inherent power of the gospel, by God's grace, to justify and vindicate at the last judgment any human being. **Grace is the critical matter** (cf. **v. 7; 2:21**; and **Lightfoot** 1881: 107; **Betz** 1979: 92).

**David deSilva:** The *"truth of the gospel"* survived rather than perished as a result of his bold resistance. His heroic efforts should arouse due loyalty and gratitude on their part, rather than defection toward those whose message resembles the one that Paul resisted—and the one to which the pillars did not give their support (**2:9**).

### **III. (:6-10) THE UNQUALIFIED RECOGNITION OF PAUL'S GENUINE AUTHORITY AND EFFECTIVE MINISTRY**

**Thomas Schreiner:** The main point in **2:6–10** is that the men of repute added nothing to Paul's gospel (**2:6**). This truth restates the main point of **2:1–5**, where it was decided that Titus would not be circumcised. In other words, the pillars of the church did not add to Paul's gospel by requiring circumcision. Not only did the pillars refuse to add anything to Paul's gospel, they also (**2:7–9**) specifically gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. In other words, they **ratified the validity of Paul's gospel**—for two reasons (marked by causal participles).

- (1) They recognized that he had been entrusted by God with the gospel for the Gentiles (**2:7**). Indeed, Paul's calling to the Gentiles was on the same plane as Peter's calling to preach the gospel to the Jews (**2:8**).
- (2) They recognized Paul had been endowed by God with grace for ministry (**2:9**).

#### **A. (:6) Paul's Apostolic Authority Not Dependent on Human Commendation**

*"But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me."*

**Howard Vos:** After a parenthetical statement about Titus in **verses 3-5**, Paul returns to the subject he was discussing in **verse 2**. In Jerusalem he conferred privately with those “*who seemed to be somewhat,*” or those “*reputed to be something.*” Here Paul takes the term used by the Judaizers for James and the Twelve, whom they pitted against Paul. Parenthetically Paul says the greatness of their reputation really didn’t matter to him—his gospel came from God Himself. But he hastens to add that God accepts no man’s person, not even Paul’s. Thus the apostle makes it clear that neither the Twelve nor he nor anyone else really makes any special impression on God. Moreover, the message of no Christian worker is superior or right because of the greatness of the worker.

**Ben Witherington:** Paul enunciates a basic principle that affects how he views the whole matter of human honor rating systems at **vs. 6b** – literally ‘*God does not accept the face of human beings*’. This is clearly enough a Hebrew expression that comes out of a culture where giving and accepting of face is an important value. It was also a culture where God’s people were reminded God has no regard for the status, ascribed or achieved, of human beings (cf. the LXX passages where ‘*face*’ is discussed – **Lev. 19.15; Deut. 1.17; 16.19; 2 Chron. 19.7; Job 13.10; Ps. 81.2; Prov. 18.5; Mai. 2.9**). The meaning of this key phrase is not so much that God shows no partiality as a judge although that is a Biblical notion as well, but that he does not evaluate human beings on the basis of their ‘*face*’, their honor rating or credentials. It is interesting that in the NT ‘accepting face’ is seen as a bad thing. As **Lightfoot** says it signifies giving regard to the external features of a person’s life – wealth, status, rank, power, authority, gender, race and the like. The opposite of this is considering a person’s real intrinsic character, or from a Christian point of view considering what they are by and through the grace of God. By placing the word Θεός in an emphatic position **Paul is contrasting human ways of evaluating people with God’s way**. He is suggesting that he is following God’s lead in this matter, unlike the agitators in Galatia and perhaps various others.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul was certainly not dazzled by the Jerusalem leaders, for their former status meant nothing to him. Paul did not reject the apostolic authority of the pillars, but he rejected an obsequious veneration of them. Perhaps the Judaizers in Galatia are subtly criticized here since they desired to make a good showing in the flesh (**6:12**). One should not become preoccupied with the pillars because God is not partial to any person, nor is he impressed with the reputation of anyone. Paul continues to support the claim that his ministry is not motivated by a desire to please people (**1:10**), and here he supports it by showing that the high status of the pillars does not lead to any alteration of his gospel.

Transition: “*But on the contrary*”

**Douglas Moo:** Paul now, by contrast (ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον, *alla tounantion, but instead*), states the positive result: the Jerusalem apostles expressed their endorsement of the gospel preached by Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles by extending to them the right hand of fellowship. This main point of the second part of Paul’s compound

sentence is delayed until **verse 9**. Paul leads up to it by noting two facts that the apostles recognized about Paul and his ministry:

- (1) that Paul had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcision (v. 7) and
- (2) that Paul's ministry was the result of God's grace working in and through him (v. 9).

Each of these points is introduced with an adverbial participle: ἰδόντες (*idontes, seeing*) in **verse 7**; γνόντες (*gnontes, knowing*) in **verse 9**. Both verbs connote mental perception in this context (R. Longenecker 1990: 55), and the aorist form of both participles may suggest an inceptive idea: the Jerusalem leaders "came to recognize" these key facts about Paul's ministry (Martyn 1997: 201, 203).

## **B. (:7-9a) Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles Comparable to Peter's Ministry to the Jews** (note chiasmic structure)

### 1. Comparable Calling

#### a. Ministry of Paul -- Distinctive Emphasis

*"seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised"*

**Craig Keener:** God **entrusted** Paul with this mission (**Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4**); he ultimately had no right to refuse it (**1 Cor. 9:17**, where Paul again uses this verb in the middle voice). To oppose Paul's mission was therefore to oppose the one who entrusted him with it; how one treated an agent reflected one's view of the agent's sender.

#### b. Ministry of Peter -- Distinctive Emphasis

*"just as Peter had been to the circumcised"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul does not speak of two different gospels in content but of two different cultures in which the one gospel was proclaimed. Indeed, the last clause of this verse demonstrates that Peter was entrusted by God with the gospel as well, but his field of service was to the circumcision, i.e., the Jews. Paul emphasizes here that both he and Peter shared the same authority as apostles; they simply labored in different spheres. It should be noted as well that Paul does not question Peter's apostolic authority. He too was entrusted with the gospel, which suggests that Paul believed that Peter preached the same gospel he did.

**Timothy George:** The decision to divide the missionary task of the church into two major thrusts, one led by Peter to the Jews and the other by Paul to the Gentiles, was a matter of practical necessity and wise stewardship. It would be a mistake to press the distinction too far, as though Peter and the apostles with him would be allowed to witness to Jews only, while Paul and Barnabas could speak to Gentiles only.

### 2. Same Power of God at Work

#### a. Ministry of Peter

*"for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised"*

**Bruce Barton:** The focus here is on **the enabler**—God. The apostles realized that as God was at work in the ministry of Peter among the Jews, so God was at work in Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. In each case they were able to identify God as the agent, giving great success to both men in their parallel ministries.

b. Ministry of Paul

*"effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles."*

**David deSilva:** The similarities between what was happening in their gentile mission and in the Jewish mission spearheaded by Peter constitute sufficient evidence for the pillars that the one God was indeed at work in both missions, extending the deliverance of his Son in both spheres, Jew and gentile (2:8).

3. Same Grace of God at Work

*"and recognizing the grace that had been given to me"*

**Tony Evans:** Paul also contrasts his mission with that of Peter. Peter was given the ministry to the Jews. This has caused many to assume that Jews are saved by one method, and Gentiles by another. Such is not the case. On what grounds do Jews base their being chosen by God? It is on the basis of the **Abrahamic Covenant**. What is the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant? **Grace!** God chose Abraham Due to grace. God did not choose Abraham because He was indebted to him. When Abraham (Abram) was chosen he was not a Jew. In Abram's day there were NO Jews. Abram was a Gentile by birth. Abraham believed God, and because of that God accepted him. That acceptance was the result of grace. Today, we believe God. We trust that He sent His only begotten Son Jesus, and the Father accepts that as righteous. We are saved by the same method that brought Abram righteousness. Abram was a Gentile convert. Both Paul and Peter had God's power resident in them. Peter for the work among the Jews, Paul for work among the Gentiles.

**C. (:9b-10) Formal Recognition of Ministry Partnership**

1. Impressive Commendation by the Leaders of the Jerusalem Church

a. Their Names

*James*

*Cephas*

*John*

b. Their Reputation

*"who were reputed to be pillars"*

**Ben Witherington:** The term  $\sigma\tau\tilde{\upsilon}\lambda\omicron\iota$  is interesting and would seem to suggest that this Jerusalem triumvirate were seen as the **main supporting columns** in the eschatological and ‘spiritual’ Temple of God currently under construction by God through the Gospel about Christ. As **Barrett** rightly points out, the word ‘pillars’ frequently appears in the LXX in reference to the supports of the tabernacle and later the columns of the Temple.

Note especially the language about the Solomonic temple in **1 Kngs. 7.15–22; 2 Chron. 3.15–17** (cf. **2 Kngs. 23.3; 2 Chron. 34.31** on the names of the columns – Jachin and Boaz). This conclusion is supported by what we find in **Rev. 3.12** (cf. 1 Clement 5.2). It must be remembered that there was considerable speculation about the destruction and reconstitution of the Temple in the eschatological age (**Ezek. 40–48; Jub. 1.17–28; 1 En. 90.28–29; 11QTemple; Test. Ben. 9.2**), and Jesus himself seems to have had something to say on this very matter (**Mk. 14.58; Jn. 2.19; Acts 6.14**), as did Paul who saw the body of Christ as also the Temple of God (**1 Cor. 3.16–17; 2 Cor. 6.16** cf. **Heb. 3.6; 10.21; 1 Pet. 2.5**). In other words, calling these three men the pillars was no small honor rating. It meant they were holding up and holding together the people of God being now renewed and restored in Christ. It invested in these men an enormous importance and implied they had **tremendous power and authority**.

2. Grateful Reception by the Ministers to the Gentile Church  
*"gave to me and Barnabas"*

Why no mention of Titus?

3. Symbol of Ministry Partnership  
*"the right hand of fellowship"*

**C. S. Lovett:** "The other apostles give full sanction to Paul's ministry, acknowledging his commission, received by *revelation*, to be identical with the one they received from Jesus in *Person*."

**Scot McKnight:** They verbally, theologically, and now publicly agreed with Paul's message (it was pure and truthful) and his sphere of ministry (the Gentile world). They publicly announced that they thought God had called Paul to this very task. It could be profitably compared today to an ordination committee's endorsement of a candidate after lengthy questioning and discussion. Astute committees (then and now) can quickly get to the heart of the issues to determine whether a given candidate is orthodox or not. The endorsement by the "*pillars*" was genuine, and Paul was introduced as one who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully and accurately.

**George Brunk:** This brings Paul to the specific outcomes of the consultation. He begins not with a formula of agreement but with a symbol of accord: They gave to Barnabas and me *the right hand of fellowship*. The common cultural practice of clasping right hands to show friendship and to confirm agreement is used here with both senses. The handshake emphasizes the elements of relationship and trust, as does the word fellowship.

4. Division of Responsibility (Validating the Status Quo)
- a. *"that we might go to the Gentiles"*
  - b. *"and they to the circumcised"*

## 5. Practical Show of Brotherly Love

### a. Request by the Apostles

*"They only asked us to remember the poor"*

**Douglas Moo:** Jews viewed **almsgiving** as one of the key aspects of a truly pious attitude toward God (**Dunn** 1993a: 112), and perhaps the Jerusalem pillars are asking that Paul's Gentile mission continue to make financial support of the poor a priority. This request would make especially good sense if, as we think, Paul is being asked to do this as he visits Jerusalem to bring aid to Jerusalem Christians (**Acts 11:27–30**; see esp. **Downs** 2008: 34–37).

**Ralph Martin:** Why were the Jerusalem saints (**1 Cor. 16:1**) stricken by poverty? Famine was only one of the factors, though a key one. Other factors also contributed:

- (1) Many new believers had liquidated their assets by selling their properties to form a common fund for communal life after their conversion (**Acts 2–4**);
- (2) there was an increasing number of widows (**Acts 6**) living in Jerusalem;
- (3) believers were persecuted following Stephen's martyrdom (**Acts 8:1–2**).

**George Brunk:** The point here is not that Paul agreed to round out his theology with social concerns. Indeed, Paul confirms that his theology was already holistic in that way. Rather, the Jerusalem leaders hope to avoid a practical split between the two branches of the church resulting from separate missions. Given the poorer social and economic conditions of the Jewish context in comparison to the Greco-Roman context, such a split would have resulted in greater economic disparity at the expense of the Jerusalem church. Clearly the Jerusalem leaders are concerned about the material needs of their people. But their concern could also be grounded in a larger vision of unity and fellowship. Paul certainly understood the relief aid to Jerusalem as carrying symbolic and theological implications. To the believers in Rome, he described the financial aid as a debt to the Jewish believers owed because the spiritual blessings of the gospel had come from them (**Rom 15:27**). Here is further evidence (see **Gal 2:2**) that Paul was committed to a theological and practical continuity between the older (Jewish) people of God and the newer (Jewish and Gentile) people of God in Christ.

### b. Response from Paul

*"the very thing I also was eager to do."*

(**Rom. 15:25 ff., 1 Cor. 16:1 ff., 2 Cor. 8:1 ff., 9:1 ff., Acts 11:29 ff., 12:25, and 24:17**)

**Timothy George:** Paul indicated that the request to remember the poor was not received as an onerous burden but rather as an activity he had already begun and was eager to carry forward. We know from his later writings that Paul devoted much time and energy to the collection of a special offering for the Jerusalem Christians (**Rom 15:25–33; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:9**). The churches of Galatia were among the Pauline congregations who contributed to this relief effort. For Paul this effort was an important witness for Christian unity, a tangible way for Gentile Christians to express materially

their appreciation for the great blessing in which they had shared spiritually with their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Paul himself carried this love gift to Jerusalem on his last visit to that city, during the course of which he was arrested and began the long journey to Rome that ended with his execution.

**Clark Pinnock:** As a fraternal gesture, motivated by real love, Paul agreed to do what he could to help the *'poor.'* This is a reference to the saints in the Jerusalem church who were extremely destitute. None of Paul's Gentile churches were so poor. Later on Paul was able to raise a collection from them in fulfillment of his promise here.

**John MacArthur:** To take care of the poor is not only a practical but a spiritual responsibility, because to forsake that responsibility is to disobey God's Word. *"Whoever has this world's goods,"* John declares, *"and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"* (1 John 3:17). James says that it is a sham believer who says to *"a brother or sister . . . without clothing and in need of daily food, . . . 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet [does] not give them what is necessary for their body"* (James 2:15-16; cf. Ex. 23:10-11; 30:15; Lev 19:10; Deut. 15:7-11; Jer. 22:16; Amos 2:6-7; Luke 6:36, 38; 2 Cor. 8-9).

Paul was therefore eager to do all he could to fulfill the request of James, Peter, and John, as his numerous and constant collections for the poverty-stricken saints in Judea attested. His command that *"if anyone will not work, neither let him eat"* (2 Thess. 3:10) pertained to the lazy, not the helpless and needy. He continually encouraged believers who were more prosperous to give financial aid to fellow believers who were in need; and he heartily commended those who were generous (Acts 11:29-30; 24:17; Rom. 15:25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-6; 9:1-5,12). *"For if the Gentiles have shared in their [the Jerusalem saints'] spiritual things,"* Paul explained to the Roman church, *"they are indebted to minister to them also in material things"* (Rom. 15:27).

**David deSilva:** Leaving Jerusalem after this second visit, then, Paul had the impression that the questions swirling around his gentile mission were settled. He had indeed won a decisive victory over against those who challenged his mission insofar as the pillar apostles recognized Paul and Barnabas as apostolic colleagues and, furthermore, did not support the call for Titus's circumcision. The episode that would follow in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), however, revealed that many questions remained unanswered—and that these, in turn, called even the most fundamental issues "settled" in Jerusalem into question anew.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are there any laborers in the gospel ministry who would benefit from an encouraging word from us? Can we help to validate the legitimacy of someone's ministry in the eyes of another? Paul did not need this endorsement for himself, but it

was a major help in answering his critics and keeping the church unified.

2) Do we appreciate the different callings and distinctive ministries that God has for each of us or do we try to force everyone into the same mold? There can be unity and partnership in the gospel despite very wide differences in methodology and emphasis. The key is whether we are preaching the same true gospel.

3) How is this incident an example of Paul yielding his rights and adopting a very meek and humble posture (while still maintaining his boldness and the power of his ministry -- no sign of weakness here)?

4) Are we overly impressed with the human credentials of certain individuals? Do we end up being a respecter of persons in some sense?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Chuck Swindoll:** Paul addresses a different charge in **Galatians 2**. In **chapter 1**, he shows his independence from the other apostles concerning his reception and understanding of the Christian gospel. This separation refutes the legalists' objection that his message is a distorted, human version of the true gospel. In **chapter 2**, however, Paul spends his energy spelling out his close relationship with the apostolic church leaders. He does this to answer the argument that the gospel he taught was not approved by these high officials. Paul explains that not only he but also his message was accepted and affirmed by the apostles, launching him into a ministry greater than he had before.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Re "*run in vain*" (**vs. 2**) -- Does not mean that Paul was unsure either of his message or his ministry. His conduct on the way to the conference indicates that he had no doubts (**Acts 15:3**). What he was concerned about was the future of the Gospel among the Gentiles, because this was his specific ministry from Christ. If the '*pillars*' sided with the Judaizers, or tried to compromise, then Paul's ministry would be in jeopardy. He wanted to get their approval before he faced the whole assembly; otherwise a three-way division could result.

**Robert Gromacki:** They agreed on their respective areas of ministry ... They saw no conflict in what each was doing; there was neither competition nor jealousy. They recognized that they were both doing what God had wanted them to do. They both preached the same message but with different approaches to different people.

**William Hendriksen:** In **verses 7-9** the following lessons stand out:

(1) Under God Paul's gospel is independent; that is, it is able to maintain itself in relation to friends and foes. It vanquishes the arguments of its foes, and is enthusiastically endorsed by its friends, who recognize it as the gospel which they themselves cherish.



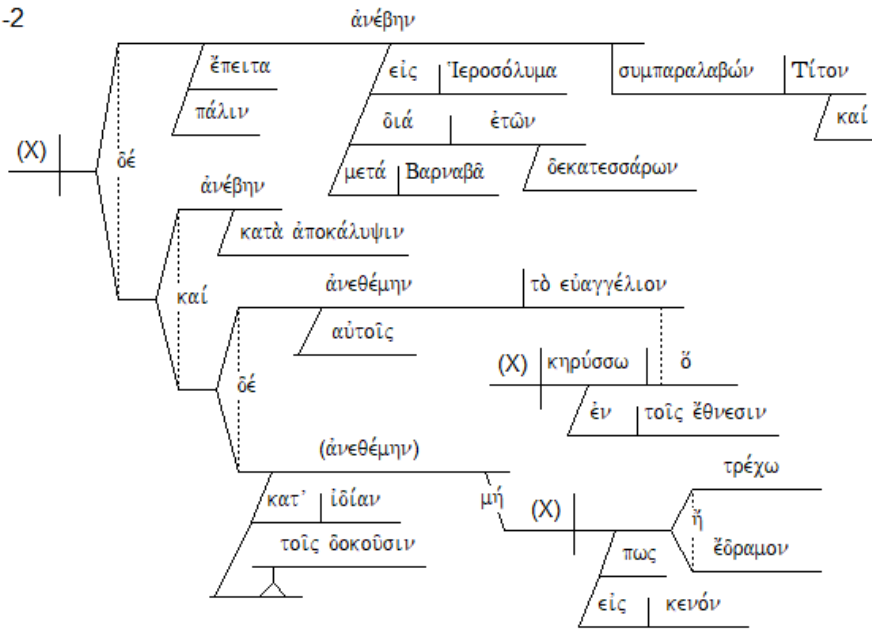
(2) One gospel suffices for every age and every clime. Methods of presentation may have to vary, but essentially the gospel for the first century A.D. is the gospel for today. Those who maintain that it is 'not relevant' for this day and age are committing a tragic error. Only then when the message of the love of God in Christ has penetrated heart and mind, resulting in a life of unselfish dedication to God and grateful observance of the principles of conduct he has laid down in his Word, will solutions be found for the problems that now vex the individual, the family, society, the church, the nation, and the world.

(3) The New Testament is not a hodgepodge of conflicting theologies -- the theology of John, the theology of Paul, etc. -- but a harmonious, beautifully variegated, unit. It is a remarkable fact that the five men, whose handclaps of ringing harmony is here described, produced, between them, no less than twenty-one of the twenty-seven New Testament books!

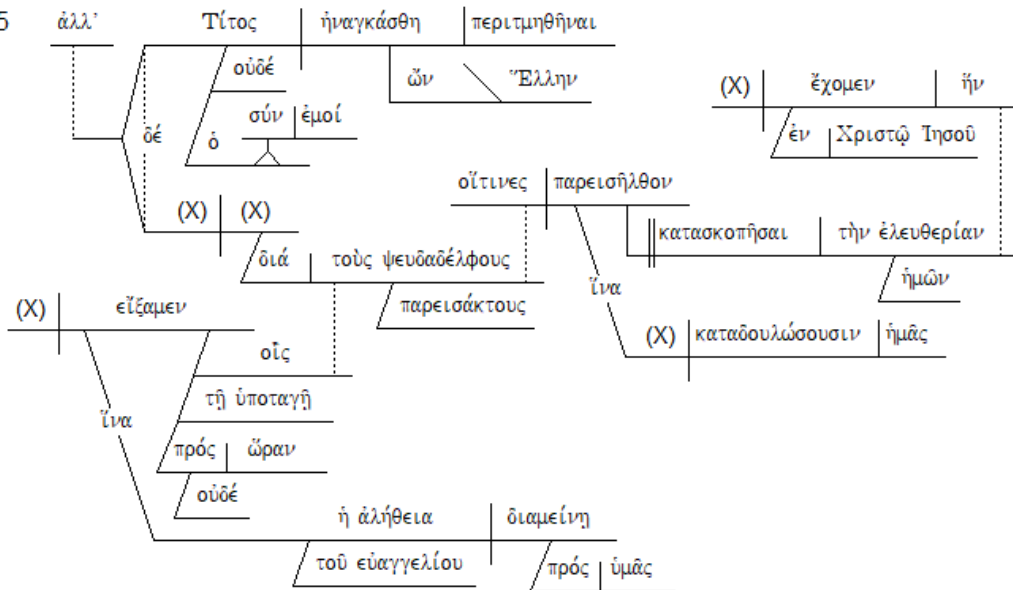
**C. F. Hogg:** Re "*liberty*" in **vs. 4** -- A word here used to describe the unfettered condition of the Christian soul in contrast with the Jewish condition of bondage to law, and so in **5:1**. This liberty is said to be '*in Christ Jesus*', and is secured by the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who frees the mind from mistaken notions about God and Christ, **2 Cor. 3:17**. It secures to the individual freedom of choice and of action, **1 Cor. 10:29**, but always within the limits imposed by consideration for the welfare of others, **Gal. 5:13**, and this because Christ's freeman is the bondservant of God, **1 Peter 2:16**. Hence Christian liberty is far removed from the carnal license which false teachers promise their dupes, **2 Peter 2:19**. James, speaking of the restraints of the gospel on those who profess it, finely describes Christianity as '*the perfect law, the law of liberty*', **1:25**, and reminds his readers that by this law the Christian is about to be judged for the use of his liberty in his words and deeds, **2:12**.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

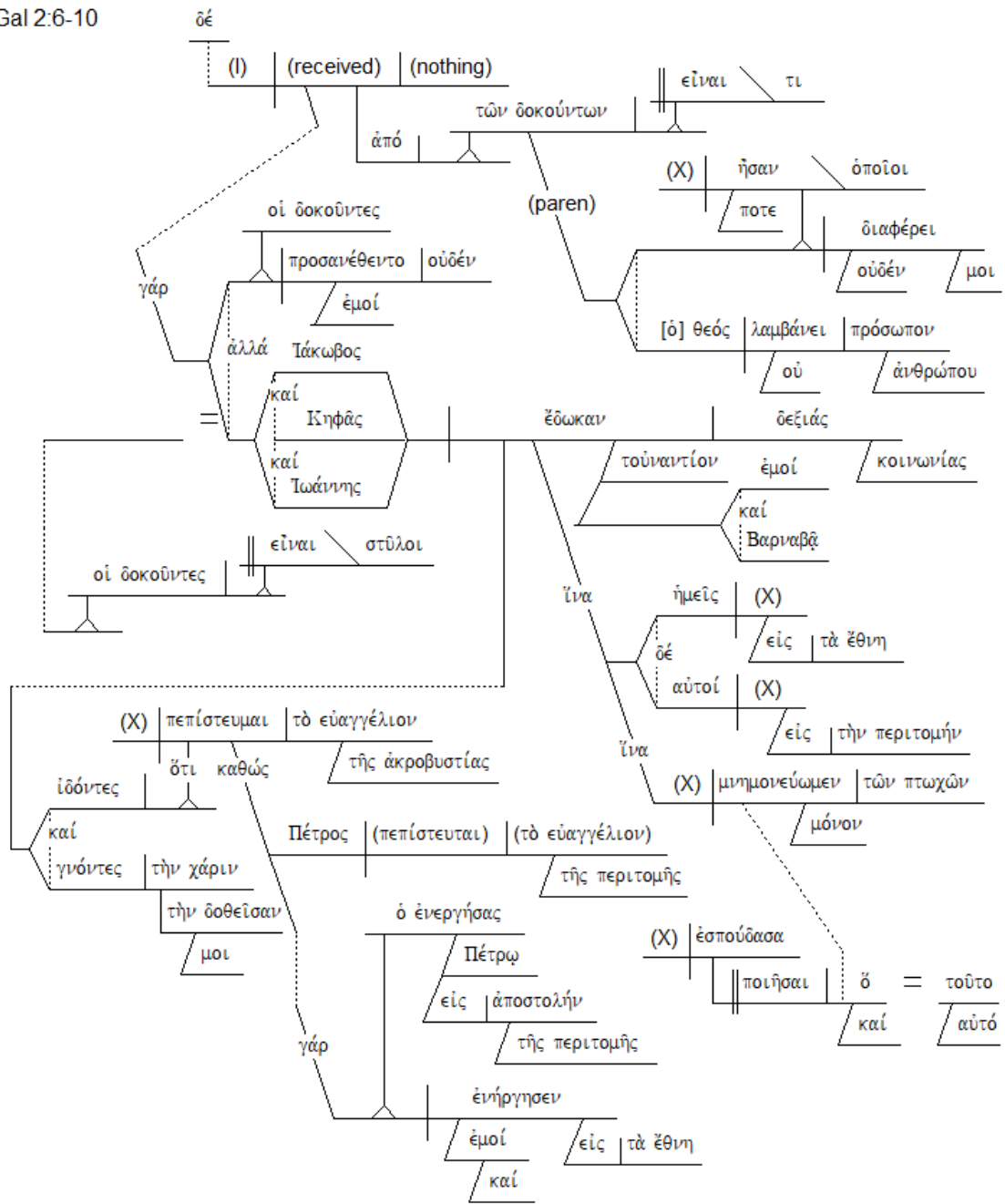
Gal 2:1-2



Gal 2:3-5



Gal 2:6-10



TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

TITLE: JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ... LIVING BY FAITH  
NO ROOM FOR HYPOCRISY OR LEGALISM

**BIG IDEA:**

**PAUL'S AUTHORITY DEMONSTRATED IN REBUKING PETER'S ERROR --  
JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR HYPOCRISY OR  
LEGALISM**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Kenneth Wuest:** Here the argument for Paul's apostolic independence has come to the highest level yet attained. In Jerusalem Paul faced Peter as an equal in rank and in the gospel ministry. At Antioch he faced him as his superior in character and courage.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** The conflict at Antioch depicted in **Gal. 2:11–14** is possibly the most theologically significant episode in the development of early Christianity. It reflects the problem that Paul encounters among his congregations in Galatia and sheds light on the boundaries of Jewish Christianity as it incorporates Gentile Christians while releasing them from Jewish Christian Torah observance.

**Thomas Schreiner: Rebuke of Peter substantiates Paul's authority (2:11–21)**

**i. Rebuke (2:11–14)**

- (1) Paul's opposition to Peter (2:11)
- (2) Peter's withdrawal from Gentiles (2:12)
- (3) Consequences of Peter's actions (2:13)
- (4) Paul's response to Peter (2:14)

**ii. Transition: The Nature of the Gospel (2:15–21)**

- (1) Righteousness only by faith, not works of law (2:15–16)
- (2) Sin does not come from Christ (2:17)
- (3) Sin comes from returning to the law (2:18)
- (4) Believers died to the law at the cross (2:19–20)
- (5) Believers live by faith in Christ (2:20)
- (6) To return to the law is to reject grace of the cross (2:21)

**George Brunk:** When is legitimate, necessary, and wise? And when is compromise an expression **compromise** of unfaithfulness, lack of courage, or duplicity? When is it a courageous expression of love, and when is it a betrayal of the truth? When does "religious adaptation" reflect loving cultural adaptation (as perhaps in **1 Cor 9:20-23**), and when does it reflect betrayal of the gospel or even hypocrisy (as perhaps in **Gal 2:11-13**)? Oh, if the church knew how to answer that question!

This part of the letter takes us to the very center of those knotty questions. It marks a major **transition** in the letter. Paul seems to be continuing the narrative of events in his

own life when he recounts his confrontation with Cephas at Antioch. But in the midst of the paragraph, Paul's writing takes on the characteristics of a **theological treatise**. That style then dominates the remainder of the letter, except for his autobiographical comments in **4:12-20**. The precise point of transition is unclear. For that reason we are treating **2:11-21** as a unit.

**Ben Witherington:** **Justification** is not the main subject of this letter, it is brought into the discussion about how the Galatians should behave as Christians and whether they should 'add' obedience to the Mosaic Law, to their faith in Christ. Paul's response is that precisely because they did not come to be in Christ by obeying the Law (initial salvation and justification was by grace through faith), they should not now add obedience to the Mosaic Law to their faith in Christ. Rather they should continue as they started in Christ, walking in the Spirit and according to the Law or Norm or Example of Christ.

## **I. (:11-13) PETER'S HYPOCRISY DESERVED PAUL'S STRONG OPPOSITION**

### **A. (:11a) Responsibility to Confront Hypocrisy – Paul Did Not Shrink Back from Confronting Peter's Hypocrisy**

*"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face"*

**Timothy George:** The first point to be made is that we are dealing with an event that occurred early in the history of the church. True, the gospel had already broken through to the Gentiles, and Peter himself had played a crucial role in this development (cf. **Acts 10**). However, the full implications of how Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity could together form a spiritual symbiosis was yet to be realized. Not even Paul's agreement with the pillar apostles over respective missionary strategies for reaching Jews and Gentiles contemplated all of the difficult and dynamic possibilities of Jewish and Gentile believers living and worshipping together in a mixed congregation. The incident at Antioch was thus a necessary if painful stage in the development of a mature NT ecclesiology.

**Max Anders:** Having presented his acceptance by the Jerusalem leaders, Paul turns to an incidence that illustrated his apostolic clout. He exercised his apostolic authority with the strongest church leader—Peter. Paul's authority as an apostle is confirmed through this correction of Peter. In this section, Paul comes to Antioch and corrects Peter, the leader of the Jews, because he was clearly in the wrong by giving the appearance that he was siding with the false teachers. By assuming the authority to correct Peter, Paul shows his authority and the truth of his message of grace.

**Craig Keener:** Probably the empire's third largest city, Antioch held a strategic position as the "mother city" and most powerful city in the massive province of Syria. Scholars lack consensus regarding its population. Many estimate 500,000 or even 600,000; others estimate as low as 100,000 or 150,000. The disparity in estimates today mirrors that in antiquity. Strabo, writing in the first century BCE, indicates a population of

300,000; in the first century CE (perhaps due to increased urbanization), Pliny's estimate is double that of Strabo; in the fourth century CE, however, Chrysostom cites only 200,000.

Antioch was a "free" city, mostly permitted self-governance, and "was a typical Hellenistic Roman metropolis." The city was divided in four parts and was laid out along a traditional Hellenistic and Roman gridiron plan. It had a theater, an amphitheater, and a circus. Colonnades, wide walkways, and many shops lined its marble-paved main street, which ran for roughly two miles.

Besides the usual smattering of pagan religion, Antioch was known for the nearby cult center of Daphne. But Josephus claims a very large Jewish population there; rough estimates generally range from 20,000 to 40,000. Its ties to the east and the proximity of Judea, then governed as part of Syria, probably gave Antioch's Jewish community stronger Judean connections than most other Diaspora cities. Jews and Christians continued in active contact in Antioch at least into the fourth century.

**Josephus:** [summarizes the situation of Jews at Antioch during the first century as follows:] The Jewish race, densely interspersed among the native populations of every portion of the world, is particularly numerous in Syria, where intermingling is due to the proximity of the two countries. But it was at Antioch that they especially congregated, partly owing to the greatness of that city, but mainly because the successors of King Antiochus [i.e., Antiochus I Soter] had enabled them to live there in security. For, although Antiochus surnamed Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem, and plundered the temple, his successors on the throne restored to the Jews of Antioch all such votive offerings as were made of brass, to be laid up in their synagogue, and, moreover, granted them citizen rights on an equality with the Greeks. Continuing to receive similar treatment from later monarchs, the Jewish colony grew in numbers, and their richly designed and costly offerings formed a splendid ornament to the temple. Moreover, they were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves (J. W. 7.43–45, tr. H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL).

**B. (:11b-13) Repercussions of Hypocrisy -- Peter's Hypocrisy Was Causing Serious Problems -- for Himself and Others**

1. (:11b) His Own Actions Condemned Him

*"because he stood condemned"*

2. (:12-13) His Bad Example Was Leading Others Astray

a. His Hypocrisy

(1) Acted first one way

*"For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles"*

Reference is probably to the fellowship meals, the agape love-feasts of the early church.

**Douglas Moo:** Paul of course realizes that he has jumped ahead in his narrative of this incident, and so he now backs up to explain (hence the *γάρ*, *gar*, *for*) what led to the need for him to resist Peter to his face. . .

The text indicates some kind of relationship between these people who arrived in Antioch and **James**, one of the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church (v. 9). Interpreters have often tended toward opposite poles in assessing this relationship.

- Some think the envoys accurately conveyed James’s own message (e.g., **R. Longenecker** 1990: 73; **Martyn** 1997: 233; **Bockmuehl** 2000: 71–73; **Schnabel** 2004: 1003–4; **Elmer** 2009: 104–5).
- Others, however, insist that the envoys only claimed to be representing the apostle and were in reality seeking authority for their message by a bogus appeal to James (e.g., **Lightfoot** 1881: 112; **Barnett** 1999: 285–86).

Our text does not allow us to make a clear decision between these options (**Silva** 2003: 101). But what we can be sure of is that on the two occasions when James is called on to make a decision about the inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles within the Messianic community, he sides with those who insist that Gentiles should not be required to “Judaize” (**Acts 11:1–18** [James is not mentioned, but we can assume that he was involved] and **Acts 15**).

**Bruce Barton:** When Peter arrived in Antioch, he already knew that God had broken down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, and he understood the true meaning of Christian freedom. So he would gladly eat with the Gentiles. The imperfect tense of the verb indicates that this was not one occasion but a repeated pattern, meaning that Peter joined with the other Jews in eating with their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ on a regular basis. This pattern undoubtedly went beyond sharing common meals and included taking the Lord’s Supper together.

But all that was before certain men came from James. These men were the legalists, members of “*the circumcision group*”, and most likely not sent by James. The wording here means they came “*from James’s group*,” that is, from the Jerusalem church. James, as leader of the Jerusalem church, had a vast range of people to deal with, and these men were part of the legalistic group of his church (almost every modern-day church has its own group of these!). Among the entourage from Jerusalem, there must have been “*certain men*” who frowned on fraternizing with Gentiles. These may have been rigid and legalistic Jewish Christians, but they were probably associated with the same “*false brothers*” that had disrupted Paul’s visit to Jerusalem.

Though this group probably tried to trade on James’s authority, he later firmly denied sending them. In the letter sent back to the Gentile Christians in Antioch after the Jerusalem council, James wrote, “*We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said*” (**Acts 15:24** NIV).

**George Brunk:** The key issue has to do with **table fellowship** between Jewish and Gentile Christians. This may have involved both regular meals and the Lord’s Supper,

which the early church typically celebrated in a meal context. Jews were careful not to associate closely with Gentiles because it violated the regulations of ritual purity and dietary laws. Eating at the same table compromises these standards. James and Peter are not technically inconsistent with the stance they had taken in Jerusalem in the previous account. There the issue was circumcision and mission responsibility. Here the question is table fellowship. The former agreement recognized and blessed two separate spheres for Jewish and Christian believers. Table fellowship, however, raises a new kind of question because here the two groups must be together—as equals.

**David deSilva:** When Peter came to Antioch, he found Christians of Jewish and gentile backgrounds worshiping together and expressing their unity by taking their meals together. This picture accords with Luke’s account of the mission to Jews and Greeks, which seems to have been distinctive to Syrian Antioch (**Acts 11:19–20**). Peter appears to have understood that such an arrangement, though in violation of Jewish sensibilities regarding unguarded or overly close association with gentiles, was perfectly in keeping with the purity of the new people God had formed from Jews and gentiles. Indeed, he may have been prepared for this situation himself by his previous experience with the centurion Cornelius and his household in Caesarea (**Acts 10:1 – 11:18**), though this history would make his subsequent change in behavior all the more disappointing. Peter therefore joined freely in the practice of the Antiochene church, eating alongside fellow believers in Christ without regard for their ethnicity.

(2) Then another way  
"but when they came,  
he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof"

**Ralph Martin:** Literally, “*he cut himself off*”—a possible pun, meaning “*he played the Pharisee*” (“*Pharisee*” is built on a Semitic root meaning “*to separate*”). These Jewish leaders were self-styled “*separated ones*,” anxious to preserve their ritual purity and ethnic distinctiveness as elites within God’s covenant people.

**F. F. Bruce:** What was their message? It may have been something like this: ‘news is reaching us in Jerusalem that you are habitually practising table-fellowship with Gentiles. This is causing grave scandal to our more conservative brethren here. Not only so: it is becoming common knowledge outside the church, so that our attempts to evangelize our fellow-Jews are being seriously hampered’ (cf. **T. W. Manson**, *Studies*, 178–181).

**Nijay Gupta:** Imagine that the Christian community in Antioch was a network of house churches. Believers met often in their separate house communities but also gathered once in a while as a large group for apostolic instruction and unifying fellowship. When Cephas initially came to town, various house churches would have invited him for a meal and to show this distinguished visitor hospitality. In the before period, he presumably said “yes” to all kinds of invites, from Jewish believers and gentile believers alike. Oakes argues that after these “*certain men*” arrived, Peter stopped accepting invitations from gentile churches. Cephas “[drew] *back*,” which may mean he



felt the need to spend time with the Jewish Christian visitors from Jerusalem (v. 12). Paul saw that these outsiders had a negative impact on Cephas, leading him (and others) into sin and hypocrisy.

(3) Motivated by Peer Pressure  
*"fearing the party of the circumcision"*

b. Its Negative Effect on the other Jewish Believers  
*"And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy"*

**Craig Keener:** Paul does not indicate a theological difference with Peter here. This is a disagreement over behavior, not over the content of the gospel message; that is why Paul charges Peter with hypocrisy, of living differently from what he believes, not with believing error. The point is not that Peter wrongly thinks it inappropriate to eat with gentiles; Peter has been eating with gentiles when no one was present to criticize this behavior. (Paul probably also knows Peter's own accounts about Jesus eating with sinners; see **Mark 2:15–17** and comment on **Gal. 2:15, 17**.) The point is that Peter knows that it is not wrong to eat with gentiles yet withdraws from them anyway to avoid criticism. It is acting differently from what he knows to be true that earns the label hypocrisy.

c. Its Negative Effect on His Ministry Partner = Barnabas  
*"with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy"*

**Bruce Barton:** Paul mentioned **Barnabas** separately, probably because Paul was especially surprised that Barnabas would be led astray by their hypocrisy. Barnabas was Paul's traveling companion; together they preached the gospel to the Gentiles, proclaiming Jews' and Gentiles' oneness with Christ. Barnabas was not from the Jerusalem church and would not have had the personal and relational stake in this that Peter had. And Barnabas should have known better (in reality, so should Peter have known better). Yet, like Peter, Barnabas was human, and for some unknown reason he followed Peter's example.

**Timothy George:** *Even Barnabas!* Paul's sorrow and embarrassment over the defection of his close friend and colleague was still a painful memory as he related it to the Galatians. Barnabas had introduced Paul to the Jerusalem believers when others in that city thought he was still a persecutor in disguise. It was Barnabas who had sought out Paul in Tarsus and persuaded him to become a part of the ministry team at Antioch. Barnabas too had stood with Paul in Jerusalem when he defended the liberty of the gospel against the false brothers. And, of course, Barnabas had accompanied Paul on the first missionary journey when many Gentile believers were won to Christ and the churches of Galatia themselves were established. For "*even Barnabas*" to be carried away was a severe blow!

## II. (:14) PETER'S HYPOCRISY COMPROMISED THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

### A. Integrity of the Gospel Must Be Maintained

*"But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel"*

**George Brunk:** According to Paul, truth involves both right belief and right behavior. Here Paul emphasizes moral integrity. The word translated acting consistently means (lit.) *to walk straight*. It is related in form to the English word orthodoxy, but it refers to one's manner of life rather than to one's doctrinal beliefs. So it would be equivalent to our word orthopraxis, or right action. In keeping with his Jewish background, Paul takes truth to involve both behavior and belief (ethics and theology).

**Ronald Fung:** From Paul's point of view, Peter's personal inconsistency carried an even more sinister significance. When Paul says that the conduct of Peter and the other Jewish Christians "*did not square with the truth of the Gospel*," the verb he uses implies that to him Peter's conduct was tantamount to the beginning of an attack on the position he was maintaining at Antioch (though it was certainly not so intended by Peter). Measured by this position, which in Paul's estimation clearly represented "*the truth of the Gospel*," Peter's play-acting was, in fact, nothing short of a defection or deviation from that truth. How that gospel truth was conceived by Paul (already intimated in the exposition on **1:12, 16**) becomes explicit in Paul's address to Peter and indeed is given repeated expression in the rest of the letter.

### B. Public Error Demands Public Censure

*"I said to Cephas in the presence of all"*

**F. F. Bruce:** The rebuke was thus public as well as personal ('*to his face*'). It has been asked why Paul did not follow the injunction of **Mt. 18:15**, '*If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone*' (where εἰς σέ after ἀμαρτήση may be an addition to the original text). Paul may or may not have known this injunction in its Matthaean form, but he certainly knew the spirit of it, for he reproduces it in **6:1** below. For aught we know, he may have remonstrated with Cephas privately before rebuking him publicly. But perhaps he would have said that, **since the offence was public, the rebuke had also to be public**. Even **Augustine** confessed, in another connexion, that he had difficulty at times in deciding whether to follow **Mt. 18:15** or **1 Tim. 5:20**, '*Those who sin (or who persist in sinning, τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας) rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest may stand in fear*' (Ep. 95.3).

### C. Inconsistency is the Essence of Hypocrisy

*"If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"*

**Scot McKnight:** As can be seen, the whole issue is **the place of the law in the life of the Galatian Christian**. Put differently and more realistically, it is the place of Jewish distinctives and social regulations that governed Jewish behavior and separated them

from the Gentiles and the Galatian converts. We should not at this point separate these two dimensions of the law for first-century Jews; they did not perceive their social distinctives (circumcision, table purity, etc.) as something other than straightforward life under the law of Moses (moral principles). The struggle for Peter (and somewhat earlier for Paul) was how to live as a Christian Jew and how that life was to be governed. Were they to submit to the Jewish law? And, if so, did that mean they were to remain Jews and expect converts to Christ eventually to embrace the whole law (to become proselytes to Judaism)? Regardless of how hard this perception is for us today, this was the central issue for first-century Jewish converts. Were they, in turning to Christ, abandoning their Jewish heritage, fulfilling it, or simply adding to it? Peter's struggle was similar to that of other Jews: Are we Jews? Jewish Christians? or Christians? Are we reformers of Judaism or are we starting the church?

Here is the nub of the issue for Paul as he looked at Peter's behavior in Antioch: Peter, in finding acceptance with God in Christ, apparently failed to realize the comprehensiveness and sufficiency of the new covenant in Christ and life in the Spirit. To Paul, Christ's work was complete and the law was thereby relegated to its proper time in history. Paul contends that Christian morality and life before God are not to be found in "observing the law"; rather, they are found in death and resurrection with Christ and in the "fruit of the Spirit." True life before God, he argues, is through Christ and in the Spirit.

### **III. (:15-21) JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH UNITES US ALL (JEW AND GENTILE) TO CHRIST SO THAT WE CAN WALK BY FAITH**

#### **A. (:15-16) Both Jews and Gentiles Can Only Be Justified by Faith Alone**

**Peter Fung:** This verse and the next form a single, overloaded sentence in the Greek; they have been aptly described as "Paul's doctrine of justification in a nutshell" and must be examined in considerable detail. . .

The upshot of Paul's statement in **vv. 15f.**, then, is (a) that justification is attained by faith in Christ alone and not by legal works, and (b) that this principle—which is illustrated in his own experience and that of the other Jewish Christians and, at least in what it denies, is supported by Scripture—applies universally to Jew and Gentile alike. That he should here (as also in **Phil. 3:7–9**) describe or interpret his conversion experience as an experience of justification by faith is in perfect accord with the conclusion derived from **Gal. 1:12, 16** that the gospel of justification by faith in both its negative and positive aspects was implicitly involved in the revelation of Jesus to him as the Messiah, Lord, and Son of God: ultimately the knowledge to which he refers in **v. 16** ("*we know*") is grounded in his encounter with Christ, and the conviction thus gained is then supported by his new understanding of Scripture.

**Timothy George:** We should remember that the problem in Galatia was not the overt repudiation of the Christian faith by apostates who formerly professed it but rather the dilution and corruption of the gospel by those who wanted to add to the doctrine of

grace a dangerous admixture of “something more.” In order to counter this tendency, Paul developed a series of daring contrasts throughout this passage.

- Thus “*Jews by birth*” are contrasted to “*Gentile sinners*”;
- justification “*by observing the law*” is contrasted to justification “*by faith in Jesus Christ*.”
- The rebuilding of the old structures of salvation by works is contrasted to their destruction by the gospel.
- And, finally, Paul’s “*dying to the law*” is contrasted to his “*living for God*.”

All of this was intended to impress upon the Galatians the radical choice that confronted them. This is the reason Paul immediately, without so much as a break in his narrative, extrapolated the **doctrine of justification** from the incident at Antioch.

**Douglas Moo:** The paragraph divides into three basic parts.

1. As we have noted, **verses 15–16** state the essential theological point of the paragraph: Jews like Paul and Peter understand that they have been justified by faith in Christ and not by “*works of the law*.” In place of the agitators’ synthesis of faith in Christ and the law, Paul insists on an antithesis: it is Christ and therefore not the law. The rest of the paragraph elaborates on this negative claim about justification and the law.
2. **Verses 17–20** spell out how finding justification “*in Christ*” has implications for the law; and
3. **verse 21** shows why righteousness (e.g., the status granted by justification) cannot come via the law.

#### 1. Different Spiritual Pedigree

##### a. Jews

*"We are Jews by nature"*

##### b. Not Gentiles

*"and not sinners from among the Gentiles"*

**George Brunk:** In good debate style, Paul begins with a point on which his opponents will agree. This affirmation expresses the typical perspective of a good Jew. All non-Jews were commonly referred to as sinners. Jews are by birth (lit. by nature) in a class of their own, meaning that they are natural-born Jews and beneficiaries of covenant status with God. This is where Paul’s argument begins. But it ends in **verse 17** with another perspective entirely: both Gentiles and Jews are sinners (cf. **Rom 1:18 – 3:20**).

#### 2. Same Gospel of Justification by Faith in Christ Alone (Apart from the Works of the Law)

Same principle stated 3 times for emphasis

##### a. Stated Once

*"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus,*

**George Brunk:** Paul never implies that this doctrine is being expressly denied in the controversies. What is in dispute is the implication of justification by faith for the Christian life and whether it is necessary to supplement this bedrock belief with submission to the Law of Moses.

**Timothy George:** In its most basic meaning, **justification** is the declaration that somebody is in the right. **McGrath** observes that in Pauline vocabulary the verb *dikaioō* “denotes God’s powerful, cosmic and universal action in effecting a change in the situation between sinful humanity and God, by which God is able to acquit and vindicate believers, setting them in a right and faithful relation to himself.” In Pauline usage the term has both forensic (from Latin forum, “law court”) and eschatological connotations. Justification should not be confused with forgiveness, which is the fruit of justification, nor with atonement, which is the basis of justification. Rather it is the favorable verdict of God, the righteous Judge, that one who formerly stood condemned has now been granted a new status at the bar of divine justice.

The classical Protestant understanding of justification is set forth with great clarity in Question 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism: “How are you righteous before God?” The following answer is given:

“Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.”

According to this definition, justification is by **imputation**, that is, the righteousness of Christ is counted or reckoned to the sinners so that their standing before God is “as if” they possessed the kind of standing before the Father that would allow him to say of them, as he did of Christ, “*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*” . . .

The “**works of the law**,” then, refer to the commandments given by God in the Mosaic legislation in both its ceremonial and moral aspects, precepts commanded by God and thus holy and good in themselves. Because of the fallenness of human beings, however, “no flesh” could ever be justified by observing the law. Moreover, God himself knew and intended for it to be thus from the beginning. But why would God give a law no one could keep or issue commands no one could obey? Paul would struggle with this question in **Gal 3** and **4** as he described the divine purpose for the law in the history of salvation.

Paul said that we are not justified by works of the law but rather *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, which the CSB translates “*by faith in Jesus Christ.*” This translation assumes

the traditional view that *Iēsou Christou* is an objective genitive, so that the faith in question is that of those who believe in Jesus Christ. More recently, however, other scholars have argued that this expression should be read as a subjective genitive, referring to the faith or faithfulness of Jesus Christ. While the faithfulness of Jesus Christ is a prominent theme in Paul's theology (cf. the kenotic hymn of **Phil 2:5–11**), what is being contrasted in Galatians is not divine fidelity versus human fickleness but rather **God's free initiative in grace versus human efforts toward self-salvation**. Thus, when Paul spoke of faith as essential for justification, he was thinking of the necessary human response to what God has objectively accomplished in the cross of Christ. At the same time, it is crucial to recognize the **instrumental character** of such faith. Paul always says that we are justified "by" faith (*dia* plus the genitive), not "on account of" faith (*dia* plus the accusative). Evangelical Christians must ever guard against the temptation to turn faith itself into one of the "works of the law." Saving faith is a radical gift from God, never a mere human possibility (**Eph 2:8–9**). Faith is not an achievement that earns salvation anymore than circumcision is. Rather faith is the **evidence of saving grace** manifested in the renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The term "works of law" most likely refers to all the works prescribed by the Mosaic law. In support of this, Paul emphasizes in **3:10b** the obligation to do all that the law requires, and hence limiting "works of law" to only a part of the law fails to convince. This also fits with **5:3** as well, where Paul reminds the Galatians that those who adopt circumcision are required "to do the whole law," not just part of the law. We should also bring in **Rom 3:20** at this point, where Paul affirms that "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law." Here Paul summarizes the argument of **Rom 1:18 – 3:20** as a whole and emphasizes that all deserve judgment since all have sinned and violated God's law (cf. **3:23**). It is hardly credible to claim that the Jews were condemned for their bad attitude of excluding Gentiles. They were liable to judgment because they had not kept the entirety of God's law.

b. Stated Twice

*"even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law;"*

**Scot McKnight:** Paul knew that implicit in conversion to Christ was a confession that a proper standing before God could not be had through a commitment to the law. Christ was the fulfillment of the law and went beyond it in his revelation (**Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:19–25**). To do the law after Christ was to deny his sufficient work; it was to step back in salvation-history to a period before Christ. For Paul, this was abominable and denied the very purpose of Christ's coming. Thus, Paul reasons with Peter that they were agreed that a person is not justified by observing the law; commitment to Christ negates a commitment to the law as the means of being accepted by God. Paul would say, "You cannot serve Christ and the law at the same time."

On the other hand, Paul is not against "good works." For him, "works" has three primary ideas.

(1) There is the **principle of works** that appears in **Rom. 3:27**, and here we are close to the idea of **merit** or doing (see also **Gal. 3:12**) as the way one finds acceptance with God. This sense of works Paul opposed; the principle of works is never a means of acceptance with God.

(2) There is the **notion of Mosaic works, or works of the law**, as found predominantly in Galatians, that describes the behavior of certain persons who were expressing their conviction that acceptance with God could only be had if one lived according to the law of Moses (e.g., **2:3, 11–14**). What these people were doing was perverted by why they were doing it: to express their faith in Moses rather than in Christ alone. There was nothing wrong with living according to the law when it was done properly; after all, Paul circumcised Timothy (**Acts 16:3**) and later himself took steps to be purified so as to offer sacrifices in the temple (**21:26**). But when one obeyed the law to express one's confidence in it as a necessary step for acceptance by God, Paul took serious umbrage.

(3) There is the idea of **good works as found in Eph. 2:10**. What Paul means here is that people are called by God's grace in order to serve him in good works, a lifestyle that is attractive, moral, and godly. We might say, for Galatians, that the "*fruit of the Spirit*" (**Gal. 5:22–23**) is a description of "*good works*." This kind of works is the primary thrust of how Paul thinks Christians should live.

Therefore, when we say Paul taught that justification was not by works, we need to clarify which kind of works he had in mind. In Galatians, he is concerned primarily with the second sense and perhaps at times (but perhaps not at all) with the first sense. But Paul is not, or never was, against "*good works*" as an adequate description of a Christian's moral life and relations with others. Indeed, Paul says we will be judged by our works (**Rom. 2:5–6; 1 Cor 3:10–15; 2 Cor 5:10; 11:15**).

c. Stated Three Times

*"since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."*

**David deSilva:**

(1) In Galatians, Paul is concerned with what will bring people into alignment with God's standards of what is "*righteous*," and thus be declared righteous before God's court on the last day.

(2) Aligning oneself with the practices prescribed in the Torah ("*works of the law*"), which Paul regards as a complete package, though some particular works have come to the fore in the Galatian situation, will not bring people into such alignment.

(3) Trust in Christ (the linguistically and contextually more probable solution of the disputed phrase *pistis Christou*) has opened up the path to becoming righteous and thus to receiving God's approbation; but believers must continue to trust in Jesus's mediation and, specifically, in the efficacy and sufficiency of the gift that Jesus's death

has secured for those who trust, namely, the Holy Spirit, to lead them into and empower them for the righteous lives that God will affirm. . .

The rival teachers were promoting conforming one's life to the vision for life communicated in the law as a path toward being "set right" in God's sight and therefore "acquitted" before God at the judgment (thus the use of the verb in **5:4**). Paul's converts were, at the very least, interested in this as a possible path to advance their own interest in attaining that righteous verdict.

### **B. (:17) Our Inconsistent Practice of Sin Can Never be Attributed to Our Perfect Savior**

*"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!"*

**David deSilva:** Accusation: If Jewish Christians start neglecting the behaviors that keep them set apart from gentile "sinners"—becoming in this way "sinners" themselves and no different from gentiles (**2:15**), contrary to God's express command to and purpose for Israel (**Lev 20:22–26**)—then Jesus has become the excuse for violating the historic covenant and disobeying God through neglect of the Torah.

**Kenneth Wuest:** Paul repudiates the false assumption of the Judaizers who charged that Christ is the promoter and encourager of sin in that He causes the Jew to abandon the law as a justifying agency, and in doing so, puts himself on the common plane of a Gentile whom he calls a sinner and a dog. The Judaizers argued that in view of the fact that violation of the law is sin, therefore, abandonment of the law in an effort to be justified in Christ is also sin. Thus Christ is the promoter of sin.

**Herman Ridderbos:** The objection has reference to the seeming ethical danger of the doctrine. Does it (the doctrine of justification by faith alone) not make for godless and normless living? The objection begins by saying something that cannot be denied: if even we (Jews) ourselves, quite as much as the Gentiles, are found to be sinners, and there is, therefore, no essential difference between those who observe the law and the sinners of the Gentiles . . . And thence the question which, on the basis of that clause, can be asked, and is as a matter of fact always being asked anew: Is this Christ, then, a minister of sin, serving in its cause? The answer could not be more definitely negative. Paul nowhere does injustice to the gravity of sin or to the holiness of the law. Both are always totally assumed.

**Bruce Barton:** The Judaizers saw justification as a "theological" excuse to get out from under Jewish law (that is, changing from Jew to Christian). But Paul (and the Jewish Christians who had experienced justification) knew that while offering freedom from the restrictive law, justification by faith demanded lifestyle and behavioral changes. When God truly gets hold of a life, nothing can remain the same. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* (**2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV**). At the end of this letter, Paul wrote, *"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation"* (**Galatians 6:15 NIV**).



Grace does not abolish the law with its standards and morality; rather, it moves it from an external standard impossible to keep to an inner motivation for living a pure and God-honoring life.

**Douglas Moo:** The meaning of this verse [:16] and the next one [:17] (which are closely related) and their contribution to the argument of this paragraph are unclear. Two main options confront us, determined according to whether “*find ourselves to be sinners*” takes place **at conversion** or **after conversion** and, correspondingly, what “*sinners*” refers to.

1. One interpretation holds that Paul is reflecting on the experience that he, Peter, and other Christian Jews had **when they first came to Christ to be justified**. At that moment, they found themselves to be sinners—that is, they understood that they were truly as sinful as the Gentiles they had scorned, and accordingly they needed to depend on Christ alone for justification. But this discovery did not make Christ a servant of sin, for their sin existed all along. **Verse 18** explains: it is when people (whether Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians, such as the Galatians) try to go back to the law (again) that they become “*transgressors*,” either in the sense that they become guilty of their sin again or in the sense that they break the fundamental “**law of the gospel**.” (For this general interpretation, see, e.g., **Lightfoot** 1881: 116–17; **Ridderbos** 1953: 101–3; **Smiles** 1998: 147–59; **Lambrecht** 1978; 1987; 1996; **Hunn** 2010).

2. Other interpreters think that Paul has in view a **postconversion situation**. Peter, Paul, and other Jewish Christians are seeking to find ultimate justification in their union with Christ and, in doing so, have recognized the implications that Paul states in **verse 16**: they have abandoned the law as a means of finding that justification. They therefore “*find themselves*” to be in the same category as the Gentiles (v. 15): “*sinners*” who do not live by God’s law. But this does not make Christ the servant of sin (in the ultimate sense of that word). This would be the case only if Jewish Christians would “*rebuild*” the law as a fundamental authority; they would then truly be “*transgressors*.” (So, in general, **Burton** 1921: 124–30; **Betz** 1979: 119–21; **Dunn** 1993a: 141–42; **Martyn** 1997: 254–56; **Kruse** 1996: 69–71; **Winger** 1992: 142–45.)

Neither interpretation is without its problems (and hence the division of opinion among scholars), but the second reading has fewer problems.

### C. (:18-21) **The Key to Righteousness is Living by Grace Through Faith**

#### 1. (:18) Seeking Righteousness by Law Keeping Is Futile

*"For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed,  
I prove myself to be a transgressor."*

**Craig Keener:** Paul argues further: *if I rebuild the things that I once tore down (2:18)*—ritual purity customs that separate me from gentiles—then I am showing that I should not have torn them down to begin with, and I am admitting that I really am breaking the law by fellowshiping with gentiles.

**C. F. Hogg:** Re "*those things which I destroyed*" -- *kataluo*, = to loosen down, used of the demolition of a building, **Matt. 24:2**, of the death of the body, **2 Cor. 5:1**, of the failure of purposes, **Acts 5:38, 39**, and of the marring of a person's spiritual well-being, **Rom. 14:20**. The Lord Jesus declared that He came '*not to destroy [kataluo] the law*', **Matt. 5:17**, that is to say, not to lower the standard of Divine righteousness, not to abrogate the least of God's requirements, but, on the contrary, in His own life to '*magnify the law and make it honourable*', **Isa. 42:21**.

**Bruce Barton:** Justification by faith destroyed the Jewish "merit system" with all its laws and good deeds that attempted to rack up points with God. To rebuild that, to be justified by faith and then return to that legal system as a basis for one's relationship with God, would erroneously imply that Christ's death was not sufficient. The truth, however, is that it was not necessary for the Gentiles to place themselves under the law in order to discover that the law could not add to their justification. Paul saw the situation in Antioch with Peter as a clear illustration of the unnecessary burden that some wanted to place on Gentile believers. Peter, through his act of pulling away from the Gentile fellowship, was giving law a place of authority that it no longer held.

**Peter Fung:** If Peter and the other Jewish Christians upheld again the observances of the law as a necessary condition for justification (as the Judaizers were urging upon Paul's Galatian converts), then they were thereby submitting themselves afresh to the dominion of the law and were bound to become transgressors of it (cf. **5:2f.; 2:16**).

**Thomas Schreiner:** If Paul rebuilds the OT law, which is abolished now that Christ has come and a new era in redemptive history has arrived, then he has violated God's will and is to be deemed a transgressor. Hence, for Peter to say, in effect, that Gentiles must observe the OT law to belong to the people of God is contrary to God's will. Reinstating the law transgresses God's will because it denies that righteousness is in Christ and returns to the old era of salvation history. Therefore, to reach back to the law for righteousness constitutes sin since it denies righteousness is in Christ. The old age was dominated by sin and the law, but the new age in Christ is marked by righteousness and life. This interpretation is preferable because it also explains the ground "*for*" (*γάρ*) in **2:19**. Paul would prove himself to be a transgressor if he reinstated the law because he had already died to the law when he died with Christ. **The era of the law had ceased with the death and resurrection of Christ.**

2. (:19) The New Principle of living by faith in Christ involves living to God  
*"For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God."*

**Timothy George:** What did Paul mean when he said, "*I died to the law*"? We must avoid two errors in interpreting these words. In the first place we must **avoid reducing the law in this context to its ceremonial aspect**. True, the burning issues in Galatia were circumcision, feast days, and food laws, all of which were external rites or ceremonies called for by the law of Moses. However, the issue at stake was not these ceremonies as such, for to Paul they were "*disputed matters*" (**Rom 14:1**); his concern was rather the theological baggage the false teachers were placing on such rites. As **J.**

**G. Machen** put it, “Paul is contending in this great epistle not for a ‘spiritual’ view of the law as over against externalism or ceremonialism; he is contending for the **grace of God** as over against **human merit** in any form.”

When Paul said he died to the law, he was referring to nothing less than the God-given commandments and decrees contained in OT Scriptures. However, he was not saying here that the law of God had lost all meaning or relevance for the Christian believer. This is the **error of antinomianism**, which Paul was at pains to refute both here in Galatians as well as in Romans. Later in Galatians, Paul would exhort his readers to carry one another’s burdens and thus “*fulfill the law of Christ*” (6:2). An ethical imperative in the Christian life flows from a proper understanding of justification. Paul would return to this theme in the last two chapters of the epistle.

Elsewhere Paul used the expression “*to die to*” not only with reference to the law but also in relation to the self, sin, and the world. In each of these cases Paul meant that his relationship to these entities—self, sin, world, law—had been so decisively altered by his union with Christ that they no longer control, dominate, or define his existence. By saying that he died to the law “*through the law*” Paul is anticipating his later discussion of the provisional role of the law in the history of salvation. The law itself, by revealing the inadequacy of human obedience and the depth of human sinfulness, set the stage, as it were, for the drama of redemption effected by the promised Messiah who fulfilled the law by obeying it perfectly and suffering its curse vicariously.

**Bruce Barton**: The law itself could not save because no one can keep its perfect standards. The law thus cannot give eternal life; instead, it offers only failure and death. So what is its usefulness? The law was a necessary instrument to show people the ultimate futility of trying to live up to God’s standard on their own. But that very hopelessness created by the law can have a positive impact if it leads a person to the true hope, Christ himself. Christ took upon himself that death penalty—the death we deserved for being lawbreakers. His action freed us from the jurisdiction of Moses’ law. When Paul understood that the law was completely incapable of giving salvation, and when he embraced the one who could give salvation, he knew he could never go back to the law. Paul felt this so intensely that he expressed it in terms of death, I died to the law. Paul went from a law-centered life to a Christ-centered life.

**George Brunk**: **To have a living relationship with God, the believer must end a relationship to the Law.** Such a claim is nonsense to the average Jew, who sees the Law precisely as the means of cultivating covenant life with God. Indeed, Deuteronomy emphasizes the point again and again.

So what is the basis for Paul’s claim? Perhaps we find some hint later in the letter. The Law cannot make alive (3:21). Only the Spirit can overcome the flesh and create the true fruit of righteousness (5:18, 23). The Law cannot do so. It simply does not have the capability to bring about spiritual and moral renewal. In the coming of Christ, God has now given the Spirit (4:6), who provides the power that the Law lacks. The implication is that the Law by its own limitation has brought death to the authority it had over Paul.

In one sense the Law is the agent of its own death. But in another sense the new gift of life in Christ and in the Spirit is the cause of that death. As a result, it is important to notice the link that Paul is making between death to the Law and being crucified (and made alive) with Christ in the next sentence. They are two aspects of the same event. **To die with Christ is to die to the Law.** This thought is expressly stated in **Romans 7:4**.

**Romans 7** lays out a fuller explanation of death to the Law and how the Law itself is the means of death to the Law. Although the Law tells me what is right, it does not empower me to do the right. Knowing the Law makes me more responsible for my conduct (it “*is holy and just and good*”), but without the power to overcome sin, this knowledge only gives sin more leverage over me, causing spiritual death. In this way, the Law becomes the agent that ends my relationship with it. By implication, the Law itself tells me to seek life elsewhere. To do that is to die to the Law as the governing authority in my life.

The expression *live to God* is key to Paul’s larger argument. (Note how *live* and *live* mark the next verse as well.) It might also be translated *live for God*. Paul is picking up on the Jewish Christian concern for upright living. He grounds his response in the assertion that coming alive to God and living for God is precisely what his view of the gospel and of justification entails. Here and throughout Scripture, *live* (v. 20) has rich connotations of human existence in its many dimensions and in its ideal and fulfilled form. To live to someone speaks of a vital, nourishing relationship with that one. For Paul, *live* encompasses the right-making action of God in justification in the totality of its effects. Justification in Christ (2:16) begins in the court-like declaration from God that we are children of God, but it results in a new relationship with God that is life-changing because our whole life is given godlike shape by an encounter with Christ, the Son of God (2:20).

3. (:20) Our Union with Christ in His Death and Resurrection makes this new life of faith possible

*"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."*

**C. F. Hogg:** Faith is the characteristic function of the new life.

**Timothy George:** The new life Paul had received flowed from his identification with the passion and death of Christ. Elsewhere Paul could speak of being buried and raised with Christ, an identification portrayed liturgically in the ordinance of **baptism (Rom 6:1–6)**. Indeed, **Betz** has suggested that Paul’s more developed baptismal theology in Romans may have evolved from this more succinct statement in Galatians.

But what does it mean to be “*crucified with Christ*”? In one sense this is presumptuous language because the mystery of atonement requires that the death of Christ be unique,

unrepeatable, and once for all. The two thieves who were literally crucified with Christ did not bear the sins of the world in their agonizing deaths. On the cross Christ suffered alone forsaken by his friends, his followers, and finally even his Father, dying, as **J. Moltmann** puts it, “a God-forsaken death for God-forsaken people.” With reference to his substitutionary suffering and vicarious death, only Jesus, and he alone, can be the Substitute and Vicar. And yet—this was Paul’s point—the benefits of Christ’s atoning death, including first of all justification, are without effect unless we are identified with Christ in his death and resurrection. As **Calvin** put it, “As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.” Thus to be crucified with Christ is, as Paul said elsewhere, to know him in the “*fellowship of his sufferings*” (**Phil 3:10**). To be crucified with Christ is the same as being dead to the law. This means we are freed from all the curse and guilt of the law and, by this deliverance, are set free to “*live for God*.” As **Calvin** said again, “Engrafted into the death of Christ, we derive a secret energy from it, as the shoot does from the root.” This experience of divine grace makes the doctrine of justification a living reality rather than a legal fiction.

“*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*” Paul set forth in this expression his doctrine of the **indwelling Christ**. Probably no verse in the letter to the Galatians is quoted more frequently by evangelical Christians than this one. Much harm has been done to the body of Christ by well-meaning persons who have perpetuated erroneous interpretations of these words. Properly understood, Paul’s words give sanction neither to perfectionism nor to mysticism. Paul was not saying that once a person becomes a Christian the human personality is zapped out of existence, being replaced somehow by the divine logos. The indwelling of Christ does not mean we are delivered from the realm of suffering, sin, and death. Paul made this abundantly clear in his next phrase, “*the life I now live in the body.*” So long as we live in the body, we will continue to struggle with sin and to “*groan*” along with the fallen creation around us (**Rom 8:18–26**). Perfectionism this side of heaven is an illusion.

Nor did Paul advocate here the kind of Christ mysticism that various spiritualist leaders have advanced throughout the history of the church. We are crucified with Christ, that is, identified with his suffering and death, which occurred once for all outside the gates of Jerusalem some two thousand years ago. Christ is not crucified in us. Similarly, we must be born again: Christ has no need to be born anew, in the “core of the soul.” The doctrine of justification by faith stands opposed to every idea of mystical union with the divine that obscures the historicity of the incarnation, the transcendence of God, or the necessity of repentance and humility before an awesome God whose “ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts.”

Having discounted these false interpretations, we must give full weight to the meaning of Paul’s words. Being crucified with Christ implies a **radical transformation within the believer**. The “I” who has died to the law no longer lives; **Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, dwells within**, sanctifying our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and enabling us to approach the throne of God in prayer. Paul gave a fuller explanation for

what it means for Christ to live in us: “*Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba, Father’*” (Gal 4:6 NIV).

**Kenneth Wuest:** The new life is no longer, like the former one, dependent upon the ineffectual efforts of a man attempting to draw near to God in his own righteousness. The new life is a Person within a person, living out His life in that person. Instead of attempting to live his life in obedience to a set of rules in the form of the legal enactments of the Mosaic law, Paul now yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit and cooperates with Him in the production of a life pleasing to God, energized by the divine life resident in him through the regenerating work of the Spirit. Instead of a sinner with a totally depraved nature attempting to find acceptance with God by attempted obedience to a set of outward laws, it is now the saint living his life on a new principle, that of the indwelling Holy Spirit manifesting forth the Lord Jesus.

**Max Anders:** Whatever Paul meant about **having died in Christ**, the point is that his death severed him from the requirements of the law. Therefore, for Peter and the Judaizers to go back to the law is to visit the graveyard. Paul goes on to say that he can live for God because Christ lives in him. Finally, Paul says that faith is the principle that unlocks the life of Christ in the believer. The more we exercise faith in Christ the more he is free to live through us. The more we are obedient to the Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit, the more our life approximates what Jesus would do if he were in our shoes. In that sense, the life he lives, he lives by faith in the Son of God.

**David Platt:** This is the key to the Christian life: **faith in Christ**—not just the Christ who died on the cross for you, but the Christ who lives in you. We live by faith when we believe Christ every moment of every day. We believe Him to be our sustenance and our strength. We believe Him to be our love and joy and peace. We believe Him to be our satisfaction—more than money and houses and cars and stuff. We believe Christ to be our purity and our holiness and our power over sin. This is Christianity: believing Christ to be everything you need for every moment you live. **You live by faith in the Son of God.**

#### 4. (:21) Contradiction of Continued Dependence on the Law

##### a. Compromises the Grace of God

*"I do not nullify the grace of God"*

**David deSilva:** Will the Galatians appreciate and accept what God has done for humanity in the cross of Christ? Will they trust the efficacy of that single act of costly obedience to join them to the family of Abraham and the family of God, without trying to turn the clock back to a time before Jesus’s death by aligning themselves with the Torah’s prescriptions? Will they place sufficient value upon the resource God has provided in the Spirit—ever so much more effective and empowering a guide to God’s heart than the Torah—to lead them into righteousness? All of these questions are wrapped up in the catchwords “*grace*” and “*trust*” that so dominate this letter.

##### b. Minimizes the Atonement of Christ

*"for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly"*

**Robert Gromacki:** The heresy of the Judaizers discredited the divine program of redemption in two ways.

1. First, *"it frustrates the grace of God."* If a man can earn salvation, then God must give him what he deserves. However, the essence of grace is for God to give men what they do not deserve...
2. Second, it deprecates the cross of Christ (*"then Christ is dead in vain"*). He died unnecessarily if a man can gain the righteousness of God through legal obedience. The issue is clear: Did Jesus Christ completely satisfy the righteous demands of God on the cross? What did He mean when He said, *"It is finished."*

**Max Anders:** Paul concludes his correction of Peter by showing the utter **absurdity of turning back to the law**. The very reason Christ died on the cross to pay for sin was because the law could not remove sin or impart righteousness. Grace provides what the law was powerless to provide—righteousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Which is more important: Peace (in terms of not making a scene and being disruptive) or maintaining the purity of the truth of the gospel? When is public confrontation necessary? Where have we seen compromise with regard to the integrity of the gospel message?
- 2) Do we fully comprehend how our actions can impact the lives of others? Do Christian leaders realize what type of influence they have by way of example over the lives of others? (cf. Rom. 14:7)
- 3) Does the doctrine of justification by faith lessen our motivation to live a life of holiness and righteousness? Is it possible to enjoy assurance of eternal life apart from the evidence of a changed life?
- 4) Do we truly live our life as an outflowing of the life of Christ within us? What is our concept of the reality of our union with Jesus Christ in terms of the practical impact on our daily living?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**William Hendriksen:** If a Jew who, having turned to Christ, has learned that strict obedience to legal requirements, divine and human, will not bring even him into the

kingdom, tries, nevertheless, to impose such legalism upon Gentiles, his effort to place this yoke upon them is inexcusable.

**C. S. Lovett:** It should be noted that Peter did not do this action out of conviction, but FEAR. He dreaded the reproach of those visiting from Jerusalem. Many there, including James, believed natural-born Jews were under obligation to observe the Law of meats. By joining them, Peter behaved as though he felt the Gentile Christians were still separate from Jewish Christians. He gave no explanation, but acted in cowardice. His great rank made the action divisive. He stumbled other Jewish Christians by his action. So great was his influence even Barnabas, Paul's fellow-champion in asserting the freedom of Gentiles and possibly the pastor of the Antiochian church, was swept into the evil. This may have been the beginning of the break between Paul and Barnabas, for they never again appear together after this. The disgrace of Peter's action in withdrawing from the agape or frequent Lord's Supper, is that he treated the Gentile Christians as though they were unclean.

**Robert Gromacki:** The **doctrine of justification** is described in seven ways:

- (1) its source is God (**Rom. 3:26; 8:30**);
- (2) its essence is grace (**Rom. 3:24**);
- (3) its means is faith (**Rom. 5:1**);
- (4) its ground is the blood of Christ (**Rom. 5:9**);
- (5) its position is in Christ (**I Cor. 6:11**);
- (6) its divine agent is the Holy Spirit (**I Cor. 6:11**); and
- (7) its evidence is works (**James 2:21, 24**).

**Chuck Swindoll:** Re illustration of the exchanged life -- Suppose you want to become a concert pianist, but you can't play a note of music. A virtuoso pianist comes to you and says, 'I have the ability to join with you in such a way that I can play the piano through you, using your hands, feet, will, and mind. But I won't unless you believe I can and will do it. Will you trust me?' Delighted, you trustingly sit down at the piano and begin to play. Your fingers caress the keys, creating a brilliant blend of harmony and melody. Soon a crowd gathers, enjoying every note. When you stop, the audience applauds heartily. Instead of taking a bow for yourself, you explain that you were merely a trusting instrument of the real maestro. Someone else performed through you. Without help, you could not have played even a simple scale. Likewise, Christ is the master musician who wants to perform beautiful music through us, if we will only believe in Him and stop trying to play the instrument by ourselves.

**Bruce Barton:** All conflicts are not the same. Paul's confrontation of Peter is not meant to be a model for every disagreement in the church. A layperson, questioning a point in the pastor's sermon, probably should not "*oppose him to his face*" publicly! Conflicts may be similar in emotion and damage caused, but the issues vary greatly in their importance. Churches, families, and friendships can be shattered over trivial matters. Often a simple church decorating or furnishing idea has nearly led to a church split. Such conflicts occur all too often, to the shame of the gospel.

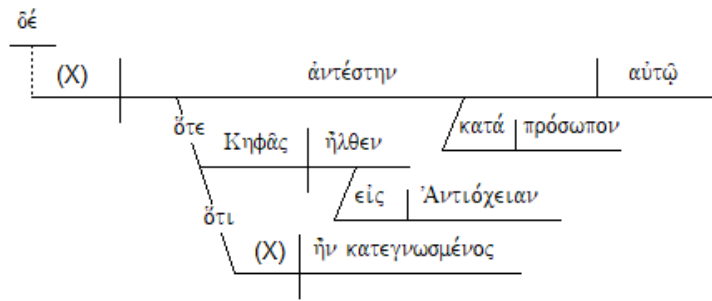


At times, confrontation must take place. The issues ought to be clear and compelling. We must seek to preserve the unity of the body of Christ and faithfulness to God's Word. Whether the issue is a minor disagreement over taste or a major crisis regarding the truth, love must be communicated to all involved.

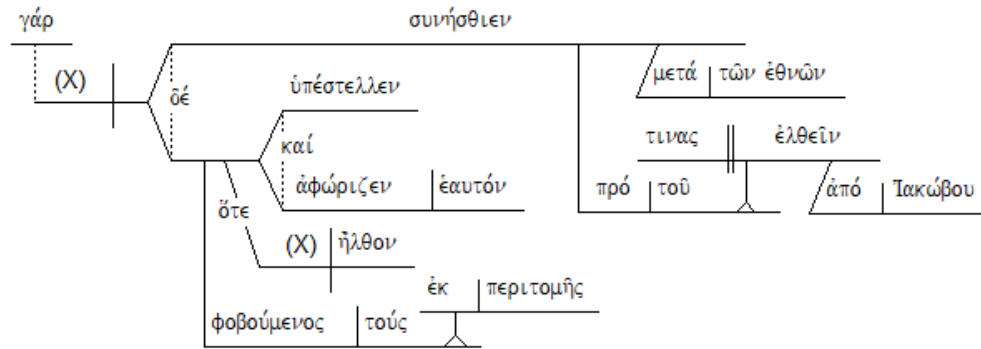
**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** According to Irenaeus, Peter founded the church at Rome together with Paul. Ignatius of Antioch mentions their common work as an example for his own preaching and witness. Two generations after Paul, Papias hands down a tradition that had already coalesced before him that both apostles had authoritative roles in the shaping of the written Gospels: Mark preserves Peter, and Luke preserves Paul. The underlying assumption is that Paul provided equally important and reliable source material for the Gospel according to Luke as Peter did for the Gospel according to Mark, and that Paul's writings themselves were considered authoritative at this early date even at Rome. This again is all the more remarkable since Paul was, as he says, "*untimely born*" (**1 Cor. 15:8**); he was not in the earliest circle of disciples, for he had not lived among the disciples and with them known the earthly Jesus. The argument at Antioch in **Gal. 2**, from the earliest New Testament writers through the sixth century, is not understood ultimately to pit the two apostles in opposition to each other or to sever their apostolic work into different sects.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

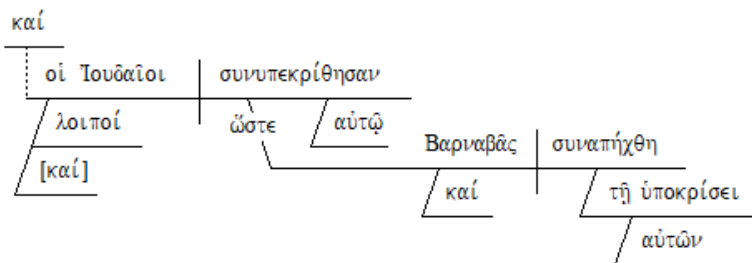
Gal 2:11



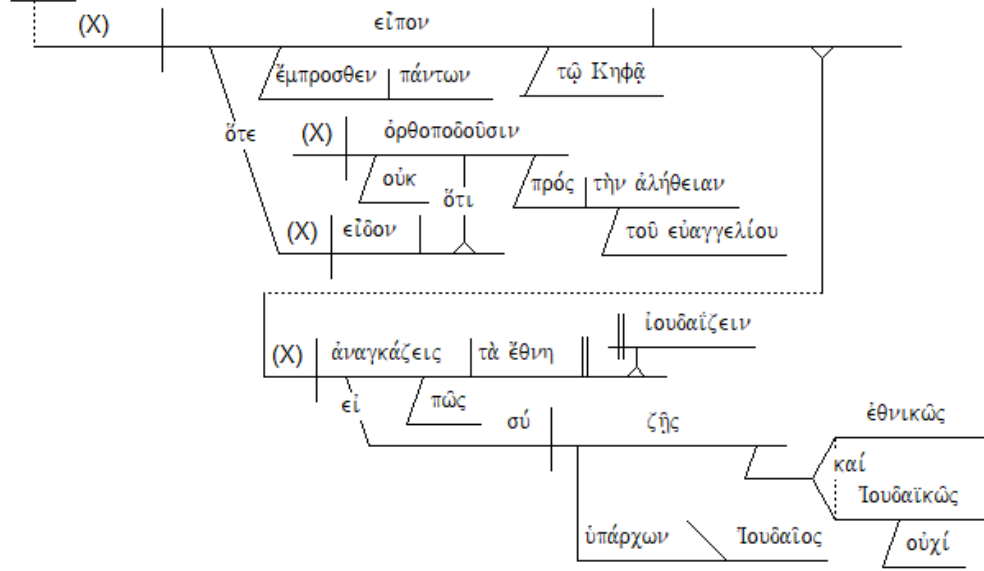
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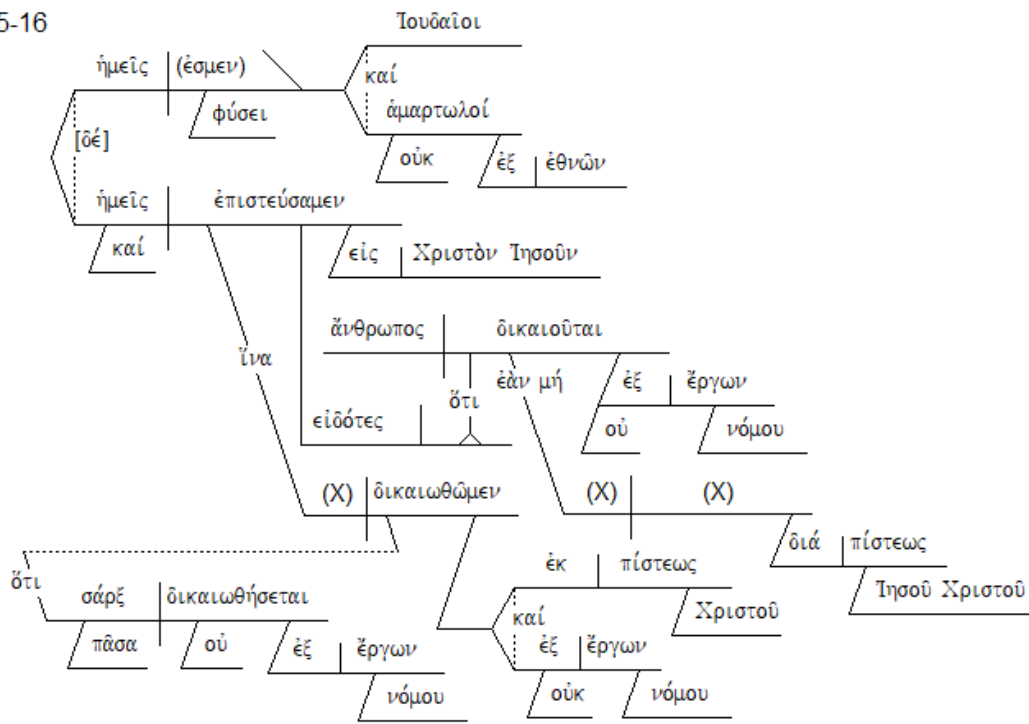
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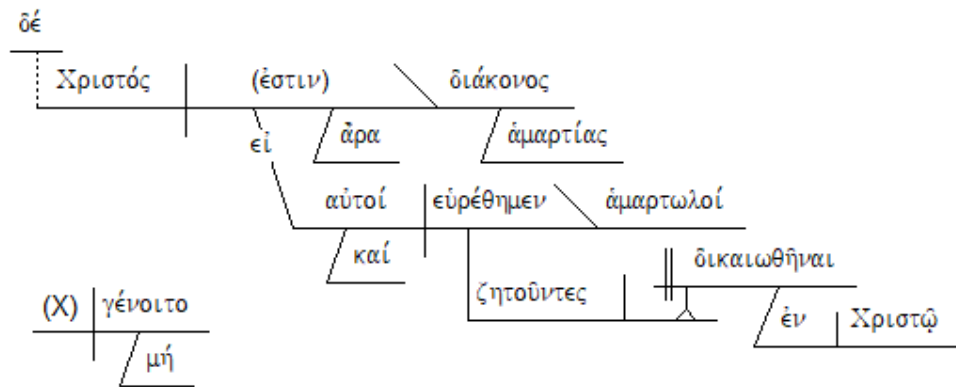
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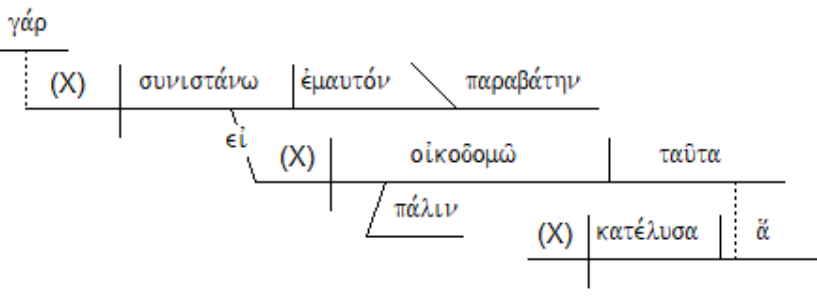
Gal 2:15-16



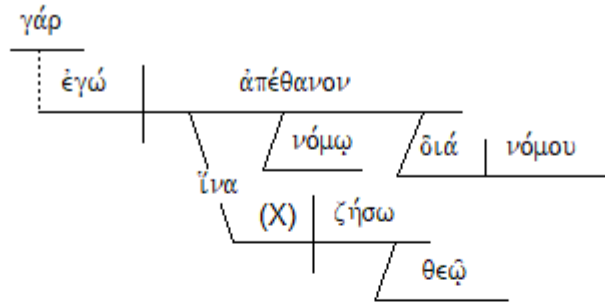
Gal 2:17



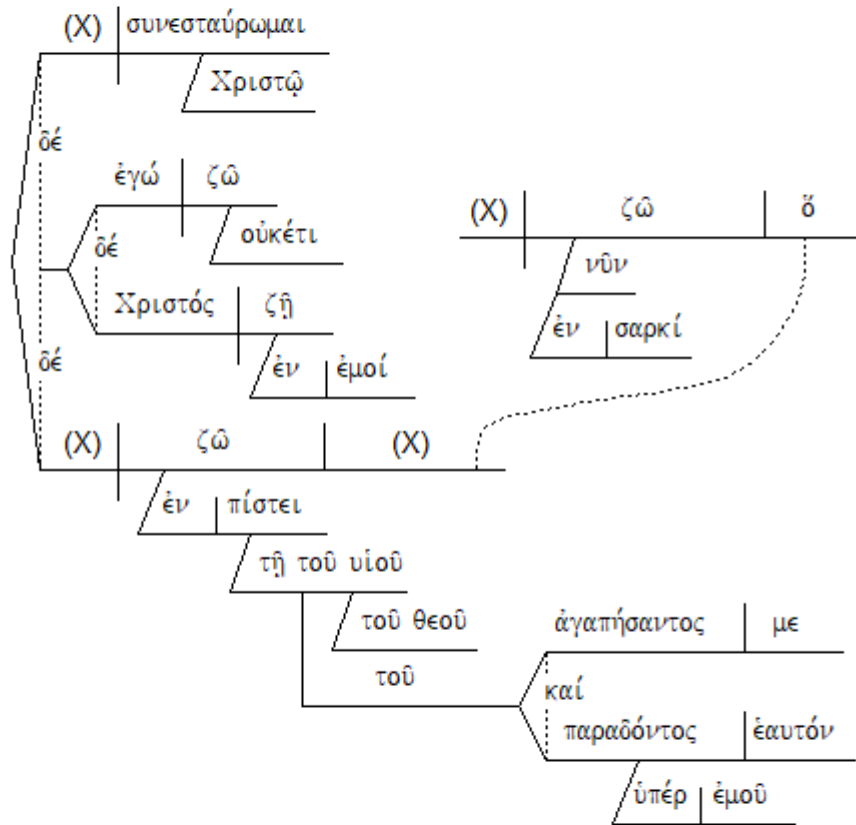
Gal 2:18



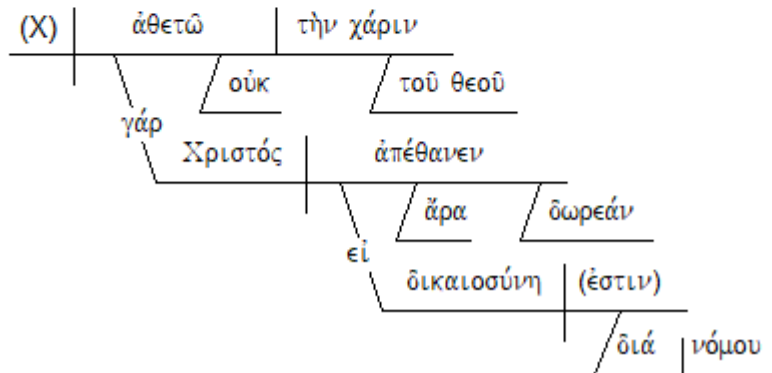
Gal 2:19a



Gal 2:19b-20



Gal 2:21



TEXT: GALATIANS 3:1-9

TITLE: REMEMBER YOUR ROOTS

**BIG IDEA:**

**JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PROVES THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO LIVE BY FAITH**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Ben Witherington:** At **Gal. 3:1** Paul begins the section of the letter where he will present his formal arguments to his converts so that they will not pursue a Judaizing course, and will instead continue to walk in the Spirit. Paul's arguments have an urgency to them not least because he knows that if even some of the Galatians do listen to the agitators it will mean the division of the churches in Galatia – disunity and discord are bound to result. Thus, throughout what follows in the remainder of Galatians Paul will be arguing against beliefs and behavior that lead to discord and disunity and for beliefs that lead to unity and harmony in the Galatian churches. In other words his arguments are of a deliberative, not a forensic nature.

In a deliberative piece of rhetoric the 'proofs' or arguments seek not to prove something true or false, but to provide **reasons for the audience to take up a certain course of behavior** . . .

Paul's deliberative arguments in this letter are of both the inartificial and artificial sort. The former are usually the stronger sort of arguments and include "decisions of previous courts, rumors, evidence extracted by torture, documents, oaths and witnesses" (Inst. Or. 5.1.2). In **Gal. 3** alone we will find an appeal to the Galatians' own experiences (they themselves are witnesses to what Paul is claiming) and to documents (Scripture and human wills, though the latter may be seen as an analogy with standing legal precedent or customs). Artificial arguments were generally thought to be less persuasive but often they would reflect the creativity of the rhetor. An excellent example of the latter is the innovative allegorical interpretation of the Sarah and Hagar story in **Gal. 4**. Undergirding all of his arguments is Paul's appeal to the supernatural work of God already done among and within the Galatians. This sort of argument was considered extremely strong by the ancients, it provided "evidence of the highest order" (cf. Inst. Or. 5.7.35). It will be seen that Paul plays this trump card from the very first (**3:1–5**) so that he immediately has the Galatians on the spot. Unless they are prepared to renounce their own experiences of God, they must listen to Paul's arguments about what conclusions they should draw on the basis of those experiences.

**Philip Ryken:** From start to finish, the whole Christian life is **by grace through faith**. A new life in Christ commences with faith, continues by faith, and will be completed through faith. To put this another way, the gospel is for Christians just as much as it is for non-Christians. We never advance beyond the good news of the cross and the empty tomb. There is nothing else to add to faith as the ground of our salvation because faith

unites us to Jesus Christ. Works have no part in establishing the basis for our salvation, but are added to faith in much the same way that a building rests upon and rises from its foundation. Therefore, the Christian always looks back to the gospel and never to the law as the basis for his righteousness before God. . .

Recovering Pharisees that we are, we sometimes lose sight of the object of our faith: Christ having been crucified for our sins. But when we bring him back into the picture, and see him portrayed as the Savior who not only died, but also rose again, then we regain the vision to live for him by faith.

### **David Platt: Outline of Galatians Chapter 3**

Main Idea: God's covenant with Moses does not contradict His covenant with Abraham, but rather complements it, and both covenants find their fulfillment in Christ and His salvation.

#### I. God's Covenant with Abraham

- A. By grace alone, God blesses His people.
- B. Through faith alone, God's people receive His blessing.

#### II. God's Covenant with Moses

- A. We all disobey the law of God.
- B. We all deserve the wrath of God.

#### III. God's Covenant through Christ

- A. Jesus fulfills the law of Moses.
- B. Jesus completes the promise to Abraham.

**Bruce Barton:** Paul used a rhetorical method often used by orators of his day called a **diatribe** (using ironic, satirical, and sometimes even abusive speech to make a point). This common Greco-Roman technique was intended to rebuke the listener. The Galatians would have been familiar with this approach.

### **Van Parunak: Structure of Galatians chapter 3:**

There are six questions, alternating between questions about their intelligence and motivation, and questions about the content of their faith and walk. The three substantive questions pose two contrasts: works/faith and flesh/Spirit. These are arranged chiastically, with works/faith on the outside, and taken up in the first section following. The basic argument is, "After all you have seen first-hand, how can you be so foolish as to be drawn away with this error?"

Three pairs of themes emerge from this. Each has a "good" and a "bad" side.

- a) **Law vs. Promise**, two modes of divine communication with man.
- b) **Works vs. Faith**, the responses appropriate to each of them.
- c) **Flesh vs. Spirit**, the source of the strength for the appropriate response.

**Thomas Schreiner: II. Paul's Gospel Defended from Experience and Scripture (3:1–4:11)**

**A. Argument from Experience: Reception of Spirit by Means of Faith, Not Works (3:1–5)**

1. The Galatians are bewitched (3:1)
2. The Spirit received by faith (3:2)
3. Progress in the Christian life by the Spirit (3:3)
4. The futility of apostasy (3:4)
5. The conclusion: the Spirit's presence by faith (3:5)

**B. Argument from Scripture: Blessing of Abraham by Faith (3:6–14)**

1. Members of Abraham's family by faith (3:6–9)
  - a. Righteousness as a consequence of Abraham's faith (3:6)
  - b. Conclusion: faith needed to belong to Abraham's family (3:7)
  - c. The gospel of universal blessing through Abraham (3:8)
  - d. Conclusion: faith needed for Abraham's blessing (3:9)
2. Curse of law removed only in Christ (3:10–14)

**I. (:1-5) THE ARGUMENT FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE = OUR OWN ENTRANCE INTO SPIRITUAL LIFE WAS BY FAITH NOT WORKS**

**John MacArthur:** Although experience in itself is not entirely reliable evidence of spiritual reality, it is nevertheless a powerful apologetic when closely linked with and built on scriptural truth.

**Thomas Schreiner: Structure:** The argument in this paragraph is vigorous and pointed. Paul opens with an exclamation (3:1a), and then each of the succeeding units has a rhetorical question (3:1b–5), which indicates that the Galatians themselves are able to answer the questions posed. In other words, the answers are obvious and plain to anyone with an ounce of perception. Since the argument consists of rhetorical questions, linking words do not connect the verses. The paragraph closes (3:5) with an inference (“therefore,” [ὁὖν]) drawn from 3:1–4 (though v. 5 is also set as a rhetorical question).

**A. (:1) The Foolishness of Forgetfulness**

1. Stinging Rebuke  
"You foolish Galatians"

Difficult for the Galatians to hear these words. They needed to be set straight.

**Howard Vos:** In a word, Paul's message to the Galatians here is that their reason and experience should have convinced them of the **all-sufficiency of faith**. He breaks into a remonstrance at the beginning of this chapter. "*O foolish Galatians*" means not that the Galatians were naturally stupid or senseless but that they have been foolish in allowing themselves to come to the place of denying the sufficiency of Christ. Paul declares the



mixture of law-keeping with faith in Christ irrational and implies that they should have been able to come to this conclusion themselves.

**John MacArthur:** *You foolish Galatians* reflects a combination of anger and love mixed with surprise. Paul was incredulous, hardly able to believe what the Galatians had done. Like many believers before and after them, they had been victimized by Satan and induced to slip away from the moorings of the truth by which they had been saved. Those believers were especially foolish because they had been so carefully and fully taught, having been on many occasions over the years privileged to sit under the teaching of Paul himself, whose very heartbeat was the gospel of God's grace.

*Anoetos (foolish)* does not connote mental deficiency but mental laziness and carelessness. The believers in Galatia were not stupid; they simply failed to use their spiritual intelligence when faced by the unscriptural, gospel-destroying teaching of the Judaizers. They were not using their heads. . .

The Galatians had foolishly fallen into Judaistic legalism because they had stopped believing and applying the basic truths of the gospel Paul had taught them and by which they had been saved. By sinful neglect of their divine resources, they compromised the gospel of grace. They followed their whims and impulses rather than God's revealed truth, and in so doing forsook the basic truth of the gospel, that men come to salvation and live out salvation only by faith in the Person and the power of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is neither entered nor lived on the basis of good feelings or attractive inclinations but on the basis of God's truth in Christ. Christians who rely on self-oriented emotions instead of Scripture-oriented minds are doomed to be "*tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming*" (**Eph. 4:14**). When they judge an idea on the basis of how good it makes them feel or how nice it sounds rather than on the basis of its harmony with God's Word, they are in serious spiritual danger.

**David Desilva:** Calling them "*unthinking*" is an effective way of challenging their openness to the message and advice of the rival teachers. While it is tempting to translate the Greek here as "stupid," Paul is not making a statement about the Galatian believers' intellects per se, but about their refusal or failure to apply them in their current situation. Had they done so, they would not have been led so easily to give the rivals' advice serious consideration.

## 2. Serious Deception

*"who has bewitched you"*

**Robert Gromacki:** In a sense, the Galatians were victims of an evil spell. They must have been hypnotized or awestruck by the forceful oratory of the key Judaizer.

**Ben Witherington:** The idea of the **evil eye** is known in earlier Jewish literature (cf. Deut. 28.54; Sir. 14.6, 8; Wis. 4.12) and it is common in the papyri (cf., e.g., P. Oxy. II. 292[12] from about A.D. 25 cf. P. Oxy. 6.930[23]). Basically the concept is that

certain persons (or even certain animals or demons or gods) have the power of casting an evil spell on someone or causing something bad to happen to them by gazing at them. The eye was seen as the window of and to the heart, the channel through which one's innermost thoughts, desires, intentions could be conveyed. This concept was closely connected with notions about envy, jealousy, greed, stinginess, as Plutarch makes clear (Quaest. Conviv. 680C-683B). In first-century society there was great fear of the evil eye, and there were various practices, such as curses, the use of amulets, spitting, that were thought to ward off or neutralize the effects of the evil eye. Especially children or the unwary were thought to be vulnerable to the malign influence of the evil eye. For example **Virgil** bemoans what has happened to some children saying "I do not know what eye is bewitching my tender lambs" (Ecol. 3.103). Broadly speaking the casting of the evil eye fell under the category of sorcery, and there was of course a widespread belief in these sorts of black arts in the Greco-Roman world. . .

Paul never actually accuses his opponents of witchcraft, precisely because he does not believe he is dealing with magic, but rather with Judaizing, and so the discussion of witchcraft societies while interesting is not directly germane here, because Paul is using the evil eye language polemically and metaphorically.

**Philip Ryken:** Doctrinal error has two primary sources: **human ignorance** and **demonic malevolence**. The church in Galatia faced both problems. The Galatians themselves were so foolish as to abandon the gospel, but as we shall see, they were doing so because they were under spiritual attack.

### 3. Clarity of the Gospel Message

*"before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified"*

**Warren Wiersbe:** It was "*Christ and Him crucified*" that Paul had preached in Galatia, and with such effectiveness that the people could almost see Jesus crucified for them on the cross.

Almost as clear as if they had been standing at the cross observing.

**Ralph Martin:** He is especially puzzled when he recalls how clearly the picture of the crucified Lord has been presented to them, presumably by his vivid preaching of the cross. "*Portrayed*" literally means to post a notice in public, like a modern bulletin board—the ancient method of giving out notices of a political or social event.

**Timothy George:** Paul put special stress on the **finality of the cross**. He proclaimed Jesus Christ as *estauromēnos*, literally, as *having been crucified*. This perfect participle relates to Jesus's cry from the cross, "*It is finished!*" The work of redemption was completely accomplished through that perfect atoning sacrifice.

**David deSilva:** "*Christ crucified*" is Paul's shorthand expression for the larger proclamation of the gospel, holding up the most distinctive image and facet of that message (see also **1 Cor 1:23; 2:2**). It is also the image that captures most graphically

the costliness of this gift or favor of God that some Galatian Christians are, in Paul's view, in danger of setting aside (2:21). The emphasis on Paul's proclamation of the crucified Messiah in 3:1 grows organically out of Paul's emphasis on the death of Christ in 2:21 and his conviction that the very value of Christ's death is now at stake. We might paraphrase Paul's underlying challenge thus: "We emphasized the redemptive and eschatological significance of Jesus's costly death on the cross while we were among you; how could you now, then, be so unreflective as to begin to entertain the idea that you will fall in line with God's righteous standards by following the Torah?"

## B. (:2) The Only Game Plan That Works

1. KISS = "Keep it Simple, Stupid" -- Fundamentalism  
(emphasis on the basic essentials)

*"This is the only thing I want to find out from you"*

2. How did you enter into the Spiritual Life? (Law vs. Faith)

*"did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law,  
or by hearing with faith?"*

Reception of the Spirit is evidence of salvation and union with God -- **Rom. 8:9**

**Robert Gromacki:** If the Judaizers had been correct, then it would have been impossible for the uncircumcised Gentile converts to have received the Spirit at all. Yet the Galatians *'were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit'* as the result of Paul's evangelistic efforts (**Acts 13:52**). To accept the heresy of the Judaizers would be to deny the presence of the Spirit in their lives.

**Ben Witherington:** The verb 'received' is in the aorist indicating a definite event in the past. Paul is referring to what happened to the Galatians at the point of their conversions. As **Dunn** points out, the phrase about receiving the Spirit is something close to a technical phrase for early Christians when they wanted to talk about **conversion** (cf. **Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:14; Jn. 7:39; Acts 2:38; 10:47; 19:2**). "It focuses the fact that for Paul and the first Christians this was the decisive and determinative element in the event or process of conversion and initiation; hence the nearest thing to a definition of 'Christian' in the NT, in **Rom. 8:9** makes possession of the Spirit the sine qua non. Moreover it cannot really be understood in other than experiential terms (as though 'receiving the Spirit' was a matter of purely rational conviction, or simply a deduction to be drawn from the fact of their having been baptized). The appeal is clearly to an event which Paul could expect them vividly to remember ..." **G. D. Fee** emphasizes that Paul is referring to what he deems to be unimpeachable evidence, which suggest he is surely referring to some dynamic experiences of the Spirit in Galatia that could have been neither forgotten nor denied. The point of this appeal is of course that Paul takes the reception of the Spirit as irrefutable evidence that God had accepted these Gentiles, and had accepted them without their having to submit to the Law of Moses and do "*works of the Law.*"

**Thomas Schreiner:** The reference to the Spirit confirms that the conversion of the Galatians is in view, for the Spirit is the sign that one belongs to the people of God (cf. **1 Cor 2:12**). At conversion the Holy Spirit is poured out in one's heart (**Rom 5:5**). Those who belong to Christ and are genuinely Christians have the Spirit dwelling in them (**Rom 8:9**; cf. **8:14–15**). Conversely, the natural person does not have the Spirit (**1 Cor 2:14**). The Spirit authenticates one's salvation and functions as the guarantee that God will complete his saving work (**2 Cor 1:22**; **5:5**; **Eph 1:14**).

**John MacArthur:** The Holy Spirit is not the goal of the Christian life but is its source. He is not the product of faithful living but is the power behind it. A higher level of living does not bring the Holy Spirit; rather submission to the Holy Spirit, who already indwells the believer, includes a higher level of living.

**Scot McKnight:** For Paul, receiving the Spirit is the identifying characteristic of the Christian. To be a Christian is to be indwelt by the Spirit, and to be indwelt by the Spirit is to be a Christian (cf. **Rom. 8:9–11**). The Spirit of God is the definition of the Christian. Paul says that the Christian's very beginning is with the Spirit (v. 3), and he contends that God works among Christians through the Spirit (v. 5). Faith brings the blessing of Abraham, and this blessing is the "*promise of the Spirit*" (v. 14). Later, he says that those who are truly sons of God are those who have been granted the Spirit, who calls out "*Abba, Father*" (4:6). What Paul is talking about here may be an experience, and it may very well be a charismatic one, but it is not some experience subsequent to faith in Christ. For Paul, faith in Christ means being granted God's Spirit. This granting of the Spirit ends the age of the law. Abraham's promise is the promise of the Spirit (3:14), and when the law had run its course, God sent his Spirit (4:4–6). So it makes sense that those who live in the Spirit are not under the law (5:18).

**David deSilva:** If the Galatian Christians can attest from their own religious experience that they had received God's Holy Spirit and experienced God's presence in their midst as a result of trusting in Jesus and in what his death secured for human beings, they will come to see that

- (1) they have received the blessing that was promised to Abraham concerning "*all the nations*" (3:14),
- (2) they have enjoyed God's complete acceptance and are already sons and daughters of the living God and thereby also heirs of God's promise (4:6–7), and
- (3) they have received from God all that they need to live beyond the power of the flesh and to conform to God's righteous standards, thus enjoying God's approval at the end (5:13–25; 6:7–10), all on the basis of having trusted in Jesus and relying upon the favor God is showing to the world through Jesus.

They are poised to deduce that they could not gain anything more by turning to performing the works of the Torah. Their trust in Jesus was enough to render them holy to the Lord, hence allowing the Holy Spirit to rest upon them and dwell among them. There was no need to perform the traditional rites by which Jews had kept themselves holy to the Lord, with holiness being defined in terms of maintaining their ethnic

distinctiveness from the gentile nations. Indeed, turning to the Torah as a means of making their possession of these blessings more secure would express a “vote of no confidence” in Jesus, whom they had hitherto trusted solely (cf. **2:21; 5:2–4**).

### C. (:3) The Foolishness of Switching Horses Mid-Race (Spirit vs. Flesh)

*"Are you so foolish?"*

*Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?"*

**Howard Vos:** Are you so irrational? You must acknowledge that your salvation and spiritual power came on the basis of faith. Having begun “*in the sphere of the spirit*” do you now wish to be perfected “*in the sphere of the flesh*,” that is, to go into the keeping of ordinances? Of course their conversion experience had brought about a spiritual change. Now apparently some were arguing that a really spiritual person should keep the law. This was to exalt flesh above spirit, to ignore spiritual enablement for daily living, and to violate what Paul must have clearly taught them when present with them (cf. **Phil 1:6; 2 Co 8:6**).

**Thomas Schreiner:** The term “*flesh*” here is used in the technical Pauline sense, referring to reliance on the old Adam, the unregenerate person. The opposition between the Spirit and flesh represents the eschatological contrast between this age and the age to come (cf. **1:4**), with the flesh representing the old age and the Spirit the age to come. The age to come has penetrated this present evil age, and hence it does not make sense for the Galatians to turn back to the old age now that the new has arrived.

**Douglas Moo:** Of course, Paul is not denying the importance of “doing” in the outworking of the salvation bestowed initially by the Spirit. Faith certainly “works” (**5:6**), and a true work of God’s Spirit will always issue in works of obedience (**5:22–24**). But the agitators were apparently insisting that becoming a “son” of Abraham and attaining ultimate righteousness with God were based on faith + torah observance. It is this synergism with respect to righteousness that Paul denies.

The concern that Paul expresses in this verse reaches to the rhetorical heart of Galatians. The Galatian Christians have started well; they have received the Spirit and have been justified by their faith in Christ, a gift of God’s grace. But the agitators have come on the scene, arguing that people can go free in the judgment only if they add to their faith the “*works of the law*.” Paul seeks to persuade the Galatians not to buy into this scheme: as they began, with the Spirit and with faith, so they must continue (see **5:5**).

**Nijay Gupta:** It is important to recognize that *flesh* and *Spirit* for Paul are not different parts of the person, like skin and soul. As **Frances Taylor Gench** explains, these are two ways of portraying the self in relationship to God and the world. “*Flesh*” describes “human nature as a whole when it is dominated by sin and thus has broken away from God. It denotes a self-centered existence, in which the entire perspective of the human being is turned in upon himself or herself, so that the self becomes the center of all values.”

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** Yet in the fullness of time Jesus, human flesh of that same created order, comes like us in every way except sin. In his coming, he restores our human flesh to health. But in **Gal. 3:3** Paul mocks the Galatians for their foolishness, manifest in their betrayal of the gospel promise. Having begun their life in the Lord through Paul's public preaching in the Spirit, do they really now think they can bring it to perfection through the flesh, either as the foreskin (circumcision) or as the stomach (dietary laws) & They have experienced the Spirit for nothing.

**D. (:4) The Need for Perseverance**

*"Did you suffer so many things in vain -- if indeed it was in vain?"*

**Scot McKnight:** Paul's third question pertains to the early experiences the Galatian converts had in **persecution**. What Paul envisages is simple: after their conversion to Christ (according to the Pauline gospel), the Galatian converts experienced persecution at the hands of others (probably at the hands of Jews, perhaps also the Judaizers; see **4:29**). Now Paul asks, "*Have you suffered so much for nothing?*" In other words, had you simply converted to Judaism immediately, you would never have experienced the persecution you encountered for converting to Christ. If you suffer as a Christian, it is for something; but if you suffer as a Christian and then toss it all away by converting to Judaism, your suffering as a Christian would be for nothing. So, he asks, was this all in vain? Paul is both shaming the Galatians and appealing to his standard argument (see **4:29; 5:11**) that those who are persecuted are in the right and those who persecute are in the wrong.

**Craig Keener:** Although Paul rejects here the idea that his converts are already apostate, he recognizes the possibility that some could follow Christ *pointlessly* (**3:4**), or "*in vain*," and that his labor for them could be in vain, if they failed to persevere (**2:2; 4:11**; cf. **1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Cor. 6:1; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:1; 3:5**).

**Timothy George:** Three times in Galatians Paul has raised the specter of the absurd consequences of justification by works. In **2:2** Paul raised the possibility that his missionary labors may have been in vain. In **2:21** he raised the stakes and suggested that if righteousness could be gained through the law, then even Christ would have died in vain. Now here in **3:4** he queried the Galatians about whether the Spirit had not been given to them in vain. In effect, he was saying to them: "**See where this kind of theology will lead you!** If salvation is not the work of God from first to last, then the preaching of the gospel is vanity, the cross of Christ was a farce, and the gift of the Holy Spirit means nothing!" By presenting these terrible alternatives to the Galatians in such a startling way, Paul sought to jar them from their folly and break the spell that had left them bewitched.

**E. (:5) The Key to the Distribution of Spiritual Blessings**

On what basis does God provide these blessings?

*"Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"*

**Ben Witherington:** Paul does not mention **miracles** very often in his letters, but there are sufficient references to let us know that the work of the Spirit from time to time took this form in Paul's churches (cf. **Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12**). There is no indication that these miracles were all performed by Paul and/or his co-workers when he was present with the Galatians. Paul concludes this first division of his first argument by reminding his converts of the obvious – these things did not occur through works of the Law but rather from hearing and believing the Gospel message.

**David deSilva:** Paul's reliance upon the converts' awareness of this Spirit urges us to value the living experience of God in our times of worship and to help our fellow disciples cultivate an awareness of God's presence and of God's hand at work in their lives. Pastor and parishioner, counselor and counselee, teacher and student alike must be able to find the irrefutable signs of God's love, acceptance, and favor in their lives, and our life together as a Christian community should be directed, at least in part, toward positioning people for transforming encounters with the living God. Without the active presence of God's Spirit in our lives, we lack, in Paul's view, the very inheritance promised in Christ (**3:14**) and the key to our transformation into the likeness of Christ (**5:5–6, 13–25**).

**Scot McKnight:** Paul has sustained here a vigorous polemical argument on his behalf, and it is highly appealing to the Galatians since it is drawn from their experience. Their experience, from front to back, confirms the message of Paul and counters the message of the Judaizers. God's Spirit comes to us and stays with us through faith; God's Spirit has nothing to do with "observing the law."

## **II. (:6-9) THE ARGUMENT FROM THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM = FAITH IS THE ONLY REQUIREMENT FOR BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES**

**Ben Witherington:** It is clearly important to Paul to be able to use a text which shows that Abraham's faith, his being reckoned as righteous, and the promise of blessing (cf. already **Gen. 12:2**) all came before there is any mention what-so-ever of circumcision as a covenant sign (**Gen. 17**) or of Abraham's faithful and obedient deed in regard to the offering of Isaac in sacrifice (**Gen. 22**), and most importantly it came centuries before the giving of the Mosaic Law and covenant. From this it follows in Paul's mind that right-standing with God and the promise of God cannot be said to be dependent on keeping the Mosaic Law, but rather on faith.

**George Brunk:** **So whose champion is Abraham?** Is he the champion of those advocating full observance of the Law, or is he the champion of Gentiles freed from the Law through their faith in Christ? In this part of Galatians, Paul is trying to wrest Abraham from the grasp of his opponents, who are using Abraham as Exhibit 1 in their argument that they are right and Paul is wrong.

Remarkably, Paul does not merely seek to neutralize his opponents' use of Abraham as their prime example. Instead, he boldly and creatively turns the tables on his opponents and shows how, understood correctly, Abraham is actually Paul's Exhibit 1 in his defense of the gospel! In Abraham, Paul finds proof of the fact that right standing with God is fundamentally a matter of faith responding to promise, not of obedience responding to Law. Furthermore, God's promise to Abraham foreshadowed the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God when that promise spoke of Abraham being a blessing to all nations. The whole gospel message is prefigured in Abraham!

**A. (:6) Abraham was Justified by Faith**

*"Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"*

Before the law was given; before Abraham was circumcised.

**John MacArthur:** The Judaizers doubtlessly used Abraham as certain proof that circumcision was necessary to please God and become acceptable to Him. After first calling Abraham to leave his homeland of Ur of Chaldea, the Lord promised, *"And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (**Gen. 12:2-3**). Abraham and his descendants were later commanded to be circumcised as a sign of God's covenant and a constant illustration of the need for spiritual cleansing from sin: *"This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised"* (**Gen. 17:10**). (The cutting away of the foreskin on the male procreative organ signified the need to cut away sin from the heart—sin that was inherent, passed from one generation to the next; cf. **Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:11**.)

Putting those two accounts together, the Judaizers argued, "Isn't it obvious that if the rest of the world, that is, Gentiles, are to share in the promised blessings to Abraham, they must first take on the sign that marks God's people, the Jews? If all the nations of the earth will be blessed in Abraham, they will have to become like Abraham and be circumcised."

**Robert Gromacki:** The time of his faith was before he was circumcised (**Gen. 15:6**; cf. **Gen. 17:9-27**). The Judaizers argued that since Abraham believed and was circumcised, the Galatians would also have to be circumcised in order to receive the righteousness of God. However, a righteous standing was imputed to the patriarch at the moment of faith. The argument is decisive: If circumcision is necessary for salvation, then why did God give His righteousness to the patriarch before he submitted to the rite? A man is not justified before he is saved.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Faith is counted as righteousness because it unites believers to Christ, who is their righteousness.



**Philip Ryken:** **What, then, must we believe?** Notice the object of Abraham’s faith: he put his trust in God. “*Abraham believed God*” (**Gal. 3:6**), and this was credited to him as righteousness. What Abraham believed was not simply God’s promises, which he could hardly believe, but God himself. Abraham put his faith in the faithful God—the God who made him the promise. When Abraham didn’t know where he was going, or how he was going to get there, he trusted God to get him where he needed to be. When he didn’t have any children, or any reason to think he ever would, he believed that God would make good on his promise. Against all hope and beyond all doubt, Abraham committed himself and his whole life to God. The Scripture says, “*No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness’*” (**Rom. 4:20–22**).

**David Platt:** God gave Abraham the promise by grace, and Abraham trusted the promise through faith, and that faith led to radical obedience. When you trust God, you do things that seem crazy to the world, not because you’re earning salvation, but because you believe God. This is the whole point of **Hebrews 11**, which we’ve referenced earlier.

#### **B. (:7) Faith = The Common Denominator for Believing Jews and Gentiles**

*"Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham"*

**Van Parunak: Conclusion:** If you are characterized by faith, as was Abraham, you are associated with him, and can claim to be his "son"--even more than those who, though genetically descended from Abraham, yet are so unlike him in how they seek to please God.

**Scot McKnight:** The fact is, Abraham’s circumcision (**Gen. 17**) came after his pronouncement of acceptance (**15:6**). Thus his descendants are those who believe, those who opt for the faith system (along with Christ and the Holy Spirit); they opt out of the works system.

**Timothy George:** Paul’s rebuttal was a stinging rebuke to the theology of the law-centered agitators. Descent by blood or physical procreation does not create sons of Abraham in the sight of God any more than the alteration of one’s private parts does. The true children of Abraham are those who believe, literally, those who ground their relationship with God and thus their existence on the basis of faith. Paul’s argument resonates with the discussion Jesus held with the Jewish leaders of his day concerning their status as children of Abraham. If Abraham were your real father, Jesus said, you would act more like him, you would embody his characteristics—rather than those of the devil to whom you really belong (**John 8:31–47**). Paul already had hinted at the presence of the evil one in Galatia (cf. the “*bewitcher*” of **3:1**). Now he suggested that those who seek to be right with God through physical lineage or human effort will at the end of the day be found outside the people of God altogether, locked up forever in “*this present evil age*” of darkness and sin (**1:4**).

**C. (:8) OT Prophecy Paved the Way for the Inclusion of the Gentiles in the Blessing of Justification by Faith**

*"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.'"*

**Ben Witherington:** Verse 8 presents us with the **personification of Scripture**. It is said that Scripture foresaw what was going to happen in regard to Gentiles being included in God's people in the NT era, and that therefore it pre-preached the Good News to Abraham about this matter. Paul sees the Scriptures as alive, active, speaking, even locking people up under sin (**Gal. 3:22**). Paul is able to say this because he identifies what Scripture says with what God says. Verse 8 could as easily be read "*God, foreseeing what was going to happen to the Gentiles ... spoke to Abraham in advance*". Scripture is seen as a written transcript of the living divine Word that comes directly from the mind and mouth of God, and so can be personified as it is here. Verse 8 then says that it was always in the mind of God to justify the Gentile nations "*out of faith*" (ἐκ πίστεως), that is **by means of faith**.

**Howard Vos:** Abraham was not given the full revelation of what the gospel was but only the word that all the Gentiles were to be blessed in him. "*In thee*" indicates that from his line blessing would flow to "*all the Gentiles,*" a veiled reference to the Messiah. The Hebrew of **Genesis 12:3** has "*all families of the earth.*" What the blessing was can only be understood in connection with the first part of the verse; it has to do with justification by faith. Justification came to Abraham by faith in the promise; justification comes today by faith in the Fulfillment of that promise.

**Ralph Martin:** A second Scripture citation is needed to oppose the Judaizers' argument and their appeal to Abraham. Earlier still in the Genesis story of Israel's ancestors God had given a first promise to Abraham (**Gen. 12:3**, repeated in **18:18**) that he was to be ancestor, not of Jewish people only but of "*all nations,*" a wide inclusion quoted by Paul in **Galatians 3:8**. The word for "*nations*" in the Greek Bible can also mean "*Gentiles*"; here it refers to the Galatians. How then can the Judaizing teachers claim that the Galatians must become Jews in order to be complete Christians? Paul's logic is clear and leads to **3:9**—those who believe are blessed in the same way as Abraham the believer.

**D. (:9) Summary: The Bottom Line for God's Blessing = Faith**

*"So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."*

**Van Parunak:** God did promise to bless the Gentiles through Abraham, and certainly, among all Gentiles, those who share Abraham's faith can count on receiving that blessing.

**Ben Witherington:** Verse 9 provides a conclusion on the basis of what Paul has argued in **vss. 6–8**. Those who live from faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. There is a sense in which Paul believes that Abraham was the first one to hear the Gospel of

justification by grace through faith and accept it, and thus a sense in which he is seen as a prototype of the Christian, even more daringly a prototype or antitype of the Galatian Gentile Christians. In other words, if this Gospel was good enough for Abraham providing him with the full blessing it should be good enough for the Galatians as well.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How are Christians today overly impressed by fancy oratory and entertainment and emotional appeals in a way which makes them susceptible to being "*bewitched*" about the truth of the gospel?
- 2) How valuable is it to recall our own conversion experience and the faith which accompanied it? In what ways are we trying to live the Christian life at odds with how we entered into the Christian life?
- 3) Is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ ever before our eyes as the defining redemptive act of our relationship with God? Do we appreciate the simplicity of the fundamentals of the Christian faith? Do we grasp the significance of the cross and the resurrection to our everyday living out of the Christian life?
- 4) What are some examples of how we can be tempted to try to live out our Christian life and make progress "*by the works of the law*" or "*by the flesh*"?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Nijay Gupta:** Looking at the overall flow of this section (**Gal 3:1–14**), we can detect a rough outline as follows. Paul commences with a reminder of their powerful experience of the Spirit as they responded to the gospel with personal faith and trust in Jesus (**vv. 1–5**). Next, he introduces Abraham in the letter as a religious paradigm and father of a people who live according to faith, trust, and faithfulness (**v. 6**). Of course, Jews venerated and respected this patriarch, but it appears Paul was focusing his attention on Abraham so as to supplant Moses (as lawgiver) and to put the spotlight on a law-free form of knowing and trusting in God. Jewish reflection on Abraham's piety is varied and complex, but Paul's point here seems to be clear: The Jewish law is not necessary for Christians as a means of being in relationship with God; while there was a period of history—even a long period—when the law was the primary platform for associating with God, the divine vision all along was a more direct and purer form of devotion that is unmediated by the law, a life lived by faith in God as experienced through Jesus Christ (hence Paul's citation of **Hab 2:4**).

**Verses 7–9 in Galatians 3** continue down the road of drawing Christian guidance from Abraham. The proper way into God's family for mortals is through the line of

Abraham, which Jews had always believed. But Paul does not connect this via physical birth and legal ancestry but rather through demonstration of the same kind of faith in God shown by Abraham. Later in this chapter it becomes clear that that Abrahamic-style faith and trust in God now happen through Christ Jesus; Abraham may be the father of faith, the inspirational model, but Christ is the agent of faith: “*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith*” (v. 26); “*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise*” (v. 29).

The final subunit of this section (vv. 10–14) lays out two paths to righteousness. On the one hand you have the path of law works, which Paul argues leads to a curse rather than final redemption. On the other hand, you have faith in Christ, which leads to blessing and justification. A key text from the Old Testament that Paul quotes here is **Habakkuk 2:4**: “*the righteous will live by faith*” (**Gal 3:11; Rom 1:17**). Paul treats this as a central Old Testament signpost pointing to the true way to justification with God; he contrasts this with trying to live and obtain justification by works of the law, which can only lead to a dead end.

**John MacArthur**: Defection and desertion are contemptible because they involve disloyalty and betrayal. Few things are more tragic or disappointing than a Christian who deserts the purity of the gospel for a false form of Christianity that presumes to improve on the finished work of Christ. Yet that is what many believers in the Galatian churches had done or were in danger of doing because of the Judaizers.

**Charles Swindoll**: Theologian **Charles Ryrie** makes some helpful distinctions concerning what legalism is and is not. He points out that 'legalism is not the presence of laws'; otherwise, 'God would have to be charged with promoting it since He has given man innumerable laws during human history.' Neither is legalism 'the imposition of law on someone else,' for if it were, God would be a legalist of the highest order. Furthermore, legalism is not the opposite of liberty, meaning that a person can live a lawless existence. As **Ryrie** explains, 'Christian liberty does not give the believer the option of living any way he pleases; it is not license. It places him in a position where he can live as God pleases, something he was unable to do as an unregenerated person. Liberated living is not unrestricted living.' What is legalism, then?

“It is a wrong attitude toward the code of laws under which a person lives. Legalism involves the presence of law, the wrong motive toward obeying that law and often the wrong use of the power provided to keep the law, but it is basically a wrong attitude. Thus legalism may be defined as a fleshly attitude which conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self...”

**Warren Wiersbe**: The key to this section is in the word '*suffered*' (v. 4), which can be translated 'experienced.' Paul asks, '*Have you experienced so many things in vain?*' The argument from Christian experience was a wise one with which to begin, because Paul had been with them when they had trusted Christ. Of course, to argue from experience can be dangerous, because experiences can be counterfeited and they can be misunderstood. Subjective experience must be balanced with objective evidence,

because experiences can change, but truth never changes. Paul balances the subjective experience of the Galatian Christians with the objective teaching of the unchanging Word of God (vv. 6-14).

**Thomas Schreiner: One Way of Salvation in Both Testaments**

It is also important to see that righteousness by faith is taught in both the OT and the NT. It is not as if OT saints were right with God on the basis of their works, while NT saints are righteous by faith. Paul argues clearly here that Abraham was justified by faith. Therefore, salvation in both the OT and the NT is by faith alone. **There is only one way of salvation.**

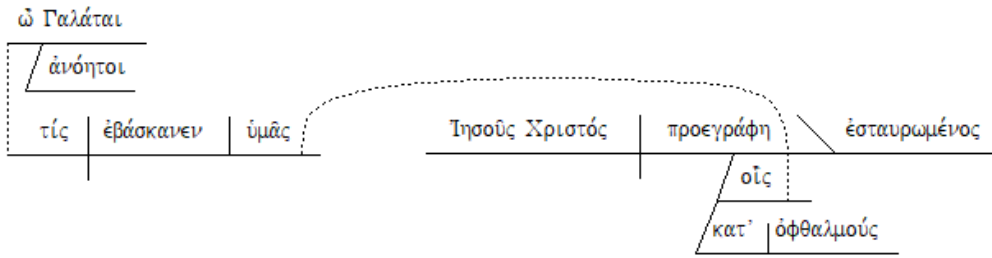
OT saints, of course, looked forward to the promise, whereas NT believers look back on what Christ accomplished in his death and resurrection. Still, Christ's death and resurrection are the basis of salvation for all. In the OT the sacrifices pointed forward to and anticipated the death of Jesus Christ. OT saints understood that God's promises remained unfulfilled, but at the very least they grasped through the sacrifices that atonement was needed for sin and that the Lord had provided such forgiveness. Perhaps some of them understood that such sacrifices pointed forward to a greater sacrifice. In any case, they were justified by faith and the atonement provided by the Lord.

**Bruce Barton:** It's easy to try to attain maturity in Christ the wrong way. Much of devoted and dedicated service is in reality human effort. All of our service and good work must flow out of a life of faith and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

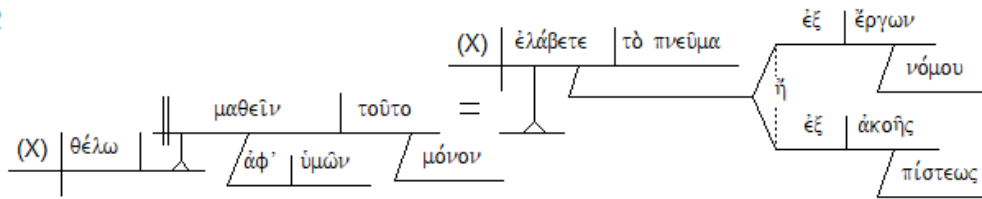
	<i>Religion by Human Effort</i>	<i>Life in the Spirit</i>
Goal	Please God by our own good works	Trust in Christ and then live to please God
Means	Practice, diligent service, discipline, and obedience in hope of reward	Confess, submit, and commit yourself to Christ's control
Power	Good, honest effort through self-determination	The Holy Spirit in us helps us do good work for Christ's kingdom
Control	Self-motivation; self-control	Christ in me; I in Christ
Results	Chronic guilt, apathy, depression, failure, constant desire for approval	Joy, thankfulness, love, guidance, service, forgiveness

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

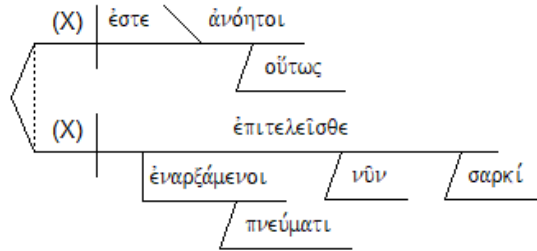
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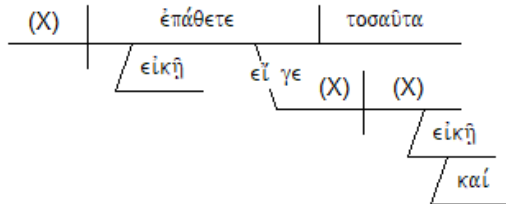
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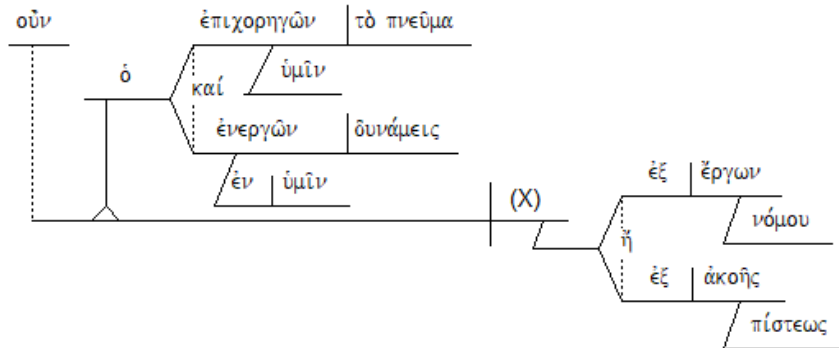
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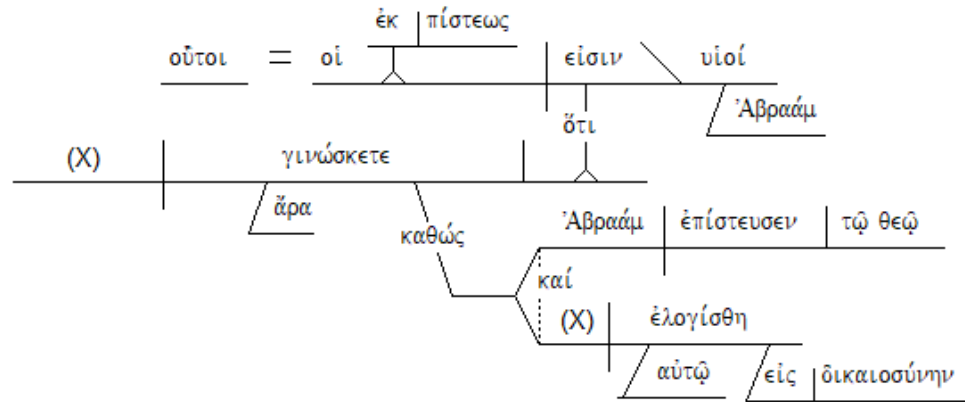
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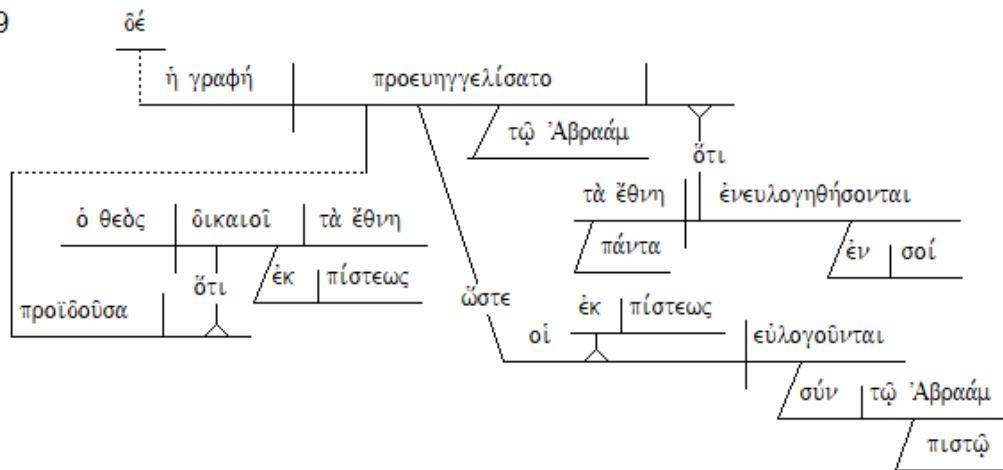
Gal 3:5



Gal 3:6-7



Gal 3:8-9



TEXT: GALATIANS 3:10-14

TITLE: REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW

**BIG IDEA:**

**JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH PROVES THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO LIVE BY FAITH -- SINCE WE HAVE BEEN FREED FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**George Brunk:** Clearly the key word in this paragraph is **curse**. As the antithesis of blessing, curse signals that Paul is presenting the negative side of the positive statement in the preceding paragraph. The teachers undoubtedly saw the Law of Moses as a place of refuge or protection. And although Paul “upholds” the Law (**Rom 3:31**) and considers it “*holy and just and good*” (**7:12**), here he insists that any commitment to “*the works of the Law*” puts one under a curse rather than under the Law’s protection. The two paragraphs function as point/counterpoint in the argument. The contrast is between faith that leads to blessing, and works of the Law that lead to curse. The first way of being righteous results in the inclusion of all peoples. Although the contrasting result is not stated as such, dependence on the works of the Law results only in the exclusion of everyone who does not fully obey the Law, which is, unfortunately, everyone (**3:11a**)!

Paul continues to interweave the two themes of **true biblical faith** and **God’s universal gospel** for all peoples. The concept of curse permits Paul to explain why works of Law lead to a dead end, yet it also provides the occasion to explain the benefit of Christ’s death on a cross: Christ took the curse of the Law upon himself, releasing those under the curse. God’s act of redemption in Christ has the effect of opening the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles and of realizing the promise of the Spirit in all believers. Paul’s reference to the Abrahamic blessing and to the Spirit (v. **14**) ties together the entire section of **3:1-14**.

**David deSilva:** Paul here drives a wedge between trust and works of the Torah, demonstrating from Scripture the incompatibility of the two paths that the rival teachers urge his converts to combine. He gives initial expression to the idea that the period of living “*under law*” belongs to the past, as Christ has redeemed people from the curse that the Torah pronounces; the present time is now for **walking in the Spirit**, the blessing surprisingly identified with the promise. The former topic will continue to be developed in **3:15–25; 4:1–7**; the latter topic in **5:5–6, 13–25**.

**Timothy George:** On one level the passage can be analyzed in terms of four major propositions, each of which is confirmed and elucidated by a citation from the OT. Thus

- (1) those who rely on observing the law are under a curse. Why so? The Bible says that those who do not continue to do everything written in the book of the law are cursed (**Deut 27:26**).



- (2) No one can be justified by means of the law anyway. Why not? The Scripture declares that the righteous ones live by faith (**Hab 2:4**).
- (3) Law and faith are not mutually compatible ways to God. How can you be so sure? Because the law itself says that those who keep the commandments will live by them (**Lev 18:5**).
- (4) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. How did this happen? He became a curse for us by hanging on a tree (**Deut 21:23**).

**Thomas Schreiner: Curse of law removed only in Christ (3:10–14)**

**a. Those who rely on the law are cursed (3:10–12)**

- i. Because one must obey the law perfectly (**3:10**)
- ii. Because justification is by faith, not the law (**3:11**)
- iii. Because the law and faith are incompatible (**3:12**)

**b. Those who rely on the cross of Christ are blessed (3:13–14)**

- i. Because Christ redeemed believers from the law’s curse (**3:13**)
- ii. Therefore, believers receive Abraham’s blessing (**3:14**)

**Nijay Gupta:** To sum up, Paul underscores for the Galatians the futility and absurdity of trying to become right with God through works of the law; the only path for this is faith, now faith in Jesus Christ. This faith is not about beliefs quietly tucked away in one’s head but about a dynamic, trust-filled relationship with Jesus Christ, the kind of trust Abraham put in the God who called him out of his land into an unknown place to receive seemingly impossible promises, a family as numerous as the stars, countless blessings, and life out of death in the form of a child. Performing the law to find righteousness is a cul-de-sac, not a highway. Or, to change the analogy a bit, those who commit themselves to that path are stuck on a dead-end road.

Paul takes it for granted that the law pronounces a curse on God’s people (with no exceptions) when he states that Christ redeemed us from the law’s curse by becoming cursed in exchange (**3:13**). Implied also is the notion that Christ did not deserve to be cursed. For him to absorb that curse, he needed to be innocent. Thus, **3:13** can be connected back to **2:20**, where Paul states that the Son of God gave himself for us out of love.

**Richard Longenecker:** The second section (**vv 10–14**) of Paul’s argument from Scripture deals with four important biblical passages—three that evidently the Judaizers had used in support of their message (**Deut 27:26; Hab 2:4; Lev 18:5**), which Paul reinterprets in rather ad hominem fashion for his converts, and a fourth that appears to have been part of an early Jewish Christian confession (**Deut 21:23**), which Paul cites as having put an end to questions about legalism. In treating the three passages used by his opponents, Paul sets them out in terms of opposing categories: those having to do with law and curse (**Deut 27:26** and **Lev 18:5**) and another having to do with faith and righteousness (**Hab 2:4**). Here the radical nature of Paul’s understanding of the relation of faith and law (or, “gospel and law”) comes to the fore, for in dealing with these passages he sharply distinguishes between them—not in what we know as a Marcionite

type of distinction, but in seeing that they operate on different levels and for different purposes (so the Antiochian interpreters, contra the Alexandrian interpreters). In presenting the fourth passage of this second section (**Deut 21:23**), Paul reiterates the important point made at the beginning of his probatio: acceptance of Christ's death for us puts an end to all legalistic enticements (cf. **3:1**). Paul's theology is a theology of the cross, of the Spirit, of faith, and of being "*in Christ*." All these elements reverberate throughout Paul's probatio, but he begins at v **1** with the cross and in v **13** lays stress on it again.

**Ben Witherington: Chart showing narrative flow:**

(1) The Group and its Plight– 'we' were under the Law's curse (**3:10,13**)

- 'we' were confined under the Law, our guardian (**3:23–24**)
- 'we' were under Law, slaves of the elementary principles (**4:3, 5**)

(2) Identification of Christ with the Plight

- he became 'a curse for us' (**3:13**)
- the Faith/Christ 'came' (**3:23–35**)
- he was 'born under the Law' (**4:4**)

(3) Redemption of the Group

- Christ 'redeemed us' (**3:13**) – 'now that the Faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian' (**3:25**)
- 'to redeem those under the Law' (**4:5**)

(4) Blessings Accruing to All Believers – cf. **3:14; 3:26–29; 4:5b-7**.

**I. (:10) DEPENDENCE ON THE LAW (FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE GOD) CARRIES WITH IT AN INESCAPABLE CURSE**

Quote from **Deut. 27:26**

**John MacArthur:** A curse is a divine judgment that brings the sentence of condemnation.

**A. Inescapability of the Curse**

*"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse"*

If you choose this route (of trusting in the works of the Law), there is no escape.

**David deSilva:** [Paul's emphasis lies] (1) in his conviction that Christ has secured for his dependents something far better able to align human beings with God's righteousness in the gift of the Holy Spirit and (2) in his conviction that the Torah was instituted for a limited term to play a very limited role in God's larger economy of making people righteous (**3:15–25**). **The law does not give life**, because that is the role

of the promise and of the faith that receives what was promised, and the law was a **temporary arrangement** with a fixed endpoint, whose term expired with the coming of the Christ and the completion of his work on behalf of Jew and gentile. This point is underscored for Paul in his experience of seeing gentiles accepted by God on the basis of their response of trust in Jesus, an acceptance that he deduces from their reception of God's Holy Spirit. The ongoing value of the boundary-maintaining function of the Torah as pedagogue over Israel was now sharply called into question by the Christ event and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Jew and gentile alike.

**David Platt:** He is quoting from **Deuteronomy 27:26** to show that the law demands obedience, perfect obedience. Similarly, when Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount, recounting various aspects of the Old Testament law, he says, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (**Matt 5:48**). The law shows us that we can't be perfect, because the law exposes our sin. To be clear, the law doesn't make us sinners but rather reveals the fact that we are already sinners. It uncovers the sinful heart that is in each of us. In **Calvin's** words, "The law was given in order to make known transgressions obvious" (**Calvin, Epistles of Paul, 61**). . .

We need grace, Paul says, because we stand cursed beneath the law. **Verse 10** makes this exact point concerning those who rely on the works of the law. The magnitude of this statement should come across to us as if an announcement had just been made that 100 nuclear warheads were headed right for this country (**Piper, Christ Redeemed Us**). Each of us stands under the curse of the law, the law given by the sovereign judge of the universe.

## **B. Hopelessness of the Curse**

*"for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them'"*

The emphasis is on "*everyone*" and "*all*" -- these are universally applicable principles. God's standard for righteousness = Perfection = impossible for any man to measure up. Good intentions will get you nowhere. 90% compliance will get you nowhere.

**Ronald Fung:** Paul's meaning in **v. 10** is, therefore, that all who hold to legal works are under the curse pronounced by the law itself upon all who do not observe the law completely. The words presuppose that no one does observe the law completely, although Paul does not pursue this line of reasoning, but concentrates on the declaration of the authoritative scripture.

**Craig Keener:** Whereas Paul's opponents may have linked law-works with Deuteronomy's blessings, Paul appeals to the same context for the curses. These curses apply to those under the law (a hermeneutical principle that Paul later invokes in **Rom. 3:19**) who fail to keep it. . .

Although many scholars doubt that Paul's argument here presupposes the impossibility of keeping the law, a probably larger number of scholars maintain, I believe correctly,

the more traditional view that Paul presupposes here that no one perfectly keeps the law.

**Douglas Moo:** A rival interpretation has gained considerable support in recent years. According to this view, “*those who are out of the works of the law*” refers to people “whose identity is derived from works of the Law” (Hays 2000: 258), and the ἐξ would function as it does in **2:12**, where τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς (*tous ek peritomēs*) means “*belonging to the group of people who are circumcised*” (e.g., Gordon 2009). On this view, the phrase refers to the people of Israel in general; and the Galatians are being warned not to join themselves to Israel by their “*works of the law.*” Paul then cites **Deut. 27:26** not as a principle that functions in a larger argument but as a reminder of historical fact: Israel did, in fact, incur the curse (of exile) because of the people’s failure to remain faithful to God’s covenant. Paul’s point, then, would be to warn his Galatian readers that, if they try to identify with Israel by taking on the distinctive “*markers*” of Judaism, “*the works of the law,*” they will themselves fall under the curse that hangs over Israel (see esp. Stanley 1990; J. Scott 1993; N. Wright 1991: 141–48; cf. also Hays 2000: 258; Thielman 1989: 66–69; Braswell 1991: 74–76; Caneday 1989: 192–95; Dumbrell 2000: 23–25, 27–29; and in modified form, Starling 2011: 49–52). This interpretation fits neatly into the more “*narrative*” reading of Paul’s argument in this part of Galatians that has gained support in recent years. Yet we think there are good reasons for preferring the “**traditional**” view.

**Philip Ryken:** The problem with the law, then, is not the law; the problem with the law is our sin. Since we cannot keep the law, the law cannot bless us. All it can do is curse us, placing us under the condemnation of divine wrath.

## **II. (:11) THE OT SUPPORTS JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH -- NOT BY KEEPING THE LAW**

Quote from **Hab. 2:4**

*"Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident;  
for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.'"*

**George Brunk:** Law observance is not the key to the divine-human relationship. Faith is that key—as it always has been!

**Philip Ryken:** In their original context, Habakkuk’s words condemned the pride of the Babylonians who conquered Jerusalem. The prophet accused them of proud self-confidence. They were “not right in relation to God: instead of trusting in him they held aloof in a spirit of self-sufficiency, trusting in themselves.” But this is not how God wants his people to live. He wants them to live by faith. They are the justified ones, the ones who have been declared righteous by God. Now they must live by faith, as Abraham did. Instead of trusting in themselves, they must trust God. Faith must characterize their relationship with God from beginning to end.

**Ronald Fung:** Paul’s argument in v. 11 is, then, to this effect: because Scripture says that it is he who is righteous (that is, justified) by faith that will live, it follows that no one is justified by works of the law (irrespective of one’s success or failure in keeping it).

**Richard Longenecker:** While γάρ at the start of v 10 was explanatory, here δέ is adversative (contra **Betz**, Galatians, 146). Used in the same sentence with the adverb δηλον (“clear,” “plain,” “evident”), the antithetical nature of vv 10 and 11 is heightened (so “it is evident, however” or “clearly, however”). By means of the antithesis presented in these two verses, in fact, Paul sets out his biblical evidence in support of what he said in 2:15–16 of the propositio and what he said about his converts’ experience and Abraham in the probatio—i.e., that Scripture in those pivotal passages under dispute associates curse with law and righteousness with faith. And it is this dichotomous categorization of the biblical texts that Paul wants to highlight against the Judaizers’ claims. . .

In v 11 Paul sets up a sharp antithesis to v 10: righteousness is to be associated with faith alone; curse is the result of trying to observe the law in order to gain righteousness.

**John MacArthur:** The passage from Deuteronomy proves justification cannot be by the Law, and the passage from Habakkuk proves it must be by faith. **The ways of law and faith are mutually exclusive.** To live by law is to live by self-effort and leads inevitably to failure, condemnation, and death. To live by faith is to respond to God’s grace and leads to justification and eternal life.

**Douglas Moo:** If we are right about the connection of the words and phrases in Paul’s quotation, then his application of the Habakkuk text exhibits that “deepening” of the original sense that is a hallmark of the NT use of the OT (see **Moo** 1986). In both Habakkuk and Paul, “righteous” (δικαιος) refers to the person who is in good standing with God, but in Paul the word takes on the specific sense of the **forensic status** of “being justified.” Both Habakkuk and Paul single out πίστις/הַמִּנְחָה (’emûnâ) as the quality that God’s righteous people need as they look to the future. And, though many interpreters insist that Paul’s “faith” is quite different from the “faithfulness” that Habakkuk calls for, the two words, if not synonymous, nevertheless occupy overlapping semantic ranges. The OT הַמִּנְחָה has the basic sense of “firmness,” “steadiness of conviction,” but this firmness includes the root attitude toward God that Paul designates as faith. The biggest difference between Habakkuk and Paul seems to lie in the use of the verb, “live.” Most interpreters of Habakkuk think that this word has the simple sense of “live one’s life,” while Paul, as we have argued, uses “live” in a **soteriological sense**. Nevertheless, at the risk of being accused of reading Paul into Habakkuk, there is some basis to think that Habakkuk himself uses the word with a more theological nuance: “*experience God’s blessing.*” In general, then, Paul’s application of **Hab. 2:4** is just that: a legitimate reappropriation of a key prophetic witness to the priority of faith in

relating to God. Paul is undoubtedly drawn to this passage because, along with **Gen. 15:6**, it is one of the few OT texts that **connect “righteousness” language with faith.**

**Thomas Schreiner:** It is obvious that righteousness is not via the law, for the righteous will gain eschatological life by faith. In this context the verb “*shall live*” (ζήσεται) must be understood in light of the verb “*is justified*” (δικαιοῦται), and hence in this context it refers to **eschatological life**. Such life is obtained not by means of works but through faith. . .

Habakkuk functions as a paradigm for the people of God. He will continue to trust the Lord even if the fig tree does not blossom and vines are lacking fruit (**Hab 3:17–18**). He will continue to trust in and rejoice in God’s promise of future salvation.

### **III. (:12) THE LAW AND FAITH ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE WHEN IT COMES TO THE ISSUE OF JUSTIFICATION**

Quote from **Lev. 18:5**

*"However, the Law is not of faith;  
on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.'"*

**Timothy George:** No doubt there were some people in Paul’s day, as there are in ours, who held that justification by faith was a good idea so long as it was not taught to the exclusion of justification by works. “God helps those who help themselves” is a maxim of theology as well as economics. Paul, however, would tolerate no such theory because, as he said, “*the law is not based on faith.*”

**John MacArthur:** To *live by law* is to live by self-effort and leads inevitably to failure, condemnation, and death. To *live by faith* is to respond to God’s grace and leads to justification and eternal life”

**Warren Wiersbe:** Law says, “Do and live!” but grace says, “Believe and live!”

**Ronald Fung:** Faith and law appear as two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive principles. Paul’s point is proved: “*the law is not based on faith*” (NIV).

**Richard Longenecker:** Here in **v 12** Paul sets out his thesis in as abbreviated a form as possible: νόμος (“*law*”) and πίστις (“*faith*”) are mutually exclusive as bases for righteousness. Paul does not attempt to give reasons; his intention is only to enunciate the principle and cite **Lev 18:5** in support. In his further discussion of the law in **3:19–25**, however, he sets out several reasons that apply here as well:

- (1) the law was given in salvation history to uncover sin, at times even by rousing it to action, and so functions for another purpose and on a different level than faith (**3:19, 22**; cf. **Rom 5:20**; **7:7–12**);
- (2) the law has no power to make alive (**3:21**), a statement indirectly

presupposing the spiritual death of all mankind (cf. **Rom 5:12, 17–18; 8:3**); and (3) the redeeming work of Christ is God's answer for sin-enslaved mankind (**3:22, 24**).

**Douglas Moo:** Faith, Paul implies, is the only instrument by which justification/life can be attained: whether at the beginning of one's Christian experience or at its end. And, though in this context directed explicitly against doing the law, the torah, Paul's argument in these verses transcends the particular circumstances of his situation. For his polemic is not only directed to the law but also to "doing"; indeed, one of the reasons (although not the only one) why Paul denies that the law can lead to justification is precisely because it is, by its nature, something to be "done." The Reformers, therefore, were entirely justified to find in Paul's argument here a fundamental and universally valid principle about the exclusive value of believing versus doing.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul rejects any notion that the law is the source of life. One does not become right with God by doing but by believing. Paul has already taught in **3:10** that righteousness by works of law is impossible since the law requires perfect obedience. We must also keep in mind that he writes from the perspective of fulfillment of God's promises in Christ. The covenant with Moses, then, is no longer in force. What makes one right with God with the arrival of the new covenant is faith in Christ—not keeping the commands found in the Sinai covenant.

#### **IV. (:13-14) CHRIST HAS REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW**

Quote from **Deut. 21:23**

**A. Person Accomplishing Our Redemption: "Christ"**

**B. Principles of Redemption** (points taken from **Robert Gromacki** here)

1. It is a Finished Redemption -- "*redeemed*" -- aorist active indicative

**Max Anders:** *Redeem* means "to buy out of slavery by paying a price." This word was used when someone purchased a slave for the purpose of freeing them. When Jesus died on the cross, he took our curse upon himself. Through his substitutionary atonement, Christ paid the penalty of the curse. When we believe in him, he frees us from the slavery of the law.

2. It is a Personal Redemption -- "*us*"

3. It is a Purposeful Redemption -- "*from the curse of the Law*"

4. It is a Substitutionary Redemption -- very costly  
"*having become a curse for us*"

**F. F. Bruce:** The curse of **Dt. 27:26** was pronounced at the end of a covenant-renewal ceremony and had special reference therefore to the covenant-breaker. Christ accordingly underwent the penalty prescribed for the covenant-breaker. . .

Re “us” -- That Gentiles as well as Jews are in view is confirmed by the emphasis on εἰς τὰ ἔθνη in the continuation of the present sentence (v 14); cf. τὰ πάντα in v 22 (συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν) and the inclusive language and argument of vv 23–27; 4:4–6. (Cf. **G. Howard**, *Crisis*, 59.)

**Richard Longenecker:** For Jews, the proclamation of a crucified Messiah was scandalous (cf. **1 Cor 1:23; Gal 5:11**), “a blasphemous contradiction in terms” (**Bruce**, *Galatians*, 166). Undoubtedly the central problem for all Jewish Christians was how to understand Jesus as God’s Messiah and yet as cursed by God, with the magnitude of the problem only heightened by the pronouncement of **Deut 21:23**. The process as to how early Christians came to understand Jesus as both Messiah and accursed may be obscure, but their conclusion is clear: the curse of the cross was “**an exchange curse**” wherein Christ became a curse for us (cf. esp. **2 Cor 5:21**). And it is just such an assertion that appears in **3:13a**, which we believe is probably an early Christian confession used by Paul.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The substitutionary work of Christ is central to understanding the entire paragraph. It is sometimes objected that the demand for perfect obedience to the Mosaic law is alien to the Sinai covenant. After all, those who sinned under the Mosaic law could offer sacrifice and receive atonement, and hence some interpreters reject the notion that flawless obedience is required. Those who argue in such a way have failed to see a crucial step in Paul’s argument. Now in one sense the Mosaic covenant required perfect obedience, and that is why sacrifices were necessary to forgive transgressions. But with the coming of Christ, a new era in the history of salvation has arrived. OT animal sacrifices no longer atone for sin. Therefore, those who place themselves under the law must keep the law perfectly (see **3:10, 12**) now that Christ has arrived. By placing themselves afresh under the law, they have repudiated Christ’s sacrifice. And OT sacrifices are no longer effective, for that which they pointed to—the sacrifice of Christ—has arrived. Christ is the only means by which the curse of the law can be removed. The Judaizers, who worried so much about release from the law’s curse, actually stood under it.

### **C. Prophetic Aside – Testifying to the Curse Accompanying Law Breakers** *"for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'"*

**Timothy George:** But in what sense could Christ have become a curse for us? Although Jesus was born “*under the law*” (**4:4**), he did not merit the curse of the law for any wrongdoing he had committed because he was as “*an unblemished and spotless lamb*” (**1 Pet 1:19**). Yet both the fact and the manner of his death brought him inexorably under the curse of the law. To prove this point from Scripture, Paul again reached back to **Deut 21:23** and quoted the text: “*Anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.*” Admittedly, the original reference was not to crucifixion, a Roman style of execution



abhorrent to the Jewish people. The Talmud recognizes four modes of capital punishment that were sanctioned by the Jewish people: stoning, burning, beheading, and strangling the criminal as he stood on the ground. After the execution had been carried out, the corpse of the criminal would then be hoisted onto a piece of timber, a stake or “*tree*,” as an indication that this person had been justly condemned as a transgressor of the divine law. It was important that the criminal’s corpse not be exposed beyond sundown because this would dishonor God and defile the land. Thus, according to John’s Gospel, the bodies of Jesus and the two thieves crucified with him were removed from their crosses before nightfall so as not to desecrate the Passover Sabbath (**John 19:31**). Thus, by being impaled on a cross, becoming a gory spectacle for all to see, Jesus exposed himself to the curse of the law. . . . While being hung on a tree was not the curse itself but rather the public proof that the one so impaled had incurred the curse, the clear inference of the NT is that the death of Jesus by crucifixion was not a quirk of fate but instead the deliberate design of God. Thus in Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, he declared that Jesus was handed over to his executioners to be put to death by crucifixion “*according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge*” (**Acts 2:23**).

#### **D. Purposes of Redemption**

1. Right Position -- Gentile Participation in the Blessing of Abraham  
*"in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles"*

**Richard Longenecker:** Paul’s arguments from Scripture in **3:6–14** conclude with two  $\text{\textit{\nu}\text{\textit{\alpha}}}$  clauses that bring to a climax in somewhat intertwined fashion the two main themes of both this section and the previous one:

- (1) the blessing of Abraham given to Gentiles, and
- (2) the promise of the Spirit received by faith.

Structurally, the two clauses are coordinate, and the second is not subsidiary to the first (contra G. S. Duncan, Galatians, 103; et al.). Grammatically, the two clauses are pure purpose clauses. Yet, as **C. F. D. Moule** has observed, “the Semitic mind was notoriously unwilling to draw a sharp dividing-line between purpose and consequence” (An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek, 1st ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953]142).

2. Right Power -- Gentile Inclusion in the Receiving of the Indwelling Holy Spirit –  
*"that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"*

**Timothy George:** Indeed, we can say that here in **v. 14** Paul brought together three key soteriological concepts that will dominate the later discussion in Galatians: justification, redemption, and regeneration. Each represents a distinct dimension of the salvation effected by Christ. Through pardon and acquittal Christ has removed our condemnation (justification). He has also set us free from the power of sin and death (redemption) and bestowed upon us a new life in the Spirit (regeneration). The good news of how this has happened and what it means Paul called “gospel” and “blessing.” Now for the first time

he introduced a new word, “*promise*,” which both reaches back to the gospel of grace revealed in the blessing of Abraham and looks forward to the new life of liberty and love to which those who are in Christ have been called.

**Craig Keener:** Why then does Paul equate the promise with the Spirit? For Paul, the Spirit is the foretaste of the future promise (**Gal. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:9-10**; cf. **Heb. 6:4-5**), the first fruits (**Rom. 8:23**) and actual down payment of the future inheritance (**2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:3, 13-14**). Given OT promises of God pouring out his Spirit when he restored his people and their land, early Christians not surprisingly associated the Spirit with promise (**Acts 1:4-5; 2:33, 38-39; Eph. 1:13**). Because the Spirit is divine, receiving the Spirit is also itself the greatest gift – God dwelling among his people (e.g., **Exod. 29:45-46**).

**John MacArthur:** All of this blessing is through faith. **Justifying faith** involves self-renunciation, putting away all confidence in one’s own merit and works. Like the Israelites who had Pharaoh’s pursuing army behind them and the impassable Red Sea in front of them, the sinner must acknowledge his sinfulness and his total inability to save himself. When he sees God’s justice pursuing him and God’s judgment ahead of him, he realizes his helplessness in himself and realizes he has nowhere to turn but to God’s mercy and grace.

**Justifying faith** also involves reliance on and submission to the Lord. When a sinner sees that he has no way to escape and no power in his own resources, he knows he must rely on God’s provision and power. Finally, justifying faith involves appropriation, as the sinner gratefully receives the free gift of pardon Christ offers and submits to His authority.

**Justifying faith** does not have to be strong faith; it only has to be true faith. And true faith not only brings salvation to the believer but glory to the One who saves.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul is now at the conclusion of his scriptural argument. He maintains that since the Gentiles have the Holy Spirit, they enjoy the blessing of Abraham. And if they enjoy the blessing of Abraham, they are members of Abraham’s family. And if they are part of Abraham’s family by receiving the Spirit, they do not need to submit to circumcision or the law to become part of the people of God.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can a loving God pronounce such a universal curse upon mankind? What is the impact upon your heart for missions as you ponder the exclusivity of God’s appointed plan of salvation?
- 2) What differences do you find between Law and Faith? As you study *good works* in the New Testament, try to discern whether these works are viewed as pre-conversion

or post-conversion works, and then try to discern their significance.

3) How can the Law be called "*good*" if it is associated with such an inescapable curse?

4) What all is contained in the "*promise of the Spirit*"?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**John MacArthur:** In ancient Judaism a criminal who was executed, usually by stoning, was then tied to a post, a type of tree, where his body would hang until sunset as a visible representation of rejection by God. It was not that a person became cursed by being hanged on a tree but that he was hanged on a tree because he was cursed. Jesus did not become a curse because He was crucified but was crucified because he was cursed in taking the full sin of the world upon Himself.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Yes, there is a fascination to the law, but it is only bait that leads to a trap; and once the believer takes the bait, he finds himself in bondage. Far better to take God at His Word and rest on His grace. We were saved "*by grace, through faith*" and we must live "*by grace, through faith.*" This is the way to blessing. The other way is the way to bondage.

**C. S. Lovett:** The Law requires perfect obedience in all things -- continually. It demands perfection. There is no room for failure. Seeking righteousness under the Law is like a man scaling a cliff -- one slip and he's dead -- for the Law demands the full penalty for even the tiniest transgression. He who violates any part of the Law is guilty of breaking the whole Law (**Ja. 2:10**). As breaking a single link causes a chain to fail, so does breaking a single requirement of the Law cause one's righteousness to crumble.

**Clark Pinnock:** Thanks to the grace of God, man's universal failure to live up to God's standards has been taken care of in the death of Jesus on the cross.

**Lehman Strauss:** This secret which God made known to the prophet Habakkuk had its primary application to Israel in those dark days following the cutting-off of King Josiah. Israel's hope was in the coming of Messiah, and it is to His coming that the five '*its*' of verse three refer. They were to wait for HIM. But the Hope of Israel is also the Hope of all nations in all ages, for the five '*its*' in the prophecy of Habakkuk become '*He*' in Hebrews 10:37, where we read: '*For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*' If all seemed hopeless to Israel, God would assure His people that there was still hope if they would but believe in Him who was to come. But faith must be exercised. In this vision given to Habakkuk Israel would find food for her faith. Though circumstances all around them seemed to contradict their hopes, they would live in the present through faith in Messiah's coming.

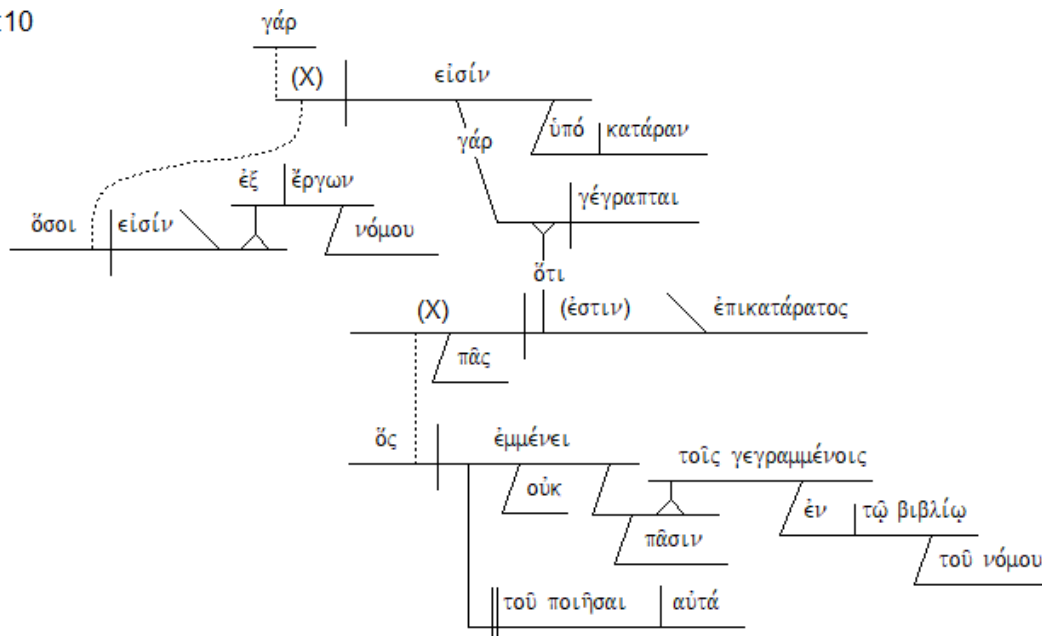
**Nijay Gupta:** We give in to a **works-of-the-law religion** when we presume that performing certain actions (without life devotion) pleases God. It doesn't. What Paul proposes to those of us who have fallen into the trap of a works-of-the-law religion is **listening with faith (Gal 3:2)**. Pray. Pray with faith and expectation, turning toward God and opening up our lives to him; sharing our deepest self, questions, concerns, and vulnerabilities—then be ready to respond to God. Works and rituals—which are great things when they come from a pure and open heart—are pleasing to God as the fruit of our devotion.

Paul takes this attitude toward things like honoring holy days and practicing a certain diet for religious reasons. Whether a Christian commits to a certain practice (or abstains) for the sake of worshiping God is not dictated by Paul. He is open to any such habits, as long as they are morally neutral or good. What matters is that the individual is personally convinced and devoted to such practices to enhance and demonstrate their faith and commitment to God (**Rom 14:5–9**). If such diets, observances, and practices actively express our living for the Lord, then they honor the Lord. If they don't, then they don't please God.

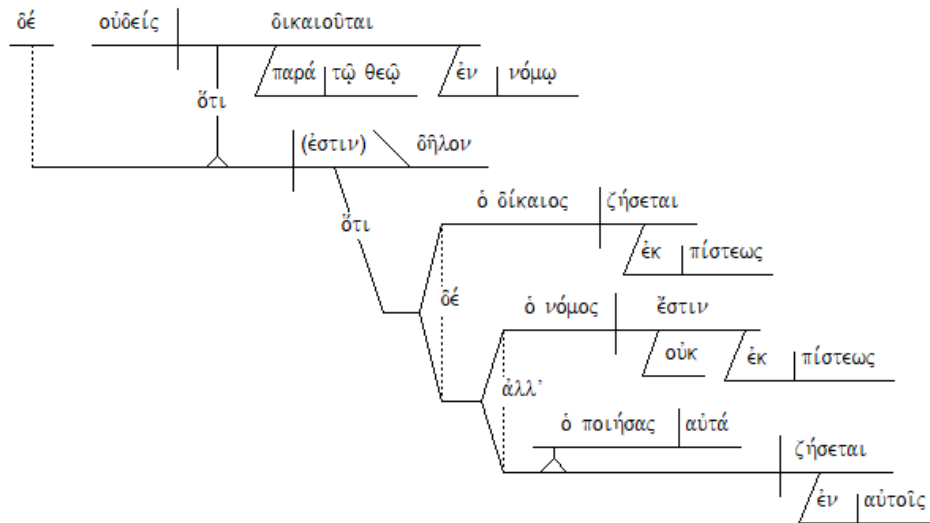
There are a lot of helpful teachings out there about the power of good habits and rituals to strengthen our Christian walk. I highly encourage you to commit yourself to going to church, praying regularly, fasting, meditating on Scripture, honoring a regular Sabbath. Paul would be disappointed if he saw Christians today living undisciplined Christian lives. But the bottom line for Paul is that all that we do, in works and rituals, must flow out of and be fed by a deep relationship with God through Jesus Christ by faith.

**Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:**

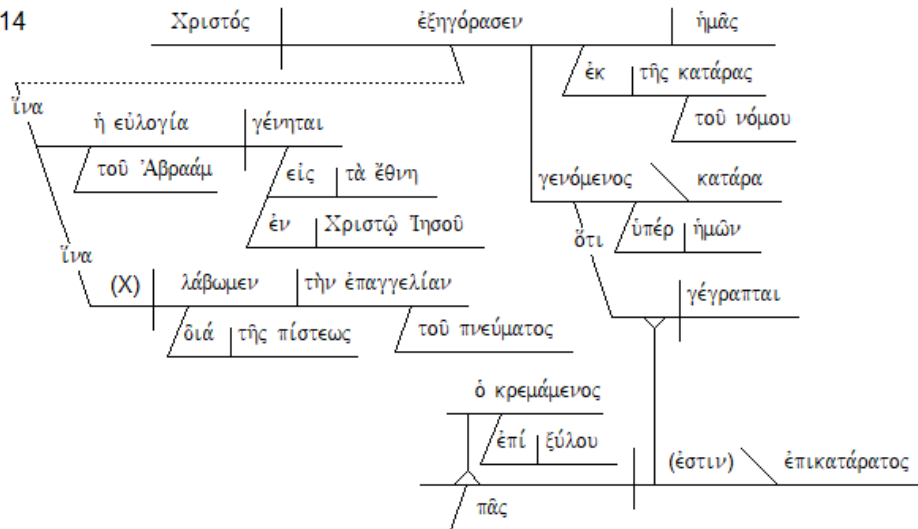
Gal 3:10



Gal 3:11-12



Gal 3:13-14



TEXT: GALATIANS 3:15-22

TITLE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S PROMISES AND GOD'S LAW

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE BLESSING OF JUSTIFICATION COULD ONLY COME VIA GOD'S UNCHANGING PROMISES RATHER THAN BY THE LAW**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**George Brunk:** There is one small problem in what Paul has been saying. He has been arguing that the Galatians, as Gentiles, have their place within the purposes of God on the basis of their continuity with Abraham, the one whose standing with God was based in faith. But doesn't God's giving of the Law after God's covenant with Abraham logically imply that God intended for the Sinai covenant to supersede or replace the Abrahamic one? How are we to understand the relative authority of these covenants?

Paul's answer to this question is that the first covenant has priority over the later one. The character of promise in the first is not modified by the legal character of the second. . .

Paul's intent here is simply to draw attention to the **permanency** of a will or covenant. His point is that in making the covenant with Moses, God did not and could not invalidate the covenant with Abraham, given God's constancy. In fact, the emphasis in the statement is on the fact that the will of which he is speaking is the human will. Paul is saying that if the terms of a human will persist, how much more does an agreement established by God! . . .

Now that Paul has satisfactorily shown how the Law does not replace or supersede God's promise to Abraham, he has a new problem. If the Abrahamic covenant of promise/faith remains in force and has clear priority over the Law of Moses, what good was the Law in the first place? If Paul wishes to preserve the authority of the Scriptures and the unity of God's purposes, he will need to show how the Law had a positive role to play, even if its role was limited.

**Douglas Moo:** While the agitators placed the law and God's promise to Abraham on the same level, viewing the law as an addition to the promise, Paul saw the law as operating on a different plane entirely. He insisted that the law could not alter the terms of the relationship that God had established with Abraham. "What the Galatians perceive as a necessary supplement to their faith Paul views as a radical break with faith" (Beker 1980: 53). The opening paragraph (vv. 15–18) of this next stage of Paul's argument establishes this fundamental redemptive-historical point. The key word in the paragraph, and to some extent in subsequent verses, is "**promise**" (vv. 16, 17, 18 [2x], 21, 22 [the corresponding verb occurs in v. 19]). The promise is God's promise to Abraham (v. 8), and Paul anticipates this new direction in his teaching at the end of **verse 14**, with his mention of "*the promise of the Spirit.*" In contrast to **verses 7–14**, in

which Paul quoted specific texts of Scripture, there is only one quotation in verses **15–25** (v. **16**). But the OT remains just as important as Paul shifts to general arguments from Scripture in this new section (George 1994: 243–44): “There is hardly a clause in this section . . . that does not allude to the OT in a fairly explicit manner” (Silva 2007: 804).

Paul’s take on **salvation history** raises two key questions, which set the agenda for **verses 19–25**. The broad, overarching question is obvious: if the law did not materially add anything to the promise, then why did God give the law to his people? After asking just this question in **verse 19a**, Paul devotes **verses 19b–25** to answering it. He makes two basic points.

1. First, the law and the promise serve distinct purposes: the law was given to exacerbate and reveal sin (**vv. 19b, 22a**) and was not intended to, or able to, give the life that only the promise and faith could achieve (**v. 21**).
2. Second, all along the law was intended to last only until the promised Messiah came (**vv. 19b, 23–25**).

This second point provides the answer to a second subsidiary question that Paul must deal with if his argument against the law is to make sense: why could not the Galatians continue to obey the law as long as it was understood as Paul has defined it? It is the **movement of redemptive history** that explains why the law is no longer necessary. What Paul says in these verses certainly shows that he holds to a single, continuous history of salvation. But he also views the coming of Christ—“*Christ crucified*” (**3:1**; cf. also **2:19–20**; **6:14**)—as a climactic moment that introduces a **significant shift** in the history of salvation. At base, the disagreement between the agitators and Paul lies just here: how significant is the shift in salvation history that Christ’s coming has inaugurated?

**John MacArthur**: The covenant with Abraham was an unconditional covenant of promise relying solely on God’s faithfulness, whereas the covenant with Moses was a conditional covenant of law relying on man’s faithfulness. To Abraham, God said, “I will.” Through Moses He said, “Thou shalt.” The promise set forth a religion dependent on God. The law set forth a religion dependent on man. The promise centers on God’s plan, God’s grace, God’s initiative, God’s sovereignty, God’s blessings. The law centers on man’s duty, man’s work, man’s responsibility, man’s behavior, man’s obedience. The promise, being grounded in grace, requires only sincere faith. The law, being grounded in works, demands perfect obedience.

In contrasting the covenants of promise and of law, Paul first shows the superiority of the one and then the inferiority of the other.

**Timothy George**: Paul now moved to a second level of argument in his long parenthesis (**3:10–25**) on the validity of the law in the context of the nature of salvation as God’s free and gracious favor promised to Abraham, secured by Christ, and sealed in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit. In **vv. 6–14** Paul had argued exclusively from the Scriptures, quoting from the Law five times and from the Prophets once in order to show how God’s promise to Abraham that all peoples would be blessed through him

has been fulfilled by Christ, whose death on the cross has wrought redemption and justification by faith for Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul would now zero in on this same theme showing first how God's covenant with Abraham stands in stark contrast to the law of Moses and yet how, in the providence of God, even the law played a crucial role in the unfolding drama of redemption. There is a noticeable shift in the style of Paul's argumentation throughout this passage. With the exception of his exegetical comment on Abraham's "*seed*" in v. 16, he did not appeal to specific quotations from the OT but argued instead from broader historical and theological considerations concerning the relationship of Abraham, Moses, and Christ. In the first pericope (vv. 15–18) Paul introduced three new terms that would dominate the remainder of his discussion in the central theological section of the letter: promise, already anticipated in v. 14, covenant, and inheritance. All of these were loaded terms in Paul's vocabulary. Together they underscore the legal and historical train of thought that led Paul toward the personal, existential application he would pursue in 3:26 – 4:11.

### Van Parunak: Overview

3:15-22 is distinctively the "**promise**" section in Galatians. The word occurs for the first time at the end of 3:14 by way of transition, occurs 6 times in this section, and elsewhere only at 3:29; 4:23, 28.

#### Two parts:

1. 3:15-18, Law does not supercede promise.
2. 3:19-22, Law does prepare for promise.

The next section, 3:23ff, shows that just as promise precedes the law, faith follows it.

Key observation: A covenant cannot be overruled while its promises remain unfulfilled. That is the argument Paul makes here.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Addition of law does not nullify promise to Abraham (3:15–25)

#### a. Interim nature of Mosaic covenant (3:15–18)

- i. Human covenants are inviolable (3:15)
- ii. Promises of Abraham given to Christ (3:16)
- iii. The law cannot annul promise given (3:17)
- iv. The law and promise are incompatible (3:18)

#### b. The purpose of the law (3:19–25)

- i. The law was given to increase sin (3:19a-b)
- ii. The law was in force until Christ came (3:19c)
- iii. The law's inferiority signaled by mediation (3:19d–20)
- iv. The law is not contrary to God's promises (3:21a)
- v. The law could not produce life (3:21b)
- vi. All imprisoned under sin (3:22)
- vii. The law as custodian (3:23)
- viii. Era of the custodian has ended (3:24–25)



**Max Anders:** The law's purpose was never to save. Its purpose has always been to be a standard that would show us the magnitude of our sin, our need for grace, and, thus, lead us to Christ. The law was a temporary measure only until faith in Christ was inaugurated. Therefore, grace is superior to the law.

## **I. (:15-18) GOD'S UNCHANGING PROMISES CANNOT BE SUPERCEDED BY THE LAW**

**Ben Witherington:** What we find in **3:15–18** is an analogy between human and divine covenants and more technically what we have here is a similitudo or simile. A simile is a bit different from an example (exemplum), though it has a force or rhetorical effect very similar to an example (Inst. Or. 5.11.22). Basically the force of the argument is strengthened to the degree that the things being compared are equal or nearly so. This form of proof is less powerful than for example the appeal to the Galatians' experience, not least because it involves an artificial, or humanly devised proof. Paul himself alerts his audience at the outset of **vs. 15** that the argument which will follow will be *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*. **Burton** has suggested this means 'from common human practice' and **Betz** that we should translate it 'from common human life', but both of these translations ignore the rhetorical function of the phrase. Paul is about to offer a **humanly devised or artificial proof**. What will follow will be speaking '*according to human beings*' and so humanly generated as opposed to that which comes from God. Paul has presented his two divine proofs, one from supernatural experience and one from the sacred Scriptures, and now he will turn to more mundane, merely human arguments, or as **Chrysostom** put it, Paul now uses human examples. **Martin Luther** understood quite well what was going on here: "Paul adds another [argument], one that is based on the analogy of a man's will; this seems to be a rhetorical argument." Almost completely missing the point of the phrase is **Dunn** who comments that Paul's use of the phrase *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον* indicates that Paul understood that his analogy here was a weak one. Paul is not signaling the weakness of the analogy, only the humanness of the argument. It would have been rhetorically inept to suggest an argument was lame, and then offer it!

### **A. (:15) Argument from Comparison to Human Covenants – God's Covenant Promises Can Never Be Changed or Annulled**

Argument from the lesser (man's covenants) to the greater (God's covenants).

*"Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations:*

*even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified,*

*no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it."*

#### Significance of Ratification

- by man
- by God

cf. business contracts -- any change must be initialed by both parties

**Scot McKnight:** Although scholars today are unsure about which particular legal institution Paul is using (Roman, Greek, Jewish), they are agreed that Paul’s point is secure: when a covenant or testament or last will has been established—probably after the death of the testator—someone cannot come along and add to it or take away from it.

**Craig Keener:** Undoubtedly, then, Paul intends both senses of the term here, using human **wills** as analogies for the biblical **covenant** with Abraham.

**John MacArthur:** First of all, the covenant of promise was superior because it was confirmed as irrevocable and unchangeable. This can be illustrated by reference to a human covenant. In terms of human relations, Paul says, even . . . a man’s covenant, . . . when it has been ratified, allows no one to set it aside or add conditions to it.

Even human beings hold their covenants to be inviolable and unamendable. Once ratified, they are irrevocable and unchangeable.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul’s language is friendlier here, for he does not label his audience as “*foolish*” (3:1) but addresses them as “*brothers*” (cf. 1:11; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). . .

A decision on the referent of διαθήκη is difficult, but the translation “*covenant*” should be preferred for a number of reasons.

(1) Context is always the most important factor in determining the meaning of a word, and Paul in this context clearly refers to the covenants with Abraham and Moses. It is possible, of course, that Paul moves from the idea of a “will” in human society to a “covenant” when referring to Abraham and Moses, but it is more likely that he retains the same term throughout instead of requiring his readers to switch back and forth between “will” and “covenant.”

(2) Wills could be altered, whereas covenants were considered to be immutable. There are several examples of covenants between human beings in the OT that were considered to be unbreakable (Gen 21:22–32; 26:26–31; 31:44–45; 1 Sam 18:3; 20:8; 22:8; 23:18; 2 Sam 3:12).

(3) In both the LXX and the NT the usual referent for the noun used here (διαθήκη) is “*covenant*.”

(4) The use of legal terms does not indicate that the reference is to a will, for legal language is used with covenants as well.

Legal language is used here to explain the nature of covenants. Once they are “*ratified*” (κεκυρωμένην), one cannot “*reject*” (ἀθετεῖ) or “*add to*” (ἐπιδιατάσσεται) them. Paul argues from the lesser to the greater from 3:15 to 3:16. If even human covenants are irrevocable and cannot be supplemented, how much more a covenant given by God. In

other words, the covenant with Abraham cannot be revoked by a later covenant, nor can additional stipulations be added to it. **The covenant with Abraham stands as it was given originally.**

**Timothy George:** In Genesis, God made a promise to Abraham, a promise, as Paul had shown already, not based on Abraham's meritorious deeds, lifelong obedience, or indeed anything other than God's own gratuitous good pleasure. This promise, or covenant, as Paul called it here for the first time, was unconditional: no ifs, ands, and buts; no strings attached. Abraham simply believed God would do what he had promised. Then came exodus, Mount Sinai, and Moses, who delivered a new and different covenant, one encumbered with burdensome requirements, a code of behavior that makes demands and issues threats.

**B. (:16) Argument from Christ-Centered Fulfillment –  
God's Promises Find Their Ultimate Fulfillment in Christ**

*"Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.  
He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one,  
'And to your seed,' that is Christ."*

**John MacArthur:** Second, Paul argues from the lesser figure of **verse 15** to the greater figure of **verse 16**, that the covenant of promise was superior to the covenant of law because it was **Christ-centered**. The immutability of the covenant involving faith directly relates to God's last and final covenant established through His Son, Jesus Christ. The covenant of law could not possibly have interrupted or modified the previous covenant of promise, because the first one not only was inviolable and permanent in itself but was inseparable from God's supreme covenant, the New Covenant in the Messiah, the Christ.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul reads the Genesis promises in light of the story line of the OT, which narrows the promise down to a son of David and finds its fulfillment in the one man, Jesus of Nazareth. The "offspring" texts should be interpreted, then, in terms of corporate representation. Jesus is the representative offspring of Abraham and David and the fulfillment of the original redemptive promise in **Gen 3:15**. Thus, the promise should be conceived typologically, for the offspring promises have their final fulfillment in Christ, so that the offspring promises in the OT point forward to and anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ.

So why does Paul connect Jesus with the promises to Abraham here? He does so to emphasize that the age of fulfillment has arrived. The promises made to Abraham have become a reality in Jesus Christ. They always pointed to the one offspring, Christ Jesus. Hence, to move backward in salvation history to the Mosaic law and covenant is a serious mistake.

**Timothy George:** Paul's emphasis on the **single seed** brings together two ideas that serve as a unifying theme throughout **Gal 3** and **4**: solidarity in Christ and unity in the church. Elsewhere Paul contrasted Adam and Christ as two heads of humanity. Adam is

viewed as the head of sinful humanity that is doomed to die, and Christ is viewed as the head of a new humanity that has the promise of eternal life (**Rom 5:12–21**). However, here in **Gal 3** the contrast is not between Adam and Christ but Abraham and Moses or, as Paul expressed it in **vv. 9–10**, the contrast between those who seek their identity in the world and thus before God on the basis of, *out of (ek)*, works and those who relate to these matters of ultimate concern out of faith. Either way, though, such an identification involves far more than an individual decision made in isolation from all others. To be “*under the curse*” is to belong to a family, to be implicated in a corporate solidarity that includes the whole human race and, for that matter, the world of nature as well (cf. **Rom 8:18–27**). In the same way, to be “*in Christ*,” the true Seed (singular) of Abraham, is to find a new family, to become a child and heir of the promise through the adoption of grace.

**Philip Ryken:** [Argument based on grammar supports doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture]

It is almost as if there is **only one party to the covenant: Jesus Christ**. But this is exactly what the Galatians were in danger of forgetting. By trusting in the works of the law, they were dividing the church along racial lines: Jews on one side, Gentiles on the other. They were not united in Christ. Paul used the promise to the offspring, therefore, to remind them that God’s eternal plan is for one family in one Christ. By the time he gets to the end of **chapter 3**, this will be the climax of his argument: “*in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. . . . And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise*” (**Gal. 3:26, 29**).

**Van Parunak:** It is worth noting that the phrase cited by Paul, *kai tw spermati sou*, appears in the Abrahamic promises **only in reference to the land**. Paul indeed extends its scope: “*the promises*,” including the promise about blessing the gentiles. But the particular promise that leads to this argument is that Abraham will one day inherit the land in which he wandered as a stranger (**17:8**), the land which he personally saw (**13:15**), the land between the river of Egypt and the Euphrates (**15:18**). Even when Hebrews shows us that Abraham was looking forward to a heavenly city, it acknowledges that **the physical land is the “land of promise” (11:9)**.

### **C. (:17) Argument from Chronology – God's Promises Came Way Before the Law and Were not Set Aside by the Law**

#### 1. God's Promises Came Way Before the Law

*"What I am saying is this:*

*the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later"*

**John MacArthur:** Third, the covenant of promise was superior to the covenant of law because of **chronology**. The Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God. Because the covenant with Abraham was permanent and inviolate, no amount of time could nullify the promise.

The four hundred and thirty years refers to the time elapsed between God's last statement of the Abrahamic covenant and His giving of the Law to Moses. The Lord repeated the promise to Abraham's son Isaac (**Gen. 26:24**) and then to his grandson Jacob (**28:15**). The Law came 645 years after Abraham, but 215 years later God repeated the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob, exactly four hundred and thirty years prior to the Mosaic covenant at Sinai.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Paul is counting from the time Jacob went into Egypt, when God appeared to him and reaffirmed the covenant (**Gen. 46:1-4**). The 430 years is the time from God's confirmation of His promise to Jacob until the giving of the law at Sinai.

## 2. God's Promises Were Not Set Aside by the Law

*"does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."*

**Scot McKnight:** What is the "*covenant of Abraham*"? It has been customary, in theology, to prefer the term testament for a unilateral (one-sided) arrangement, initiated and carried out by one person, and to use the term covenant for a bilateral arrangement. There were two Greek terms for covenant: *diatheke* and *syntheke*, the latter clearly implying equality of partners. It is also clear that Greek translators of the Hebrew term *berith* did not want to make the covenant of Abraham to sound like a mutual arrangement of equal parties, so they chose the term *diatheke*. In the history of discussion, some theologians have stressed the unilateral nature of God's covenant with Abraham and have sometimes even preferred the expression the "*testament of Abraham*." And, of course, this has become the standard way Christians describe the Bible: Old Testament and New Testament.

On the other hand, since there is clearly an obligation on the part of the persons (Abraham and his corporate "*seed*") to commit themselves to the obligations of the covenant (i.e., circumcision, obedience to the law, surrender), other theologians prefer the translation "*covenant*." I shall use the term covenant because I agree that, while God's arrangement with Abraham was sovereignly initiated and established, Abraham did have an obligation to live within the parameters established by God. Their relationship, however, was by no means equal, and the covenant should never be understood as a mutually agreed upon agreement.

**Howard Vos:** The law, or Mosaic covenant, instituting the concept of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience, could not set aside the unconditional Abrahamic covenant.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The Abrahamic covenant focuses on what God does for his people in saving them, while the Mosaic covenant accents human obedience. The Abrahamic covenant celebrates God's work in delivering his people, whereas the Mosaic summons human beings to keep the law. Paul does not give a complete exposition of the two covenants here, but he does see a fundamental incompatibility. If believers lived under the Mosaic covenant, the promise given to Abraham would be nullified. Human

obedience would be the fundamental issue for receiving the promise, and hence circumcision would continue to be required. But since the law is subsequent to the promise and inferior to the promise, circumcision and observance of the law are not required in order to belong to Abraham's family.

**Douglas Moo:** Promise, in the case of both Abraham (3:6) and all who experience his blessing (3:8–9), is activated by faith, and—as Paul is especially at pains to argue in this context, versus the agitators—by “faith alone.”

**Craig Keener:** God ratified his covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:15; cf. Gen. 22:16-18), confirming it with an oath (Gen. 22:16); nothing, therefore, could supersede this arrangement. If Abraham was justified by faith (Gen. 15:6 in Gal. 3:6), the subsequent law of Moses could not do away with this way of justification (cf. Rom. 10:6-10). Indeed, with 430 years between the promise to Abraham and the law, faith in God's promise clearly remained sufficient already during a long era.

**D. (:18) Argument from Completeness –  
The Blessing of the Promised Inheritance Came Via God's Promises -- Not God's Law**

*"For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise;  
but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise."*

**John MacArthur:** Fourth, the covenant of promise is superior to the covenant of law because it is more **complete**. Paul's point is that an inheritance . . . based on law depends on man's performance, whereas the one granted . . . to Abraham by means of a promise depends on God's power. The term granted translates the perfect tense of *charizomai* (*to give graciously*) and points to the permanent character of the inheritance. The principles behind the two types of inheritance are incompatible. One is by God's law and man's works and the other by God's grace and man's faith. Not only that, but the abilities to fulfill the covenants are of an infinitely different order. Man cannot succeed in perfectly keeping the law, and God cannot fail in perfectly keeping the promise. Because the covenant of promise is complete, the covenant of law can in no way improve or change it.

**Timothy George:** In this verse Paul brought together by way of conclusion the three main points he had made in this short pericope: the faithfulness of God, the lateness of the law, and the gratuity of the promise.

**Ben Witherington:** Verse 18 provides the conclusion that Paul wishes to draw on the basis of his historical observation and analysis. The γὰρ indicates we are meant to connect the previous sentence to this one. Here again, though Paul uses εἰ plus an implied indicative verb, he is clearly dealing with what he considers to be an unreal condition: “*If the inheritance [comes] from the Law, then it does not come from the promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham through (or by) the promise.*” Here promise and Law are set over against each other as the essence or heart of two separate

covenants. As **Lightfoot** says ‘Law’ and ‘Promise’ “are used without the article, as describing two opposing principles”.

**Douglas Moo:** This verse provides a further explanation (γάρ, *gar*, *for*) for why the law cannot annul the promise: the law introduces an element that is antithetical to the nature of promise, which is a matter of **grace**. In this verse Paul introduces a concept that will be important in his subsequent argument: “*inheritance*” (κληρονομία, *klēronomia*; see κληρονόμος [*klēronomos*] in **3:29; 4:1, 7**). Paul may have been influenced by the reference to a “*will*” in **verse 15** to introduce this word into his argument at this point. God’s promise covenant with Abraham, he suggests, also involves **the promise of an inheritance**. In the OT, the “*inheritance*” is usually identified with the land (e.g., **Gen. 28:4; Deut. 1:39**); for Paul (and for other NT authors), the “*inheritance*” is Christ himself and all the blessings Christ provides his people. The verb that Paul uses to describe God’s “*giving*” of the inheritance is κεχάρισται (*kecharistai*, a perfect form that emphasizes the continuing effects of the “**gracious giving**”). The notion of gracious giving is warranted based on Paul’s other uses of the verb χαρίζομαι (*charizomai*: **Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 2:7, 10** [3x]; **12:13; Eph. 4:32** [2x]; **Phil. 1:29; 2:9; Col. 2:13; 3:13** [2x]; **Philem. 22**). And it is just here that an important perspective on Paul’s argument emerges. “*Promise*,” by its nature, involves a free and unconstrained decision to commit oneself or specific objects to another. It is this nature of promise that Paul highlights in order to show why the inheritance cannot be based on the law. As Paul has explained in **Gal. 3:12**, “*law*” operates according to the **principle of doing**: it demands works. And as Paul makes clear elsewhere, **grace and works are antithetical**. In fact, Paul’s logic in this verse is very similar to his logic in **Rom. 4:4–5**, where he argues that Abraham could not have been justified by works because, if he had, his status before God would not be based on grace. Explicit in his argument there and implicit here is the fact that God always operates with his sinful creatures on the basis of grace (see also **Rom. 11:6**: “*And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace*”). Paul argues against imposing the law on the Galatian Christians, then, not only because it belongs to an earlier phase of salvation history. It is also not a channel of blessing or inheritance, because its nature contradicts the fundamentally gracious manner in which God bestows his blessing on his people. As **Dunn** (1993a: 186) rightly says, “Paul stakes his case on the theological axiom that salvation is always, first to last, a matter of divine initiative and grace.” And we will let **Calvin** (1854: 63) have the last word: “Let us carefully remember the reason why, in comparing the promise with the law, the establishment of the one overturns the other. The reason is, that the promise has respect to faith, and the law to works. Faith receives what is freely given, but to works a reward is paid. And he immediately adds, God gave it to Abraham, not by requiring some sort of compensation on his part, but by the free promise; for if you view it as conditional, the word *gave* (κεχάρισται) would be utterly inapplicable.”

**Nijay Gupta:** Contrary to what the rival teachers pronounced, this glorious inheritance, this status of true family members of God, could not come through the law. And if they tried to seek out adoption and inheritance via the law, they would be cut off from the Abrahamic promise; they have chosen their path, and it is a dead-end. There is only one

way to the inheritance: it is through Abraham, now offered freely and graciously to the Galatians through faith in Jesus Christ.

**TRANSITION:** "*Why the Law then?*"

**Ben Witherington:** It was the task of any good rhetor to anticipate any questions or objections to one's arguments that might be raised by one's audience, and to forestall them by answering them in advance. Paul does this here, once again drawing on the diatribe style involving a question to an imaginary interlocutor followed by the speaker's answer.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul's answer is intriguing, for he argues that the law and the promise have different functions. The law could never grant righteousness, but it enclosed all under sin until Jesus Christ came (3:21–25). Hence, the law was in force for an interim period in salvation history until the coming of Christ. Now that faith in Christ has come and the promise to Abraham is realized, believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant and law. And if believers are not under the Mosaic covenant, then circumcision is unnecessary.

**John MacArthur:** After showing the superiority of the covenant of promise, Paul shows the **inferiority of the covenant of law** –

1. first in regard to its purpose,
2. then in regard to its mediator,
3. and finally in regard to its accomplishment.

## **II. (:19-22) THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S LAW WAS NEVER TO PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION**

**Scot McKnight: Outline of 3:19-25**

### **I. The Question About the Historical Purpose of the Law (vv. 19–20)**

- A. The question (v. 19a)
- B. The answer (vv. 19b–20)
  1. The purpose of the law (v. 19b)
  2. The temporal limitations of the law (v. 19c)
  3. The circumstances of the giving of the law (vv. 19d–20)

### **II. The Question About the Historical Function of the Law (vv. 21–25)**

- A. The question (v. 21a)
- B. The answer (v. 21b)
- C. The reason for the answer (vv. 21c–25)
  1. The inability of the law (v. 21c)
  2. The function of the law in history (v. 22a)
  3. The function of the promises in history (v. 22b)
  4. The explanation of the function of the law (vv. 23–25)
    - a. Time elements of the law (v. 23)



- b. Effect of the law (v. 24a)
- c. Result of the law's effect (v. 24b)
- d. Suspension of the law (v. 25)

**Ronald Fung:** Paul's contention in vv. 19–22 may be summed up as follows: The law is an institution inferior to the covenant of promise and it does not bestow righteousness. Its "true effect ... is to nail man to his sin. As the prison holds the prisoner ... so man is shut up by the Law under sin.... Rightly understood, then, the Law prevents any attempt on man's part to secure righteousness before God in any other way than ... that promised to Abraham." There is no essential contradiction of the promise by the law, because, simply, the law is intended to serve the purposes of the promise, which has to do with justification by faith.

In this section (3:15–22) Paul has again demonstrated that justification is by faith and not by works of the law. He has done it in terms of the relation between the law and the promise, by showing clearly that it is the original covenant of promise which represents God's intention in his dealings with men, and that the law is an inferior institution designed to serve the purposes of the promise. Hence the Judaizers were wrong, in the terms used in v. 16, to impose new conditions for salvation ("*add a codicil*") upon the original covenant of promise, which cannot be rendered null and void ("*set ... aside*") in this way.

The entire passage is, in fact, an elaboration of the **antithesis between law and promise** already introduced in vv. 13f. As in that earlier passage (cf. especially vv. 13f. and v. 22), the doctrine of justification by faith is explained historically, that is, from the perspective of salvation history. This perspective is continued in the next section (3:23 – 4:11). Before turning to that, however, we may briefly note again the nexus of ideas in which justification belongs: promise (vv. 16, 18, 22), inheritance (v. 18), and life (v. 21). If in 3:15–22 justification is treated primarily with reference to the promise, in the next section it is the notion of sonship (implied in the concept of inheritance) that will occupy the dominant place.

#### A. (:19-20) God's Law Was Necessary But Clearly Inferior to God's Promises

##### 1. (:19a) The Law was Necessary Because of Sin

*"It was added because of transgressions"*

Again, the emphasis on the law having been "*added*" after the Promises.

**Rendall:** The real meaning is that it was added with a view to the offences which it specifies, thereby pronouncing them to be from that time forward transgressions of the Law. Its design is gathered in short from its contents. The prohibitions of the Ten Commandments reveal their own purpose: they were enacted in order to repress the worship of false gods, idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, disobedience to parents, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, covetousness. These sins prevailed before the Law, but by pronouncing them to be definite transgressions it called in the fear of God's wrath to reinforce the weakness of the moral sense and educate man's conscience.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Four interpretations dominate.

(1) The law was given by God **to restrain sin**. According to this reading, the law taught Israel how to live before Christ came.

(2) The law's purpose was **to define sin**. If this view is adopted, **3:19** is similar to **Rom 4:15**, which says, "*Where there is no law, there is no transgression.*" The law provides the standard, the measuring stick, by which sin is identified. The law classifies sin as sin in a technical or legal sense. In other words, sin is identified as "*transgression*" when a specific law is violated. **Longenecker** defends this view by saying that the notion that the law multiplies sin does not fit with the temporal clause, while the definitional sense accords with the idea of the supervision of the pedagogue, and also explains why those under the law are cursed.

(3) **Dunn** argues that the law was given **to deal with sin**. In other words, sacrifices were provided in the OT cultus to atone for sin before the coming of Christ.

(4) Despite the attractiveness of the first three views, the view that is the most plausible is that the law was given **to increase sin**. The problem with the first view, that the law was given **to restrain sin**, is the context of Galatians. Such an admission by Paul would support the view of the Judaizers who argued that the Galatians must be circumcised and keep the law. Surely the opponents must have argued that the law's restraining function was desperately needed among the Galatian Christians. Instead, Paul has already argued that the law curses those who are under its rule since no one can obey it (**3:10**). Indeed, the law is unable to grant life, and all enclosed within its realm are under the power of sin (**3:21–22**). Furthermore, **4:5** speaks of those who were under law as redeemed or liberated from it, indicating that those who are under law are enslaved to sin. Hence, there is no reason to think that the law is envisioned as restraining sin here. Quite the opposite. As in **Rom 5:20**, the law was given to increase transgressions. Such a perspective fits with the history of Israel, for life under law did not lead to a law-abiding society. Instead, **sin reigned in Israel**, and as a result both the northern and southern kingdoms were sent into exile.

A more attractive solution is that the law was given **to define sin**, and it is possible that both the defining of sin and the expansion of sin are included. Still, it is difficult to see how the law defined sin only until Christ came. The idea that the law increased the reign of sin in Israel until the coming of the Christ, however, fits with the OT story of Israel's life under the law. Furthermore, it was noted above that Paul links being "*under law*" (cf. **3:23**) with being under the power of sin, and hence the upsurge of sin under the law is preferable. By showing that the law could not curb sin, God revealed that the only answer to the power of sin is the coming of the Messiah.

Finally, it is unlikely that Paul emphasizes here that the law provides atonement for sin. Instead, he emphasizes in Galatians that the law does not provide full and final forgiveness, for if forgiveness is truly secured through the law and its sacrifices, then Christ died for nothing (**2:21**).

**Philip Ryken:** Sometimes the law restrains sin, but this is not why God gave Moses the law with all its regulations and requirements. He did not give it to decrease transgression, but actually to increase it. The law exposes sin for what it really is, namely, a violation of God's holy standard. That is what transgression means: the crossing of a legal boundary or the breaking of a specific law.

The law has a way of making people want to break it. Paul explained this effect of the law to the Romans. "*If it had not been for the law,*" he wrote, "*I would not have known sin*" (**Rom. 7:7**). And as soon as Paul found out what sin was, he wanted to try it: "*The law came in to increase the trespass*" (**Rom. 5:20**). Or, to paraphrase what Paul said to the Galatians, the law was given "*in order that there might be transgressions.*" Sometimes the law serves as a **stimulus to sin**.

One purpose of the law, then, is **not preventive but provocative**. Rather than preventing transgression, the law actually provokes people to sin. By doing so, it does not make things better, but makes a bad situation even worse: "*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin*" (**Rom. 3:20**). God did not give the law to reveal the way to be justified; he gave it to disclose the evil power of sin. "Therefore," wrote **Martin Luther**, "the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God."

Yet this is a good thing. When the Scripture says that the law was "*added,*" it literally says that the law came in by a side road. The law feeds into the promise; it is the on-ramp to the gospel highway. The more we know the law, the more we see our sin, and the more we see this, the more we confess that we need a Savior. "The law was given," wrote **Calvin**, "in order to make transgressions obvious, and in this way to compel men to acknowledge their guilt." And it is only when we see our guilt that we see how much we need Jesus. The law is the law so that Christ can become our Savior.

## 2. (:19b-20) The Law was Clearly Inferior to God's Promises --

- a. Proven by the nature of mediation  
*"having been ordained through angels  
by the agency of a mediator"*

Mediated through angels and Moses rather than directly given by God as the promises were to Abraham.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The "*mediator*" (μεσίτου) in the verse is almost certainly Moses, for he functioned as the one who transmitted the law to Israel. The presence of a mediator suggests the inferiority of the revelation or the weakness of the people. The reference to Moses' hands alludes to the Ten Commandments, which Moses brought down from the mountain with his own hands (cf. **Exod 32:15, 19; 34:4, 29**). So, Paul emphasizes

that the law was given to Moses through angels, and Moses in turn mediated the law to the people.

**Timothy George:** Paul did not intend to denigrate Moses as a person but rather to show again the transitory and totally inadequate character of the law as a system of salvation. The epistle to the Hebrews picks up on one of Paul's favorite antinomies, that of servant and son, and applies them to Moses and Christ in precisely this way: "*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's household, . . . but Christ was faithful as a Son over his household*" (**Heb 3:5–6**; emphasis added). Here in Galatians Paul did not develop these themes but focused instead on the unity of God, quoting from the Shema, the most basic confession of the Hebrew faith, "*Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*" (**Deut 6:4**). Paul's point was this: the promise to Abraham came directly from God, not through angels or by means of a merely human mediator such as Moses.

- b. Proven by the intended duration -- Only Temporary  
*"until the seed should come  
to whom the promise had been made"*

**Ben Witherington:** The Law is seen by Paul as an important **parenthesis** between the Abrahamic covenant and the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham in Christ, but a parenthesis nonetheless, a temporary means of God's dealing with the chosen people. . .

The temporality of the Law includes an end as well as a beginning in history, a point made five times in **3:19–25** (w. 19c, 23a and c, 24a, 25).

- c. Proven by the need for a mediator  
*"Now a mediator is not for one party only;  
whereas God is only one."*

**John MacArthur:** Paul seems to be pointing out that a mediator (literally one who stands between two parties) is needed only when more than one party is involved. God gave the covenant directly to Abraham without a mediator because He was the only one involved in making the covenant. Abraham was a witness to the covenant and was a beneficiary, but he was not a party to it. Abraham had no part in establishing or keeping the covenant. That responsibility was God's alone. The covenant of law, however, not only involved mediators (angels and Moses) but mutual obligations on the two parties (God and Israel).

**Thomas Schreiner:** A mediator involves at least two parties, and in this context the distance between God and Israel is stressed. Such a view fits with the giving of the law in Exodus, where Moses received the law on the mountain alone and brought it down to Israel (cf. **Exod 19–34**). Mediation also implies a contract between God and Israel. Therefore, the promises of the covenant were dependent on both parties fulfilling their responsibilities. The Sinai covenant failed because Israel did not do what was demanded and broke the stipulations of the covenant. The promise given to Abraham,

by contrast, is dependent on God alone. And since it depends on his promise and is not contingent, it will certainly be fulfilled.

The main idea of the verse seems clear in context. On the one hand, the law is inferior to the promise because it required mediation: from God to angels to Moses to the people. On the other hand, the one God spoke directly to Abraham. Hence, the promise is clearly superior to the law. The indirect way that the law came to Israel suggests that it should not be placed on the same plane as the promise.

The declaration that “*God is one*” recalls one of the fundamental tenets of Judaism, found in the Shema of **Deut 6:4**. Paul also appeals to the oneness of God in **Rom 3:30** to underscore that there is **one way of salvation**. It is intriguing that both in Romans and here in Galatians the oneness of God is introduced where Paul defends the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God apart from the law. Since there is one God, there is one way of salvation. Inasmuch as the law did not and could not accomplish salvation, it is inferior to the promise.

**Nijay Gupta:** It is a bit like two people who meet and fall in love, but they speak different languages and communicate through a translator. The love may genuinely be there, but so is the translator, which means there is a necessary distance relationally between the lovers. They might appreciate the good work of the translator to connect them, but they no doubt long for the translator to not be necessary, so they can engage more directly, heart to heart. The oneness of God is not just a numerical value; it is a testimony and confession that God’s people believed and professed about God’s essential nature and desire for wholeness against fragmentation, peace against division, integration against disintegration. The mediation of angels and mortals must give way to a more fluid and intimate union between God and the believer, and this can only happen in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Perhaps there is also an element of this oneness value that involves Jews and gentiles coming together as one—this would anticipate **Galatians 3:28** where Paul affirms that “*all*” are children of God on equal footing by participating in the unique Sonship of Jesus Christ by “*putting on*” Christ.

**Van Parunak:** Thus we have three specific ways in which the law is different from promise:

1. its purpose,
2. its duration,
3. and its bilateral nature.

Application: Each of these should lead us to thank God.

## **B. (:21-22) God's Law Should Not be Stretched Beyond Its Intended Purpose**

### 1. God's Law is Not an Enemy to God's Promises

*"Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!"*

**Ronald Fung:** The law’s inferiority to the promise does not mean that the law contradicts the promise (v. **21a**). Paul substantiates his emphatic denial of any such

contradiction by referring again to the function of the law, but this time in a positive as well as a negative aspect.

2. God's Law Can Never Provide Justification

*"For if a law had been given, which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law."*

**Howard Vos:** If the law is inferior to promise, is there opposition between these two divine arrangements? Paul says, "*Perish the thought.*" The law is all right as far as it goes, but it really could not compete with promise because it could not give life. The law as an externally prescribed rule cannot even pretend to impart life. And if sanction were given to law as a new means of justification, it would achieve nothing unless it gained a means of bestowing spiritual life.

3. God's Law Accomplished Its Intended Purpose

*"But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."*

**Ben Witherington:** The Law is therefore to be understood not as a restriction of the Abrahamic promises to one race – that is the mistake Paul’s opponents are making – but as a temporary measure introduced for certain specific purposes which, in the long run, would not prevent but rather facilitate the creation of the single family spoken of in the promise.

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) What are some examples of man's covenants which have proven to be dependable and others which have proven to be unreliable? What makes God's covenants 100% dependable?
- 2) What is the nature of the "*inheritance*" which God promised back to Abraham and in which we Gentile believers share? Were there some elements of God's promise to Abraham that were strictly for national Israel or do present day believers share in all these blessings as the "true Israel" of God? Why does the nature of an inheritance demand that it come as a grace gift rather than as a reward for works? What is the basic difference between a contract between two parties and a will executed by one?
- 3) How does our relationship to Christ as the heir of God determine what level of inheritance we enjoy?
- 4) How has God's law been effective in your life in terms of convicting you of sin and highlighting God's perfect standards?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**John MacArthur:** Four reasons are given for affirming the superiority of the covenant of promise: its confirmation, its Christ-centeredness, its chronology, and its completeness... The one and only heir of every promise of God is Christ. Every promise given in the covenant with Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ. Therefore the only way a person can participate in the promised blessings to Abraham is to be a fellow heir with Christ through faith in Him...

After showing the superiority of the covenant of promise, Paul shows the inferiority of the covenant of law -- first in regard to its purpose, then in regard to its mediator, and finally in regard to its accomplishment.

**William Hendriksen:** If the law given at Sinai was unable to impart righteousness, then what possible good could it do? Of what use was it? ... it was given to man in addition to the promise in order to bring about within his heart and mind an awakened sense of guilt. A vague awareness of the fact that all is not right with him will not drive him to the Savior. Only when he realizes that his sins are transgressions of the law of that God who is also his Judge and whose holiness cannot brook such digressions, such constant stepping aside from the appointed path, will he, when this knowledge is applied to his heart by the Holy Spirit, cry out for deliverance.

**Robert Gromacki:** The reason for the addition of the law was “*because of transgression.*” It was designed to restrain fallen human nature. If no restrictions were ever placed on unregenerate wills, then sinners would manifest their position in every conceivable evil practice. The intent of the law, therefore, was to reduce the amount of sin that could be committed. In a sense, sinful man is not as bad as he could be (his practice), although he is as bad off as he can be (his position). Moral anarchy could not be tolerated by either God or man. The aim of the law was to give to sin the character of transgression and to create within the sinner a consciousness of guilt. It removed the excuse of an innate human weakness caused by evolutionary heredity or a hostile environment. It showed to man that he had willfully violated the decree of the personal, sovereign God of the universe.

**Warren Wiersbe:** The Judaizers were impressed by the incidentals of the law -- glory, thunder, lightning, angels, and other externals. But Paul looked beyond incidentals to the essentials. The law was temporary, and required a mediator. The covenant of promise was permanent, and no mediator was required. There could be but one conclusion: the covenant was greater than the law.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** The word “*seed*” then points explicitly to the stories of the election of and promise to Abraham. **The motif ties the creation stories, where we first found the seed (universal covenant), to the story of Israel (particular covenant).** The link between these two covenants is integral to Paul’s preaching to the Galatians: the election of Israel is specifically in the promised seed of Abraham, the Christ.

In what I am calling the first episode the promise is threefold: **land, progeny, and blessing to the nations**. The Lord calls to Abram: “*Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you*”; “*I will make of you a great nation*” (*goy*, MT; *ethnos*, LXX); “*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (**Gen. 12:1–3**). We do not yet hear the word “*seed*,” only “*nation*” (*ethnos*).

This detail presents a lexical and theological puzzle that complicates translation. The Hebrew word often translated in English as “*nation*,” *goy*, is *ethnos* in the Septuagint. Paul will use this word, usually translated “*Gentile*” in English, as a counterpart to “*Jew*.” But at **Gen. 12:2** it is clear that the word *ethnos* includes the nation of Israel. As the biblical narrative moves forward, the word *ethnos* no longer refers to Israel but to the not-Israel; this is not the case here. The complication deepens: in the Hebrew Bible, some of these *ethnē* descend from Abram through Hagar’s son Ishmael (**Gen. 17:16; →1:17**). The promise for the great nation from Abram’s loins points typologically to the promise of the “*seed*” in **Gen. 15**, the key episode for Paul’s preaching to the Galatians.

The second episode of the promises (**Gen. 13:14–17**) leaves out the blessing on the nations and reorders the other promises. Paul is less explicitly interested in this episode, even though it implicitly underlies his preaching to the Galatians. The promises of land and seed are richly interwoven: the promise of the seed (*sperma*; **13:15–16**) is sandwiched between two promises of the land (**13:14–15, 17**). Here the promised people are not referred to as a *goy* (“*nation*,” **12:2**) but *zera*, “*seed*.” This seed (singular) will be as innumerable as the dust of the earth: “*The LORD said to Abram . . . , ‘Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land [gē/ha’arets] that you see I will give to you and to your seed [sperma/zera, singular; NRSV “offspring”] forever. I will make your seed [sperma/zera] like the dust of the earth [gē/ha’arets] so that if one can count the dust of the earth [gē/ha’arets], your seed [sperma/zera] also can be counted. Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land [gē/ha’arets], for I will give it to you’*” (**Gen. 13:14–17 AT**).

The third episode of promises in **Gen. 15:2–23** is also twofold but is significantly expanded. At **Gen. 15:4** the word “*heir*” appears (*klēronomēsei*, LXX; *yirash*, MT), but in the following verse this heir is identified as “*seed*” (*sperma*, LXX; *zera*, MT; NRSV, “*offspring*”). This seed will be as numerous as the stars (**Gen. 15:5**; see also **22:17**). The Lord will give Abram a land. Added here is the detail of its boundaries: it will stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates (**Gen. 15:7, 18–21**). The tribes originally occupying the land are now mentioned, foreshadowing the future threats to the promise. In this dialogue with the Lord, Abraham registers his complaints, doubts, and objections. In this episode bracketed between the two promises of progeny and land lie the key terms for Paul’s interpretation in Galatians: righteousness and faith. “*And [Abram] believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness*” (**Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6**).



In **Gen. 15:2** we hear Abram's complaint to the Lord God: despite the earlier promises, Abram continues without an heir. "*You have given me no seed [sperma/zera], and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir*" (**Gen. 15:3** AT). The Lord responds that Abram will indeed have an heir of his own body (**Gen. 15:4**). The slave born in his house, Eliezer of Damascus, is the non-seed; he is not Abram's biological son or his heir. Eliezer foreshadows Ishmael, who is the biological non-heir. The Lord brings Abram outside and tells him to try to count the stars: Abram's descendants (*sperma/zera*) will be as numerous as this starry band. There is an ambiguity built into the use of the word "*seed*" at this point: the single seed refers to something uncountable.

In the fourth and theologically central episode in **Gen. 17**, even before God covenants, he promises. This is the story that opens the particular covenant with the election of Abram. Unlike **Gen. 15**, with its detailed promise of the land, **Gen. 17** shrinks the promise of the land to fill just one verse (**17:8**), while the promise of descendants and the command to circumcise will fill five verses (**17:10–14**).

At **Gen. 17:5**, God (El Shaddai) changes Abram's name to Abraham, promising that he will be the father of many: "*No longer shall your name be Abram [ 'avram], but your name shall be Abraham [ 'avraham] for I have made you the father [av] of a multitude of nations [ethnōn/goyim]*" (AT). The name of the patriarch up to this point had been Abram in the episodes in Genesis; however, Paul uses the patriarch's covenant name to refer to him throughout: Abraham. Paul's narrational dislocation of the name is no doubt intentional, for it highlights the content and goal of his preaching to the Gentiles.

Paul's use of the patriarch's covenant name Abraham in Galatians is significant for at least two reasons.

1. First, the chronological relationship between election and circumcision is key to Paul's overall argument. The rite of circumcision is given to the patriarch only after God renames him at the gift of the covenant, where Abram becomes Abraham. That the Gentiles in Galatia do not grasp the theological import of this chronology has resulted in their being confused by the teaching of the Third Party, who impose circumcision. Paul needs to remind the Galatians from scripture that the promise of the seed (**Gen. 15:5; Gal. 3:16**) precedes the giving of the statute of circumcision (**Gen. 17:11**).
2. Second, Abram's new identity as Abraham, "*father of many*," indicates the promissory nature of God's covenant with the nations through Christ, including the Gentiles in Galatia. They are among the nations who, apart from the promise of Christ, are strangers to the covenant of election (**Gen. 17:4; ethnē**, LXX; *goyim*, MT; **Eph. 2:12**). Through Christ they are members of the particular covenant of election.

God renames Sarai at **17:15**. Now she will be Sarah. Whereas the change in Abraham's name is marked with a change in identity (he becomes the "*father of many*"), the significance of Sarah's name change is left in the shadows. And even though she is renamed, Paul himself does not use her name at all throughout Galatians; he refers to her simply as "*free*," "*our mother*," the "*free woman*," and the "*Jerusalem above*" (**Gal.**

**4:23, 30–31; 4:26**). In both Genesis and Galatians, the seed cannot be delivered except through Sarah's own body.

While Hagar's very presence in the narrative is both a threat to the promise and the engine of the story of Abraham's family, Hagar's own name remains unchanged throughout. This foreshadows the complexity of her specific role in the particular covenant. Hagar's role points to Sarah's own crucial role in the story of election: the promised son comes not through Hagar but specifically through Sarah. The promise is fulfilled neither in Eliezer of Damascus nor in Abraham's first son Ishmael. Even though the former is not Abraham's biological son and the latter is, neither of them is the son of the promise; neither is born of Sarah. The seed will come specifically through Sarah's womb, not Hagar's (**Gen. 17:16, 19, 21**). Abraham himself is in effect a third wheel at this point in the story. The details regarding Sarah's infertility and Hagar's birthing of Abraham's firstborn will become key indicators of the complexity of God's promises and providence as Paul moves into the allegory of **Gal. 4**.

At the apex of the fourth episode of the promise, Abraham steps from the universal into the particular covenant in which he is given the command to circumcise. But God's covenant with Abraham is not limited to him or even to his biological descendants; it includes also the slaves born in his house and any slaves he will acquire. All of them must be circumcised (**Gen. 17:12–13**). The fact that the seed itself is promised before the rite is commanded expresses the overflowing abundance of God's grace, which Paul understands in specifically messianic terms.

Abraham fits the typology that Paul employs with the Galatians for (at least) four reasons:

- (1) Abraham is a Gentile when God calls him out from Ur;
- (2) Abraham's faith in the promised Messiah makes him righteous in God's sight;
- (3) his righteousness is declared before the covenant rite is given; and
- (4) this all occurs long before the law of Sinai is revealed. In Abraham's faith, righteousness is bound to Christology and hence points to ecclesiology.

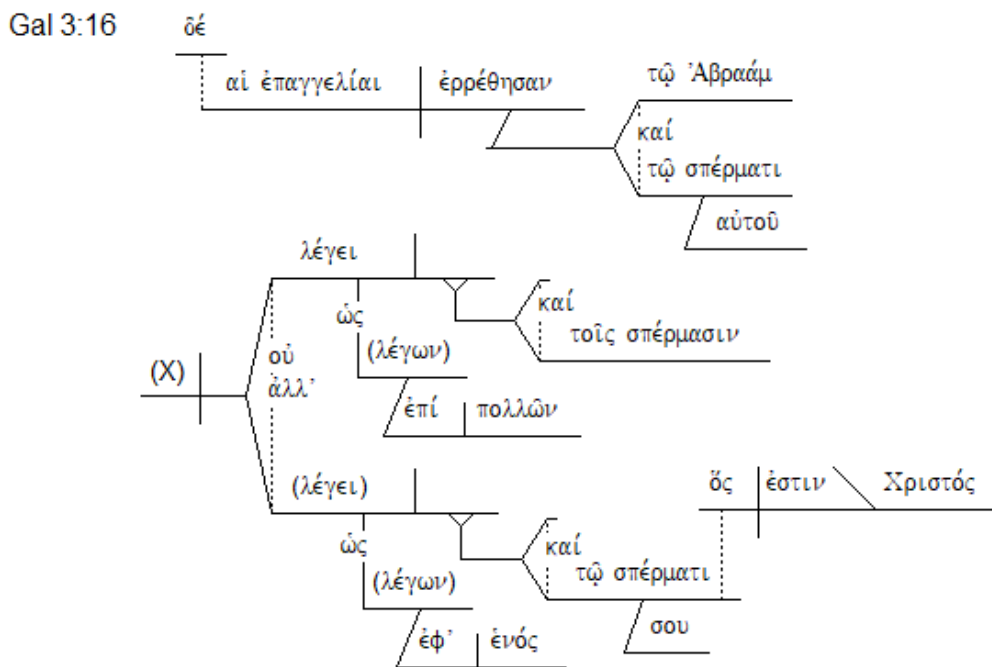
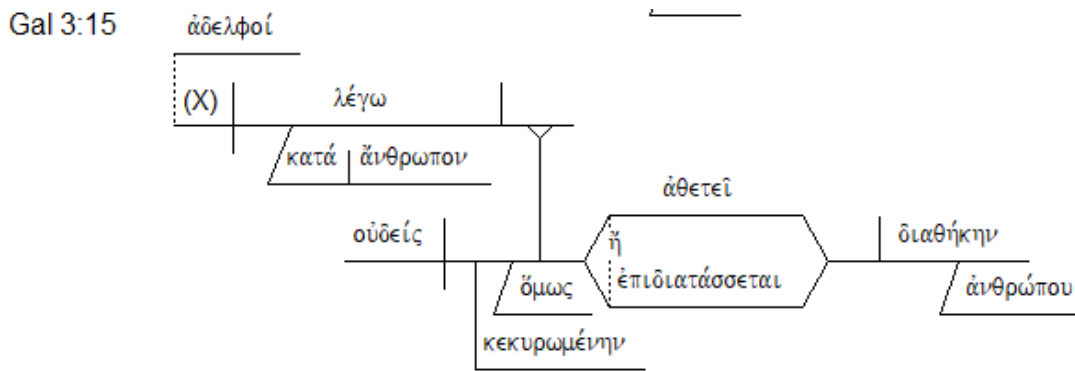
Abraham is the ecclesiological figure par excellence in whom the Galatians are to find not only their messianic faith but also their own election as Gentiles in Christ apart from circumcision.

We encounter a fifth episode in **Gen. 18:1–15** that also points to the episode of the long-awaited birth of Isaac narrated in **Gen. 21**. In **Gen. 18**, the promises of land and progeny recede and the plot now centers on the promised son. Sarah's incredulity over the promise's seeming impossibility (**Gen. 18:12–15**) anticipates her laughter after his birth (**21:6–7**). While **Gen. 18** plays a minimal role in **Gal. 3**, a small detail in **Gen. 21:9–10** about Sarah's reaction to the boys will play a key role in Paul's allegory in **Gal. 4**.

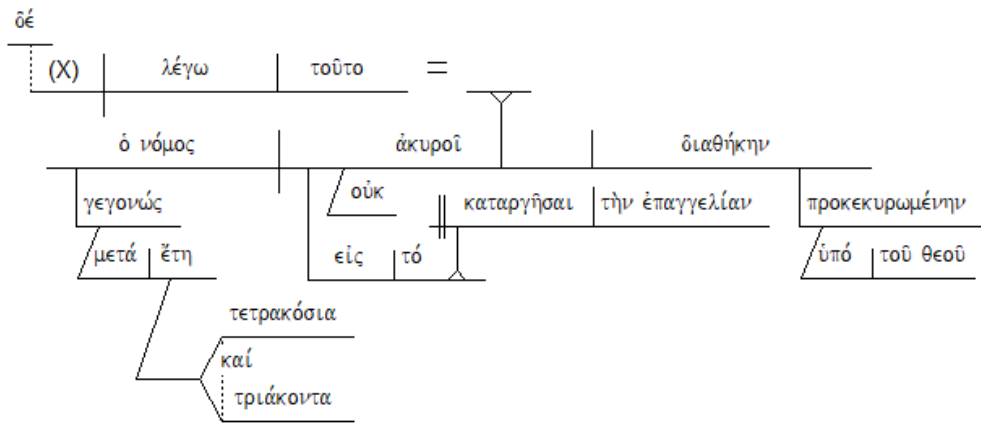
A sixth episode of the promise narrated in **Gen. 22** is strikingly different from the preceding episodes; the promised son is at the center of impending doom. God

commands that Abraham sacrifice his own son. The most dire threat to the covenant in the entire Hebrew Bible, the Sacrifice (Binding, Akedah) of Isaac makes the threat of Sarah's infertility pale in comparison. God commands; Abraham obeys; God spares; Abraham's hand is stayed; the declaration of the promise is reiterated. Disaster averted. But the fact that Paul does not allude to this final episode in Galatians is theologically provocative, especially given the embryonic christological typology of **Gen. 22 (Heb. 11:17; James 2:21)** that will blossom in the later tradition. But we can safely assume that the passage does not serve the pastoral needs of the Galatians' situation. The fact that Paul omits the story in recounting the promise is an additional sign that he is not writing a theological tract but a pastoral response to a specifically fraught intracommunal situation.

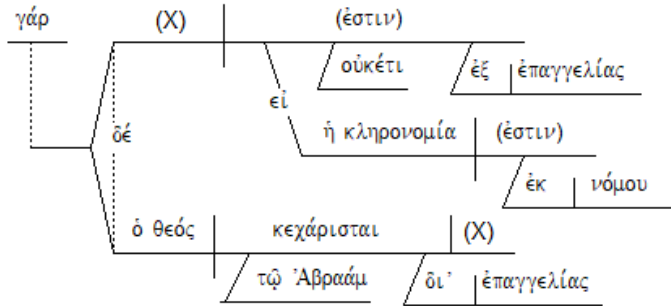
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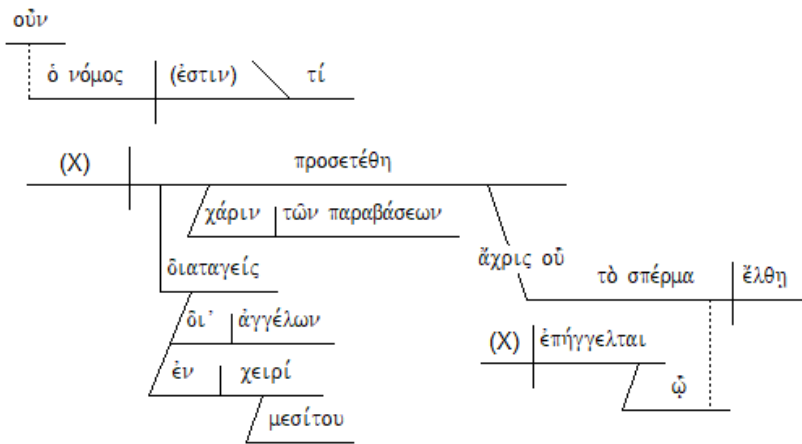
Gal 3:17



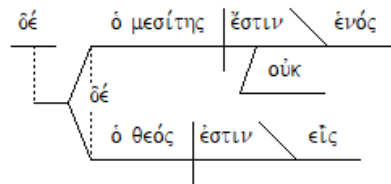
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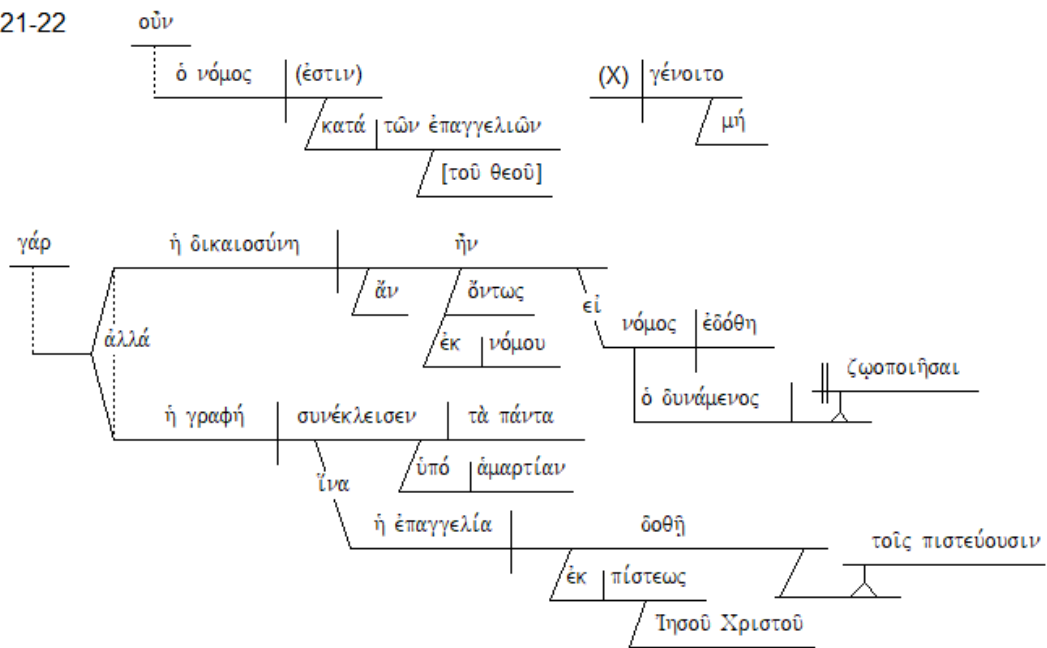
Gal 3:19



Gal 3:20



Gal 3:21-22



TEXT: GALATIANS 3:23-29

TITLE: BEFORE AND AFTER FAMILY SNAPSHOTS --  
PRIVILEGE OF SONSHIP THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE COMING OF CHRIST ELEVATED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD TO THAT OF PRIVILEGED SONS AND HEIRS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**David deSilva:** Paul continues to advance the view of salvation history articulated in **3:15–22**, with the period of Torah’s authority yielding to the period of the Spirit’s guidance in Christ, by formulating an argument from analogy based on the common experience of children growing up in households of more-than-moderate means, that is, households that could afford to own several slaves (**3:23–25**). Such children moved through several stages of care—first nannies or wet nurses, then pedagogues, then (while still being ushered about by the pedagogue) teachers—before reaching maturity, the age at which they become adult sons and daughters within the household and participants in the life of the city. Paul likens the period of the Torah’s authority over human action and interaction to the period of the pedagogue’s authority over the minor children in a household, and the coming of faith to the children’s coming of age in the household, at which time they pass into a new status and a very new set of conditions and circumstances. The stereotype of the pedagogue as a despot-disciplinarian would reinforce Paul’s earlier descriptions of life “under law” as life “under a curse” (**3:10–14**), as well as the intrinsically temporary nature of such conditions in God’s larger plan for humankind (**3:15–22**).

**John MacArthur:** Continuing his discussion of works of the law as opposed to faith in the promise, Paul now contrasts the personal effects those two approaches have on people. After showing the historical relationship between the covenant of promise to Abraham and the covenant of works through Moses and then showing the redemptive superiority of the former over the latter (**vv. 6-22**), he now introduces the personal application of the two covenants. In doing so, he describes the before and the after of conversion, the character and orientation of a person’s life before he trusts in God for salvation and after God grants him righteousness because of that trust. Before conversion a person is under the law and suffers the bondage that relationship brings; after conversion he is in Christ and enjoys the freedom that relationship brings.

**I. (3:23-24) BEFORE SNAPSHOT –  
BEFORE JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST CAME –  
RESTRICTIONS / PREPARATION**

**Van Parunak:** **Vv. 23-24** describes our situation in the **past**, using two metaphors: prisoners in jail and children under a guardian. In both cases, the law is the power that holds us in until the purpose for our restraint arrives.

#### **A. Timeframe**

*"But before faith came"*

Is Paul talking about Jews in OT times (probably) or anybody in their pre-conversion days (more of an application)?

**Douglas Moo:** **Verses 23–25** form a unit, framed by references to the “*coming*” of faith (**Mussner** 1988: 254). . . **Faith** has always been the means by which humans relate to God. The object of that faith has now been revealed as the God who has decisively revealed himself in the Son: and this, for Paul, is the key point to be made in response to the agitators.

**Ronald Fung:** The coming of faith is therefore identical with the coming of Christ, who is the object of faith; it is the coming of Christ, making possible the coming of faith, which is the decisive point in salvation history.

**Bruce Barton:** Faith, as spoken of in the Scriptures, does not refer to some innate human power that, when used to its greatest capacity, gives us merit with God no matter what the actual content or object of that faith. The central point of the gospel is not belief, but **who we believe** and how we believe in him. Paul did not hesitate to display the vulnerability of Christianity in the claims about Jesus Christ. The system proves true or false in its foundational statement: “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*” (**1 Corinthians 15:17** NIV). Abraham was justified by his faith and, along with other Old Testament believers, had to trust in God’s grace without knowing much of God’s plan; but “*this faith*” was faith in what should be revealed -- Jesus Christ.

**Van Parunak:** The principle of trusting in the finished work of Christ. “*The*” calls us back to **v.22**, and the faith there defined. Before the coming of Christ, no one could exercise faith in Jesus the Messiah, only an anticipatory faith in an unknown messiah.

#### **B. Restrictions -- Only a Schoolmaster**

##### 1. Function of Guarding -- but not Delivering

*"we were kept in custody under the law"*

**Robert Gromacki:** Under constant surveillance. They were in the prison house of sin with no way of escape. The law was like a jailor or a sentry, watching every act of moral disobedience. They were being guarded at all times.

**Philip Ryken:** The law kept the Jews under its **protective custody**. It watched over them, keeping them safe until it could lead them to Christ. An old commentary by **G. G. Findlay** describes the situation like this:

“The law was all the while standing guard over its subjects, watching and checking every attempt to escape, but intending to hand them over in due time to the charge of faith. The law posts its ordinances, like so many sentinels, round the prisoner’s cell. The cordon is complete. He tries again and again to break out; the iron circle will not yield. The deliverance will yet be his. The day of faith approaches. It dawned long ago in Abraham’s promise. Even now its light shines into his dungeon, and he hears the word of Jesus, ‘*Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace.*’ Law, the stern jailor, has after all been a good friend, if it has reserved him for this. It prevents the sinner escaping to a futile and illusive freedom.”

The law is a guardian, refusing to let go until it hands us directly over to Christ. . .

These two illustrations—the prison and the pedagogue—show that the law had the legitimate purpose of keeping us safe until Christ came to save us. God used the law “to shut us up in prison until Christ should set us free, or to put us under tutors until Christ should make us sons.”

**David Guzik:** Before we were saved by faith; before we lived our lives by faith, we were *kept under guard by the law*. Here, Paul uses a different word and a different idea than when he wrote the *Scripture has confined all under sin* in the previous verse.

The idea behind confined is **imprisonment**; the idea behind under guard is **protective custody**. There is a sense in which we were imprisoned by our own sin under the law; but there is also another sense in which it guarded us in protective custody.

#### **How does the law protect us?**

- It protects us by showing us God’s heart.
- It protects us by showing us the best way to live.
- It protects us by showing what should be approved and disapproved among men.
- It protects us by providing a foundation for civil law.

In these ways and more, we were kept under guard by the law.

**John MacArthur:** After using the third person for most of the chapter (vv. 6-22), Paul reverts to the first person (*we*). In using *we*, he first of all identifies himself with the Jewish people, to whom both covenants were given. But in a broader and more comprehensive sense he is also identifying himself with all of mankind, Jew and Gentile. Even the most pagan Gentile who has never heard of the true God is under obligation to keep His moral and spiritual standards and, if he disregards those standards, to face the judgment of God.

Paul uses two figures to represent God’s law and its effect on unbelievers,

- first that of a prison
- and then that of a guardian.



In custody under the law, which he violates continually, sinful man is **imprisoned**. He is, as it were, on death row, sentenced to execution for his sin, the wages of which is death (**Rom. 6:23**).

## 2. Looking Forward to the Coming Faith

*"being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed"*

### **C. Preparation -- Purpose of the Law = to Lead us to Christ**

*"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."*

**Max Anders:** In the Jewish culture a slave was assigned to each child to escort them to school and to assist in their supervision. This nanny was not a thirteen-year-old, sweet, little baby-sitter. This supervising nanny was more like a stern sergeant who had the bark of a German shepherd and the bite of a Doberman pincher. Every time the child took liberties without permission on the path to school (children like to play) or did something wrong, this authoritarian nanny pointed her finger at the child and in no uncertain terms told the child what it had done wrong and delivered the punishment. By correlating the law with this nanny image, we learn that the law was given to point out sin and to threaten a great punishment if God's people didn't straighten up. Man's very inability to obey this law perfectly, and thus earn God's approval, caused men and women to long for a better way to salvation and a relationship with God—by grace.

**Richard Longenecker:** The focus here is on the supervisory function of the law, the inferior status of one under such supervision, and the temporary nature of such a situation in the course of salvation history.

**David deSilva:** The confining, guarding, strict supervisory function of the Torah suggested to Paul that the pedagogue set over young children in a household was an apt metaphor. Though no doubt his charges often chafed against his guardianship, and though popularly lampooned as a despotic disciplinarian over the same, the pedagogue nevertheless serves a positive purpose in the lives of underage children in the household—though, notably, only up to a certain point in the child's life. Paul's identification of the Torah as pedagogue (as opposed to taskmaster, slave driver, or warden) suggests that **3:23–25** offers, among other things, a positive continuation of the answer to the question raised in **3:19**: "*Why, then, the law?*"

**Timothy George:** In a proper sense the law does **lead us to Christ** not by weaning us from our sins but rather revealing them clearly and even causing them to be multiplied and increased to the point where we stand before God utterly void of any hope of self-reclamation. Yet this convicting, condemning, killing function of the law is not an end in itself but rather, as **A. Schlatter** once put it, "the silent preparation for the revelation of faith."

## **II. (3:25-29) AFTER SNAPSHOT – AFTER JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST HAS COME – FULFILLMENT / ENJOYMENT OF PRIVILEGES**

**Max Anders:** Grace appropriated through faith makes us adult children of God and unites us as brothers and sisters. The law never brought this vertical and horizontal oneness. Therefore, grace is superior to the law.

### **A. (:25a) Timeframe**

*"But now that faith has come"*

### **B. (:25b) Fulfillment -- Graduated to a Higher Level**

*"we are no longer under a tutor"*

**Richard Longenecker:** To be a Jewish believer in Jesus did not mean turning one's back on one's own culture or nation. Yet no longer could it be argued that circumcision, Jewish dietary laws, following distinctly Jewish ethical precepts, or any other matter having to do with a Jewish lifestyle were requisite for the life of faith. Certainly not for Gentile Christians in any sense, though Paul and the Jerusalem apostles for cultural, national, and/or pragmatic reasons allowed Jewish believers in Jesus to live a Jewish lifestyle, but not as required spiritually.

**John MacArthur:** The law was never intended to be anything more than a temporary means of showing men their sin and of leading them to the Savior. Its internal, moral demands left men ridden with guilt; its external ceremonies (circumcision, offerings, washings, sabbaths, feasts, etc.) symbolized the need for cleansing from that guilt. Now that faith in Jesus Christ has come, a person is no longer under the law as a tutor. He is now out from under the law's symbolism, the law's bondage, and the law's discipline. The law's purpose has been fulfilled, and the person is no longer "*under law, but under grace*" (**Rom. 6:14**). God's moral standards, however, do not change, and the New Testament reiterates them, and the power of the resident Holy Spirit in the believer enables obedience to them (see **Eph. 2:10**).

As he unfolds the result of being rightly related to God through faith in Christ Jesus, Paul shows three aspects of the freedom of that relationship. Those who believe in Him and thereby become one with Him are

1. sons of God,
2. are one with every other believer,
3. and are heirs of the promise.

### **C. (:26-29) Enjoyment of Privileges**

**Scot McKnight:** Paul's main thesis is that the Galatians are sons of God and heirs by faith in Christ (v. 26). He then restates his point by saying that all who were baptized have put on Christ (v. 27). That Paul was most concerned with the word *all* in both verses 26 and 27 becomes obvious by his explanation in verse 28: in Christ there are no

racial, social, or sexual distinctions, because all are one. The implication of the “allness” of **verses 26–28** is brought out in **verse 29**: those who belong to Christ are both the seed of Abraham and heirs.

**David Croteau**: These four verses are the central point to the entire letter. Paul summarizes his argument in **verse 26** (which recalls **3:7**): through faith, believers (whether Jew or Gentile) have been united to Christ and are the true people of God. Every person is united to Christ in the same way: through faith. Ethnicity, social status, and gender do not change the terms of how someone is united to Christ. These distinctions still exist, but everyone is united to Christ in the same way (**1Co 12:13; Col 3:11**).

### 1. Full Sonship

*"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"*

**David deSilva**: The word “*all*” is emphatic by virtue of its position at the beginning of the Greek sentence, speaking in the first instance to the whole company of the Galatian Christians, whatever the ethnic derivation of any particular individual within the assemblies.

**Van Parunak**: We are now **sons of God**, no longer just **children**. We have grown up, and neither jail nor a babysitter is now appropriate.

**Bruce Barton**: The phrase “*in Christ Jesus*” strikes a dominant responsive chord for those who are trusting him as Savior and Lord. In this context, the phrase expresses the alternative to being “*under the supervision of the law*” (**3:25** NIV). Just as the use of a life instructor in the ancient Greek world assumed a distance between the slave and the child under his care, the alternate arrangement “*in Christ Jesus*” assumes a personal relationship. Paul made this clear by reminding the Galatians that their relationship with Christ means that they are “*children of God*.”

**Philip Ryken**: Liberal theology used to teach “the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” The idea was that since every single human being is a son or a daughter of God, we are all brothers and sisters. In one sense this is true. God exercises his care over all his creatures, and we all belong to a common humanity. Yet sonship is a privilege granted specifically to those who come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Although God is Creator of all, Ruler of all, and Judge of all, he is the Father only of his Son Jesus Christ and of those who are in Christ by faith.

### 2. (:27-28) Fully United with Christ without Distinction

#### a. (:27) Same Identity in God’s Eyes

*"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

**Robert Gromacki**: This change of spiritual clothing was taken from a cultural custom. In ancient times a Roman lad wore the *toa praetexta*, a toga with an elaborately

embroidered purple hem. When the boy reached manhood he put off this sign of immaturity and put on the white toga. Thus, under law, a person could never merit the clothing of spiritual sonship.

**Bruce Barton:** The expression *enedusasthe* (*put on, clothed yourselves*) recalls a specific ancient rite of passage. In Roman society, a youth coming of age laid aside the robe of childhood and put on a new toga. This represented his move into adult citizenship with full rights and responsibilities. Likewise, being “*in Christ*” leads to our ongoing experience of clothing ourselves with Christ. Paul combined this cultural understanding with the concept of baptism. By becoming Christians and being baptized, the Galatian believers were becoming spiritually grown up and ready to take on the privileges and responsibilities of the more mature. Paul was saying that they had laid aside the old clothes of the law and had put on Christ—that is, Christ’s robe of righteousness (see **2 Corinthians 5:21**; **Ephesians 4:23-24**). The person who did so became a “new” person, with a new lifestyle and new aspirations. Clothing ourselves with Christ is not passive; it is an action we must take. Have you put on the attitudes, characteristics, and intentions of Jesus Christ?

**George Brunk:** Here in **Galatians 3:27**, Paul confirms the close tie between conversion and ethics that we also found in **2:17-20**. This is the basis for Paul’s confidence that life in Christ is complete. It has no need of the Law for ethical direction or motivation. But the real point is that the genuine child of God has so deeply encountered the person of Jesus Christ that the personality of that One, in all of his humanity, has been taken on by the believer. In using the image of clothing, Paul is clearly not suggesting that conversion is an external thing, put on, as it were, to cover up the real person underneath. Paul uses the metaphor to speak about actual change in the person.

**Robert Fung:** **Baptism** is here regarded as the **rite of initiation into Christ**, that is, into union with Christ, or, what amounts to the same thing, of incorporation into Christ as the Head of the new humanity. This sense of the expression “*baptized into*” as “baptized so as to become a member of” is required by the context “on each of the three occasions which are decisive for its meaning”: here, **1 Cor. 12:13**, and **Rom. 6:3**.

Baptism is also regarded as “*putting on*” Christ, who is thought of as a garment enveloping the believer and symbolizing his new spiritual existence<sup>24</sup> (cf. **Rom. 13:14**, where the ethical aspect is primarily in view). The metaphor is probably derived from Hebrew tradition where the figure of changing clothes to represent an inward and spiritual change was common (cf. **Isa. 61:10**; **Zech. 3:3f.**).

The baptism in view in **Gal. 3:27** is almost certainly water baptism; this being the case, its juxtaposition with faith, especially the fact that union with Christ is ascribed both to faith (v. **26**) and to baptism (v. **27**), raises the question of the exact relationship between the two. An extreme, mechanistic view of baptism would have us believe that it was, “for Paul and his readers, universally and unquestionably accepted as a ‘mystery’ or sacrament which works *ex opere operato*,” that the moment the believer receives baptism, union with Christ “takes place in him without any cooperation, or exercise of

will or thought, on his part.” Such a view simply ignores the close connection between faith and baptism in the present instance; the fact that in this chapter faith is mentioned fifteen times and baptism only once would even by itself compel agreement with the dictum that Paul “by no means unconditionally attributes magic influence to baptism, as if receiving it guaranteed salvation.”

A more satisfactory view of the logical relationship between faith and baptism is represented by the statement that “St. Paul saw in Baptism the normal but not necessary, the helpful but not indispensable sign and seal put upon the act of faith appropriating the gift of God in Christ.” On this understanding, baptism is the “outward and visible sign of [an] inward and spiritual grace” (Book of Common Prayer), and the apparent equation of faith and baptism in **vv. 26f.** may be explained as a natural transference of terms whereby the symbol (baptism) is said to effect that which it symbolizes or as a form of metonymy whereby what is strictly true of faith is predicated of baptism. Probably Paul mentions baptism here because he is about to emphasize the oneness of those who are in Christ (**v. 28**, where the “*all*” of **v. 26** recurs): the visible sign of this oneness is not faith but baptism; the oneness with Christ that is symbolized in baptism is the basis for the oneness in Christ (cf. **Eph. 4:5**, “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*”). Here, as in **Rom. 6**, “there is an appeal in the presence of those who were in danger of forgetting spiritual facts, to the external sign which no one could forget.”

**Timothy George:** For Paul the baptismal rite, with its evocation of, and association with, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, models justification although it can never mediate it in an automatic way apart from faith and repentance. In the NT, believers’ baptism with (or “in” or “by”; cf. **1 Cor 12:13**) the Holy Spirit is antecedent to baptism with water, the latter being a confession and public witness to the former. We have no record of the baptism of the Galatians, but we may assume that many of them were baptized by Paul and Barnabas or the elders they appointed to care for the churches soon after the initial evangelization of that area (cf. **Acts 14:21–23**). However, in the opening verses of **Gal 3**, when Paul reminded the Galatians of the beginning of their Christian experience, he did not say, “Were you baptized?” but rather, “*Did you receive the Spirit?*” (**3:2–3**). The objective basis of faith is not the ordinance of baptism but rather that to which baptism bears witness, namely, the whole Christological - soteriological “event” summarized in the phrase “*God sent his Son*” (**4:4**), together with the gift of the Holy Spirit who through the preaching of the gospel has awakened faith in the elect.

With all this in mind, the question naturally arises: If one has already received the gift of the Spirit and has trusted Christ for salvation, then **why be baptized with water at all?** Certain Christian groups, notably Quakers and the Salvation Army, having drawn such a radical conclusion from these premises, have dispensed with baptism altogether. However, the nonpractice of baptism can in no way be justified on the basis of the NT, which attaches great importance to this crucial event. Why be baptized? The most basic answer, of course, is that the Lord Jesus Christ ordained (hence the Baptist preference for “ordinance” as opposed to “sacrament”) and commanded it. Just as Jesus identified himself with our wretched sinful condition in his own baptism, thereby proclaiming in

advance his death, burial, and resurrection, so too we are identified with Christ by our baptism, declaring the salvation Christ has wrought in three tenses—the drama of redemption accomplished once and for all, our own deliverance from the bondage of sin, and the consummation and final resurrection that is yet to come.

**Scot McKnight:** Some will no doubt have problems with the observation that **faith** and **baptism** are parallel expressions for Paul. Among many free churches in the world, baptism has taken on a secondary importance and is too often confined to “nothing more than an entrance rite” into the church. While it is clear that Paul makes a fundamental difference between external rites and internal reality (cf. **Rom. 2:25–29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11; cf. Gal. 5:6**), and can even suggest that baptizing was not his purpose (**1 Cor. 1:13–17**), **baptism was in the early church the initial and necessary response of faith**. To be sure, their world was more ritual-oriented than ours and consequently got more out of rituals than we probably do. Nonetheless, we dare not make baptism “nothing more than a ritual of entrance,” for it was for the earliest Christians their first moment of faith, and we know of no such thing as an “unbaptized believer.” Baptism was not necessary for salvation, but faith without baptism was not faith for the early church. The Galatians knew this, and so Paul appealed to their experience.

b. (:28) No Distinction in God’s Eyes

*"There is neither Jew no Greek,  
there is neither slave nor free man,  
there is neither male nor female;  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

The law created all types of differences -- between Jews and Gentiles; between clean and unclean animals; etc.

**Bruce Barton:** The barriers broken down in this verse may not seem so radical to our day, but they were astounding in ancient Roman culture. This made Christianity unique and attractive—it valued each individual, yet it provided a unified body. All believers are one in Christ Jesus. All are equally valuable to God. Differences arise in gifts, in function, in abilities, but all are one in Christ (**Ephesians 2:15**).

**David deSilva:** Here he explains how the believers have become God’s “sons and daughters” by virtue of being joined to the Son in baptism and how this new status affects personal identity and social relationships within the Christian assembly.

**John MacArthur:** It is not, of course, that among Christians there is no such thing as a Jew, Gentile, slave, free person, man, or woman. There are obvious racial, social, and sexual differences among people. Paul, however, was speaking of spiritual differences—differences in standing before the Lord, spiritual value, privilege, and worthiness. Consequently, prejudice based on race, social status, sex, or any other such superficial and temporary differences has no place in the fellowship of Christ’s church. All believers, without exception, are all one in Christ Jesus. All spiritual blessings,

resources, and promises are equally given to all who believe unto salvation (cf. **Rom. 10:12**).

**Ronald Fung:** The three antitheses, which represent the most far-reaching distinctions of ancient society, seem to have been deliberately chosen with an eye to the threefold privilege for which a pious male Jew daily thanked God: that he was not made a Gentile, a slave or a woman—categories of people debarred from certain religious privileges. It is noteworthy that in the third antithesis the words used are not the customary terms for man and woman but the more technical terms denoting male and female, thus indicating that what is in view is the general relationship between the sexes and not the specific relationship between husband and wife. The statement that there is no “male and female” in Christ does not mean, as was believed in later Gnosticism, that in the new era mankind is restored to the pristine androgynous state; nor does it mean that all male-female distinctions have been obliterated in Christ, any more than that there is no racial difference between the Christian Jew and the Christian Gentile.

**Scot McKnight:** Scholars have often observed that a Jewish blessing that was prayed daily by some Jews is reversed here: “Blessed be God that he did not make me a Gentile; blessed be God that he did not make me ignorant [or a slave]; blessed be God that he did not make me a woman” (Tosefta Berakoth 7:18). This is possibly a first-century prayer; the distinctions behind it were certainly made at times by Jews and by others. In any case, Paul is surely responding to such a demeaning classification of humans.

**Timothy George:** The three pairs of opposites Paul listed stand for the fundamental cleavages of human existence: **ethnicity**, **economic capacity**, and **sexuality**. Race, money, and sex are primal powers in human life. No one of them is inherently evil; rather, they are the stuff of which life itself is made. The propagation of the human race is based on the distinction between male and female. And, while slavery is a gross perversion of God’s material blessing, the ability to work hard, invest wisely, and plan carefully is essential to the well-being of any economic order. Likewise, the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of the human family has inspired some of the greatest music, some of the finest art, and some of the best literature of the ages. Yet each of these spheres of human creativity has become degraded and soiled through the perversity of sin.

Nationality and ethnicity have been corrupted by pride, material blessings by greed, and sexuality by lust. This has led to the chaotic pattern of exploitation and self-destruction that marks the human story from the tower of Babel to the destruction of the Twin Towers. Indeed, outside of Christ the primal forces represented by these three polarities are controlled and manipulated by the elemental spirits of the universe (*stoicheia tou kosmou*; **Gal 4:3, 9**). However, all of those who have become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ have been liberated from enslavement to these evil powers. A new standard and pattern of life now distinguishes the baptized community that is still in the world but not of it. Here, as nowhere else, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to “*bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (**Gal 6:2** ESV). The

boundaries of baptism define “the existence of a place in the world where things are different: Jews and Gentiles share the same table; slaves and free citizens are treated equally as brothers and sisters; women are accorded a respect that is more substantial than a merely outward and sometimes two-edged ‘equality.’”

**Nijay Gupta: Esau McCaulley** examines **verse 28** from a different angle, that of **Jewish inheritance rights**. While most interpreters see the categories and pairings in this verse as generically aimed at neutralizing social status, **McCaulley** connects these categories specifically to the privileges of the heir in antiquity. Jewish inheritance laws, for example, excluded slaves and gentiles. And women could only inherit if the father did not produce a male heir. From this perspective, **Paul was radically redefining heir status in Christ**. There are no haves and have-nots in Christ’s family. All receive equally and participate fully in the life of the family.

### 3. (:29) Full Heirs

*"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."*

**Richard Longenecker**: The sentence is a first class conditional sentence, which **assumes the truth** of what is stated in the protasis. The protasis itself focuses on only one fact: **relationship with Christ** (ὁμοῖς Χριστοῦ, “*you belong to Christ*”; cf. οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “*those who belong to Christ Jesus*,” of **5:24**), which has been affirmed earlier in the phrase “*in Christ Jesus*” of **vv 26 and 28**. In Paul’s later letters this relationship will be spelled out more fully in the interplay between being “*in Christ*” and members of “*the body of Christ*” (see references cited at v 26; also **Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12, 27**; Colossians and Ephesians passim). The apodosis of the sentence highlights the results of relationship with Christ: status as Abraham’s “*seed*” (τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, “*you are Abraham’s seed*,” which picks up ideas earlier expressed in **3:7, 9 and 16**) and heirs of God’s covenantal promise (κατ’ ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι, “*heirs according to the promise*,” which picks up ideas variously expressed in **3:14, 16–18, 19, 21–22**).

**Timothy George**: Earlier in this chapter Paul showed how Jesus Christ alone is the true seed (singular) of Abraham (**3:16**). Through our union with Christ, we have now inherited this privileged status. This has happened not through procreation but through regeneration, not by our goodness but by God’s grace, not by works of the law but through faith alone. Paul will now show what it means for those who have been liberated from the curse of the law and the bondage of sin to enter into their new estate as “*heirs according to the promise*” (**3:29**).

**David deSilva**: A major goal for Paul in Galatians is to demonstrate that the social lines of division created by the distinctions made between Jew and gentile and enforced by the regulations of Torah for keeping the two groups separate are transcended in the new community formed in Christ, with the result that the regulatory principles of the “old creation” (even those once given by God!) no longer have authority over relationships in the community of the “*new creation*” (**Gal 6:15**). Paul’s vision continues to challenge the global Christian community wherever Christians allow longstanding



ethnic and racial divisions, prejudices, and hostilities to guide their interactions with one another ahead of our unity in Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of religious cults or other religions teach some form of reliance upon keeping a set of laws? What are some of those laws? How do we use laws in our household?
- 2) Is there a different emphasis in the NT between being a "*child of God*" and being a "*son of God*"?
- 3) How does this baptism into Christ compare to the type of Holy Spirit baptism which is one of the core distinctives for those of charismatic persuasion?
- 4) If the role of parents is to prepare their children for independence and maturity and adulthood ... do some parents continue to provide too much direction to their adult children? How is this harmful?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** No matter how wealthy a father may be, his infant son or toddling child cannot really enjoy that wealth. In the Roman world, the children of wealthy people were cared for by slaves. No matter who his father was, the child was still a child, under the supervision of a servant. In fact, the child himself was not much different from the servant who guarded him. The servant was commanded by the master of the house, and the child was commanded by the servant.

**Robert Gromacki:** Thus, the law as a *paidagogos* performed a needed function before justification, but it has no authority over the regenerated child of God. The redeemed sinner does not have to obey the law to maintain his justified position or to achieve sanctification. Of course, at all times he is "*not without law to God, but under the law to Christ*" (I Cor. 9:21). He must never be morally lawless; rather he should always be submissive to the righteous, eternal law of God which transcends all ages and which reflects the holy character of God.

**William Hendriksen:** In the figure here used the "*pedagogue*" is the man--generally a slave--in whose custody the slave-owner's boys were placed, in order that this trusted servant might conduct them to and from school, and might, in fact, watch over their conduct throughout the day. He was, accordingly, an escort or attendant, and also at the same time a disciplinarian. The discipline which he exercised was often of a severe

character, so that those placed under his guardianship would yearn for the day of freedom."

**David Guzik:** *If you are Christ's:* This is the issue.

- The issue is not "Are you under the law?"
- The issue is not "Are you a Jew or a Gentile?"
- The issue is not "Are you slave or free?"
- The issue is not "Are you a man or a woman?"

The only issue is **if you are Christ's**.

If we are Christ's, then...

- We find our place in eternity, because we are sons and daughters of God.
- We find our place in society, because we are brothers and sisters in the family of God.
- We find our place in history, because we are part of God's plan of the ages, related spiritually to Abraham by our faith in Jesus.

"It enables me to answer the most basic of all human questions, 'Who am I?' and to say, 'In Christ I am a son of God. In Christ I am united to all the redeemed people of God, past, present, and future. In Christ I discover my identity. In Christ I find my feet. In Christ I come home.'" (Quoting John Stott)

**John MacArthur:** *The fulness of time* refers to the completion of the **period of preparation** in God's sovereign timetable of redemption. When the law had fully accomplished its purpose of showing man his utter sinfulness and inability to live up to God's perfect standard of righteousness, God ushered in a new era of redemption. When He sent forth His Son, He provided the righteousness for man that man could not provide for himself.

When Jesus was born, everything was right for the coming of the Messiah. First of all, the time was right religiously. During the Babylonian captivity, Israel once and for all forsook the idolatry into which she had so often fallen. Despite their many other sins and failures, including the national rejection of their own Messiah, no significant number of Jews has ever again turned to idolatry.

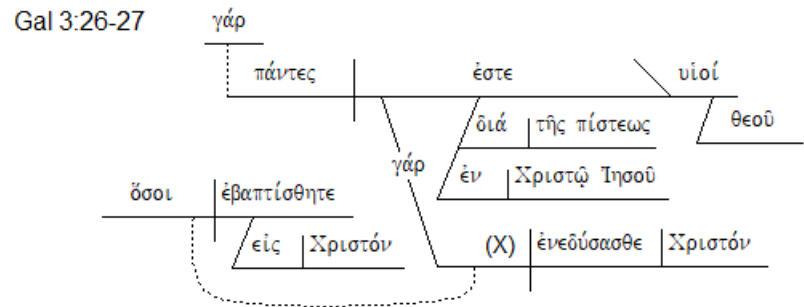
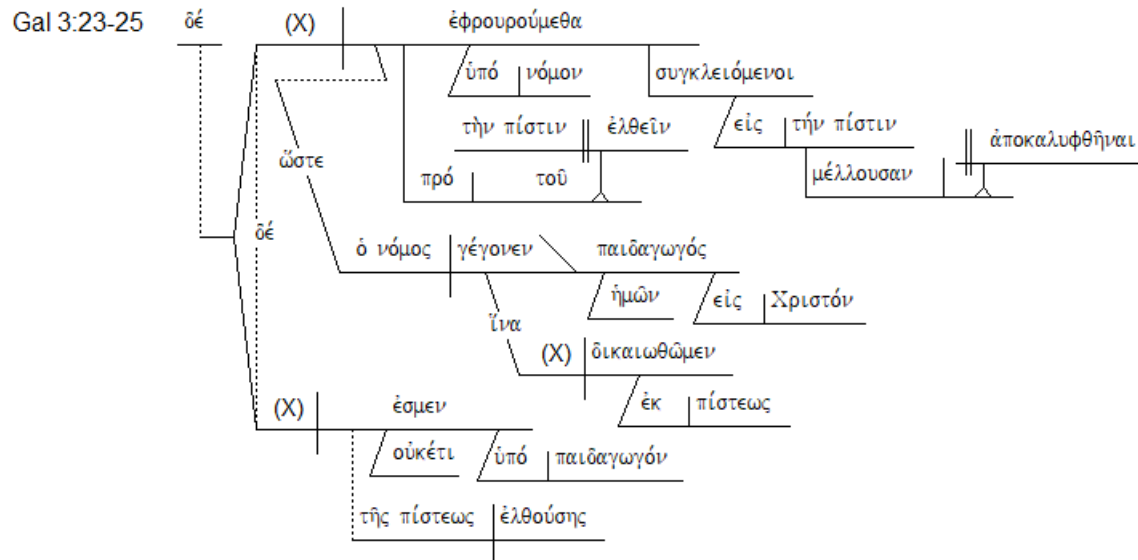
Also during the Exile, Jews developed synagogues, which they used as places of worship, as schools, and as courts. In addition to that, they at last had the completed Old Testament, assembled by Ezra and others after the return from Babylon. Those features facilitated the proclaiming of the Messiah's gospel among the people of Israel.

Second, the time was right culturally. Christians who propagated the gospel during the first several centuries had a common language with those to whom they witnessed and with whom they worshiped. Alexander the Great had thoroughly established Greek culture and language throughout the known world, and these continued their dominating influence long after Rome succeeded Greece as world ruler.

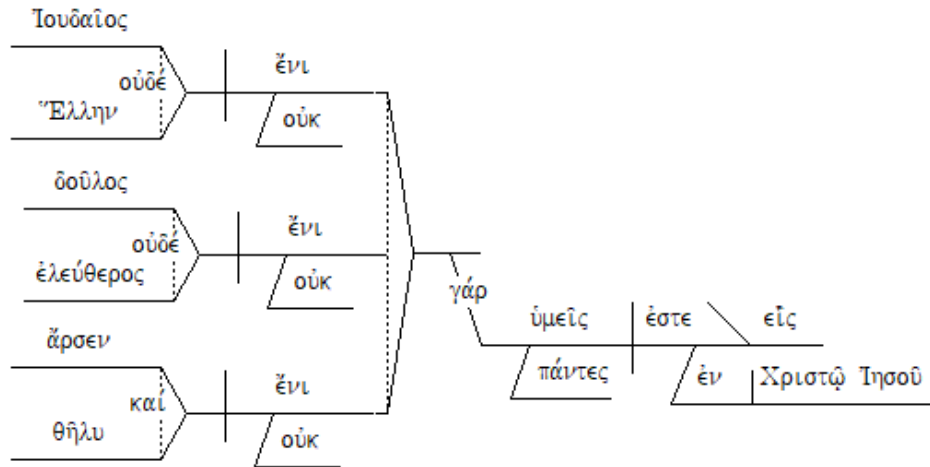
Third, the time was right politically. Rome had instituted the *pax Romana* (Roman peace), which provided economic and political stability. The apostles and other early preachers and teachers could travel freely and safely throughout the empire and could do so on the magnificent system of roads built by the Romans.

Each of those factors was in some unique way a key to the spread of the gospel. God's timing was perfect."

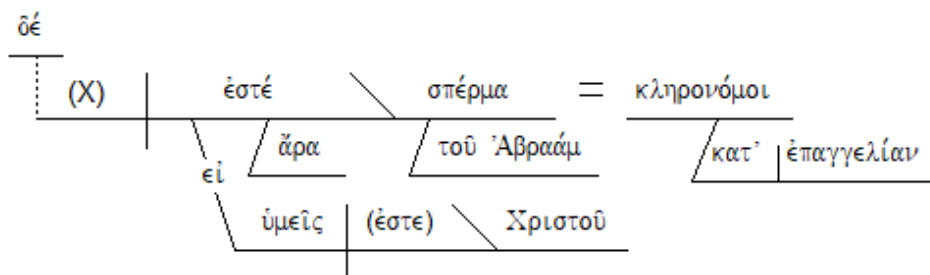
**Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:**



Gal 3:28



Gal 3:29



TEXT: GALATIANS 4:1-7

TITLE: BEFORE AND AFTER FAMILY SNAPSHOTS – PART 2  
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE COMING OF CHRIST ELEVATED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD TO THAT OF PRIVILEGED SONS AND HEIRS** – that's a Big Deal

**INTRODUCTION:**

What's the Big Deal about Christmas? Secularists today continue to try to minimize Christmas. They do everything in their power to have the name of Christ blotted out from the very day that celebrates His great incarnation – **the Word** becoming flesh and dwelling with man; the arrival of **Immanuel** = “*God with us.*” What's the big deal about a baby being born to the Virgin Mary (that's a pretty big deal) and laid in a manger in the stable in Bethlehem? What's the big deal about the shepherds in the local fields and the wise men from afar coming to worship this baby and bringing presents of great value?

There's no question that Christmas is a big deal to all of the retail businessmen in our economy. Their whole year hinges on the amount of sales they can generate during this frenetic shopping season. Now we have the convenience of never leaving our couch but ordering anything we can imagine online and having it delivered to our door in a couple of days. Ask your friend who works for UPS – no question that Christmas is a big deal.

There's no question that Christmas is a big deal to our Hollywood entertainers and the music industry. Every night there is one television special after another with the most bizarre people you can imagine associated with celebrating the holiday season. I wouldn't be shocked to see Miley Cyrus twerking some obscene rendition of a popular Christmas carol. Most of the music centers around the secular icons of Santa Claus and Christmas trees and mistletoe . . . but even the sacred songs seem misunderstood as they are sung by cultic religious groups like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir – what do they know about the significance of Christmas?

Certainly our very calendar testifies to the fulcrum point in history of the arrival of Jesus Christ, the prophesied Son of David, the promised Messiah of the Jewish nation. We date everything by His birth – either **B.C.** – *Before Christ* . . . or **A.D.** -- *Anno Domini* is Medieval Latin, translated *In the year of the Lord* – pretty impressive; no other individual has had that type of impact on the world. But the world remains blind to His true significance.

What's the Big Deal about Christmas? The Apostle Paul unfolds it in our passage from Galatians for today. It changed everything with respect to our relationship to God

the Father.

**George Brunk:** At this point Paul challenges the Galatians with an analogy. **What do you want to be? Heirs or slaves?** Being subject to the Law is like being minors in a household managed by guardians and trustees. For such minors, freedom is minimal indeed. But the redeeming action of the Holy Spirit has adopted the Galatians as children of God, which in turn has made them full heirs of God's promises! So Paul is asking, "How do you want it? Do you want to return to being slaves managed by others, or do you want to be free adults who will inherit the best of God's promises?" Paul tries to make the choice easy.

**Nijay Gupta:** The law belongs to a pre-adult stage of history and ought not to be carried forward into adulthood. That which once had a particular guardianship role is no longer in effect. That age of maturity clearly corresponds to the coming of Christ in time and history; thus, at the advent of a new era the law retires, so to speak, as trustee. That does not mean Paul jettisons the Old Testament, throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Absolutely not! But believers must think now about the law differently. In Christ, in the age of "*faith*" (*pistis*; **3:23–25**), believers are called to a unique kind of **freedom** in their new life in God, free from obligation to the law and free from any other entity.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** **Chapter 4** includes some of the richest Christology in all of Paul's writings, most explicitly in **4:1–7**.

**Thomas Schreiner:** **Galatians 4:1–7** restates from another angle the content of **3:15–29**. The era under the Mosaic law and covenant is conceived of as a time of slavery (**4:1–3**). However, a new period in the history of salvation has now become a reality with the coming of Jesus Christ, and he has liberated his people from the slavery they were subjected to under the Mosaic law (**4:4–5a**). Therefore, believers in Jesus Christ are now God's "*sons*"; indeed the gift of the Spirit demonstrates they are sons, and as sons they are heirs of the promise made to Abraham (**4:5b–7**). This section, then, concludes in the same way as **3:26–29**. Believers through Christ Jesus are sons and heirs of the promise made to Abraham, so that observance of the Mosaic law is unnecessary.

#### **Argument from slavery to sonship (4:1–7)**

- a. The illustration: a slave while a minor (**4:1–2**)
- b. Application of illustration (**4:3–5**)
  - i. Enslaved under the elements (**4:3**)
  - ii. Sending of Son in fullness of time (**4:4**)
  - iii. Liberation of those under law (**4:5**)
- c. Implication of illustration: sons and heirs (**4:6–7**)

### **I. (4:1-3) BEFORE CHRIST CAME – PREPARATION / RESTRICTIONS**

#### **A. (:1) A Child Lives Like a Servant**

*"Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything."*

Difference between legal position and enjoyment of all the privileges and responsibilities.

Like a trusteeship – money is there; protected; designated for you – but you can't draw against it until you reach the age of maturity.

When you look at how people live – not much difference between a child and a slave

- Both told what they can and cannot do
- Restrictions
- But a child is being prepared for future independence

Look at that phrase "*Owner of everything*" – gives a little foretaste to what our position is as sons and full heirs

Right now we live as **stewards** ... transitioning to living as **owners** of everything

**David deSilva:** The scenario that Paul imagines is likely that of the surviving minor child after the father's death; the terms of the inheritance, the selection of the guardians, and the timing of the heir's coming of age are all spelled out in the father's last will and testament. The word here translated "guardian" can refer to the manager or steward of a household, estate, or similar unit, but it can also refer to the person granted legal care of and authority over some charge, the more likely sense here. The term rendered "steward" refers to the person entrusted with care or custodianship of the property. The two terms would not necessarily designate different persons, but only different functions, potentially of the same person, who might be guardian of both the minor's person and his or her property.

**Ben Witherington:** Paul here seems to envision the death of the father and the appointment in a will of guardians and trustees, a normal Greek procedure. On the whole then, it would appear that Paul is alluding to practices in a cultural setting where **Hellenistic law** still determined such matters as adoption and inheritance. This analogy then was more likely to suit the background and clientele Paul would have found in south Galatia where the Greek influence was considerable than in north Galatia.

Alternate View:

**Bruce Barton:** To further illustrate the spiritual immaturity of those who insist on remaining under the law, Paul used an example from **Roman law** and custom. In ancient times, the "coming of age" of a son carried tremendous significance. This did not occur at a specific age (such as twelve or thirteen), as it did among Jews and Greeks; rather, the "coming of age" was determined by the father. In Rome this event was usually marked on March 17 by a family celebration known as the Liberalia. During this event, the father formally acknowledged his son and heir. The son received a new "grown-up" toga and entered into adult responsibilities.

**B. (:2) A Child Chafes Under Supervision**

*"but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father."*

Especially true of royal princes – they have no lack of guardians and managers

There is a date set by the father – His eternal decree

**C. (:3) A Child is Restricted Under Bondage**

*"So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world."*

Benefits of **maturity**, as opposed to the restrictions of **immaturity**.

Look at all that was involved in the basic principles of the OT law – including all of the ceremonial and ritual cleansing regulations – to these the Pharisees and then the Judaizers had added even more restrictive elements; no freedom in having to obey all those regulations.

**Scot McKnight:** Once again, the Judaizers would have been offended at Paul's rather disparaging view of the law. How can Paul, we imagine they might have asked, say the law was nothing but the "ABCs" of God's revelation? I believe Paul has worked this out quite carefully: it is because he sees Jesus Christ as the climactic fulfillment of the Mosaic revelation. To revert to my typewriter illustration, the former era is nothing but a time when Jews hammered out their ABCs on a typewriter; the new era is a fulfillment of that machine and an entirely new agenda is in order: not just ABCs, but sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books are now in order! That old typewriter (the law) is a "basic principle" compared to the fullness of the computer age (Jesus Christ and God's Spirit)!

**Warren Wiersbe:** This word *elements* means *the basic principles, the ABCs*. For some 15 centuries, Israel had been in kindergarten and grade school, learning their 'spiritual ABCs,' so that they would be ready when Christ would come. Then they would get the full revelation, for Jesus Christ is *'the Alpha and the Omega'* (**Rev. 22:13**); He encompasses all the alphabet of God's revelation to man. He is God's last Word (**Heb. 1:1-3**).

**Dr. Wayne Barber:** The word "*elemental*" there is the word *stoicheion*. *Stoicheion* means the ABC's of something. It's the basic set of rules that determines behavior, and begins to frame conduct and morality. Now what is he referring to? Many people wonder what these ABC's are. There are a lot of opinions, but I think if you will let Scripture speak for itself, it tells you what it is. ABC, as he speaks of here, is religion of any sort, any form, any shape. Look down in **Gal 4:9**, and he uses the same term and defines what he's talking about. He says, "*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless,*" notice how he categorizes them, "*elemental things [stoicheion] to which you desire to be enslaved all over again. You observe days and months and seasons and years.*" And he goes on to explain.



It's clear as a bell what he is talking about. Why would you go back up under this old immature system called religion when you can walk in the adult privileges of being a mature son of God? Why is it that you would want to do that? You see, on one side there's a relationship. On the other side there's a religion. In the Gentile world religion and philosophy were carefully brought together. And whatever system that was, it had its own set of rules. In the Jewish world it involved a system of rabbinic teaching. Whatever it is, he says, religion of any kind, be it Islam, be it Buddhism, be whatever it is, you put it over here. It's for the immature that need a set of rules and it doesn't save you in any way, shape or form.

**Ben Witherington:** It would appear that Paul's view is as follows. There are elementary teachings that are found throughout the world, and one form of these elementary teachings is the Mosaic Law. Jews were under one form of these elementary teachings while Gentiles were under another, but both shared a common condition of being enslaved and under subjection because of these teachings. For a Gentile Christian to submit to the Mosaic Law would be like going back under the elementary pagan teachings of the world, which they left behind when they became Christians. God has even liberated Jewish Christians from under the Law, these basic teachings which were appropriate for God's people during the period of spiritual minority but not after the eschatological condition of new creation came to pass, not after Christ came. Therefore, Gentiles should not consent to submit to teachings which even Jewish Christians were no longer required to observe.

**Rendall:** The association of this word with *n pioi* [children] fixes on it the conception of a **rudimentary training** to which the world was subjected during its spiritual infancy by way of preparation for the Gospel of Christ and the dispensation of the Spirit. Before men could enter into the spirit of His teaching, they had to learn the **elementary principles of religion and morality**. Compulsory obedience to definite rules of justice and order was a necessary preparation for the freedom of the Spirit. This preliminary education was given to the Hebrews in the Ten Commandments and the Law, it was imparted to a wider world in Greek civilisation and philosophy, in Roman law and government, and in other forms of national and social life. These rudiments are disparaged in **ver. 9** as weak and beggarly in comparison with the teaching of the Spirit, for Christian men ought to have outgrown their spiritual childhood. So, again, in **Col. ii. 8, 20**, they are condemned wherever their traditional hold on human society produces an antagonism to the higher teaching of Christ. But before the Advent they formed a valuable discipline for the education of the world.

**David DeSilva:** As literal children, Paul and his Galatian converts were exposed to precisely this kind of socialization into the rules and regulations imposed upon them as they were enculturated into systems of "**foundational principles**," from whose stranglehold Christ freed them in principle and the Spirit works to free them in actuality. Paul may indeed offer the opposing pairs of Jew/Greek, free/slave, male/female as examples of *stoicheia*, "universal polarities that the Greeks and others thought to be the basis of the cosmos." In his *Metaphysics* (1.986a 22–27), **Aristotle**

identified twenty foundational stoicheia, articulated as ten pairs of corresponding opposites: (1) Limit and the Unlimited, (2) Odd and Even, (3) Unity and Plurality, (4) Right and Left, (5) Male and Female, (6) Rest and Motion, (7) Straight and Crooked, (8) Light and Darkness, (9) Good and Evil, (10) Square and Oblong. These became principal categories by means of which reality could be described, sorted, and otherwise ordered. . .

Such an understanding of the *stoicheia tou kosmou* well suits the fact that Paul considers the Torah itself to be a representative of this group. Torah quite obviously has a dimension of “**fundamental instruction**” regarding the way the world worked, investing this instruction with an aura of divine legitimacy. Its regulation was built upon binary oppositions that resemble (and in some cases include) other well-known pairs of *stoicheia*—Jew and Greek, male and female, even slave and free. It, too, had a cosmic dimension, instructing those under it to observe particular signs in the sky and regulate their lives accordingly (i.e., by observing sacred days and seasons, and setting them apart from ordinary days, on which to attend to other business), thus giving celestial bodies like sun and moon authority over the human sphere.

Understanding the *stoicheia tou kosmou* here to represent the “world [*kosmos*]-defined regulatory principles [stoicheia]”—which, though impersonal, confront the individual as a suprasocial being with a life and power of its own—also aligns well with the further uses of these two morphemes (*stoich-* and *kosmos*) in Galatians. Paul will direct those liberated from these “**regulatory principles**” to “regulate themselves by” (better, “*walk in step with,*” *stoichōmen*) the Spirit (5:25). He will also declare himself dead to the world (*kosmos*)—by which he means not the world as God’s creation but the world as “*present, evil age,*” a collection of systems ruling not on behalf of God but in place of God—and the world to him on account of Christ’s cross, pronouncing the “*new creation*” (which stands in stark contrast to the order that has taken hold over the first creation) to be the only thing that now has value (6:14–15). Those who are in agreement with him on this point—who “*regulate themselves by*” (again, better, “*walk in line with,*” *stoichēsousin*) this rule (6:16) and reject the paired *stoicheia* of “*circumcision*” and “*uncircumcision*” (6:15)—are those upon whom he wishes grace and mercy at the end of his discourse and whom he names “God’s Israel” (6:16).

The *stoicheia*, then, are **the guiding powers and principles of this age**, the building blocks (metaphorically speaking) from which the *kosmos* as “*present, evil age*” (1:4) is composed—which have contributed to perverting and corrupting the present age. These “**elementary principles**” divide the world and all that constitutes it, creating the categories, hierarchies, and evaluations that guide, limit, and constrain human beings in their thoughts, behaviors, and interactions, keeping them in a form of ideological and systemic bondage. They include, especially, all that contributed to the internal and external divisions among human beings, the power differentials across those divisions, and the ideologies that sustained those divisions and power structures. Living “*under the elementary principles of the world*” (4:3) is on the same level and of the same kind as living “*under a curse*” (3:10), “*under law*” (4:4, 5); “*under a pedagogue*” (3:25), “*under guardians and custodians*” (4:2), and, finally, “*under sin*” (3:22). From his

present vantage point in experiencing God's dealings with humanity, Paul sees that this existence was a prolonged state of being enslaved.

Alternate View:

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** The term "*elemental spirits*" will reappear at **4:9** to refer to the reality that binds the Galatians to their former pagan identity. These **elemental spirits** fall into the same category for the Galatians as does the circumcision that the Third Party wants to impose on them—a formal equivalent of their relapse into paganism. While these elements are "*weak*" (**4:9**), they have the power to enslave (**4:3**). They are lower cosmic powers; they are "godlings." Being less than God, they cannot ultimately oppose God. They do, however, oppose the freedom of the Galatians.

## **II. (4:4-5) FULCRUM POINT = THE COMING OF CHRIST**

These 2 verses are the heart of the message.

**Timothy George:** When we analyze these verses in terms of their structure, we find four central ideas brought together within a single literary unit.

1. To begin with, there is a **temporal introduction**, "*When the time came to completion*," an expression that connects this passage to the illustration of the minor heir entering into his full inheritance at the father's preappointed time.
2. Next there is the announcement of God's **supernatural intervention** in the mission of Jesus Christ, "*God sent his Son*."
3. This sending formula is followed immediately by two parallel participial constructions describing the **condition** and **status** of the incarnate Son: He was "*born of woman*" and "*born under the law*."
4. Finally, in **v. 5**, two purpose-result clauses, both introduced by *hina* ("*in order that*"), describe the **reason for the coming of Christ** and the **great benefit** believers receive through faith in him (literally): "*to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*."

Thus in a remarkable way Paul brought into focus here both the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christology and soteriology can never be separated; where one is inadequate, the other will always be deficient. In this passage Paul united these twin peaks of evangelical doctrine under the controlling rubric of God's gracious initiative and divine purpose.

### **A. Timeframe –**

*"But when the fulness of the time came"*

Marking the completion of the old era and the dawn of a new era

1. Fullness in terms of Prophecy

The details had been incrementally unfolded by way of progressive revelation ... Starting with the very basic intimation in the early chapters of Genesis of the seed of the woman that would come to reverse the Fall and recreate Paradise.

- Promise to Abraham
- Promise to David
- Virgin birth – Isaiah
- Bethlehem birth – **Micah 5:2**

## 2. Fullness in terms of Advantageous Time to Preach the Gospel

### **Alistair Begg:**

- Marked by Expectancy in the Jewish world – looking for a Messiah; when will these prophetic passages come to fruition?
- Marked by Security – Roman Empire – established peace and security; built roadways that made possible movement
- Marked by Clarity – Greek language for communication across national and ethnic boundaries
- Marked by Futility – particularly in the religious realm; looking for religious experience that was real and satisfying

**Howard Vos:** “*The fulness of the time*” occurred when **world conditions** were most auspicious for the coming of Christ and at a time appointed by the Father. Perhaps at no other point in world history could Christ and the church so effectively have swept onto the human stage. **Culturally** the Greeks had prepared the way for the coming of Christ and the church by providing a culture and a language which were adopted by Rome and spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Greek was the lingua franca of the Empire and could be understood by those who had access to New Testament literature and preachers of the gospel,

**Politically** Rome had prepared the way by uniting the Mediterranean world under one government and one citizenship. Ease of movement in that part of the world, facilitated by the marvelous Roman road system, is readily appreciated by the contemporary traveler who has no end of trouble with passports and visas; in fact, some countries in the Mediterranean area are periodically closed to him.

**Religiously** the Jews had made preparation by their preaching of monotheism in some one hundred fifty synagogues located throughout the Empire and by their anticipation of a Messiah who could solve the world’s problems. Within Judaism, too, a preparation for the coming of Christ occurred as the law did its work and it became increasingly evident that no one could keep the commandments; the law “*concluded all under sin.*” The philosophers made a religious contribution too, in a negative sort of way. They cast doubts on the old pagan systems of religion and looked for some sort of unifying power

behind all of the old polytheistic systems of the day. At the most opportune time “*God sent forth his Son.*” God took the initiative according to a divine plan. He sent His Son on the divine mission of providing salvation. The fact that He sent forth His Son demonstrates preexistence of the Son. Taking on human form so He could identify with fallen humanity, the Son was born of a woman. Born “*under the law,*” He perfectly kept that law, fulfilled it, and ultimately paid its curse for all mankind.

### 3. Fullness in terms of God’s Timetable and Decree

**Donald Guthrie:** In the context it is clear that his thought is still centred on servitude to the law and the most reasonable assumption, therefore, is to regard the “*fullness*” as the limit of God’s testing time under the law, during which the hopelessness of man’s servitude was fully demonstrated. Paul is convinced, as the early Christians were generally, that the coming of Christ was not by accident but by divine appointment.

- John the Baptist came as a forerunner to announce that the time had come
- Jesus preached that the time had come as well – **Mark 1:14-15** “*Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’*”

#### **B. Divine Plan –**

*"God sent forth"*

Sending out from a previous state

Implies the pre-existence of the Son from all eternity

#### **John 3:16**

**Nijay Gupta:** The mention of the Father’s dispatching of his Son is intended to be a **climactic statement** in the grand storyline that Paul narrates. This is an important theological affirmation that the Galatians need not anticipate a further fulfillment of their Christian faith in circumcision or anything else.

#### **C. Qualifications to Redeem**

1. Fully God – “*His Son*”

2. Fully Man -- “*born of a woman*”

**Phil. 2** – demonstrates how Jesus humbled Himself

**Clark Pinnock:** The humanity of Christ is one of the underdeveloped doctrines of orthodox Christianity. We have been so zealous to preserve a good testimony to the deity of Christ that we have often allowed His humanity to become unreal and obscured. Yet the New Testament is eager to stress God’s self-disclosure in our flesh

and history. The chief Christological heresy it had to combat was docetism, the denial of His full humanity. Paul teaches that God entered fully into the conditions of human life."

**Philip Ryken:** God the Son was "*born of woman*" (**Gal. 4:4**). Whereas the word "*sent*" implies his eternal deity, the word "*born*" declares his true humanity. Jesus had an ordinary birth. To say that a human mother gave him birth is to say that God the Son became a human being. This is the doctrine of the incarnation: God became man. What better way to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus Christ than to say that he was born of a woman?

When Jesus was delivered by the Virgin Mary and laid in a manger, God the Son took on our flesh and our nature, with all its temptations and aggravations. The Christ who came to save is the God-man; he is one person in two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin" (A. 22). And it was just because Jesus is a true man that he can be our Savior.

### 3. Fully Obedient to God's Law -- "*born under the Law*"

Under obligation to keep all the requirements of the law and establish righteousness.

Our Substitute to bear the full penalty of the law.

**David Platt:** Jesus was born not simply a man, but more specifically a Jewish man who grew up in a Jewish home, attending the Jewish synagogue. He perfectly fulfilled all the demands of the law of God. If Jesus had not been **righteous**, He would not have been able to redeem unrighteous men.

Adoption requires someone who comes at the right time and someone who has the right qualifications. There's one more requirement that should be mentioned: Adoption requires someone who has the **right resolve**. You don't adopt accidentally; you adopt **purposefully**.

#### **D. Mission = Accomplishing Redemption**

*"in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law"*

to pay a ransom to secure somebody's freedom.

to purchase somebody off the slave block.

- Deliverance from bondage to the law
- Deliverance to something better = sonship and full heirship

### E. Goal = Full Sonship (Implied Heirship)

*"that we might receive the adoption as sons"*

- Adoption is a beautiful thing – both for the parents and for the child.
- Usually a very expensive process.
- Brings someone into a new family unit with full rights and privileges.

**David Platt:** We have been adopted, and the blessings we receive are staggering. Three blessings in particular are worth mentioning.

1. First, we have an **eternal Father**.
2. Second, our adoption by God means that we have an **eternal family**.
3. Third, in addition to having an eternal Father and an eternal family, we have an **eternal home**.

**Craig Keener:** What may be more relevant than details of ancient adoption procedure is what Paul wants his audience to understand. Why would they resort to circumcision to achieve a status that they already possess? Would not any right-thinking person be envious (cf. possibly **3:1**) of their status and the Spirit-experience that confirmed it? To capture some of the **thrill** that Paul's words convey, compare the words of a philosopher from this era: "If Caesar adopts you, no one will be able to endure your conceit, but if you know that you are a son of Zeus, will you not be elated?"

### III. (4:6-7) AFTER CHRIST HAS COME – FULFILLMENT / ENJOYMENT OF PRIVILEGES

**Robert Gromacki:** "How can a person know that he is a son? What are the evidences of the fact that he is no longer a spiritual child under legal supervision? The opening causal clause (*"because ye are sons"*) introduces the reader to two spiritual realities that will exist in the life of every genuine Christian. They are results of sonship which actually confirm that position."

#### A. New Privileged Experience of Full Sonship

*"And because you are sons"*

#### B. New Privilege of Intimacy (through the indwelling Holy Spirit)

*"God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"*

**John MacArthur:** *Abba* is a diminutive of the Aramaic word for father. It was a term of endearment used by young children of their fathers and could be translated 'daddy' or 'papa.' The Holy Spirit brings us into a personal, intimate relationship with our heavenly Father, whom we may approach at any time and under any circumstance, knowing that He always hears us and lovingly cares for us, because we are truly His own.

**Howard Vos:** The Greek of **verse 7** is much more expressive than the English: “*So that (as a result of Christ’s redemptive work on your behalf and His implanting the Spirit in your hearts) you are no longer (though you once were) a slave (in bondage under the law) but an adult son; and if an adult son (rather than one who is still a minor under certain controls), then an heir (enjoying a marvelous new spiritual heritage) through God [the preferred Greek textual reading].*” “*Through God*” is very instructive. The entire Trinity has been involved in making the believer a son and an heir: the Father sent the Son who gave Himself to redeem us, and the Father implanted the Spirit in our hearts to act as a seal and an earnest (**Eph 1:13-14**) of our inheritance and aid us to live like sons of the King.

**Thomas Schreiner:** The logic of Paul’s argument seems strange, for he seems to suggest that first believers become God’s sons and then God sends the Spirit to them to confirm the sonship that already exists. It is mistaken, however, to derive a **chronological order** from what Paul says here. The main point in this paragraph is that believers are sons and heirs. Hence, the verse begins with the declaration that believers are God’s sons. They are truly members of Abraham’s family.

Paul introduces the sending of the Spirit to confirm that they are truly the sons of God. He is not intending to say that the Spirit being given after sonship is a reality. The point is that **the Spirit confirms, authenticates, and ratifies their sonship.**

### **C. New Privileged Expectation of Full Heirship**

*"Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son;  
and if a son, then an heir through God."*

**Bob Deffinbaugh:** Far from producing a greater spiritual maturity, being under the Law was proof of the opposite—**immaturity**. The theology of the Judaizer was that grace alone was not sufficient to save (cf. **Acts 15:1**) nor to sanctify (**Gal. 3:3**). Their solution was to add law to grace. In other words, the Law was necessary to produce godliness and maturity in the life of the Christian, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul nullifies this theology by associating the Law with childhood and immaturity. He describes the period during which Israel was under the Law as the time when they were children (**Gal. 4:3**) It is necessary to restrict and confine a child because children are too immature to make wise decisions. We do not let our children make important decisions, because they are neither wise nor mature enough to do so. Thus, by associating the Law with the immaturity of a child, which requires tutors, custodians, and stewards, Paul indicates that the need for rigid rules and regulations is the mark of immaturity. How then do the Judaizers dare to promise a higher level of spirituality through a return to the Law?

**Ben Witherington:** We have here in **vs. 7b** a first-class and real condition. Paul is quite convinced that the Galatians really are already sons and heirs. This is why he is so exercised to head off their attempts to move in a nomistic direction. In order to accomplish this aim he knows it will not be enough to appeal to reason, and so in what



follows in **Gal. 4.8ff**. Paul will rely more on **pathos** than on **logoi** so that his acts or persuasion will have their intended effect.

**Nijay Gupta:** Paul concludes this passage (**4:1–7**) by **contrasting roles** in the household: slave and son. It is as if two paths lay before the Galatian believers—one leads to enslavement and the other to freedom and sonship (see vv. **21–31**). The Galatians formerly were enslaved to the *stoicheia tou kosmou* (vv. **8–9**; cf. **5:1**). In their initial faith in Christ, they experienced freedom and new life in the Spirit (**3:1–5**). To be compelled to be circumcised and live under the law would be to give up that freedom and voluntarily trade away their sonship to become slaves again.

Why does Paul spend so much time developing a conception of Christian sonship and inheritance? Theologically, Paul wanted to underscore two things.

- First, his household and family language is all about **belonging**. Sadly, so many things in the world then and now are about reinforcing systems and tiers of access, acceptance, and inclusion. In the Roman world, what family you are a part of made a big difference in terms of honor, power, and provision. Paul wanted these gentile Galatians to know, really know, that they were warmly embraced in the great household of the one God, not as second-class citizens but 100 percent as family.
- The second point is related. Paul’s familial and household imagery reinforces his focus on what I call the “**Christ relation**.” Paul did not want to tell the Galatians simply that they were children of God. He taught them that through the Sonship of Christ they fully participate in deep communion with the Father—they have been brought near (**Eph 2:13**). This became possible only through the love of the Son who gave himself for sinners (**Gal 2:19–20**).

**George Brunk:** The final phrase, *through God*, does not seem to attach smoothly to any single element in the sentence. So it must apply to the entire preceding statement, to the whole process of liberation from slavery and incorporation into God’s family. It underscores that this is a divine rather than human work, a theme that is dominant in the letter from **1:1** onward and is focused in the Spirit-flesh contrast, beginning in **3:1-5**.

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Rom. 8:12-17**

**Douglas Moo: Parallels between Gal. 4:4-7 and Rom. 8:1-17**

<b>Galatians 4:4-7</b>	<b>Romans 8:1-17 (AT)</b>
ὅτε δεῖ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ( <i>hote de ēlthen to plērōma tou chronou</i> , <b>But when the fullness of the time had come,</b> )	
ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, ( <i>exapesteilen ho theos ton huion autou</i> , <b>God sent forth his Son,</b> )	ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ( <i>ho theos ton heautou huion pempsas</i> , <b>God, sending his own son [v. 3]</b> )
γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, ( <i>genomenon ek gynaikos, genomenon hypo nomon</i> , <b>born of a woman, born under the law,</b> )	ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας ( <i>en homoiōmati sarkos hamartias kai peri hamartias</i> , <b>in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering [v. 3]</b> )
ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ( <i>hina tous hypo nomon exagorasē</i> , <b>in order to redeem those under the law,</b> )	
ἵνα τῆν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν. ( <i>hina tēn huiiothesian apolabōmen</i> , <b>in order that we might receive sonship.</b> )	ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υἰοθεσίας ( <i>elabete pneuma huiiothesias</i> , <b>you received the spirit of sonship [v. 15]</b> )

<p>Ἔστι δὲ ἐστε υἱοὶ, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν κράζον· Ἀββα ὁ πατήρ. (<i>hoti de este huiioi, exarpesteilen ho theos to pneuma tou huiou autou eis tas kardias hēmōn krazon: Abba ho patēr</i>, and because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father.")</p>	<p>οὗτοι υἱοὶ θεοῦ εἰσιν (v. 14) ἐν ᾧ κράζομεν· Ἀββα ὁ πατήρ (v. 15) (<i>houtoi huiioi theou eisin, these are the sons of God [v. 14]</i>) (<i>en hō krazomen: Abba ho patēr</i>, in which we cry, "Abba, Father" [v. 15])</p>
<p>ἄστε οὐκέτι εἶ δοῦλος ἀλλὰ υἱός· (<i>hōste ouketi ei doulos alla huios</i>, so that you are no longer a slave but a son;)</p>	<p>οὐ γὰρ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα δουλείας (<i>ou gar elabete pneuma douleias</i>, for you did not receive a spirit of slavery [v. 15])</p>
<p>εἰ δὲ υἱός, καὶ κληρονόμος δια θεοῦ. (<i>ei de huios, kai klēronomos dia theou</i>, and if a son, then also an heir through God.)</p>	<p>εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι (<i>ei de tekna, kai klēronomoi</i>, and if children, then also heirs [v. 17])</p>

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of religious cults or other religions teach some form of reliance upon keeping a set of laws? What are some of those laws? How do we use laws in our household?
- 2) Is there a different emphasis in the NT being being a "child of God" and being a "son of God"?
- 3) How does this baptism into Christ compare to the type of Holy Spirit baptism which is one of the core distinctives for those of charismatic persuasion?
- 4) If the role of parents is to prepare their children for independence and maturity and adulthood ... do some parents continue to provide too much direction to their adult children? How is this harmful?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** No matter how wealthy a father may be, his infant son or toddling child cannot really enjoy that wealth. In the Roman world, the children of wealthy

people were cared for by slaves. No matter who his father was, the child was still a child, under the supervision of a servant. In fact, the child himself was not much different from the servant who guarded him. The servant was commanded by the master of the house, and the child was commanded by the servant.

**William Hendriksen:** In the figure here used the '*pedagogue*' is the man--generally a slave--in whose custody the slave-owner's boys were placed, in order that this trusted servant might conduct them to and from school, and might, in fact, watch over their conduct throughout the day. He was, accordingly, an escort or attendant, and also at the same time a disciplinarian. The discipline which he exercised was often of a severe character, so that those placed under his guardianship would yearn for the day of freedom.

**John MacArthur:** *The fulness of time* refers to the completion of the period of **preparation** in God's sovereign timetable of redemption. When the law had fully accomplished its purpose of showing man his utter sinfulness and inability to live up to God's perfect standard of righteousness, God ushered in a new era of redemption. When He sent forth His Son, He provided the righteousness for man that man could not provide for himself.

When Jesus was born, **everything was right for the coming of the Messiah.** First of all, the time was right **religiously.** During the Babylonian captivity, Israel once and for all forsook the idolatry into which she had so often fallen. Despite their many other sins and failures, including the national rejection of their own Messiah, no significant number of Jews has ever again turned to idolatry.

Also during the Exile, Jews developed synagogues, which they used as places of worship, as schools, and as courts. In addition to that, they at last had the completed Old Testament, assembled by Ezra and others after the return from Babylon. Those features facilitated the proclaiming of the Messiah's gospel among the people of Israel.

Second, the time was right **culturally.** Christians who propagated the gospel during the first several centuries had a common language with those to whom they witnessed and with whom they worshiped. Alexander the Great had thoroughly established Greek culture and language throughout the known world, and these continued their dominating influence long after Rome succeeded Greece as world ruler.

Third, the time was right **politically.** Rome had instituted the *pax Romana* (Roman peace), which provided economic and political stability. The apostles and other early preachers and teachers could travel freely and safely throughout the empire and could do so on the magnificent system of roads built by the Romans.

Each of those factors was in some unique way a key to the spread of the gospel. God's timing was perfect.

**Alistair Begg**: (:4-5) Our culture confused about why Jesus came to live and die and who Jesus is? Journalistic questions: Who, What, Why, Where, When ...

### **I. When did this happen? In the fullness of time**

The moment that was determined by God's eternal decree; the issues of time are under God's control; coming of Christ was divine appointment not accidental intervention; "*at just the right time God died for the ungodly*"; God determines the times and seasons; stands Himself outside of time and invades time in the person of His Son Jesus; we spend a lot of time trying to pinpoint what time it is;

Illustration: **G.K. Chesterton** – came around corner and got knocked down by man carrying unwieldy grandfather clock; looking up he commented: "Why can't you use a wristwatch like everyone else"

Palestine uniquely positioned for spread of gospel around the world – to Europe, Africa, Asia

Could argue that contemporary culture trumps all of these; not the main reason for the phrase "*fullness of time*" but not irrelevant either

Keep the verse in its **context** – talking in **chap. 3** about 3 historical figures – Abraham -- promise, Moses – law (to reveal sin and draw men to Christ) and Jesus (the end of the law – has silenced the law's condemnation); the law had brought men to despair – people lack sense of peace, security and hope despite their engagement in religious pursuits; the more they are confronted with the standards of righteousness the more they are aware of their failings; law not a ladder to climb up to heaven but a mirror to reveal to our sin and inconsistency; Where may I be washed? Salvation is not a reward to be earned but a gift to be received;

The time has come for men to repent and put their faith in Christ

### **II. What happened? God sent His Son**

Sending out from a previous state; the life of Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem; When our children ask: Where was I before I was born? You did not exist.

Pilate asked Jesus: Where did you come from? Jesus did not answer him.

Without ceasing to be what He was = God; He became what He was not = Man;

**John 1**;

Jesus is perfectly qualified to do what is required of Him;  
"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see ..."

Subject to the Jewish law; regarding baptism: "*Thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness*" – obeyed the law in all detail and perfection; What sins do you accuse me of? Bearing the penalty of the law as our substitute

Jesus is the only Savior – only one qualified to be a Savior; If God must save, then the Savior must be God; not some minor differences among religions; fundamental and huge differences

### III. Why?

- In order to provide Redemption
- In order to adopt those whom He redeemed

#### **Sons Not Slaves – vs. 7**

You have been set free as a result of the Lord Jesus Christ; **Mark 1:15** – fullness of times; the exact moment set by God’s eternal decree;

The very law that was given by God to prove to me that I need a Savior becomes in the hands of external religion a mechanism to prove to me that I don’t need a Savior – “just do what the law says and you will be saved”

Sent His Son to die for us; sent His Spirit to live in us; Jesus is a Son by nature; willingly took on form of a servant so that we who are by nature the slaves of sin might become the sons of God by the adoption of grace; what the Son has procured by His death the Spirit applies in our life; Adoption is a beautiful thing; the legal status precedes the objective experience of that reality

Illustration: “Daddy, I need a new shoelace”

**John MacArthur**: In the Jewish world for the first eleven years of the young man's life, he was instructed in the things of God; he was led very carefully. If dutifully his father performed the task that he was given to the place where he understood how to live as a man, he understood the law of God, the word of God, the responsibilities of the society and the community, and at the time that he reached his twelfth birthday there was a very definitive moment in time when he passed from being a child to being a mature son. The first Sabbath after his twelfth birthday, that young man was taken to the synagogue and there he became a son of the law, Bar Mitzvah, no longer the son of his father, no longer the son of his mother, which he was very early on. He is now obligated not to them but to God. He is the son of the law. His authority is the law of God. He has reached the point where he is mature enough to come under its adjudications, judgments and demands. And the father as it is, yields him up to personal responsibility to obey the law of God, that, the first Sabbath after his twelfth birthday.

**Ben Witherington**: Paul distinguishes between a minor child (νήπιος) and an adopted son, and he uses the term υιοθεσία, the normal technical Greek term for adoption. As **Moore-Crispin** says, in ordinary human affairs certainly “the νήπιος of **Gal. 4.1** could not be said to ‘receive adoption’ at a time set by his father”, and there is no good reason why υιοθεσία, which has a regular and clearly defined sense in Greek, should be translated ‘receive the full rights of sons’, as if Paul were speaking about the enhancement of those who were already God’s ‘sons’. The conclusion one must draw is that Paul views the status both of Jews under the Law and of Gentiles outside of the

Law as the same in regard to the matter of redemption, namely that they both needed redemption and adoption as sons, neither had this as a birthright. In Paul's view it is Christ who is the 'natural' son and heir, the true seed of Abraham and true son of God, and others can be included in his inheritance only by adoption, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Nevertheless, Paul distinguishes somewhat between the natural child in **vss. 1–2** and the slave in **vs. 7** in regard to the kind of 'slavery' they endured, and perhaps in regard to what they might expect to happen once they were set free from their bondage.

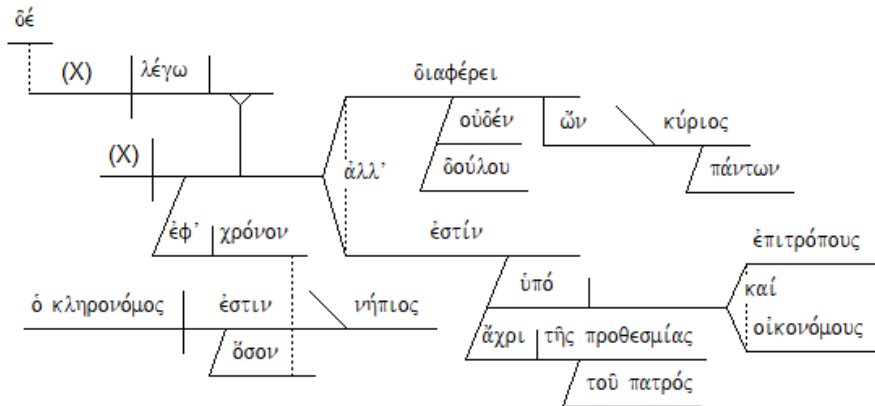
**Ronald Fung:** From our study of **4:1–7**, two points may be emphasized in connection with Paul's exposition of the doctrine of **justification by faith**.

(1) There is here a close-knit nexus of ideas between deliverance from enslavement to the law, adoption to sonship to God, and reception of the Spirit: the first makes the second possible, the second provides the logical basis for the third, the third furnishes the evidence for the second. But since freedom from the law implies justification by faith (cf. **3:23f.**), we may say that **4:1–7** implies a close connection between justification by faith, sonship to God, and reception of the Spirit. It is not surprising that this connection was already present in **3:26–29** since that section and the present section represent two parallel movements. But whereas there justification, adoption and receiving of the Spirit appear as different aspects of a single experience, here they are presented in their logical relationship to one another.

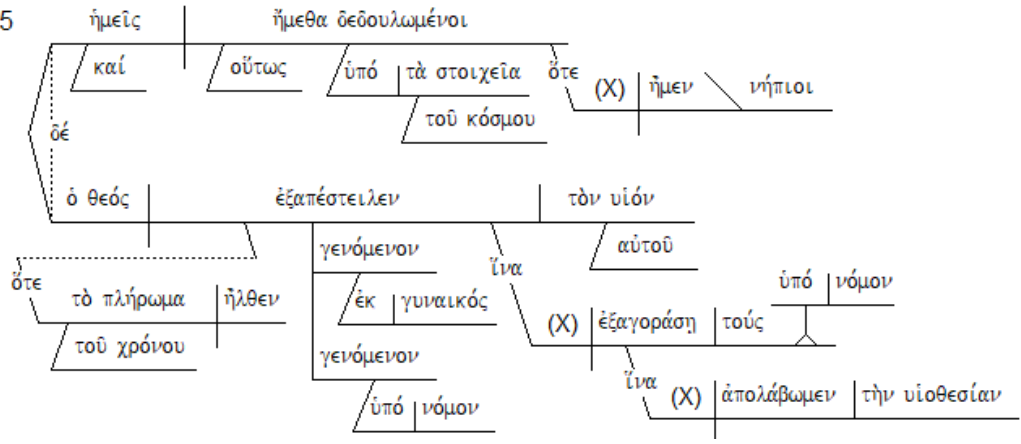
(2) The entire discussion is, once again, carried on within the framework of salvation history. As in **3:23–29**, Christ's appearance is presented as that which brings about the fullness of time, as that which puts an end to the domination of law and achieves for mankind the coming of age: the twofold (and parallel) sending of the Son (**v. 4**) and (the chronologically subsequent) sending of the Spirit (**v. 6**) effected the breach between the old aeon of slavery under law and the new aeon of adoption to sonship and reception of the Spirit. Thus, salvation history and the eschatology of the two aeons are closely interwoven, and central to both is the historical event of Christ's advent, passion, and triumph.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

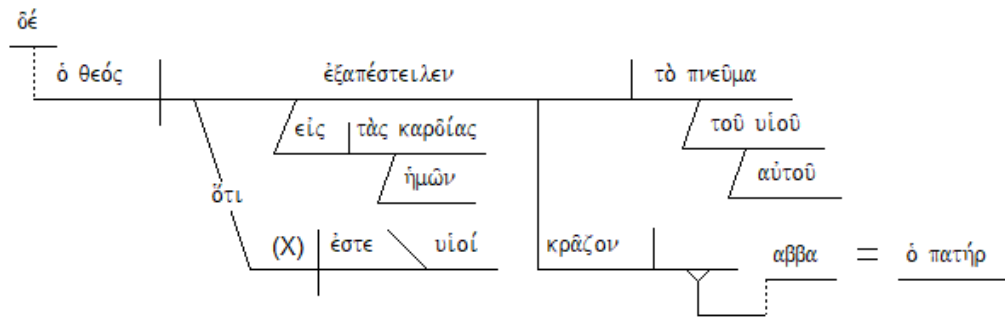
Gal 4:1-2



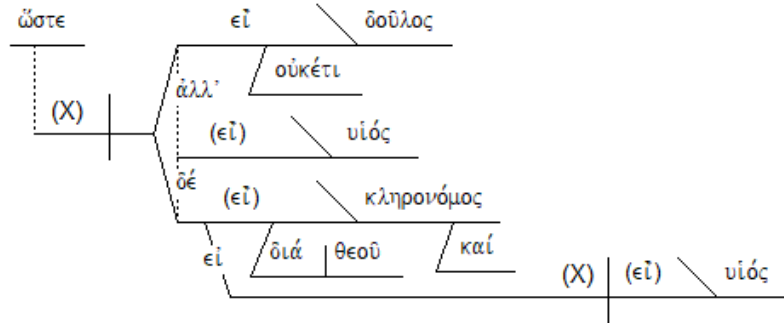
Gal 4:3-5



Gal 4:6



Gal 4:7





TEXT: GALATIANS 4:8-20

TITLE: REVERTING TO LEGALISTIC BONDAGE SHOULD NOT BE AN OPTION

**BIG IDEA:**

**JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH MUST BE HELD ON TO DESPITE THE SEDUCTIVE DECEPTIONS OF ZEALOUS FALSE TEACHERS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Nijay Gupta:** After engaging in a heavy dose of theoretical and theological discussion of the law and its place in the ongoing story of God’s redemptive work, Paul spends some time addressing the “live” issues in Galatia (**vv. 8–20**). He begins by trying to point out the sheer folly of their present actions—did you leave slavery to false gods behind only to erect another idol to worship? What a waste! (**vv. 8–11**). Paul’s tone in this passage becomes even more desperate as he seeks to heal his own relationship with them. When he first came to Galatia, they welcomed him with open arms, but later they treated him with suspicion, perhaps even resentment; what’s changed? (**vv. 12–16**).

And lastly, Paul turns his gaze to the meddling outsiders who poisoned Paul’s relationship with the Galatians. Can they really be trusted?, Paul asks. They have been up to something, hatching a nefarious plan (**vv. 17–18**). Paul concludes this section with a lament: You are like my own children in Christ, but you seem to need a redo on your birth, because I just can’t see the “Christ” part of your life right now (**v. 19**). Paul knew he was being hard on them (**v. 20**), and he doesn’t let up either, as the next section will make clear (**vv. 21–31**)!

**Ben Witherington:** It is no surprise that Paul’s arguments in Galatians are so emotion laden. He believes that a matter of enormous consequence lies in the balance, namely whether or not the Galatians will commit apostasy from the one true Gospel, and so he is prepared to move heaven and earth rhetorically, and pull out all the emotional stops to get them not to pursue the course the agitators are urging them to adopt. He knows that the appeals to the emotions and to the Galatians’ own experiences are more likely to move them than all the logic in the world. As an effective rhetor, then Paul adopts tactics he deems most likely to accomplish his rhetorical aims. . .

What we find in **4:12–20** is a pulling out of all the **emotional stops**:

- (1) Paul appeals to the Galatians own feelings of kindness and fairness toward him in the past, reminding them of the kind of relationship they used to have (**vs. 12, 15**);
- (2) he appeals to their feelings of pity for his physical condition (**vss. 13–14**);
- (3) he reminds them he is their spiritual parent (**vs. 19**) and is still in the process of painful labor until Christ is fully formed in them (i.e., he is still

making strenuous efforts on their behalf and giving undeserved benefits for which the audience should be grateful – a shaming device);

(4) as a parent he tells them he wishes he could change his tone with them, but he is in doubt and worrying over them, indicating his love for them but also instilling fear in them about their own condition (had they lost their former ‘*blessing*’? vs. 15, 20);

(5) finally he speaks of good and bad sorts of zeal or zealous courting (yet another strong emotion) which lead to either love or enmity (vss. 16–17).

This is not an erratic argument, or miscellany of ideas, it is a touching of all the major emotional bases in a masterful way, by using all the rhetorically appropriate sort of key terms listed under pathos and the tactics listed in the literature on appeals to pathos or the deeper emotions.

**Scot McKnight:** Paul is a good pastor; thus, he cannot wait until the end of his “sermon” to make some. While he still has one more argument (4:21–31) to go through until he has **applications** presented his complete case, he nonetheless jumps into the significance of his arguments thus far. He has argued from the Old Testament (3:6–14), the nature of covenants (3:15–25), and from sonship (3:26 – 4:7). Our section, the application, belongs to the argument from sonship but goes well beyond it to become an application of his entire argument.

This section can be neatly divided into two (uneven) sections:

- (1) The Problem (vv. 8–11) and
- (2) The Plea (vv. 12–20).

The Plea is rather random and emotional. In it Paul appeals to his own example and to his own role in their reversion to Judaism (vv. 12–16); then he explains what is actually going on at Galatia (vv. 17–18) before appealing once more in a more emotional tone (vv. 19–20).

**Timothy George:** The remainder of **chap. 4** can be divided into three literary units.

1. **Verses 8–11** are an exhortation in which Paul reminded his Galatian converts of their former way of life, the great transformation that had happened to them through their adoption into God’s family, and his deep concern that they were about to exchange their spiritual heritage for a mess of pottage.
2. **Verses 12–20** extend the theme of Paul’s fear for the Galatians in the form of a personal expostulation. He recalled the endearing bonds of friendship and love he and the Galatians had enjoyed in days past and pleaded with them to remain faithful to the one and only gospel he had first preached among them.
3. The final section, **vv. 21–31**, contain the allegory of Hagar and Sarah whose sons, Ishmael and Isaac, are taken as representative types of spiritual slavery and spiritual sonship.

**Philip Ryken:** By the Spirit of God's Son, the Galatians had learned to call God "Father." **Yet they were in imminent danger of going from sonship right back into slavery.** They were about to squander their spiritual inheritance by selling their birthright as the sons and daughters of God.

No wonder the apostle Paul was so alarmed! Why would anyone who had been adopted by God want to go back and work for the devil? It made no sense, which is why the apostle tried everything he could think of to stop them.

## **I. (:8-11) EXHORTATION: DON'T TURN BACK TO A LIFESTYLE OF LEGALISTIC BONDAGE = FUTILITY**

**Robert Gromacki:** Paul wanted to prove that legalism was no better than paganism. In principle they were identical because both required strict observance of rituals and laws to gain salvation. To the apostle the Judaizers were similar to the pagan religious priests who once supervised the Galatians before their conversion.

**Max Anders:** As Gentiles, your new relationship as God's sons produces maturity. You are free from the bondage of paganism. It is illogical to revert to bondage by observing the law.

**Thomas Schreiner: The folly of reverting to the law (4:8–11)**

- a. Enslaved to false gods (4:8)
- b. Incredulity at their relapse after conversion (4:9)
- c. Relapse marked by observance of Jewish calendar (4:10)
- d. Fear of a futile ministry (4:11)

### **A. (:8) Legalistic Bondage Was their Lifestyle Prior to Conversion**

#### 1. Backwards Reminder of Pre-conversion days

*"However at that time"*

**Timothy George:** Paul was drawing a **sharp distinction** between the pre-Christian past of the Galatian believers and their present status as adopted sons in the family of God. Paul provided no details concerning the precise character of the Galatians' former religious commitments.

#### 2. Base Deficiency = No Knowledge of the True God

*"when you did not know God"*

#### 3. Bondage to False Gods

*"you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods"*

**Timothy George:** There is only one God, the true God from whom all things came, the "jealous" God who brooks no competition. All other pretended deities are merely "so-called gods" (1 Cor 8:4–6). Significantly, one of the most damaging charges

brought against Christians during the second century was that of atheism. By that time the majority of Christians were former Gentiles who had rejected the false gods of Greco-Roman religion. In response to this charge, the apologist **Justin Martyr** declared:

“We confess that we are atheists, as far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both him, and the Son who came forth from him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to him, and the prophetic Spirit we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to everyone who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.”

The Christians were persecuted for being atheists, that is, for repudiating and refusing to worship the false deities, the nongods, of the Roman Empire. This does not mean, however, that either Paul or Christians of Justin’s generation believed that these false gods were merely projections of the human mind. Clearly, they understood them to be existent beings, fallen angels, demonic spirits, the *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* described earlier. These elemental spirits were indeed real enough: they could appear on earth in various guises; they could perform miracles and wreak havoc in the world of nature. They trafficked in destruction and death and were especially violent in stimulating persecutions against the Christians.

**Ben Witherington:** Paul is drawing an analogy between going back to observing the calendrical feasts and days of the Emperor cult with going forward and accepting the calendrical observances enunciated in the Mosaic covenant. He wishes his Galatians converts to do neither, and so he throws odium on what the audience is contemplating doing by suggesting it would be similar to committing apostasy, it would be similar to going back to Emperor worship. But the Emperor Claudius, while of course a real being, was most definitely not a real god, nor were his forebears in the Julio-Claudian clan including Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula.

## **B. (:9-10) Reverting to Legalistic Bondage after Conversion Is Futile**

### 1. Escape from Legalistic Bondage Marked by Conversion

*"But now"*

### 2. Essence of Conversion / Salvation

#### a. From man's perspective

*"that you have come to know God"*

**Timothy George:** The kind of knowledge Paul was speaking of is neither intellectual acumen nor some kind of special information available only to an inner group of initiates. “*To know*” in the Pauline sense also goes beyond implied acknowledgment of monotheism and intellectual assent to Christian doctrines. This sort of knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for the kind of transformation Paul described as having taken place among the Galatians. Paul’s concept of knowledge was more closely related to the Hebrew verb *yāda‘*, which is frequently used in the OT to refer to the kind of

**personal intimacy** associated with sexual intercourse, as in **Gen 4:1**, “*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain*” (ESV). “*To know*” God in this kind of experiential intensity implies a divine-human encounter in which the total self, not merely the mind or thought processes, is claimed and transformed.

- b. From God's perspective  
*"or rather to be known by God"*

**Ernest Campbell:** This statement refutes the idea that man is the one who reaches out to God, and it emphasizes the fact that God is the One who does the reaching out. God is the One who draws men unto Christ the Redeemer (**John 6:44**).

**Timothy George:** Paul’s insistence on the **divine initiative** in salvation excludes both moralism and mysticism. We can neither keep God’s commandments nor love him purely apart from his overcoming grace and prevenient favor toward us. “*Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins*” (**1 John 4:10**). Nor can human beings ever “find God” no matter what sort of religious techniques or spiritual exercises they may employ. We are like blinded rats lost in the labyrinth of sin until by God’s amazing grace we who were all lost in the maze of self-justification are truly and everlastingly “found.”

**Thomas Schreiner:** A beautiful picture of conversion is drawn here (cf. **1 Thess 1:9**), as Paul contrasts “*then*” (τότε, **4:8**) and “*now*” (νῦν)—their former lives and their new life in Christ. Then they did not know God, but when the Galatians were converted, they came to know God. Such knowledge is not merely abstract and impersonal but has a personal and warm dimension, for they exclaim that God is their beloved Father (**4:6**). They sense his nearness and love for them, since they are now his children.

Still, the accent cannot rest on their knowing God, and hence Paul qualifies his initial statement. Even though it is true that believers have come to know God, there is a deeper reality that explains why they know God’s saving love, namely, **God’s knowledge of them**. God’s knowledge of his people hearkens back to the Hebrew verb “*know*” (yāda ), where God’s knowledge refers to his **choosing of someone**—the setting of his affection upon someone.

- Hence, he “*knew*” Abraham by choosing him to be the father of the Jewish people (**Gen 18:19**).
- He “*knew*” Israel and chose them out of all the people groups on earth (**Amos 3:2**).
- He “*knew*” Jeremiah before he was born and hence appointed him to be a prophet (**Jer 1:5**).
- So too, the Galatians have come to know God because God knew them first, because he loved them and graciously chose them to be his own.

### 3. Enigma of Reverting back to Legalistic Bondage

*"how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"*

**C. F. Hogg:** Weak in the sense of powerless to produce results, an epithet elsewhere applied to the law and in the same sense, **Rom. 8:3, Heb. 7:18**... Beggarly in the sense of powerless to enrich. Without spiritual wealth, without an inheritance, present or prospective, without any gift of life or of the Spirit, these religions of childhood, **v. 1**, and of bondage, were “*poverty-stricken*” indeed and could give nothing, for they had nothing to give. With this poverty contrast the riches of God...

**George Brunk:** The *elements* are thus those things that assume religious-like influence over people, but have no real power. The idols of paganism and the Jewish Law share in this impotence, even though, for Paul, the Law is God-given and not the invention of human imagination, as with pagan religion and philosophy. The Law itself is a powerless system of religious beliefs and practices. The key to Paul’s experience in Christ is that the Spirit of Christ provided the power to fulfill the just and right standard of the Law (cf. **5:14-16; Rom 8:3-4**). When the Galatians submit to the Law observance being urged by the Galatian opponents, they are embracing a *weak* and *beggarly* condition instead of building on the strength of the Spirit and the riches of grace in Christ—both of which are constant themes in Pauline writings. Such a condition is tantamount to slavery.

**David deSilva:** Their coming to a place of knowing God—or, rather, being known by God (here Paul uses the rhetorical device of self-correction to highlight God’s taking the initiative in reversing their condition of alienation-through-ignorance)—ought to have positioned them to recognize and reject any attempt to persuade them from their position. They ought to have valued the testimony of the Spirit in their inner person more than the testimony of the rival teachers.

**Ronald Fung:** *Ta stoicheia tou kosmou* (**Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8, 20**) is taken by the majority of modern scholars in a cosmological sense as the elemental powers of the universe, which are then more specifically identified with the angelic powers through whom the law was promulgated, or with the spirits particularly connected with the astral bodies, the rulers of the planetary spheres believed to exercise a controlling influence over the lives and destinies of persons. Others interpret *ta stoicheia* as the elementary teachings—rudimentary principles of morality and religion, more specifically the requirements of legalism by which people lived before Christ—and the *kosmos*, “*the world*,” as mankind’s habitation, which is dominated by sin. . .

[Another possible] view takes *stoicheia tou kosmou* as an expression contributed by Paul himself, the meaning of which is to be determined from the context: using *stoicheion* “in a transferred sense for that whereon man’s existence rested before Christ,” Paul includes in the *stoicheia* of the world “on the one side the Torah with its statutes (**4:3–5** ...), and then on the other side the world of false gods whom the recipients [of his letter] once served, **4:8f.**” On this understanding, the elements of the world can “cover all the things in which man places his trust apart from the living God revealed in Christ; they become his gods, and he becomes their slave.” This

interpretation is preferred here, if only provisionally and in full recognition that the matter continues to be keenly debated.

**Douglas Moo:** Paul is pulling out all the rhetorical stops to convince the Galatians not to take what he views as a disastrous step. To accomplish this, he implies that putting themselves under the law, since the era of the law has ended with the coming of the promised Seed, is akin to returning to their impotent pagan religions.

#### 4. Examples of Dependence Upon Legalistic Ritual

*"You observe days and months and seasons and years."*

**Ronald Fung:** In this enumeration Paul apparently intends to say that the Galatians had taken over the entire Jewish system of religious observances. In his view this religious observance of sacred days and seasons according to the Jewish calendar--as an obligation imposed by the law, and not simply as a matter of custom--was a form of subservience to the *stoicheia* which could neither save nor justify its adherents but only cast them into bondage.

**Max Anders:** The Judaizers had persuaded the Galatians to observe the Mosaic calendar. These seasonal events included special days (weekly sabbaths), months (new moons), and seasons (Festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). The Galatians kept these festivals to gain God's favor.

**Timothy George:** Obviously Paul was concerned that the Galatian believers would be drawn into a religious system where adherence to certain cyclical celebrations was regarded as obtaining or maintaining a favorable standing with God. This is a recurring temptation for believers in all ages of church history. In medieval times Roman Catholics were taught that the ritual of annual confession and Easter Communion was a minimal requirement for being a member of the church in good standing. Today in many evangelical churches thousands of inactive members throng to worship services at Christmas and Easter assuming such semiannual pilgrimages are all the Lord requires of them. Whatever the context, a religion of "*days, months, seasons, and years*" can never lead to liberation from the weak and beggarly elemental spirits whose grasp can only be escaped through faith in the one who came "*in the fullness of time*."

**Bruce Barton:** Paul did not condemn the celebration of the Jewish events— for he himself kept the Sabbath and still traveled to Jerusalem for certain festivals (see also **Colossians 2:16**). He would have condemned the Gentile Galatians celebrating the Jewish holidays in order to somehow receive more merit before God or fulfill some legal duty in doing so. The God-honoring festivals were not bad in themselves; but when used as a way to earn salvation or "score points" with God, they became nothing more than slavery.

#### **C. (:11) Threat of Futility**

*"I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."*

**John Piper:** It's not surprising then that the Judaizers should find a foothold for their false teaching in the hearts of the recent Galatian converts, just like all kinds of cults and ego-centric fads are able to gain a foothold in the church today. The teaching of the Judaizers did not oppose the pride left in the Galatian believers. It catered to that pride. They said, move on from faith to works; move on from the booster rocket of the Holy Spirit and kick in with the efforts of your flesh (**Gal. 3:1-5**). They offered the law as a means of enjoying one's pride in a morally acceptable way. And so their teaching was not as radical and humbling as Paul's was. It was very appealing to people who wanted to be religious and moral but did not want to become putty in the hands of God.

**George Brunk:** With this confession Paul ends the reasoned argument of the previous section to make a more personal appeal. With this reference to his intense labor on behalf of the Galatians, Paul intends to evoke feelings of shame and remorse in the readers.

**Ronald Fung:** We may assume that here also Paul is thinking of the Galatians' justification and that he fears that they, by holding fast to their religious observances as a means of justification, might fail to receive the justification which is available only through faith, and that consequently all the hard toil intended for their benefit should prove to have been in vain. The issue, then, is "not the observation of religious usages as such ... , but the basis of the justification before God ... : Judaism with its auto-soteriological, legalistic scheme of redemption or the gospel of free grace. These two are unreconcilable."

**Douglas Moo:** The various expressions of the Galatians' commitment to Christ along with Paul's ministry among them will prove to be "empty," "without purpose," if the Galatians should succumb to the message of the agitators by submitting to the law.

## **II. (:12-16) EMOTIONAL PLEA: DON'T REJECT THE LOVING INSTRUCTION OF YOUR ORIGINAL DISCIPLER (3 APPEALS TO LOVE AND AFFECTION).**

**Max Anders:** The controversy over legalism separated Paul from his close friends, the Galatians. Therefore, the law cannot be mature and true because it has separated intimates.

**David deSilva:** Having shared his deeply personal fear that his work among them may prove to be all for nothing (**4:11**), Paul continues to write in a more personal vein throughout this next paragraph, returning to the task of supporting his cause with appeals to ethos and pathos (specifically invoking feelings of friendship, shame, and indignation). He purposefully recalls his former connection with the Galatians, forged during his earlier time with them, and adds the weight of this connection to the force of his reasoning in **2:14 – 4:11**. Remembering the "good old days" in their relationship before the rival teachers came along, nosing their way in to break up the relationship to



their own advantage, also allows him to rouse hostile feelings toward, and undermine the credibility of, those who have broken in with **self-serving intent**.

**Timothy George:** What we have in this personal aside is a poignant witness to the indissoluble linkage between theological content and pastoral concern. All true theology worthy of the name is **pastoral theology**. As in the autobiographical section of his letter, so here too Paul's concern for the truth of the gospel is bound up with his own apostolic vocation on the one hand and with his consuming burden for his "children" on the other.

In our own day these two essential aspects of balanced pastoral ministry are all too often torn asunder. It is possible, for example, for a pastor to be so preoccupied with theological ideas and doctrinal content that he appears insensitive and detached from the hurts and struggles of his people. More often, though, the imbalance goes the other way: pastors who spend most of their time trying to assuage the needs of their congregation through the techniques of self-help and secular psychology. Such a dichotomy is deadly for any ministry of pastoral care that seeks to be both biblically responsible and personally redemptive. What deeply agitated Paul in Galatians was not that certain people had misconstrued the doctrine of justification on a theoretical plane but rather that individual men and women whom he loved dearly were in spiritual jeopardy because of this deviation from the truth of the gospel. This concern, more than anything else, prompted Paul to leave "the lofty heights of theological argumentation" and address himself to the Galatians in this deeply personal and emotional appeal.

**Thomas Schreiner: Live in Freedom from the Law: Argument from Friendship (4:12–20)**

1. Exhortation to become like Paul: free from the law (4:12a)
2. Galatians received Paul as a messenger of God (4:12b–14)
  - a. Paul's weakness in preaching (4:13)
  - b. His warm reception (4:14)
3. Query regarding blessing of the Spirit (4:15)
4. Paul's friendship in contrast to false teachers (4:16–18)
5. Paul's anguish and perplexity (4:19–20)

**A. (:12-14) Appeal to Love and Affection Based on Their Initial Acceptance of Paul -- the Evangelist**

*"I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself."*

**Richard Longenecker:** Here Paul begins the **exhortation** portion of his letter, principally by recalling his past relations with his converts and contrasting their past and present attitudes to him. Standing at the head of this section and epitomizing all that

Paul wants to say in these verses is the first imperative of Galatians, which in effect is also the operative appeal of the entire letter: “*become like me!*” (4:12).

**Ronald Fung:** The point of reference is probably freedom from the law.

**John MacArthur:** *I beg of you, . . . become as I am*, he pleaded, free from trying to earn salvation by keeping the law and free from having to live by its outward symbols, ceremonies, rituals, and restrictions. “*I died to the Law, that I might live to God,*” he had already written (2:19). Now he implored them to confess again that death to the law as a way of sanctification, which death they, too, had experienced when they trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. While all believers are called to live in obedience to God’s moral standards that never change (such living is the evidence of salvation, as indicated in **Eph. 2:6-10**), they can no more live by the law than they could have been saved by it. “*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery*” (5:1).

**Nijay Gupta:** Here Paul was addressing the fact that, though he had certain privileges and freedoms in life, he willingly gave up some of those benefits for the sake of the gospel. In the social world in which Paul lived, a world of constant competition and one-upmanship, it was counterintuitive to seek to make oneself a slave to others. But Paul had a strong motivator: winning others to the gospel. As it applies to the Galatians in particular, Paul probably became like them by “*liv[ing] like a gentile,*” just as he mentioned Cephas’s initial disposition in Antioch earlier in Galatians (**Gal 2:14**; cf. **1 Cor 9:21**). What would this have looked like? I assume it meant that he really tried to fit in when he came to Galatia; he treated them with respect and sought to appreciate their culture and social values. When Paul says he made himself a “*slave*” to those he ministered to (**1 Cor 9:19**), this metaphor seems to imply that he deferred to them culturally when he could (without compromising his own Christian morals and principles). He says to the Galatians he became like them, as if it were a matter of plain fact, something so obvious as to not need examples or defense.

**Ernest Cambell:** Re vs. 12 -- He wants them to thoroughly understand that he holds 'nothing' (*ouden*) against them; they have no reason to feel ashamed of the way they have treated him in the past; and there is no reason they should feel that there are any barriers hindering them from becoming like he is. This is a good example of Paul's desire to remove all psychological hindrances that might keep others from obeying the Gospel.

**Timothy George:** Paul was a pioneer in what we call today **contextualization**, the need to communicate the gospel in such a way that it speaks to the total context of the people to whom it is addressed. Insofar as we are able to separate the heart of the gospel from its cultural cocoon, to contextualize the message of Christ without compromising its content, we too should become imitators of Paul. In the words of **J. Stott**: “In seeking to win other people for Christ, our end is to make them like us, but the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. If they are to become one with us in Christian conviction and experience, we must first become one with them in Christian compassion.” . . .

Whatever the nature of Paul's **physical affliction**, it must have resulted in some kind of bodily disfigurement or obviously unpleasant symptoms so that his condition was a "trial" to the Galatians. In the culture of the times, such infirmity and weakness was commonly seen as a sign of divine displeasure and rejection. Paul would have stood in stark contrast to the strong, good-looking "superapostles" who boasted in their physical prowess, rhetorical eloquence, and academic achievements. The Galatians would have been tempted to reject scornfully one of whom it was said, apart from his physical malady, that "*his actual presence is feeble and his speaking beneath contempt*" (2 Cor 10:10 Phillips). But to their credit the Galatians had not yielded to this temptation. On the contrary, they had received Paul "*as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.*"

**B. (:15) Appeal to Love and Affection Based on Their Earlier Willingness to Love Paul Sacrificially (Based on the Spiritual Blessing He Had Communicated in the Discipleship Process)**

*"Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me."*

**Max Anders:** Paul wants to know why they no longer welcome him with joy. At one time they appreciated him so much that they would have torn out their eyes and given them to him. Paul may have had eye problems and, in hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration to make a point), Paul states that the Galatians loved him so much that they would have joyously given their eyes to him.

**Ronald Fung:** Formerly, because they had Paul in their midst preaching the good news of salvation, the Galatians felt happy (cf. NEB, NIV) and satisfied (cf. RSV), they congratulated themselves (RV), they had "*a sense of blessing*" (NASB, cf. AV). In that state of mind, Paul testifies, the Galatians would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him, had that been possible. It is unlikely that the language here implies eye trouble on Paul's part; it may be no more than a graphic description of deep affection: to have one's own eyes torn out and given to another represents the yielding up of one's most precious possessions (cf. Dt. 32:10; Ps. 17:8; Zech. 2:8).

**C. (:16) Appeal to Love and Affection Based on Consistent Proclamation of the Truth**

*"Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?"*

**John MacArthur:** Many people appreciate a preacher or teacher only as long as he says what they want to hear. The confused and defecting believers in Galatia had once greatly admired Paul, but now they looked on him as their enemy, because he confronted them with the truth about the genuine gospel of God, which had saved them, and the false teaching of the Judaizers, which led them back into the bondage of legalism.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** At 4:16, Paul asks whether his insistence on the truth of a circumcision-free gospel for the Gentiles is now creating hostility on their part toward

him. In accepting the rite of circumcision, the Galatians have put both their fidelity to the gospel and their loyalty to Paul in jeopardy. They have denied the truth of the gospel: Gentile Christians are heirs to the promise of Abraham through Christ alone apart from law observance. They have rejected Paul's preaching and scorned his friendship. They now bear hostility toward their former friend and missionary whom they had once held in great affection. Because he has told them the truth, and because they have rejected it, they now perceive him as the enemy. He does not, however, perceive them this way.

**Philip Ryken:** Paul writes to the Galatians, therefore, as a wounded lover. He wonders, "*Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?*" (**Gal. 4:16**). His gospel has not changed. He is still proclaiming the good news about the cross and the empty tomb. He is still preaching justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Yet the Galatians were starting to reject the one true gospel. Unwilling to hear the truth, they were treating Paul like an enemy. The very message that first created the bond of their affection for him was starting to cause a rift between them.

### **III. (:17-20) DON'T BE DECEIVED BY ZEALOUS FALSE TEACHERS**

**Max Anders:** Zealous opponents should not be able to woo you away from the truth of God's salvation in Christ, but you should trust the motives and actions of the one who first led you to Christ.

#### **A. (:17-18) Discern the Motives of Those Desiring to Minister to You**

##### **1. Beware of the Ulterior Motives of Fanatical False Teachers**

*"They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them."*

Watch out for spiritual leaders that try to make you dependent on their ministry.

**Ernest Campbell:** "The context indicates that with a selfish zeal the Judaizers affectionately courted the friendship of the Galatians."

**David deSilva:** Paul alleges that the rival teachers are showing a great deal of interest in the Galatians, but not to the latter's advantage. Instead, the rival teachers' goal is to "*exclude*" the Galatians—to shut them back outside of the people of promise (i.e., by convincing them that, as gentiles, they have no place in the people of God) so that the Galatians will be put in the position of trying to reenter the people of promise by courting the rival teachers and becoming their followers. The rival teachers' actions represent the antithesis of Paul's own, a contrast implicitly supported by the parallelism between **12** and **17**.

**Ronald Fung:** The ultimate aim of the agitators was for the Galatians to seek them (cf. NASB), not Paul, as their exclusive teachers, receiving their directions from them and obeying the law which they observed. The same Greek verb both begins and ends the

verse (this is most clearly reflected in RSV), and the two instances show that the verb “may be used not only of the quest for adherents but also of the adherents’ attachment to their leaders or teachers.”

**Timothy George:** The Galatian Christians had been courted, seduced, and bewitched by false teachers whose true aim was to alienate their affection from Paul and to enlist them as devotees in their own campaign of self-aggrandizement.

**Philip Ryken:** The Judaizers were the wrong kind of zealots. In their misguided zeal for the law, they told the Galatians that they had to become Jews in order to be good Christians. This heretical teaching had the result of dividing the Jews from the Gentiles inside the church, where we are all supposed to be one in Christ. It also had the result of turning the Galatians away from Paul and the one true gospel of free grace. The Judaizers seem to have envied Paul’s missionary success. What they really wanted was their own disciples, as false teachers always do. So they tried to win the Galatians away from Paul by flattering them and courting their affections.

## 2. Appreciate the Commendable Motives of All Godly Disciplers

*"But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you."*

Paul was not expressing jealousy at the fact that they would respond to other teachers ... he just wanted them to be discerning in their response.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Zeal, of course, is a commendable quality, as long as it is directed to the right object. If one is zealous for what is good, one’s life will be pleasing to God. In other words, Paul was not jealous for his own reputation. If others had arrived in Galatia, preached the gospel, and strengthened the Galatians in the faith, he would have rejoiced.

## **B. (:19-20) Desire the Pastoral Care of Those Who Have Proven Genuine Love**

### 1. (:19) Paul Renews His Commitment to Lovingly Disciple Them

*"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you --"*

What a tremendous description of the goal of all discipleship!

**John MacArthur:** Speaking like a mother, Paul now addressed the Galatian believers as my children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you. He was not arguing like a lawyer before a skeptical jury but pleading like a parent to a wayward child.

**George Brunk:** Paul portrays life in the Spirit and ministry as the bringing forth of new life in Christ through acts of death (sacrifice and suffering) in emulation of Jesus himself (2 Cor 1:5-7; 4:10-11). That is precisely how Paul sees himself in relation to the Galatians. Here at the end of the times (1 Cor 10:11), God’s new world is taking

shape, and Paul's ministry is helping to bring it to birth. As Paul's experience with the Galatians shows, evangelism is more than a quick and simple decision for Christ. It is an extended and formative process that involves change in one's values, character, and behavior, to which the whole self of the evangelist contributes as model.

David deSilva: Paul expresses clearly here the essential formational element of justification, namely, God's desire to restore his image within us by conforming us to the likeness of Jesus, his Son, the perfect human bearer of that image. In this process of transformation, we become righteous (hence, are justified, brought into alignment with God's standards and heart) as we become more like God's Son, who comes to life within the believer by the action of the Holy Spirit. Whether Paul speaks of Christ taking shape in and among the believers (4:19) or of Christ living in the believer (2:20) or of believers being shaped into Christ's likeness (as in Phil 3:8–11; 2 Cor 3:18), such transformation is the passionate heart of Paul's gospel and theology.

2. (:20) Paul Reiterates His Pastoral Care to Keep Them On Track

a. This Pastoral Care May Involve Discipline

*"but I could wish to be present with you now  
and to change my tone"*

(at least it will involve saying some hard things to them in a confrontational tone)

**David deSilva:** Paul's perplexity concerning the Galatians is also the cause of his desire to be present with them (and thus to learn the facts more clearly and intervene more directly), with the implied hope that such direct intervention would lessen his anxiety about them, prove the matter not to be so dire, hasten correction, and thus allow him indeed to adopt a kinder, gentler tone.

**Ronald Fung:** Apparently he believes that if only he could be present with them he would be able to regain their trust and allegiance, so that it would no longer be necessary to use such severe language as he has found it necessary to use in reminding them of the truth and warning them against falsehood. As it is, however, he is prevented from paying them a personal visit at the moment, and his heartfelt desire was perforce unfulfilled.

**Howard Vos:** Paul's tenderness and concern for the Galatians, which extended to suffering birth pangs for their spiritual renewal, now expresses itself in his desire to be present with them if it were possible. It is hard to know exactly how their situation is when he must go on hearsay, and it is usually much more difficult to deal with a problem in writing than in person. If he were present he could change his tone of voice, either to suit the needs of the situation or to change from condemnation to praise. "*For I stand in doubt of you*" indicates distress of mind or perplexity or something similar in knowing how to deal with the Galatians, whether firmly or gently, to bring them back to the standards of faith and grace.

b. This Pastoral Care Includes an Element of Perplexity  
"for I am perplexed about you"

**Timothy George:** Here Paul's true humanity is evident. This verse echoes his earlier unbearable thought of "wasted labor" (4:11). He was exasperated, perplexed, and heartbroken. The situation was desperate, but defeat was not a foregone conclusion. The Galatians might still have been won back from the brink of disaster. The gleam of hope that later emerges in the letter (5:10) is based on the fact that the "extraordinary power may be from God and not from us."

**Nijay Gupta:** Paul's exasperation matches his deep concern for their well-being. Their decisions were not a minor matter but a matter of life and death (5:2, 4). Paul wished to change his tone, to pacify the situation and speak to them gently and warmly. But that doesn't happen in the remainder of this passion-filled letter, and it certainly doesn't happen in the next section, 4:21–31!

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) Is it possible for a Christian worker to "labor in vain"? How would this plea have motivated the Galatians to respond to Paul's appeals?
- 2) Why had the Galatian believers turned against Paul in some sense and were now treating him differently than they had previously? How does Paul show us a good example in terms of how to deal with conflict and controversy within the local church?
- 3) How is the concept of *Tough Love* shown in how Paul dearly expresses his love and affection and yet strongly expresses his opposition to the error of the Judaizers?
- 4) What type of "bodily illness" might have made Paul seem so contemptible and loathsome to the Galatians? Do we ever miss the impact in our heart of the message that God is trying to communicate because we allow some of the external oddities of the messenger to distract us?

\* \* \* \* \*

**QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:**

**William Barclay:** He calls the elementary things, the religion based on law, *weak and poverty-stricken*.

- (i) It is *weak* because it is helpless. It can define sin; it can convict a man of sin; but it can neither find for him forgiveness for past sin nor strength to conquer future sin.
- (ii) It is *poverty-stricken* in comparison with the splendour of grace.

By its very nature the law can deal with only one situation. For every fresh situation man needs a fresh law; but the wonder of grace is that it is *poikilos*, which means *variegated, many-coloured*. That is to say, there is no possible situation in life which grace cannot match; it is sufficient for all things.

**Chuck Swindoll:** The Galatians turned from treating Paul like an angel to looking on him as an enemy. Who changed? Not Paul – his message and method remained the same. But when he confronted the Galatians with their break from the true gospel, they turned on him, becoming defensive and spiteful. Christian unity was threatened because Paul had spoken the truth. How ironic! Yet the same problem arises today. Churches split, friendships shatter, pastors resign . . . frequently because someone has dared to tell the truth. It doesn't have to be this way. Truth can heal our relationships if we will take off our pride and clothe ourselves with humility, compassion, and tact. This approach will not ensure that conflicts will disappear, but it will bring honor to God and help facilitate reconciliation.

**Scot McKnight:** Re vv. 8-11 -- What is revolutionary here is that Paul considers “*moving into Judaism*” as nothing other than a reversion to “*paganism*”, to “*non-gods*” (cf. Gal. 1:6). He asks, “*Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*” Their move from idolatry to Christianity and now to Judaism is for Paul no different than a venture back into “*idolatry*” or “*paganism*.”

**John Piper:** So the Judaizers -- these rigorous, moral monotheists out of Jerusalem -- must have been thunderstruck to hear Paul say to the Galatians: if you begin to use the Jewish law to show God the merit of your virtue you come under the sway of demons and are no better off than in your former idolatry. In other words, Paul has uncovered for us a typical demonic scheme which is just as prevalent in the religions of the twentieth century as it was in Paul's day. It is clean, it is moral, it is religious and it is hellish.

**John MacArthur:** Re vv. 12-20 -- But the apostle's approach changes dramatically in **verse 12 of chapter 4**. His anger at the Judaizers subsides, and he moves from the purely doctrinal to the more personal. In fact, **verses 12-20** are the strongest words of personal affection Paul uses in any of his letters. He does not so much preach or teach as simply pour out his heart in personal exhortation. He says, in effect, “I cared about you more than I can say. I love you dearly just as you have loved me dearly. Please listen to what I'm saying, because it's so vitally essential.”

**William Hendriksen:** Re vv. 12-20 -- It is characteristic of Paul, the tactful shepherd of souls, the warm-hearted master-psychologist, that his rather sharp reproof (**verses 8-11**) is followed immediately by tender, urgent, intensely personal appeal. This paragraph is one of the most gripping in all of Paul's epistles. The apostle implores and agonizes, because he cannot endure the thought that those whom he addresses and who at one time had treated him with such sympathetic consideration and had accepted his gospel with such enthusiasm would now continue to wander farther and farther away from home. Hence, lovingly, as a parent speaking to children . . .



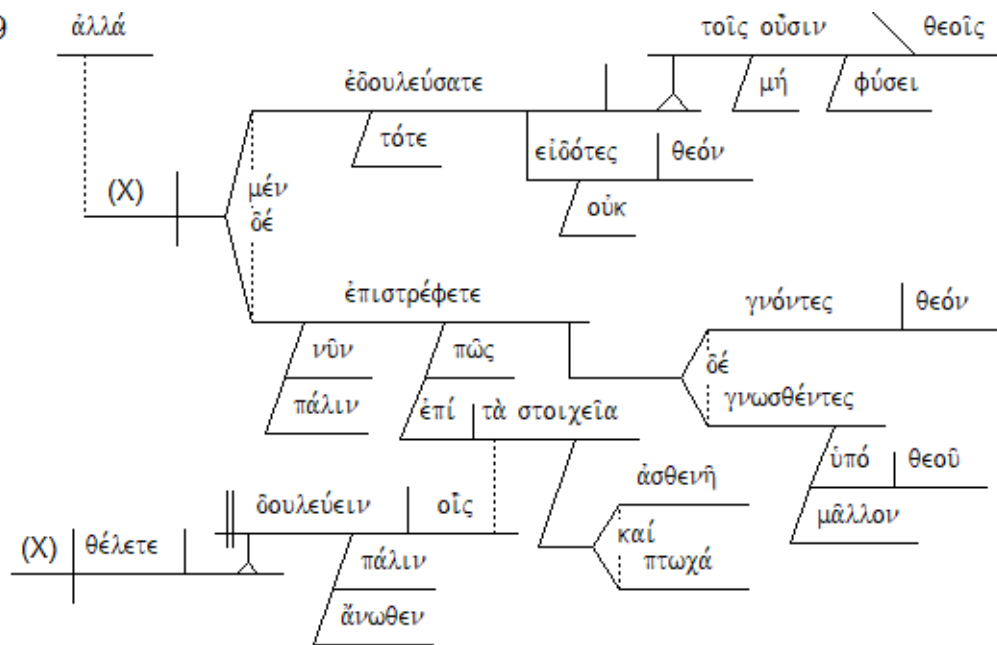
**John Piper:** So the answer to the question, How is Christ formed in your life? is: by your faith.

It's really quite simple: the Son of God comes and shapes us from within if we rely on him to come and shape us. The Son takes shape in those who abandon themselves to him. Christ forms himself in the lives of those who will let go of all the forms of life in which they have shaped on their own. Christ takes shape in a life that is willing to become putty in God's hands. Christ presses the shape of his own face into the clay of our soul when we cease to be hard and resistant, and when we take our own amateur hands off and admit that we are not such good artists as he is.

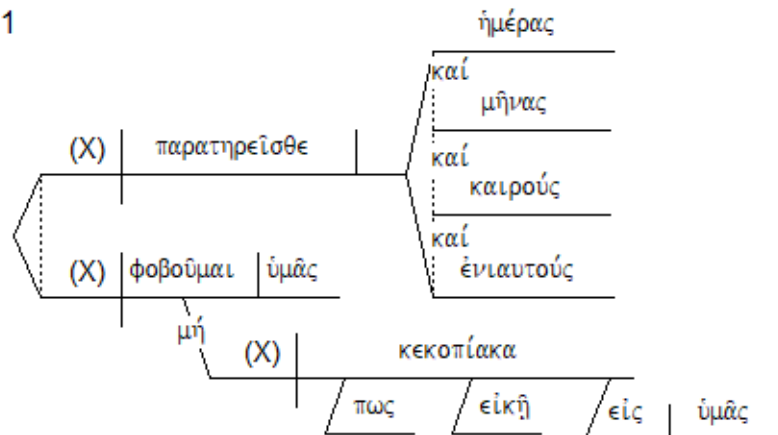
Here we can see clearly what faith is. Faith is the assurance that what God will make of you, as Christ is formed in your life, is vastly to be preferred over what you can make of yourself. Faith is the confidence that the demonstration of Christ's work in your life is more wonderful than all the praise you could get for yourself by being a self-made man -- or woman. Faith is a happy resting in the all-sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross, what he is doing now in our heart and what he promises to do for us forever.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

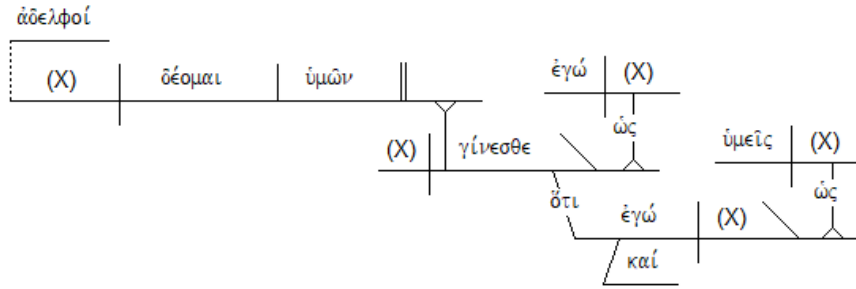
Gal 4:8-9



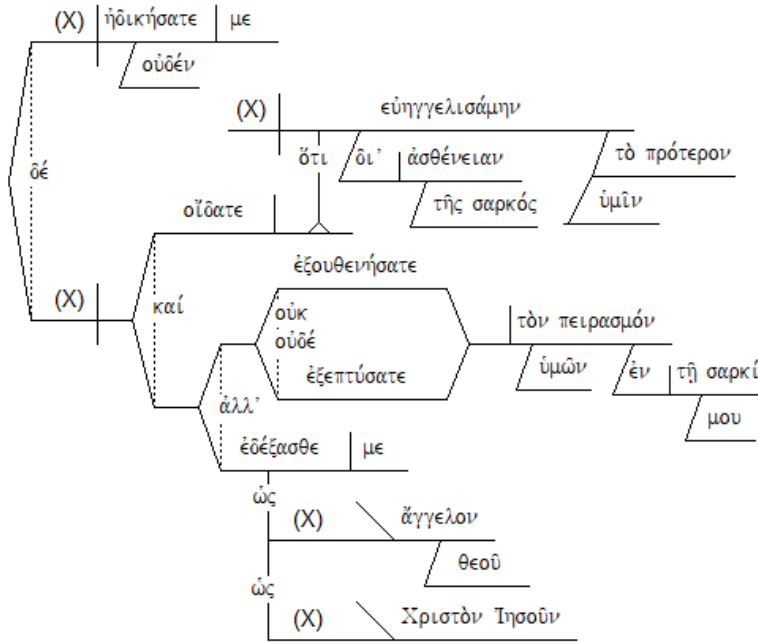
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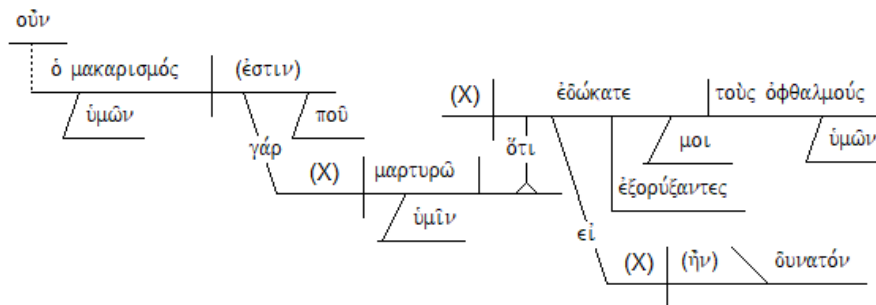
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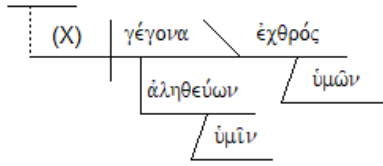
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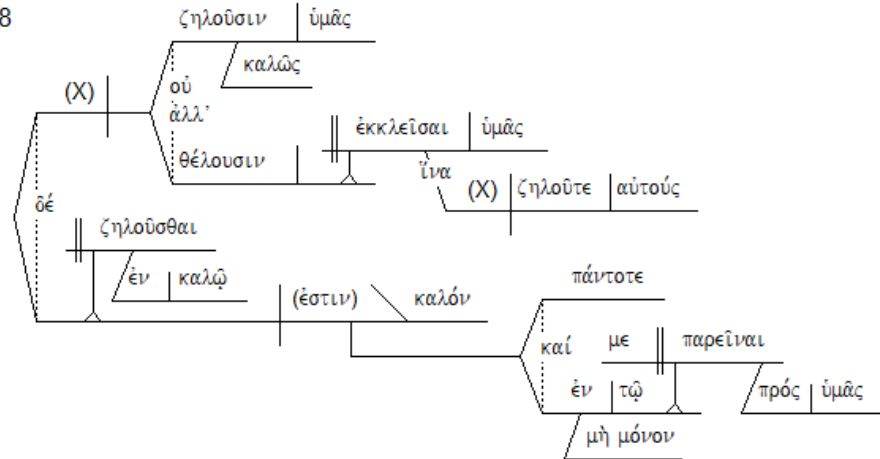
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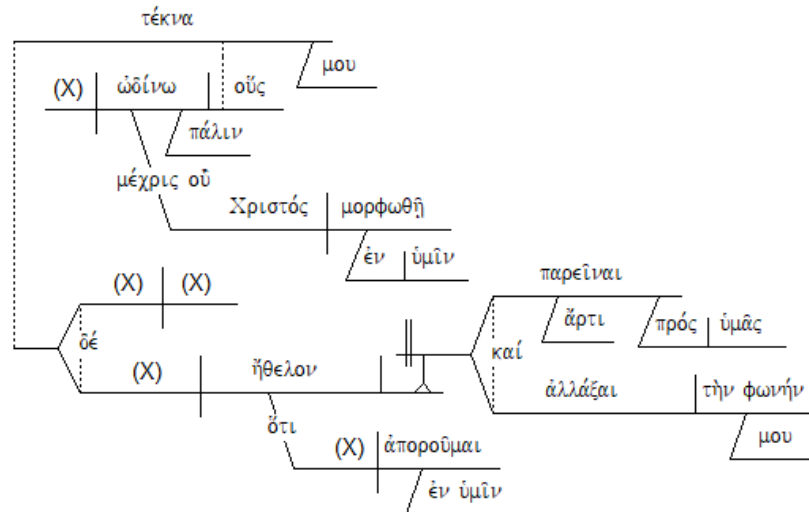
Gal 4:16 ὥστε



Gal 4:17-18



Gal 4:19-20



TEXT: GALATIANS 4:21-31

TITLE: THE ARGUMENT FROM OT ANALOGY

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE OT ANALOGY OF ISHMAEL AND ISAAC PICTURES OUR FREEDOM  
-- ACCOMPLISHED BY THE SPIRIT ACCORDING TO GOD'S PROMISE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**William Hendriksen:** The chapter closes with a reminder--in the form of an allegory--that those who hear the law should take it to heart. When the Judaizers pride themselves in the fact that they are “*sons of Abraham*,” and the Galatians are influenced by this boast, let it be remembered that Abraham had two sons: one by the slave-woman, the other by the free-woman. Slavish law-observance, as if this were the pathway to salvation, makes one similar to Ishmael, slave-son of a slave-woman (Hagar). On the contrary, the exercise of one's freedom in Christ, basing one's trust in him alone, makes one a true son of Abraham, similar to the free-born son Isaac, born to the free-woman, Sarah.

**Douglas Moo:** Perhaps a majority of contemporary interpreters would categorize Paul's interpretation neither as “typology” nor as “allegory,” but as a mixture of the two (**Betz** 1979: 239; **Lincoln** 1981: 13–14; **Goppelt** 1982: 139; **Mussner** 1988: 320; **Martyn** 1997: 436; **Drane** 1975: 41–43; **Schreiner** 2010: 293). . . .

Paul grounds his reading of the Sarah and Hagar narrative in an important pattern of OT salvation-historical movement, a reading, to be sure, enhanced by his hermeneutical axioms. He gives to the narrative before him in Genesis, without denying its intended historical sense, an additional or added meaning in light of these hermeneutical axioms.

**Scot McKnight:** [Paul] argues in this last argument, if one reads Scripture “*allegorically*,” one will see that the stories of Abraham-Sarah-Isaac along with the stories of Abraham-Hagar-Ishmael teach the point he has been making. God's way is through promise, not through the “*flesh*.” This final argument from the law (i.e., the Pentateuch) complements his previous three arguments: from Scripture texts (**3:6–14**), from covenants (**vv. 15–25**), and from sonship (**3:26 – 4:20**). As well, Paul anchors his argument in the patriarch Paul thinks is paramount: Abraham, not Moses. . . .

I see no reason why we cannot make **allusions** like these, allusions that restate the message of the gospel in terms of Old Testament figures and events. There is no reason, so far as I am concerned, why Christians cannot express the gospel by using the characters and events of the Old Testament. This is, in effect, **a retelling of an Old Testament narrative in terms of the Christian gospel**. Thus, I see no reason why we cannot find analogies to the gospel in Old Testament stories as long as we are aware that what we are doing is not historical exegesis but application and rereading.

**Chuck Swindoll:** Paul's doctrinal case against the legalistic Judaizers is brought to a climax and a close in **Galatians 4:21-31**. Here he uses the Judaizers' method of argument and exegesis to disprove their position. He opens with a question (**v. 21**), provides some historical background from the life of Abraham (**vv. 22-23**), allegorizes the history given (**vv. 24-27**), and, finally, applies the allegory to the Galatians' situation (**vv. 28-31**).

**Timothy George:** [Paul] developed the analogy of Hagar and Sarah, doubtless an example familiar to the Galatians from the use already made of it by the false teachers. He had set forth two parallel lists of complementary items derived from this famous passage in Genesis. Sarah-Isaac-the new covenant-Mount Zion-Jerusalem above stand together over against Hagar-Ishmael-the old covenant-Mount Sinai-Jerusalem that now is. Paul's inversion of the traditional interpretation of the analogy shows that the true descendants of Isaac are those who are justified by grace through faith on the basis of God's unfailing promise, while the offspring of Ishmael are those, like the Judaizers, who seek to justify themselves "*according to the flesh*" (**vv. 23, 29 RSV**).

**John MacArthur:** The Old Covenant of law was given through Moses at Mount Sinai and required God's chosen people, the Jews, to keep all the commands He gave in conjunction with that covenant. Because the terms of the covenant were humanly impossible to keep, it produced a type of religious slaves, as it were, bound to a master from whom they could never escape. Anyone, including a Jew, who attempted to satisfy God and gain freedom from condemnation by trying to live up to that covenant in his own self-righteousness was spiritually like a child of Hagar, the bondwoman. He was a slave, struggling for a freedom he could not obtain by his own efforts...

In one sweep Paul sets forth the common factor of divine power in behalf of Sarah, the captive Jews, and the church. The common element of all three is divine power granting freedom and fruitfulness. Everything in this trilogy is the result of regenerating grace, not human effort.

**Howard Vos:** From personal appeal Paul now turns to an illustration from Scripture in an effort to separate the Galatians from legalism. Those who boast of their submission to the law and claim to be sons of Abraham forget that Abraham had two sons, the one of a freewoman and the other of a bondwoman. Blessing and inheritance belong to the former. Paul declares the legalistic Galatians to be descended from the latter.

**Philip Ryken:** As a result of Paul's evangelistic efforts, new churches were planted throughout the region. Yet shortly thereafter, a group of Jewish-Christian missionaries arrived in Galatia to "correct" Paul's gospel. These men, who came from Jerusalem, are sometimes known as "the Judaizers." They preached a legalistic form of Christianity. They wanted Gentiles to become Jews in order to be good Christians. Thus they were trying to add the law of Moses on top of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Under the influence of this teaching, the Galatians began to squander their newfound freedom in Christ. They were keeping Jewish traditions that were unnecessary for Christians. Some of them thought they had to get circumcised. Others were saying that it was mandatory to celebrate Passover and other Jewish festivals. In their effort to prove that they were good Christians, they were becoming enslaved to all kinds of Old Testament rituals.

We often do the same thing. We forget that Christianity is a form of liberty, and not slavery. We reduce faith in Christ to a list of rules or traditions. We evaluate our spiritual standing by what we do for God, rather than by what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. In truth, we are all recovering Pharisees, in constant danger of forgetting to live only by faith and choosing instead to go right back under the law.

In order to persuade the Galatians that they were free from the law, the apostle Paul used a legal argument. In fine rabbinic style, he used the Torah, or Old Testament law, to make his point. “*Tell me,*” he wrote, somewhat sarcastically, “*you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*” (**Gal. 4:21**). His meaning could be paraphrased like this: “So you want to be under the law, do you? Well, do you have any idea what the law really says? Because if you did, you would realize that the law itself tells you not to be under the law!”

**Thomas Schreiner: Stand in Freedom: Argument from Allegory (4:21–5:1)**

1. Listen to the Scripture (**4:21**)
2. Contrast between two sons of Abraham (**4:22–23**)
3. The allegory: the wives represent two covenants (**4:24a-b**)
4. Hagar: Mount Sinai, the present Jerusalem, and slavery (**4:24c–25**)
5. Jerusalem above: free and fertile (**4:26–27**)
6. Galatians as children of promise persecuted by children of flesh (**4:28–29**)
7. Inheritance only for sons of the free woman (**4:30**)
8. Galatians as children of free woman (**4:31**)
9. Exhorted to stand in freedom (**5:1**)

**(:21) ATTENTION GRABBER – KEY QUESTION**

*“Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?”*

Pay attention to the OT allegory in order to see the absurdity of your inconsistency.

**Chuck Swindoll:** The legalists, and the Christians who joined them, were not forced to live according to the Law. They made that choice freely; therefore, they were responsible for it. Focusing on their decision, Paul wants to know if they have really thought it through. Have they come to grips with the whole Law—Genesis through Deuteronomy—or have they just narrowed their sights to particular aspects of the Law?

**Ben Witherington:** Verse 21 begins in dialogical fashion, with direct address to those contemplating submitting to the Law. As **Betz** says, this is reminiscent of the

Hellenistic diatribe style. Like the approach in the first major argument in **3:1–5**, Paul seeks to engage his audience directly, only here he does not rely on rhetorical questions. Lest we assume that Paul had actually moved on to another subject, this verse reminds us that the Galatians’ relationship to the Mosaic Law, and Paul’s desire that they not submit to it, is the main subject of all the arguments in this letter. The present participle θέλοντες supports our contention that Paul believes he is addressing those on the verge of submitting to the Law, but not having done so yet.

## **I. (:22-27) THE KEY DISTINCTIONS IN THE OT ANALOGY REGARDING ABRAHAM'S TWO SONS = ISHMAEL AND ISAAC**

### **(:22a) Setting the Stage – Historical Account:**

*"For it is written that Abraham had two sons  
This is allegorically speaking"*

**John MacArthur:** The translators of both the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible have chosen simply to transliterate rather than translate the term *egored* (*allegorically*, v. 24). This has led to difficulty in handling the passage, because usually an allegory is either a fanciful or fictional story carrying a hidden meaning or a true story in which the apparent meaning is meaningless.

But obviously the record of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar is both historical and meaningful. Recognizing this, the New International Version translators have attempted to aid the understanding of what Paul intended by avoiding the term *allegorical* and rendering “*These things may be taken figuratively.*” But that also can have the implication of something that is not literal. It is best to identify this literal, historical account as simply analogous to and illustrative of the spiritual truth that Paul elucidates with it. The dictionary defines analogy as “a partial similarity between like features of two things on which a comparison may be made.” Paul is simply comparing the similarities between the story of Abraham and the spiritual truth he is teaching.

**Nijay Gupta:** We can guess with some confidence that Paul was offering a counternarrative of the Abrahamic story to the one told by Paul’s rivals in Galatia. If we get a bit imaginative, we might propose that (prior to Paul’s writing this letter to the Galatians) the rivals made this kind of case to the predominantly gentile Galatian church:

“Through our holy Jewish Scriptures, we see an elect line formed, and another line rejected. So, ‘yet have I loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.’ And so also earlier with the two sons of our great father Abraham. One son was born of the slave and cut off from God’s holy people. The other son was embraced in the family, a special child foretold by God to fulfill the divine promise to Abraham. The rejected son was not a true Israelite. He had no name and no inheritance. The accepted son was circumcised and became heir to the divine promise. You Galatians do not want to be rejected, do you? Cut off and vulnerable in the wilderness, no family and no name, like the rejected son? If you want to be a



fellow heir of the kingdom of God, you must fully join the blessed son of Abraham in circumcision.”

Paul’s own interpretation of the story of Abraham’s two sons would agree that one son was rejected and the other blessed. But the meaning and importance of these two for Paul is much different.

**A. (:22b) The Distinction in the Social Position of the Mother**

1. Slave

*"one by the bondwoman"*

2. Free

*"one by the free woman"*

**Philip Ryken:** From the very beginning there was a fundamental spiritual difference between the two sons. One son was born by proxy, the other by promise. One came by works; the other came by faith. One was a slave; the other was free. Thus Ishmael and Isaac represent two entirely different approaches to religion: law against grace, flesh against Spirit, self-reliance against divine dependence.

**B. (:23) The Distinction in the Divine Initiative –**

(Resulting in a Difference in the Faith Approach on the part of the parents)

1. Human Plotting

*"But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** Abraham and Sarah’s attempt to have a child via Hagar signaled a lack of faith on their part—a human attempt to fulfill the promise (**Gen 16**).

2. Divine Promise

*"and the son by the free woman through the promise"*

**John Piper:** Isaac was not born according to the flesh because his birth was the result of God's supernatural intervention in fulfillment of his own promise. Abraham had learned his lesson: the only acceptable response to God's merciful promise is trust in that promise, not works of the flesh that try, to bring down God's blessing with our efforts...

Abraham and Hagar tried to get God's promised blessing by their own strength without relying on God's supernatural enablement. That is just what happened when the law was given at Mt. Sinai. Instead of humbling themselves and trusting God for help to obey his commands Israel says confidently, “*All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do*” (**Ex. 24:3; Deut. 5:27**). But they did not have hearts inclined to trust in God (**Heb. 4:2**) or truly depend on him (**Deut. 5:29**). And so like Hagar and Abraham they depended on their own resources.

Our real life is not, like Ishmael's, simply owing to the work of man. Our real life is owing to the work of God in us fulfilling his promise to make for himself a people (**Gen. 12:1-3**) and to put his Spirit within them (**Ezek. 36:27**) and write his law on their hearts (**Jer. 31:33**).

**Ben Witherington:** This argument builds on what Paul has already said in **Gal. 3** about Abraham being reckoned as righteous by grace through faith, and now Paul is going to establish that the chosen line in the case of the second generation was also on the basis of grace, not on the basis of heredity or 'flesh'. Ishmael was after all a first-born, and one born of the flesh in a natural way. But this is not what determined who would inherit. In this fashion Paul will undermine any appeals to heredity or 'natural' connections with Abraham. Paul's point will be that even Isaac came to Abraham and into his inheritance by way of promise, just as the Galatians had.

**Timothy George:** Not only did the two sons have **different mothers**, but they also were **born in different ways**. The son of the slave woman was born "*as a result of the flesh,*" that is, by the normal means of human procreation; conversely, the son of the free woman was born "*through promise,*" that is, in direct fulfillment of God's word to Abraham. **Luther** correctly observed that the principal difference here was the absence of the word of God in the birth of Ishmael: "When Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael, there was no voice or word of God that predicted this; but with Sarah's permission Abraham went into Hagar the slave, whom Sarah, because she was barren, gave him as his wife as Genesis testifies. . . . Therefore Ishmael was born without the word, solely at the request of Sarah herself. Here there was no word of God that commanded or promised Abraham a son; but everything happened by chance, as Sarah's words indicate: '*It may be,*' she says, '*that I shall obtain children by her.*'"

The birth of Ishmael was the result of the outworking of the philosophy that God helps those who help themselves. Both Abraham and Sarah were childless in their old age, and it appeared that they would die that way. So they decided to "help God" fulfill his promise. The result was the birth of Ishmael, who was a source of contention and suffering for the rest of his life. Then fourteen years later God's promise was at last fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, so called because of the laughter, first of unbelief and then of joy, which greeted his birth. Ishmael was Abraham's son by proxy, according to the flesh; Isaac was his son by promise, a living witness to divine grace.

### **C. (24-27) The Distinction in the Two Covenants – Divine Interpretation of the Analogy**

*"these women are two covenants"*

1. The Old Covenant -- fleshly Jerusalem representing bondage to the Law  
The Covenant of Law and Works
  - a. Fleshly Jerusalem = the Source  
*"one proceeding from Mount Sinai"*

- b. Issuing in Slavery  
*"bearing children who are to be slaves"*
- c. Identified as Hagar  
*"she is Hagar"*  
*"this present Jerusalem"*

## 2. The New Covenant -- spiritual Jerusalem representing freedom

### The Covenant of Grace and Faith

- a. Spiritual Jerusalem = the Source  
*"But the Jerusalem above"*
- b. Issuing in Freedom  
*"is free"*
- c. Identified as *"the Jerusalem above"*

**Timothy George:** Paul's meaning is clear: those who sought liberation through the Mosaic legislation were doomed to disappointment. The children of Hagar could never become the children of Sarah by observing the stipulations of that covenant, which was ratified at Sinai. And this applied to Jewish "Christians" (such as the legalists) and their Gentile followers no less than to unbelieving Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah altogether.

## 3. Summary

- a. (:25) The Old Covenant -- Don't regress back to this  
*"Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."*

**Ben Witherington:** Paul's view is that for Christians to submit to the Law is tantamount to submitting to slavery and giving up the freedom one has in Christ. It is tantamount to going back to Sinai, not on to the promised land.

**Howard Vos:** For centuries Jerusalem had been glorified in Hebrew history and hymnody as the capital of the Jewish commonwealth and a place where God especially chose to dwell. But the city had had her share of sin, sorrow, and bondage and had never come to enjoy the exalted place anticipated for her. Old Testament prophets looked forward to a golden age when the city would be free, when Messiah would rule in righteousness and holiness from Zion. When Paul wrote Galatians those prophecies had not yet been fulfilled. The city was still in political and spiritual bondage. In fact, it appeared that the old city would never realize the expectations so many had had for her.

**Ronald Fung:** Representing Mount Sinai in Arabia, then, Hagar corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem of Paul's day, which was in spiritual bondage together with her children just as Hagar was in physical bondage with her child Ishmael. Thus the fact of **bondage** (albeit in two different senses) holds together Hagar and Ishmael, the Sinaitic

covenant of law, the present earthly Jerusalem (which stands by metonymy for Judaism, with its trust in physical descent from Abraham and reliance on legal observance as the way of salvation), and her children, that is, all who adhere to the law as the means of justification and the principle of life.

**George Brunk:** Paul uses Hagar and Sarah, and their respective sons, to illustrate **two covenants**, or ways of living before God. These two ways correspond to the by-now familiar contrast in Galatians between the way of slavery and the way of freedom. Hagar, the slave woman, stands for slavery. Sarah, Abraham's wife and the one through whom God's promise was to be fulfilled, stands for freedom. The shocking irony is that in holding on to Law observance, the teachers are actually identifying with Hagar, the Gentile, rather than with Sarah, the Jew! Just as shocking is the implication that the present Jerusalem, center of the Jewish people and seat of the pillars in the church (**2:9**), is the symbol of slavery!

- b. (:26) The New Covenant -- Embrace this  
*"But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother."*

**F. F. Bruce:** Paul now inverts the exegesis which would have commended itself to him in earlier days. Now it is the people of the law who are the offspring of the slave woman; the children of the free woman are those who embrace the gospel of justification by faith, comprising a minority of Jews and a rapidly increasing preponderance of Gentiles. To Jews this exegesis must have seemed preposterous. It was crystal clear that they were Sarah's offspring, while Hagar's descendants were Gentiles.

- c. (:27) The Surpassing Blessing of the New Covenant  
*"For it is written, 'Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.'"*

**John MacArthur:** In one sweep Paul sets forth the common factor of divine power in behalf of Sarah, the captive Jews, and the church. The common element of all three is divine power granting freedom and fruitfulness. Everything in this trilogy is the result of **regenerating grace**, not human effort.

**Bruce Barton:** Paul quoted from Isaiah's prophecy (**Isaiah 54:1**). Isaiah's words had comforted the Jewish exiles years later in Babylon, proclaiming that they would not only be restored, but that their future blessings would be greater than any in the past. To be barren (childless) in ancient days meant great shame and disgrace for a woman. Families depended on children for survival, especially when the parents became elderly. Israel had been unfruitful, like a childless woman, but God would give great blessings and would change their mourning into rejoicing.

Paul applied the comparison of former-versus-later blessings, prophesied by Isaiah, to his Hagar/Sarah analogy. Sarah, who had been barren, was blessed with Isaac. Her child

was a gracious gift, not the result of work. Because God had promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, she ultimately would have many more children (the Christian church grew rapidly and is still growing). While the Jews knew (or should have known) from their own Scriptures that Gentiles would turn to God, two changes astounded them:

- (1) The Gentiles did not have to become Jews first (as the Judaizers preached); and
- (2) so many Gentiles became believers that they soon outnumbered Jewish believers.

Instead of fulfilling their privileged role to bring God's plan into reality, these Jews were insisting on remaining in control. Their inability to recognize God's acceptance of the Gentiles made them equally unable to rejoice!

## **II. (:28-32) THE KEY APPLICATIONS OF THE OT ANALOGY REGARDING ABRAHAM'S TWO SONS = ISHMAEL AND ISAAC**

### **A. (:28) Privilege of Promise**

*“And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.”*

### **B. (:29) Pattern of Persecution**

*“But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.”*

### **C. (:30) Priority of Purification (Putting Away the Old Vestiges of Legalism)**

*“But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.’”*

Paul was calling for church discipline to be exercised against the false teaching Judaizers and their heretical adherents.

**Ben Witherington:** To sum up, in a tour de force argument Paul has identified the agitators in Galatia with Hagar, and himself with Sarah. Each is on the way to producing children, the former for slavery, the latter for freedom. Paul takes the high ground of identifying himself and his Gentile converts as the true heirs of the promises to Abraham, and suggests that the agitators, even in spite of their Jewishness, are the real Ishmaelites giving birth to slaves. Paul believes that the story of Isaac is being revisited in the experience of the Galatians, “his children”, just as the story of Sarah has been revisited in the experience of Paul (cf. **4.18–20**). His exhortation to them in essence is to become what they already are, and this is precisely what he will go on to say as he draws the argument to a close in **vs. 31**.

## **(:31) CONCLUSION – KEY PRINCIPLE: WE HAVE BEEN BORN TO FREEDOM, NOT BONDAGE**

*“So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.”*

**Philip Ryken:** [Paul] divided the whole world into two groups: the slaves and the free. The slaves are under the law and outside of Christ, while the free are in Christ and no longer under the law because they live by faith. This contrast between law and faith—between religious bondage and spiritual freedom—runs throughout Paul’s letter to the Galatians. This epistle was written to help the slaves of religion find true freedom in Christ.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** Paul now returns to the first-person plural, including himself among the Galatians as children of Sarah, the free mother in whom they are liberated from their former slavery. And even though they were born in an ordinary way, in Christ they are born according to the promise, like Isaac. Paul sets the allegory as the capstone of the whole letter to show the Galatians that, by their faith in Christ, they are members of the particular covenant; through Christ they are children of Sarah apart from the law. They are like Isaac, but they do not subsume or replace Isaac. Remaining uncircumcised, they are to remain steadfast in the freedom of the Jerusalem above, their free mother, the church.

**Richard Longenecker:** The question that comes directly to the fore in Paul’s use of Abraham in **3:6–9**, and that underlies all of his argumentation thereafter in **3:10 – 4:11**, is: **Who are Abraham’s true children and heirs?** Likewise in his hortatory use of the Hagar-Sarah story in **4:21–31** it is this question that permeates all the discussion. So in concluding his allegorical reinterpretation of the Hagar-Sarah story Paul makes an affirmation that serves as the **conclusion** of **4:21–31** (so **Lightfoot**, Galatians [1890], 184–85; **Burton**, Galatians, 267–69; **Schlier**, Galater, 228; **Mussner**, Galaterbrief, 334; et al.; contra **Zahn**, **Lagrange**, **Bousset**, et al., who consider v **31** to be the beginning of a new hortatory section), but also sets up the exhortations of **5:1–12** by reiterating the key features of “slavery” and “freedom.”

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) As you reread the OT account of Ishmael and Isaac, what are the points of comparison and distinction that you see in the story? cf. **Romans 15:4**  
If Paul uses this method of allegorical interpretation, why do we insist on a literal, grammatical, historical approach?
- 2) In what sense did Ishmael attempt to persecute Isaac? How was Paul being persecuted by the Judaizers?
- 3) What type of freedom is realized under the New Covenant and what type of bondage is Paul accusing the Judaizers of trying to inflict upon the Galatians?
- 4) How does this passage teach the need for proper church discipline when heresy is

present that undermines the essence of the true gospel message? Why are churches today so lax in this area of discipline?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

#### Thomas Schreiner: Contrasts

Abraham's son of the slave woman (Ishmael)	Abraham's son of the free woman (Isaac) (4:22)
Born of the flesh	Born of the promise (4:23)
Mount Sinai = Hagar = slavery (4:24)	
Present Jerusalem = slavery (4:25)	Jerusalem above = free = our mother (4:26)
Children of the barren and desolate one (4:27)	Children of the one with the husband
	You = children of promise = Isaac (4:28)
Born of flesh ... persecutor	Born of Spirit (4:29) ... persecuted
Cast out son of slave	Son of free woman will inherit (4:30)
We are not children of slave woman	But children of free woman (4:31)

Reliance on the law represents leaning on the flesh and hence results in slavery and expulsion from the inheritance. Paul reminds his readers that those who trust in God's promise (rather than in the law) have great hope because they rely on the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who have received the Holy Spirit are free from slavery and will receive the inheritance.

**William Barclay:** The man who makes law the principle of his life is in the position of a slave; whereas the man who makes grace the principle of his life is free, for, as a great saint put it, the Christian's maxim is, "Love God and do what you like." It is the power of that love, and not the constraint of law, that will keep us right; for love is always more powerful than law.

**Robert Gromacki:** It is impossible to be born of two mothers. The heir could not be born of both Sarah and Hagar. Even so, spiritual heirs cannot be begotten out of grace and out of works at the same time. The Judaizers claimed that a person had to be saved by both faith and works of legalism. In essence, that concept is impossible. That view actually reduces to salvation by works alone.

**John Piper:** Full freedom is what you have when no lack of opportunity, no lack of ability and no lack of desire prevents you from doing what will make you happiest. In a

thousand years. In order to be free in the fullest sense you have to have opportunity, ability and desire to do what will make you happy in a thousand years. Another way to say it would be that there are four kinds of freedom, or better, four stages of freedom on the way to the full freedom all of us long for: the freedom of opportunity to do what we can, the freedom of ability to do what we desire and the freedom of desire to do what will bring us unending joy...

In order to be fully free it is not enough to have opportunity, ability and desire to act. The acts you desire and perform have to lead to life indeed, eternal life not destruction.

**Scot McKnight:** Re persecution -- The gospel, properly understood and persuasively presented, is offensive to sinful people. There is no getting around this. To be a follower of Christ means an inevitable conflict, and that means being offensive. We should not shirk the opportunity; it is not we who are actually being rejected (**Matt. 10:40-42**). Through the experience of being opposed, however, comes the confirmation that we are simply being treated the way all of our faithful brothers and sisters have been taught. Since Day One, God's people have been opposed. "It is the same now," wrote Paul (**Gal. 4:29**).

**Girdlestone:** This allegorical interpretation of Hagar would be quite unlooked for among Jewish teachers. It would never occur to them that Hagar could represent Jerusalem, and they would repel the insinuation that the children of Jerusalem were in bondage. When the Lord Jesus told them that He was prepared to set them free they had answered, "*We are Abraham's seed, and we have never been in bondage to anyone.*" They were bond-slaves without knowing it. Judaism had become legalism, and so had become a system of bondage. Where, then, was spiritual emancipation to be found? "*Jerusalem which is above is free, and is the mother of us all*" -- if we are Christians. The child of promise was the seed of Sarah, not of Hagar. The Seed was Christ; and those who are one with Christ, form the heavenly city of the saints.

**Bruce Barton:**

### **CONTRAST OF SARAH AND HAGAR**

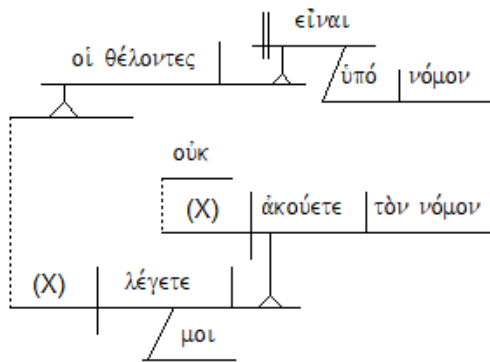
Paul contrasted those who were enslaved to the law (represented by Hagar) with those who are free from the law (represented by Sarah).

	<i>Sarah</i>	<i>Hagar</i>	<i>Significance</i>
<i>Name of child</i>	Isaac	Ishmael	Isaac represented God's intervention. Ishmael was born by the ordinary process.
<i>What the child represented</i>	Covenant of Promise (grace)	Covenant of Mt. Sinai (law)	God's promise to Abraham was prior to the covenant with Moses at Mt. Sinai.
<i>Source</i>	Based on Jerusalem above (Spirit)	Based on present Jerusalem (flesh)	The present Jerusalem represents legalism. The Jerusalem above represents life in the Spirit.
<i>Results in life</i>	Leads to freedom	Leads to slavery	Paul wanted the Galatians to experience Christian freedom, not a return to the law.

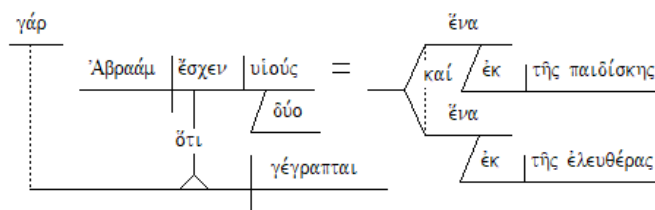


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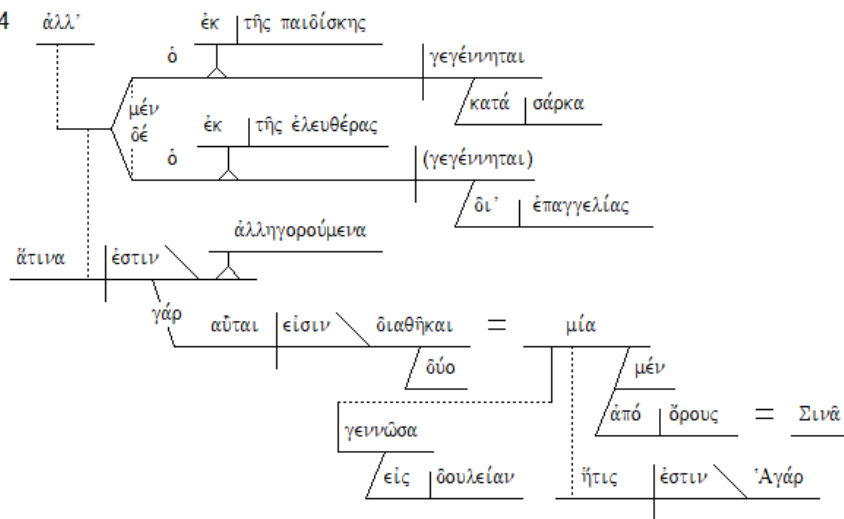
Gal 4:21



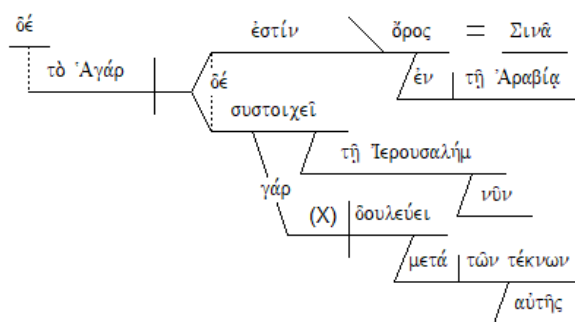
Gal 4:22



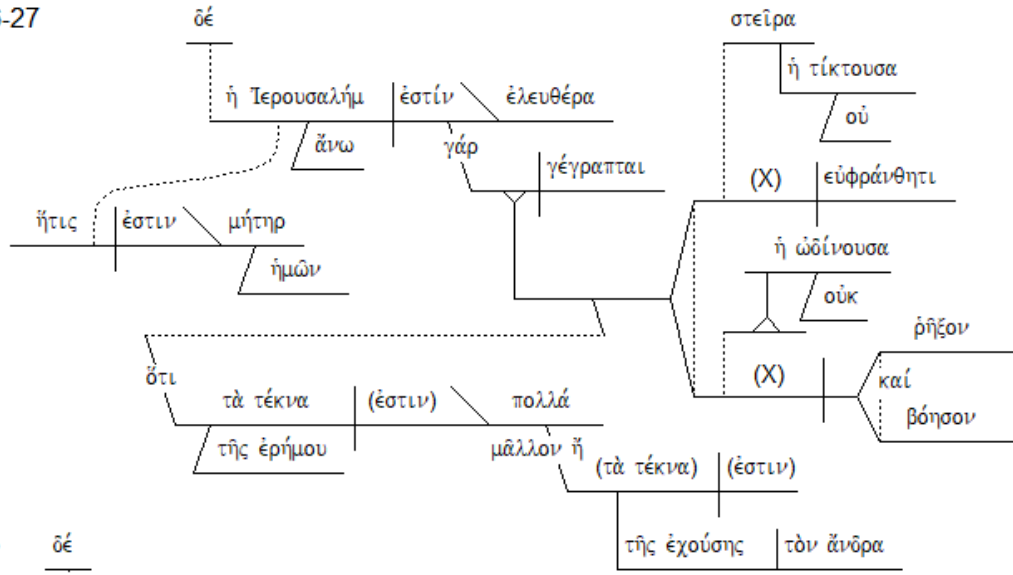
Gal 4:23-24



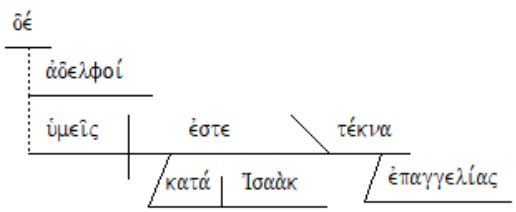
Gal 4:25



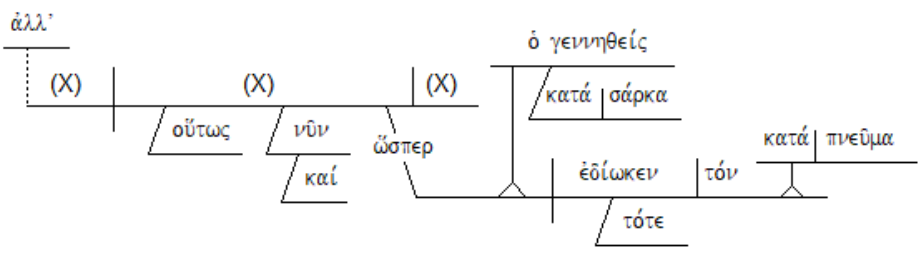
Gal 4:26-27



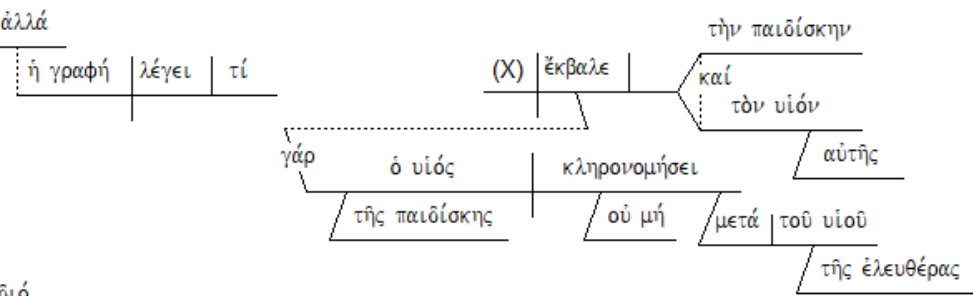
Gal 4:28



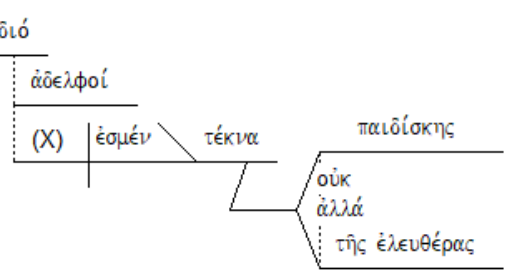
Gal 4:29



Gal 4:30



Gal 4:31



TEXT: GALATIANS 5:1-12

TITLE: STAY FREE!

**BIG IDEA:**

**STAND FIRM IN THE LIBERTY TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Robert Gromacki:** After the Civil War a great majority of the slaves became sharecroppers. Although they were free, they did not enjoy their freedom. In some cases they were worse off than before. Under the influence of the Judaizers, the Galatians were beginning to find themselves in a similar situation. Set free by the great emancipator of the soul, Jesus Christ, they soon were acquiescing to the demands of the legalists. The apostle wanted them to take a stand, to **act like free men**, not like slaves.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Legalists in our churches today warn that we dare not teach people about the liberty we have in Christ lest it result in religious anarchy. The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the inner discipline of God that is far better than the outer discipline of Galatians man-made rules.

**John MacArthur:** The **freedom** for which Christ sets us free (**v. 1**) is the freedom to live a life of righteousness in the power of the Holy Spirit. God's standard of holiness has not changed. As Jesus makes clear in the Sermon on the Mount, it requires not simply outward performance but inner perfection. Through His Holy Spirit, believers have the ability to live internal lives of righteousness.

The final two chapters of Galatians are a portrait of the **Spirit-filled life**, of the believer's implementing the life of faith under the control and in the energy of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-filled life thereby becomes in itself a powerful testimony to the power of justification by faith.

In making his appeal for living the Spirit-filled life of freedom rather than reverting to the futile works-bound life of legalistic self-effort, Paul begins with the negative, a warning first against false doctrine (**vv. 2-6**) and then against false teachers (**vv. 7-12**). He shows the spiritual dangers of the first and the corrupt character of the second.

**George Brunk:** Having completed the allegory on slavery and freedom, Paul is now ready to make a strong, direct appeal to the Galatians. Paul wants them to remain firm in their first commitment to the gospel as he had preached it. Happily, the "cost" of this commitment is freedom from the yoke of slavery!

The letter is moving to its climax. Paul's strong affirmations carry a note of finality. Now we come to the heart of the matter. As we would expect in this section, marked as

it is by request, imperatives are numerous, and the language of personal appeal dominates. At this crucial point Paul's use of **freedom** confirms that it is a unifying theme of the letter. After announcing this theme in his appeal to stand firm, Paul explores several specific weaknesses in the visitors' false teaching and several strengths of his gospel. Paul's summary formulation in **5:5-6** is one of the most striking and memorable statements of Pauline theology.

**Max Anders: Six Negative Consequences of Returning to the Law**

1. **(:2)** First, it invalidates Christ's work on the cross for Christ will be no value to you. By submitting to circumcision, a person demonstrated that they were not fully trusting in Christ. Instead they added their own works to what Christ had done, thus invalidating the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.
2. **(:3)** The second negative consequence of returning to the law is obligation. Once a person submits to one part of the law (circumcision), he is obligated to obey the whole law.
3. **(:4-6)** The third negative consequence of returning to the law is that it removes a person from the sphere of grace. While the legalist is insecure because he cannot know if he has done enough to merit salvation, the believer is secure because he has placed his faith in Christ and will eagerly await righteousness.
4. **(:7-10)** The fourth negative consequence of returning to the law is that it hinders spiritual growth and development. Using the metaphor of a race, Paul states that the legalists had cut in on the Galatians' spiritual race and caused them to stumble spiritually. As a result, the Galatians were no longer obeying the truth. Turning to a yeast metaphor, Paul illustrates how quickly a little bit of legalism can contaminate a believer and, indeed, a whole church. Paul, however, expressed his confidence that the Galatians would not depart from the truth. He warned that those who are confusing them will experience God's judgment.
5. **(:11)** A fifth consequence when one retreats to legalism is the removal of the offense of the cross. Before Paul was converted, as a Pharisee, he preached circumcision. Now he is being accused of still preaching circumcision. Paul denies this accusation by pointing to the offense or stumbling block of his gospel. He omitted circumcision, and this omission was an offense to the legalists who attacked him.
6. **(:12)** The sixth and final consequence of turning to the law is anger. Paul is so angry he wishes the legalists would go the whole way and castrate themselves as did the pagan priests of the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor. This desire is not a pretty picture, but Paul is completely exasperated by these people who are preaching circumcision and sabotaging the Galatians' faith.

**David deSilva:** The structural parallels between **5:1** and **5:13** strongly suggest that **Gal 5:1–12** is a discrete unit, with **5:13** opening a new but closely related unit. Both **5:1** and **5:13** begin from the same premise, stated in similar terms (“*Christ freed us for*

*freedom,” 5:1; “you were called to freedom,” 5:13), which provides the launching-off point for the exhortation to follow in the second half of each verse.*

**David Platt: (5:1-15) Christ Our Liberator**

Main Idea: Paul urges his readers to resist the dangerous message of bondage and encourages them to live in the freedom of Christ.

- I. Christ Has Set Us Free: Live Free (5:1)!
- II. Christ Has Set Us Free: Live in the Truth (5:2-12).
  - A. A false message
  - B. False messengers
- III. Christ Has Set Us Free: Live to Love and Serve (5:13-15).

**Thomas Schreiner: Resist the Dangerous Message of Bondage (5:2–12)**

1. It involves the requirement of circumcision (5:2–6)
  - a. Paul’s warning (5:2)
  - b. The impossible obligation (5:3)
  - c. The consequence (5:4)
  - d. The contrast (5:5)
  - e. Its irrelevance (5:6)
2. Its perpetrators will be judged (5:7–12)
  - a. They are interlopers (5:7)
  - b. They are not God’s messengers (5:8)
  - c. Their pernicious influence (5:9)
  - d. They will not succeed in winning over the Galatians (5:10)
  - e. Their misrepresentation of Paul (5:11)
  - f. Paul’s prophetic exclamation (5:12)

**(:1) THESIS OF THE EPISTLE: STAND FIRM IN THE LIBERTY TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED**

**A. Our Calling – To Freedom in Christ**

*“It was for freedom that Christ set us free”*

**Timothy George:** We will not go astray if we remember that for Paul, Christian liberty was always grounded on the believer’s relationship with Jesus Christ on the one hand and with the community of faith on the other. Outside of Jesus Christ, human existence is characterized as bondage—bondage to the law, bondage to the evil elements dominating the world, bondage to sin, the flesh, and the devil. God sent his Son into the world to shatter the dominion of these slaveholders. Now God has sent his Spirit into the hearts of believers to awaken them to new life and liberation in Christ. . .

Evidently one of the major problems among the churches of Galatia was that believers there did not know what to do with their Christ-won freedom. Some were using their liberty as a pretext for license, to the gratification of their sinful nature. Others were

“Lone Ranger” Christians, having forgotten the mandate to bear one another’s burdens. Still others had fallen into discord and faction, backbiting and self-promotion. Thus in these closing two chapters Paul summoned the Galatians to a mature use of their spiritual birthright, reminding them that it is love, the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, that brings liberty to its fullest expression.

## **B. Our Commitment – Stand Fast**

*“therefore keep standing firm”*

**Timothy George:** Because of who God is and what he has done for believers in Jesus Christ, Christians are commanded to “become what they are,” that is, to make visible in the earthly realm of their human existence what God has already declared and sealed in the divine verdict of justification. When this indissoluble connection is forgotten or downplayed, the temptation for the Christian to lapse into legalism on the one hand or into libertinism on the other becomes a serious threat to Christian freedom.

**Scot McKnight:** This thesis has two elements: the statement of freedom (**v. 1a**) and the implication of freedom (**v. 1b**). In other words, you are free; therefore, do not get caught up in the Mosaic law.

**George Brunk:** To the affirmation of God’s liberating action in Christ, Paul now joins the command to continue steadfastly and firmly in the resulting condition. This is a classic illustration of how Paul typically links the indicative of divine action to the imperative of human response. Such use of language provides another window into the heart of Paul’s religious conviction, which he is struggling to express in Galatians: spiritual authenticity exists only where human religious deeds are consistent with and continuously nourished by the deeds of God.

## **C. Our Caution – Avoid Legalistic Bondage**

*“and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery”*

Why do we have to constantly be vigilant and on guard against this danger?

**John Piper:** If you want God's favor, there are two ways to relate to him. You can relate to him as an heir, or you can relate to him as a slave. The difference is that a slave tries to become acceptable to his master by presenting him valuable service; but the heir trusts that the inheritance of his father is his by virtue of a will that was drawn up without his earning it at all. A slave is never quite sure he has done enough to please his master and win an honorable standing in the house. A son rests in the standing he has by virtue of his birth and the covenant his father made in his will to bless his children.

## **I. (:2-6) FAITH IN THE LAW CANNOT BE HARMONIZED WITH FAITH IN CHRIST**

### **A. (:2) Faith in Christ and Faith in the Law Are Mutually Exclusive**

*“Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.”*

**George Brunk:** In Paul's mind, for Gentile Galatians to accept circumcision meant accepting the full validity of the Law's demand and devaluing the work of Christ. In effect, this means denying the full sufficiency of identification with Christ (in the strength of the Spirit)!

Moreover, Paul clearly believed that if Gentiles had to become full Jews through circumcision, their new life in Christ would no longer be a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of blessing to all nations. Gentiles as Gentiles would not be redeemable. Since God's promise to Abraham had been fulfilled in Christ, the free entry of the Gentiles into the people of God is a benefit of Christ. Christ removes the wall that separates Jew and Gentile. He does not make the one side become the other; he makes the two become a new one (**3:28**; cf. **Eph 2:13-16**). To embrace the Law in the form of obligation to receive circumcision means rejecting this benefit of freedom and equality (see **2:4** and the elaboration in **2:11-14** and **3:6-14**).

**B. (:3) Obedience to the Law is an All or Nothing Proposition**

*“And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.”*

**Bruce Barton:** Circumcision symbolizes having the right background and doing everything required by religion. No amount of work, discipline, or moral behavior can save us. If a person counts on finding favor with God by being circumcised, he will also have to obey the rest of God's law completely. Trying to save ourselves by keeping all God's laws only separates us from God.

But why, someone may ask, doesn't keeping part of the law, or the entire law to a degree, count for something with God? Well, it may in fact count for something with God (for instance, as a conscious expression of thanks for what he has accomplished for us), but not if we are expecting God to see our flawed effort as if it were a perfect performance. The entrance requirement to the kingdom demands a holy life. Only as we are clothed with Christ can we be acceptable. Only by grace can we have this vital union with Christ that renders us complete and righteous (**2 Corinthians 5:17, 21**).

**C. (:4) Faith in the Law Nullifies Faith in Christ**

1. The Profile

*“you who are seeking to be justified by law”*

2. The Problem

a. It Cuts our Union with Christ

*“You have been severed from Christ”*

b. It Casts us down from our Standing in Grace

*“you have fallen from grace”*

**George Brunk:** The Law is not inherently alien to Christ or grace, but trusting it as a basis of securing one's relationship with God amounts to rejecting God's decisive action in the cross of Christ. Christ defines the will of God, and doing the will of God depends on the Spirit's empowerment. Anything else is slavery, something less than freedom from sin and freedom for righteousness. Moreover, believers who have entered into grace might later abandon that same grace. In emphasizing the freedom of God in choosing a people and the initiative of God in salvation, Paul does not displace or diminish human responsibility in the covenant relationship with God. The loss of salvation is a real possibility that demands vigilance on the part of the believer.

**D. (:5) Faith in Christ Has its Focus on the Future Realization of Righteousness**

1. The Power of This Life in Christ

*“For we through the Spirit”*

**Nijay Gupta:** What role exactly does the Spirit play in our hope of righteousness (revealing finally and completing what has already been given to us in Christ)? The Spirit is given as a deposit or guarantee of that hope (**2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14**). The Spirit gives believers confidence and reassurance that we are fully accepted and embraced by God through participation in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Through the Spirit, we can hope and wait patiently for something we cannot see (**Rom 8:5**; cf. **1 Peter 1:1–9**).

2. The Profile of This Life in Christ

*“by faith”*

**Bruce Barton:** The words *faith* and *Spirit* provide the keys to this verse, for these words separate the Judaizers' approach to God from the Christian approach to God. The Judaizers' emphasis on circumcision showed that they were trying to gain salvation “in the flesh.” But Paul pointed out that Christian faith comes “*through the Spirit*.” The Judaizers' emphasis on the law contrasted sharply with Christianity's emphasis on faith. Christianity's basic doctrine showed the Judaizers to be wrong—dead wrong.

**Ronald Fung:** The whole weight of the verse is on the two phrases “*through the Spirit, by faith*,” (RSV) which are brought forward for emphasis since they stand for the two aspects that distinguish the Christian hope from the Jewish. There is in “*through the Spirit*” an implied contrast with “*the flesh*” which is the active principle of legal righteousness (cf. **3:3**), while “*by faith*” stands in explicit and decisive contrast with “*by way of law*” (v. **4**). The two phrases are not, strictly speaking, predicated of “*righteousness*”: it is not explicitly stated here that it is “*through the Spirit*” and “*by faith*” that believers are justified, but only that it is “*through the Spirit, by faith*” that “*we wait for the hope of righteousness*.” But since the expectation of this “*hope*” to which believers are pointed forward by their justification is grounded in their present experience of the Spirit and in faith it is plainly not, and cannot be, based on works of the law, because justification, which gives rise to the hope in question, cannot itself be achieved by works of the law, but is attained only “*by faith*.” The clear contrast between faith and law in the immediate context (as well as in the epistle as a whole) shows



beyond doubt that in Paul's thinking there can be no such thing as a hope which is being awaited on the basis of faith while the ground of that hope (namely, justification) is itself based on works of the law.

### 3. The Prize of This Life in Christ

*“are waiting for the hope of righteousness”*

**John Piper:** Righteousness is a hope and not a full present reality.

Good argument against those who would teach some form of perfectionism.

#### **E. (:6) The Only Thing That Matters is Faith in Christ Working Through Love**

*“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”*

**George Brunk:** In some ways, this verse summarizes the whole of what Paul wants the Galatians to understand. It continues to expand the positive picture of the gospel of freedom. The phrase in Christ, the beloved expression of the apostle, stands for the whole of Christian faith and illustrates the Christ-centeredness of Paul's theology.

## **II. (:7-12) STANDING FIRM REQUIRES REJECTING THE DESTRUCTIVE TEACHINGS OF THOSE OPPOSED TO THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

### **A. (:7) Remember How You Started Off So Well in the Christian Race**

*“You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?”*

**Bruce Barton:** Although Paul asked **who**, he already knew the answer. The word “*who*” is singular; Paul knew that the problem was the **Judaizers**, and here he was focusing on their leader, whom he probably did not know (see **5:10**). Paul warned the Galatians that the Judaizers, instead of helping them along, were actually hindering their faith. Instead of opening up new truths to the Galatians, they kept the Galatians from obeying the truth. The Judaizers represented the interests of Satan. They wanted to keep the Galatians enslaved to the law and derail the new believers. The Galatians would not complete the race if they tried to do it by their own efforts.

**Ronald Fung:** Paul has shown up the utter futility, indeed the positive hurtfulness, of seeking to be justified through circumcision and the law (**vv. 2–6**). His argument now assumes, as in **3:1–6**, the form of an appeal—this time to the readers' original attitude to the gospel. Paul reminds them that they were “*running well*,” at least when he was with them. But since he bade them farewell someone had hindered them from “*following the truth*.” “*Obeying the truth*” (RSV, NASB, NIV) is identical in meaning with “*obeying the gospel*” in **Rom. 10:16** (cf. RSV), “*the truth*” here being that which found expression in the gospel of justification by faith apart from circumcision and the law (**2:5, 14**). The person or persons behind the “*who*” of Paul's rhetorical question

evidently were the same as those envisaged in **3:1** (RSV “*Who has bewitched you ... ?*”), whom we have identified as Judaizers.

**B. (:8) Contrast the Source of Your Calling with the Source of This New Teaching**

*“This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.”*

**C. (:9) Fear the Cancerous Nature of Heresy**

*“A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.”*

**Timothy George:** In **v. 8** Paul was concerned with the methodology of the false teachers; in **v. 9** he turned to consider the end result of their meddlesome interference. He did this by quoting a proverbial saying from the world of bread making: “*It takes only a little yeast to make the whole batch of dough rise,*” as they say (GNT). This is a commonsense saying similar to our own English maxim, “Just one rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.” Paul’s point is clear: his opponents had not overturned the whole system of Christian teaching but were only making a seemingly minor adjustment to it—the imposition of the harmless rite of circumcision. But even a seemingly slight deviation on such a fundamental matter of the faith can bring total ruin to the Christian community. Just a little poison, if it is toxic enough, will destroy the entire body. Implicit in Paul’s words is a warning to every church, denomination, and theological institution. Any community of faith that is unwilling to recognize and to reject perversions of the gospel when they crop up in its midst has lost its right to bear witness to the transforming message of Jesus Christ, who declared himself to be not only the way and the life but also the truth, the only truth that leads to the Father (**John 14:6**).

**D. (:10) Validate the Confidence of the Apostle Paul**

1. Confident the Galatians will Stand Fast in Faith and Liberty

*“I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view”*

2. Confident in the Ultimate Demise of the False Teacher(s)

*“but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is”*

**John MacArthur:** Because the Judaizers stood against God and His truth, they would carry the full weight of their own judgment. False teachers often cause many others to “*follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words,*” Peter wrote. But “*their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. . . . The Lord knows how. . . to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment*” (**2 Pet. 2:2-3, 9**).

**E. (:11) Consider the Credentials of the Apostle Paul = His Ongoing Persecutions**

*“But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.”*

**John MacArthur:** Among their other deceptions and lies, the Judaizers apparently claimed that Paul preached circumcision just as they did. Because Timothy was half Jewish, Paul had him circumcised in order to minimize criticism from Jews among whom they would minister together (**Acts 16:1-3**). But Paul never advocated circumcision as having any part in becoming or living as a Christian.

**Bruce Barton:** Paul's message of the cross of Christ was offensive and a constant stumbling block to the Jews. The only way that offense could be removed would be if he stopped preaching that Christ died for our sins. If Paul had been preaching obedience to the law and acceptance of the rite of circumcision, then the stumbling block in his ministry would have been removed. But to remove it would be to lose the entire message; for without the Cross, Christianity has no meaning. The very fact that Paul was being persecuted revealed that he did not preach circumcision.

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

#### **F. (:12) Indulge in Some Graphic Sarcasm to Drive the Point Home**

*"Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."*

**William Barclay:** Paul ends with a very blunt saying. Galatia was near Phrygia and the great worship of that part of the world was of Cybele. It was the practice that priests and really devout worshippers of Cybele mutilated themselves by castration. Paul says, "If you go on in this way, of which circumcision is the beginning, you might as well end up by castrating yourselves like these heathen priests." It is a grim illustration at which a polite society raises its eyebrows, but it would be intensely real to the Galatians who knew all about the priests of Cybele.

**George Brunk:** With this coarse invective, he exhausts all rhetorical means of persuasion in his passionate appeal to the Galatians. We can imagine that this comment goes to the edge of propriety in his day as in ours. Clearly Paul is reaching for the greatest shock effect that he dare create to make his readers sense the depth of his frustration with the adversaries.

**Howard Vos:** Actually the Greek verb is in the middle voice, "*cut themselves off*." A few commentators apply this to the Judaizers' cutting themselves off from the Galatian communion as a worthless foreskin is thrown away. But the majority favor a stronger

concept; as the RSV puts it, “*would mutilate themselves.*” The Galatians would be familiar with this practice because votaries of Cybele frequently engaged in it. In his irony the apostle may be suggesting that the Judaizers who are so interested in cutting outdo themselves and castrate or mutilate themselves. **Harrison** observes: “As an emasculated man has lost the power of propagation, so should these agitators be reduced to impotence in spreading their false doctrine. Such is the fervent wish to which the Apostle Paul gives expression here.”

**Timothy George:** It is also possible to interpret Paul’s remark with reference to this verse from the Pentateuch, “*No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose penis has been cut off may enter the Lord’s assembly*” (**Deut 23:1**). In the Septuagint the words used to translate “*the Lord’s assembly*” are *ekklēsia Kurious*, “*the church of the Lord.*” By wishing that his opponents would emasculate themselves, Paul may have been intentionally weaving an ironic reversal. Just as the false teachers were urging the Galatian believers to have themselves circumcised in order to become a part of the true church or people of God, so Paul may have suggested that his opponents get themselves castrated and so, on the strength of **Deut 23:1**, be once and for all excluded from the church. But to be excluded from the church, that is, the invisible church of God’s elect ones, was to be excluded from Christ, placed under a curse, and anathematized. Thus **5:12**, harsh as it is, is really a reiteration of Paul’s opening anathema against those who disturb the church through the promulgation of a false gospel (**1:6–9**).

**(:13a) TRANSITION**

*“For you were called to freedom”*

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) Does this passage teach that a believer can lose his salvation as he falls back into some form of legalistic bondage? How do you deal with passages like **verse 4**?
- 2) The Judaizers were boasting in their adherence to the OT law as represented by their obedience to the rite of circumcision. Are we boasting in anything but the cross of Christ?
- 3) What are some of the ways that walking in the flesh instead of in the Spirit evidence themselves in your life? What type of legalistic practices have some appeal to you?
- 4) Do a study of the topic of “**freedom**” in Paul’s epistles. In what different senses does he use this term and how does he develop this important topic? How tolerant are we of the freedom that other Christians express in their walk with the Lord? Why do we sometimes prefer a specific code of rules to live by rather than exulting in our freedom?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Ernest Campbell:** It is important that we grasp Paul's contrast between the letter of the Law, that brought death to the offenders, and the working of the Spirit in this age of Grace, who gives life to believers (**2 Cor. 3:3-6**). Only ignorance, implanted in the mind by Satan, could cause the Galatians to forsake the life-giving ministry of the Spirit for the death-dealing ministry of the Law!

**E. J. Epp:** The **implications of this Christian freedom** as Paul develops it are vast and far-reaching, but essentially he sees freedom as a reality effected in and through the Christ-event, which has broken the power of sin and neutralized the individual hostility against God; which at the same time has covered the guilt and stain of sin and erased the past; which has crushed all enslavement to self, to religious convention, to the present powers of evil, and to cosmic forces; and which has triumphed over every force that dominates humankind, including human mortality itself. But that is only one side of the Pauline coin—the “freedom from what?” side; there is also the significant “freedom for what?” side, and this many-faceted emphasis in Paul, though it can be simply stated, is infinitely complex in its outworking: a Christian is now free to obey God in a radical fashion by serving his fellow human beings in selfless love.

**Warren Wiersbe: Outline of Chaps. 5-6 --**

1. I have been set free by Christ. I am no longer under bondage to the law (**Gal. 5:1-12**).
2. But I need something--Someone--to control my life from within. That Someone is the Holy Spirit (**5:13-26**).
3. Through the Spirit's love, I have a desire to live for others, not for self (**6:1-10**).
4. This life of liberty is so wonderful, I want to live it to the glory of God; for He is the One making it possible (**6:11-18**).

Now contrast this with the experience of the person who chooses to live under law, under the discipline of some religious leader.

1. If I obey these rules, I will become a more spiritual person. I am a great admirer of this religious leader, so I now submit myself to his system.
2. I believe I have the strength to obey and improve myself. I do what I am told, and measure up to the standards set for me.
3. I'm making progress. I don't do some of the things I used to do. Other people compliment me on my obedience and discipline. I can see that I am better than others in my fellowship. How wonderful to be so spiritual.
4. If only others were like me! God is certainly fortunate that I am His. I have a desire to share this with others so they can be as I am. Our group is growing and we have a fine reputation. Too bad other groups are not as spiritual as we are.

No matter how you look at it, **legalism** is an insidious, dangerous enemy. When you abandon grace for law, you always lose.

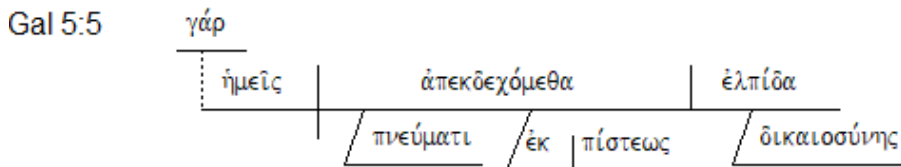
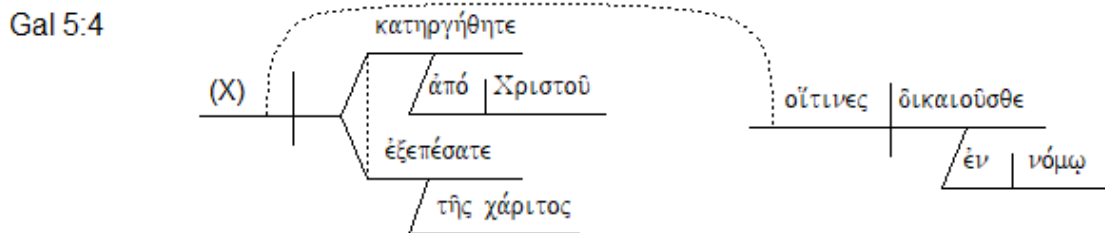
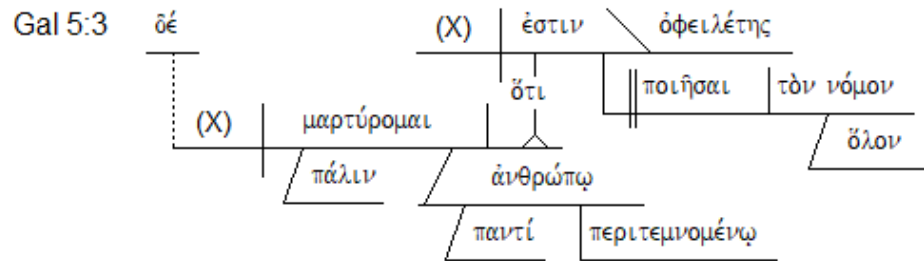
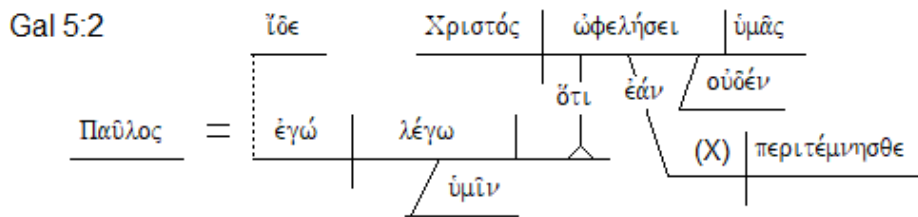
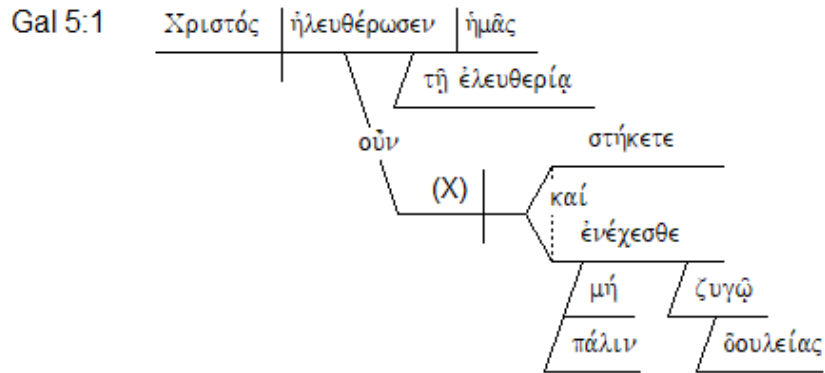
**John MacArthur:** Paul's primary point in this passage, as throughout the letter, is that **law and grace cannot be mixed**. They are totally incompatible and mutually exclusive. To mix law with grace is to obliterate grace. For a believer to start living again under the law to merit salvation is, in fact, to reject salvation by grace. Contrary to the teaching of the Judaizers, to add circumcision and other works of the law to what Christ accomplished by grace is not to raise one's spiritual level but to severely lower it. Legalism does not please God but offends Him. It does not bring a person closer to God but rather drives him away.

Applied to one who was really an unbeliever, the principle of falling from grace has to do with being exposed to the gracious truth of the gospel and then turning one's back on Christ. Such a person is an apostate. During the time of the early church many people, both Jews and Gentiles, not only heard the gospel message but witnessed the miraculous confirming signs performed by the apostles. They became attracted to Christ and often made professions of faith in Him. Some became involved in a local church and vicariously experienced the blessings of Christian love and fellowship. They were exposed first hand to every truth and blessing of the gospel of grace but then turned away. They had *"been enlightened,"* had *"tasted of the heavenly gift,"* and had even *"been made partakers of the Holy Spirit"* by witnessing His divine ministry in the lives of believers. But they refused to stand fully with Christ by placing their trust in Him, and they fell away, losing all prospect of repentance and therefore of salvation (**Heb. 6:4-5**). They came to the very doorway of grace and then fell away back into their works religion.

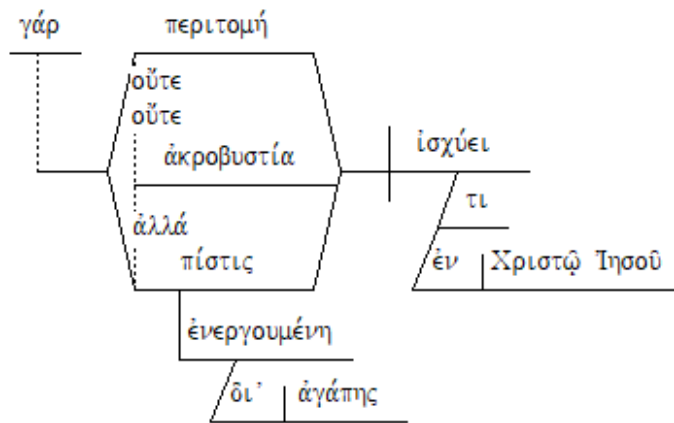
**John Piper:** The cross means the end of all boasting in anything we can do. But these people were making circumcision a ground for boasting. They were treating it not as a gift of grace from God but as a debt or price paid to God. And so the way they treated circumcision it called attention to their religious ability and not to God's free grace. And nothing made Paul angrier than the religious nullification of the freedom of God's grace.

**Robert Baker Girdlestone:** The marked feature of this life is love. Love begets love. The love of God penetrates our nature, breaks down our prejudice, melts our hard heart, awakens in us a spirit of devotion to God, and an earnest desire to be Christlike, and this leads to a spirit of tenderness towards others. Thus love is the fruit and consequently the test of life. So says St. John again and again in his First Epistle.

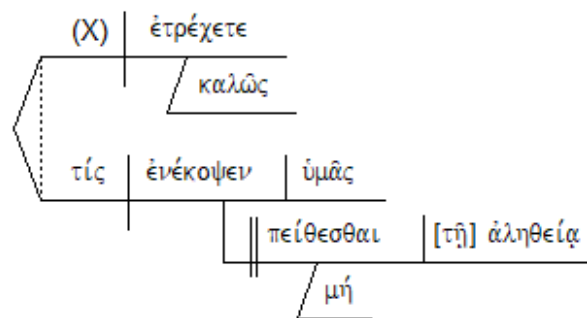
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



Gal 5:6



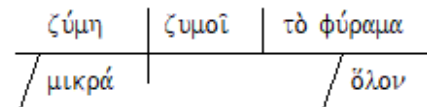
Gal 5:7



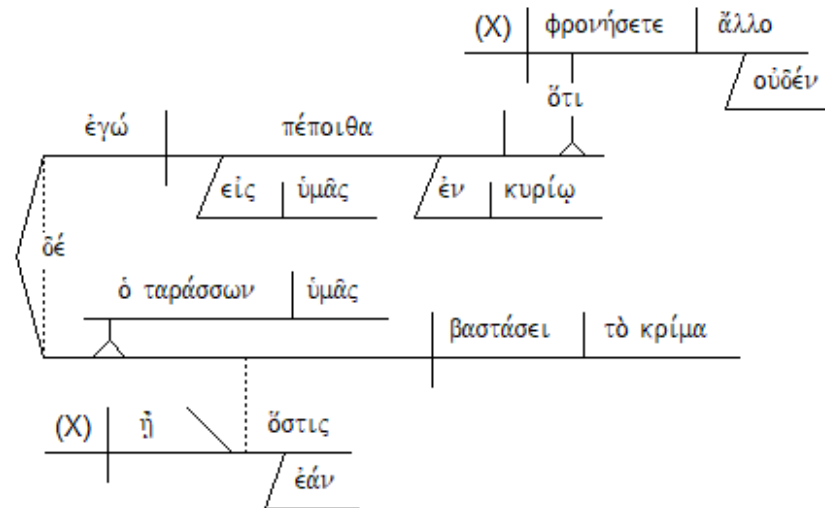
Gal 5:8



Gal 5:9

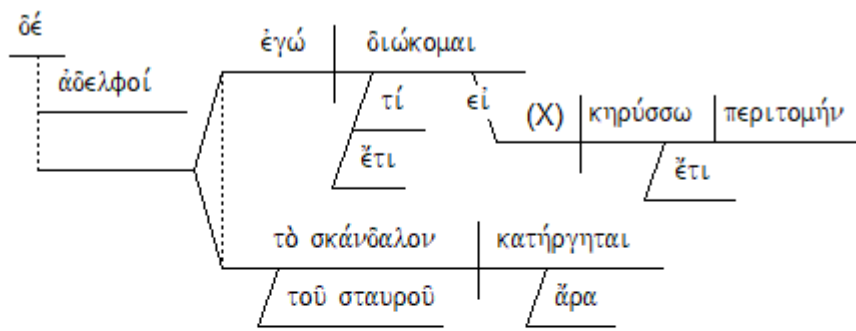


Gal 5:10

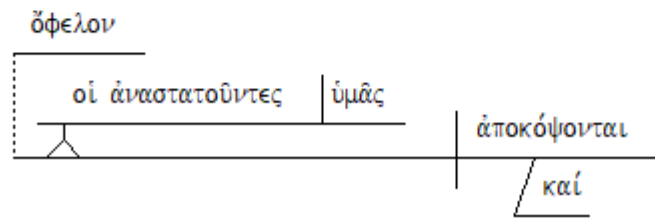




Gal 5:11



Gal 5:12



TEXT: GALATIANS 5:13-26

TITLE: WALK IN LOVE BY WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

**BIG IDEA:**

**USE FREEDOM AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WALK IN LOVE BY WALKING IN THE SPIRIT --  
(NOT AN OPPORTUNITY TO FULFILL THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH)**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Howard Vos:** As Paul now launches into his discussion of the life of Christian liberty, he points out that liberty must not be allowed to degenerate into license but should be governed by love and consideration for others.

“*For ye*” reminds the Galatians that the Judaizers with their upsetting dogmas of legalism were striking at the very root of their faith. They had been “called” out by the Holy Spirit from among a sinful and condemned humanity “*unto liberty*.” The latter is better translated “on the footing of” or “on the condition of” or “on the ground of freedom.” In other words, **freedom** was an essential element in the Christian life. But, he warns, do not make your liberty an opportunity for giving way to carnal passions. Do not make your liberty “a base of operations” for the flesh in its war against the spirit. In such a case a man may be brought into bondage to corruption. There are three kinds of bondage described in this context: the bondage of legalism and bondage to the flesh or old nature, both of which are condemned; and a bondage of love, which is strongly urged. If one wants to be in bondage, let him serve others in the bondage of love. Be bound by love in your service one to another. In other words, you are living on a plane of liberty or freedom, but you are not free to do exactly as you please. Some practices may be lawful but not wise; nor may they contribute to the welfare and spiritual development of others. The Galatians had been looking for a bondage. Now Paul recommends a real and worthwhile bondage for them to subject themselves to: a bondage of mutual love. **Rendall** puts it well: “The true ideal of the Christian is not freedom, but unfettered service to the love of God and man. . . .”

**David deSilva: The Spirit’s Sufficiency to Nurture Righteousness**

In this important section, Paul affirms that the Christians have already received all that is necessary (and effective!) for living transformed lives of righteousness, that is, for living in line with God’s standards (5:5–6). If the freedom for which Christ liberated us means, in part, liberty from slavish rules and ethnic laws (5:1), it also means liberty from the enslaving power of our own baser, self-centered, self-gratifying drives and passions (5:13). Christ has given his followers the means to fulfill the righteous demands of the Torah apart from regulating their lives by the Torah. As they allow the Spirit to regulate their lives and empower their service (5:16, 25), they will fulfill the core commandment of the Torah—the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (5:13–14)—in their lives together as Christian communities and in their service beyond the household of faith. The Spirit gives the believer, as the Torah did not, the power to

overcome the flesh—to live out his or her mortification (crucifixion) of the flesh (5:24)—and to walk in line with God’s righteousness.

**Timothy George:** Here in **Gal 5** Paul used four distinct verbs to designate the Spirit-controlled life of the believer, all of which are roughly equivalent in meaning: to walk in the Spirit (v. 16), to be led by the Spirit (v. 18), to live by the Spirit (v. 25a), and to keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25b). Each of these verbs suggests a relationship of dynamic interaction, direction, and purpose. The present tense of the imperative *peripateite*, “walk,” also indicates a present activity now in progress.

**Thomas Schreiner: Live Out Freedom in the Spirit (5:13 – 6:10)**

1. Freedom expressed in love (5:13–15)
2. Living by the Spirit instead of the flesh (5:16–24)
  - a. Yield to the Spirit (5:16–18)
    - i. To conquer the flesh (5:16)
    - ii. Because the battle is fierce (5:17)
    - iii. To be free from the law (5:18)
  - b. Marks of the flesh and the Spirit (5:19–23)
    - i. The works of the flesh (5:19–21b)
      - (1) Sexual sins (5:19b)
      - (2) Refusal to worship God (5:20a)
      - (3) Social sins (5:20b–21a)
      - (4) Sins of revelry (5:21b)
      - (5) Eschatological warning (5:21c)
    - ii. Fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23)
  - c. The crucifixion of the flesh (5:24)
3. Caring for One Another by the Spirit (5:25 – 6:5)

**(:13) THESIS**

*"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*

**John MacArthur:** In **Galatians 5:13b-15**, Paul gives four purposes of God's call to the freedom of loving Him: to oppose the flesh, to serve others, to fulfill His moral law, and to avoid harming others.

**David Platt:** There are two things Paul wants us to avoid about Christian freedom: legalism (trying to earn acceptance before God by works) and license (misapplying the doctrine of grace). In **verses 13-15** Paul addresses the temptation to license. He talks about the moral law in a positive sense. Paul shows that freedom from the law does not do away with the obligations of holy conduct. Rather, justified people are now free to do what Christ wants! He says that part of being free from sin’s slavery is that we are free to love and free to serve! This freedom represents the fulfillment of the Old

Testament law of love. This subject of love continues in **Galatians 5:22** and **6:1-4**. Here we see the call to love one another and our neighbors.

Negatively, Paul says, “*Don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh*” (v. 13). The “flesh” does not refer to that which clothes our bony skeletons, but our fallen human nature. We are prone to drift spiritually because of our flesh. Christian freedom is not a freedom to sin but a freedom from sin. Christian freedom is a freedom to enjoy serving others and pursuing godliness. Do not live to gratify the desires of the flesh. That is an abuse of freedom and a misunderstanding of freedom.

Positively, Paul says that because we are free let us “*serve one another through love*” (v. 13), fulfilling the law of “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (v. 14). “Serve” is actually the word for “slave” (Stott, Message of Galatians, 141–42). Paul has said, “Don’t be a slave,” but now he says, “You are free to be a slave.” Luther put it well: “A Christian is free and independent in every respect, a bond servant to none. A Christian is a dutiful servant in every respect, owing a duty to everyone” (George, 378). It is a paradox. The Galatians were free from bondage and under grace. But Paul says that they were now free to love and serve others. It is as if he says, “If you want a law, here is one: love” (cf. 6:2). But the difference in Paul’s exhortation is that it is fueled by the Spirit (5:16 – 6:10), and it is not done in an effort to earn righteousness. When it comes to loving our neighbors as ourselves, we must remember that keeping the entire law for our justification is unattainable, but Jesus fulfilled it for us. Now, as a result of our faith in Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are free to live out the moral teaching of the law. The Spirit changes us and empowers us to obey God.

**Timothy George:** **Flesh** refers to fallen human nature, the center of human pride and self-willing. Flesh is the arena of indulgence and self-assertion, the locale in which “the ultimate sin reveals itself to be the false assumption of receiving life not as the gift of the Creator but procuring it by one’s own power, of living from one’s self rather than from God.” Thus we cannot restrict the term “flesh” to human physicality, although the “*works of the flesh*” Paul will shortly describe (5:19–21) seem to find their most lurid manifestations in connection with bodily life. It is God’s intention for the believer in this present life to be *en sarki*, “*in the flesh*” (cf. CSB “*in the body*”; 2:20), but not *kata sarka*, “*of/according to the flesh*” (cf. CSB “*in a purely human way*,” 2 Cor 1:17; “*from a worldly perspective*,” 2 Cor 5:16). To live according to the flesh is to take the flesh as one’s norm, that is, “to trust in one’s self as being able to procure life by the use of the earthly and through one’s own strength and accomplishment.” Paul warned the Galatians that they must not turn their freedom into license or use it as an occasion to gratify their fleshly desires.

## **I. (:14-15) WALK IN LOVE**

### **A. (:14) The Golden Rule Fulfills God's Moral Law**

*"For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

**John Piper:** “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” is not a command to love yourself. It is a command to take your natural, already existing love of self and make it the measuring rod of your love for others.

**Kenneth Wuest:** Thus, the individual is released from one law consisting of a set of ethical principles to which was attached blessing for obedience and punishment in the case of disobedience, a law that gave him neither the desire nor the power to obey its commands, and is brought under another law, the law of love, which is not a set of written commandments but an ethical and spiritual dynamic, produced in the heart of the yielded believer by the Holy Spirit, who gives him both the desire and the power to live a life in which the dominating principle is love, God's love, which exercises a stronger and stricter control over the heart and is far more efficient at putting out sin in the life than the legalizers think the thunders of Sinai ever were.

**Ben Witherington:** Paul is here using eschatological language, indeed the very same sort of language used to describe the fulfillment of a particular age of history or period in **Gal. 4.4** (there using the noun form *πλήρωμα*). I would suggest this is a considerable clue to what Paul is doing here. The time when obedience to the Mosaic Law was obligatory on God's people is over and done with, Christians are now living in the eschatological age in which God's promises, prophecies, designs, will, are all being fulfilled. The intent or basic aim of the Law was to produce a unified people of God, unified on the basis of love toward the one true God and toward each other. This is still the will of God for the people of God, even though they are no longer under the Mosaic Law covenant. Thus it is that Paul can speak of the basic substance of the Law being fulfilled in the community of Christ, not because the Law continued to be the rule for believers' behavior and not by their submitting to that Law. Rather this fulfillment is what happens quite naturally when Christians follow the example and teaching of Christ. If the Galatians will continue to walk in the Spirit, pay attention to the Law of Christ, and run as they had already been running, they will discover that a by-product of this effort is that the basic aim and substance of the Law has already been fulfilled in their midst. They thus need not worry about submitting to the Law, when its whole or basic aim is already fulfilled in their midst. “Believers fulfill the Law not because they continue to be obligated to it but because, by the power of the Spirit in their lives, their conduct coincidentally displays the behavior that Mosaic Law prescribes. In this verse, then Paul is claiming that believers have no need of the Mosaic Law because by their Spirit-inspired conduct they already fulfill its requirements.” In short, Paul is not building up here in one verse what he labored the whole letter to dismantle. He is arguing that if the Galatians continue to follow his advice and the leading of the Spirit, the essential aims of the Law will be already fulfilled paradoxically without submitting to circumcision and the Mosaic covenant.

**B. (:15) The End Result of Hatred Will Be Mutual Destruction**

*"But if you bite and devour one another,  
take care lest you be consumed by one another."*

**Donald Guthrie:** The apostle thinks of a pack of wild animals flying at each other's throats. It is a vivid representation not only of utter disorder, but also of mutual destruction. The policy enjoined by the Judaizers could lead only to dissension of the bitterest kind, for it must arouse passions which are unrestrained by the influence of love.

**Ralph Martin:** The two verbs “to bite” (*daknō*) and “to eat up” (*katesthiō*) usually refer to fighting among wild animals.

**William Hendriksen:** Bitter (=biting) words harm the biter as well as the one bitten. They tend to destroy the fellowship.

**George Brunk:** The theological debate precipitated by the teachers in the Galatian churches is causing (or could cause) bitterness, factionalism, and division. Paul wants to address this matter.

## **II. (:16-26) WALK BY THE SPIRIT**

**Ben Witherington:** In a striking argument, Paul contrasts the unitive effects of the work of God in the life of the various Christian communities with the divisive effects of following another course of living. In this argument the effects of following the guidance of the Spirit on the Christian community are pitted against acting on the basis of sinful inclinations which destroys community. In other words, we have here a deliberative argument for unity and concord, not merely an adaptation of a typical virtue and vice catalog. The argument builds on what Paul has just said about freedom and love on the one hand and about flesh and anti-social behavior on the other, but the argument is clearly distinguishable from what precedes. Like the beginning of the previous argument in which Paul makes a dramatic personal appeal, based on his own authority (**5:2**), this argument also starts with Paul’s own personal but nonetheless authoritative assertion about the nature of the Christian life (**5:16** – λέγω δέ). The argument has two parts:

- (1) **vss. 16–21** which begins with the exhortation to walk according to the Spirit and then goes on to concentrate on activities that can destroy the community and keep persons out of the Kingdom of God;
- (2) **vss. 22–26** which begins with mention of the fruit of the Spirit and concludes with an exhortation to stay in line with the Spirit and not engage in divisive behavior.

**Verse 16** should especially be compared to **vss. 25–26**, which reveals that the argument ends on the same note with which it began.

**Douglas Moo:** The passage falls into three paragraphs (e.g., Schreiner 2010: 339). **Verses 16–18** are framed by references to “walking” and “being led” by the Spirit and focus on the power of the Spirit to overcome the flesh and the law. **Verse 16**, with its promise that those who walk by the Spirit will overcome the flesh, is the theme verse for all that follows. The second paragraph of the section contrasts the effects of the flesh

with those of the Spirit (vv. 19–23). Verse 24 concludes the section with a final assurance that the people who belong to Christ have been given a new freedom from the power of the flesh. As Dunn (1993a: 295) points out, the section also displays something of a **concentric structure**:

- A Assurance about the flesh (vv. 16–17)
  - B Those led by the Spirit are not under the law (v. 18)
    - C The “works” of the flesh (vv. 19–21)
      - C’ The fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22–23a)
        - B’ No law stands against the fruit of the Spirit (v. 23b)
- A’ Assurance about the flesh (v. 24)

- A. (:16-18) Walking by the Spirit is the Only Way to Experience Freedom**  
- Freedom from carrying out the desire of the flesh  
- Freedom from the Law

**David Platt: Walk by the Spirit (5:16-18).**

- A. We must continually walk by the Spirit (5:16a).
- B. We must walk by the Spirit to conquer the flesh (5:16b).
- C. We must walk by the Spirit because the battle is intense (5:17).
- D. We must walk by the Spirit to be free from the law (5:18).

**Scot McKnight:** Once again, Paul arranges his thoughts in a **chiasm**:

- A. Live by the Spirit and you escape flesh (v. 16)
  - B. The conflict is between flesh and Spirit (v. 17a)
    - B.’ The conflict prohibits doing God’s will (v. 17b)
- A.’ Be led by the Spirit and you escape law (v. 18)

1. The Simple Formula for Defeating the Flesh

*"But I say, walk by the Spirit,  
and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."*

**Herman Ridderbos:** He must *walk* by the Spirit, that is, he must in fellowship with Christ let himself be ruled by the Spirit. The principle of the Spirit does not make human effort unnecessary, but arouses it and equips it to put all its forces into the service of the Spirit. The tense of *walk* points to a continuing condition. The life through the Spirit does not consist of a separable series of deeds, but assumes an inner conversion which is sustained by God.

2. The Intense Battle Between the Flesh and the Spirit

*"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit,  
and the Spirit against the flesh;  
for these are in opposition to one another,  
so that you may not do the things that you please."*

### 3. The Power for Victory and Freedom = Submitting to the Spirit

*"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."*

**John Piper:** The Spirit is not a leader like the pace car in the "Daytona 500." He is a leader like a locomotive on a train. We do not follow in our strength. We are led by his power. So *"walk by the Spirit"* means stay hooked up to the divine source of power and go wherever he leads.

#### **B. (:19-23) Contrast Between the Deeds of the Flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit**

**Warren Wiersbe:** The contrast between works and fruit is important. A machine in a factory works, and turns out a product, but it could never manufacture fruit. Fruit must grow out of life, and in the case of the believer, it is the life of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:25**).

##### 1. Deeds of the Flesh

*"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are:"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** Identifying the works of the flesh does not demand extraordinary spiritual discernment. It is not a secret disclosed to a gnostic elite. Instead, those things that issue from the flesh are obvious and clear to anyone with an ounce of discernment. The term *"flesh"* (σαρκός) here is a genitive of source, specifying that evil works stem from the old Adam. Vice lists are common in Pauline literature, and they function to delineate qualities that are not pleasing to God and not in accord with life in the Spirit.

###### a. *"immorality"*

**Howard Vos:** *Fornication* involves all illicit sexual relations; *uncleanness* is a broader term including not only sexual irregularities but all that leads to them; *lasciviousness* denotes open shamelessness, insolent disregard of decency, or brazen boldness in this reprehensible kind of life. These three words appear together also in **2 Corinthians 12:21**.

###### b. *"impurity"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** The word focuses on the defilement and filthiness generated by sexual sin.

**John MacArthur:** *Impurity* is from *akatharsia*, which literally means "unclean" and was used medically to refer to an infected, oozing wound. It is the negative form of *katharsia*, which means "clean" and is the word from which we get catharsis, a cleansing. In Scripture the term is used of both moral and ceremonial uncleanness, any impurity that prevents a person from approaching God.

###### c. *"sensuality"*



**Thomas Schreiner:** The final term, “*sensuality*” (ἀσέλγεια), is also a common word used for sexual sin (**Mark 7:22; Rom 13:13; 2 Cor 12:21; 1 Pet 4:3; 2 Pet 2:2, 7, 18; Jude 4**) and emphasizes the lack of restraint and unbridled passion of sexual license. It “throws off all restraint and flaunts itself.” Those who are deceived may think following their sexual passions is equivalent to following the Spirit, but such actions flow from the selfish will rather than the work of the Holy Spirit.

d. “*idolatry*”

**Philip Ryken:** “*Idolatry*,” of course, means the worship of other gods. It is the quest to find our identity and security in anything or anyone besides the one true God. “*Witchcraft*,” or sorcery, is the worship of what is evil. This would obviously include contemporary forms of the occult, such as black magic and Satan worship. However, the Greek word that is used here for “*witchcraft*” (*pharmakeia*) provides the origin for the English word “pharmacy.” This is a reminder that in the ancient world witches often prepared and administered lethal poisons. Thus the postmodern parallels to ancient witchcraft would include abortion and euthanasia—forms of killing that in our culture are usually performed by doctors. According to the Bible, these activities are among the self-evidently wicked deeds of the flesh.

e. “*sorcery*”

**David Platt:** Sorcery involves the practice of trying to manipulate circumstances or dark powers to bring about a desired goal rather than submitting to and trusting in God alone. Today people read horoscopes to find meaning, and many believe superstitious actions will somehow manipulate events. This is the work of the flesh.

f. “*enmities*”

**Howard Vos:** *Hatred*, the opposite of love, “*enmities*,” has in view the mutual animosities of men. *Variance* is dissension or *strife*, not necessarily implying self-interest. *Emulations* is better translated “*jealousy*,” which arises out of enmity. It has in view rivalry involving self-assertion. *Wraths* indicates an ascending scale of animosity; jealousy smolders until it erupts in wrath.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Social sins that disrupt the community predominate in the vice list. Eight different words describe the sins that foment discord in the church. Six of the eight terms are plurals. The terms overlap in meaning so that we cannot always distinguish sharply how one term differs from another.

g. “*strife*”

h. “*jealousy*”

i. “*outbursts of anger*”

**John MacArthur:** *Outbursts of anger* are sudden, unrestrained expressions of hostility toward others, often with little or no provocation or justification. It is the all-too-common sin of unbridled temper.

j. "*disputes*"

**Thomas Schreiner:** *Selfish ambition* brings discord, for it does not focus on the good of others but grasps after honor and praise for oneself.

k. "*dissensions*"

l. "*factions*"

m. "*envying*"

**Thomas Schreiner:** "*Envy*" (φθόνοι) is found in other Pauline vice lists (**Rom 1:29**; **1 Tim 6:4**; **Titus 3:3**; cf. **Phil 1:15**), and it concentrates on the desire to possess what others have, so that one is not satisfied with the gifts God has given. "It is the grudging spirit that cannot bear to contemplate someone else's prosperity."

n. "*drunkenness*"

**Philip Ryken:** The Bible does not prohibit alcohol, any more than it prohibits food, but it always condemns getting drunk. The term used here refers to drinking bouts—what people today would call "getting wasted." The orgies to which Paul refers were not simply sexual, but involved wild partying of all kinds, including revels held at pagan temples.

o. "*carousing*"

p. "*and things like these*"

*"of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

**Howard Vos:** Various classifications of these works of the flesh have been attempted. A fourfold division is followed here:

1. Sexual sins: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness (adultery does not appear in the best manuscripts)
2. Idolatry and magic
3. Sins of strife: hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders
4. Sins of intemperance: drunkenness, revellings

**Thomas Schreiner:** Indeed, as this verse demonstrates, the Galatians had been orally informed previously about the consequences of giving reign to the works of the flesh.

The terrible consequence of these vices is reiterated most solemnly here. Righteousness by faith instead of works of law must not lead to a life of sin. Those who are justified by God's grace are also empowered by the Spirit to live in a new way. If the works of the flesh dominate, then no eschatological reward will be received. Good works are not the basis of justification, but they are most certainly, though still imperfect and partial, a consequence of justification.

## 2. Fruit of the Spirit

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is:"*

**Scot McKnight:** Paul's listing of the "*fruit of the Spirit*" does not seem to have any particular order, though some have proposed an order. **J. R. W. Stott** sees in these nine virtues three groups of three: attitudes to God, others, and self, while **J. B. Lightfoot** sees dispositions of the mind, qualities governing human relations, and principles of conduct.

### a. "love"

**John MacArthur:** **Agape love** is the form of love that most reflects **personal choice**, referring not simply to pleasant emotions or good feelings but to willing, self-giving service. "*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8). In the same way, the most extreme sacrificial choice a loving person can make is to "*lay down his life for his friends*" (**John 15:13**). The apostle John expresses those two truths together in his first letter: "*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*" (**1 John 3:16**). But love is tested long before it is called on to offer that supreme sacrifice. As John goes on to say, "*Whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*" (v. 17). A person who thinks his love is great enough to sacrifice his life for fellow believers but who fails to help them when they have less extreme needs is simply fooling himself.

True agape love is a sure mark of salvation. "*We know that we have passed out of death into life,*" John says, "*because we love the brethren. . . . Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God*" (**John 3:14; 4:7**). By the same token, as John repeatedly makes clear throughout the same letter, having a habitually unloving spirit toward fellow Christians is reason for a person to question his salvation (see e.g., **2:9, 11; 3:15; 4:8, 20**).

Jesus Christ is the supreme example of this supreme virtue. It was not only the Father's love but also His own love that led Jesus to lay down His life for us, demonstrating with His own self-sacrifice the love that gives its life for its friends.

### b. "joy"

**Philip Ryken:** *Joy* is the ability to take good cheer from the gospel. It is not, therefore, a spontaneous response to some temporary pleasure. It does not depend on circumstance at all. It is based rather on rejoicing in one's eternal identity in Jesus Christ. With joy comes "peace," a sense of wholeness and well-being. **John MacArthur** writes, "If joy speaks of the exhilaration of the heart that comes from being right with God, then peace refers to the tranquility of mind that comes from saving relationships." Such tranquility may be enjoyed both with God and with others. "*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**Rom. 5:1**), and since we have peace with God, we are able to make peace with others.

c. "peace"

**George Brunk:** **Peace** is commonly tied to joy, as in the passages just cited. As noted above, the Bible typically uses the term to refer to the health and wholeness of the individual in relationship, hence describing the well-being, or shalom, of the community. Here the context implies a form of peace that is not just inner serenity, but also one that leads to harmonious relationships with others. Peace is rooted in right relationship with God and is thus a fruit of right relationship with God (justification, as in **Rom 5:1**).

d. "patience"

**Thomas Schreiner:** "*Patience*" (μακροθυμία) is used elsewhere in Pauline virtue lists (**2 Cor 6:6; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 3:10**). It is the work of the Spirit of God when one endures difficult situations and people without losing one's equanimity.

e. "kindness"

**John MacArthur:** **Kindness.** *Chrestotes* (*kindness*) relates to tender concern for others. It has nothing to do with weakness or lack of conviction but is the genuine desire of a believer to treat others gently, just as the Lord treats him. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that, even though he was an apostle, he "*proved to be gentle among [them], as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children*" (**1 Thess. 2:6-7**).

f. "goodness"

**David Platt:** "*Goodness*" is closely related to *kindness* (cf. **Rom 15:14; Eph 5:9; 2 Thess 1:11**). It speaks to the idea of doing good deeds and being generous. Paul later says that believers should "*do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (**Gal 6:10** ESV).

g. "faithfulness"

**Thomas Schreiner:** The word translated "*faithfulness*" (πίστις) often means "*faith*" in Paul, but in a virtue list such as this it almost certainly means "*faithfulness*" (**Titus 2:10**) and perhaps in a few other texts as well (**1 Tim 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:10**;

**Titus 2:2).** Those led by the Spirit are loyal and dependable, and one can count on them to fulfill their responsibilities.

h. "gentleness"

**F. F. Bruce:** πραΰτης, "gentleness", is defined by **Aristotle** (Eth. Nic. 2.1108a) as the mean between excessive proneness to anger (ὀργιλότης) and incapacity for anger (ἀοργησία). Moses was πραῦς σφόδρα, "very gentle" (**Nu. 12:3**), in the sense that, in face of undeserved criticism, he did not give way to rage but rather interceded with God for the offenders. Jesus was "gentle (πραῦς) and lowly in heart" (**Mt. 11:29**) but was perfectly capable of indignation (**Mk. 3:5**). Paul entreats the Corinthians "by the meekness (πραΰτης) and gentleness (ἐπιείκεια) of Christ" (**2 Cor. 10:1**), but if the words that follow that entreaty are an expression of meekness and gentleness, one wonders what he would have said had he been unrestrained by these qualities. (There, as here, Paul's affectionate concern for his converts is matched by his fierce denunciation of those who troubled them.) "The meek (οἱ ... πραεῖς) shall inherit the land" (or "the earth"), according to **Ps. 37** (LXX 36): **11**—a saying which is incorporated in one of the Matthaean beatitudes (**Mt. 5:5**)—the suggestion perhaps being that the hotheads will wipe one another out and leave the meek in possession. For an animal to be πραῦς is to be tame or tamed (the verb πραῦνω is used of taming wild animals), but as an ethical quality πραῦς implies self-control, the fruit of control by the Spirit of God. πραΰτης has much in common with μακροθυμία, with which it is conjoined in **Eph. 4:2** and **Col. 3:12**. Christians should show "all gentleness (πᾶσαν ... πραΰτητα, RSV 'perfect courtesy') to all men" (**Tit. 3:2**).

i. "self-control"

**Bruce Barton:** Mastery over sinful human desires and their lack of restraint. Ironically, our sinful desires, which promise self-fulfillment and power, inevitably lead us to slavery. When we surrender to the Holy Spirit, initially we feel as though we have lost control, but he leads us to the exercise of self-control that would be impossible in our own strength.

*"against such things there is no law."*

**C. F. Hogg:** "Fruit" is thus the outward expression of power working inwardly, and so in itself beyond observation, the character of the fruit giving evidence of the character of the power that produces it, **Matt. 7:16**. As lust manifests itself in works, the restless and disorderly activities of the flesh, or principle of evil, in man, so the Spirit manifests His presence in His "peaceable", **Heb. 12:11**, and orderly fruit.

**C. (:24) The Reality of the Crucifixion of the Flesh**

*"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."*

**Thomas Schreiner:** The death of the flesh does not mean that believers do not feel the tug of fleshly desires (5:17). Still, the flesh has been dealt a decisive blow at the cross. The passions and desires of the flesh are not absent, but they no longer rule and reign. Those who walk by the Spirit and who are led by the Spirit find themselves, even though imperfectly and partially, triumphing over the passions of the flesh that formerly dominated them.

**Timothy George:** This verse and the one that follows it serve as a dual conclusion to Paul's two catalogs of vices and virtues. If the Christian life is a continuous tug-of-war between the flesh and the Spirit, are not believers consigned to a spiritually meager existence of perpetual defeat and minimal growth? In these verses Paul asserted the sufficiency of the Spirit to deal with the flesh by pointing the way to Christian victory. That way is the path of sanctification Paul described here in terms of the dual process of mortification, daily dying to the flesh, and vivification, continuous growth in grace through the new life of the Spirit.

#### **D. (:25-26) The Summary Exhortation**

##### 1. Positively -- Let's Do It!

*"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."*

**John Piper:** How do you allow the Spirit to control you? I want to try to show you that the answer is, you allow the Spirit to control you by keeping your heart happy in God. Or to put it another way, you walk by the Spirit when your heart is resting in the promises of God. The Spirit reigns over the flesh in your life when you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you and now is working everything together for your good.

##### 2. Negatively -- Watch out for Pride

*"Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."*

**Ronald Fung:** Returning to the theme of v. 15, which described behavior opposite to that of mutual service through love, Paul here puts in a negative form the corollary, for the Galatians, of walking by the Spirit. To "*be conceited*" is to boast of things that are insignificant and lacking in true worth, whether the boaster actually has them or only imagines that he has them or desires to have them. The word naturally includes the ideas of "talking big" and being "desirous of vainglory" (AV). The renderings "*become conceited*" (NIV) and "*become boastful*" (NASB) reflect the Gk. verb *ginōmetha* and suggest that Paul may have deliberately chosen to speak in a moderate tone, hinting that the sin of "*self-conceit*" (RSV) had not yet taken root in the readers, even though the very injunction is sufficient indication that they needed to be vigilant.

Two participial clauses represent the twofold result or expression of idle boastfulness. It is tempting to regard the action of "*provoking*" (AV, etc.) or "*challenging*" (NEB, NASB) as referring to the special temptation of the "strong," and the action of "*envying*" (AV, etc.; NEB "*jealous*") as the special temptation of the "weak" (cf. **Rom.**

**15:1**). The “strong,” that is, those whose personal conscience does not present as many restrictions to their behavior, risk turning their freedom into license (cf. **Gal. 5:13**) and are tempted to challenge the more scrupulous to follow their conduct; the “weak,” on the other hand, are hindered from following the “strong” because of their conscience, and might be tempted to respond with envy. According to this reading of the verse, Paul is implying that the way to avoid such challenge-envy behavior is for both parties to follow the leading of the Spirit—since the fruit of the Spirit is love—and to serve one another through love. In Romans as well Paul presents love as the solution to a similar situation in the Roman church (**Rom. 14:15**): both the strong and the weak in faith (**14:1; 15:1**) have alike been accepted by Christ (**15:7**); hence the strong must not hold the weak in contempt and the weak must not pass judgment on the strong (**14:3, 10**). Nor must they pass judgment on each other (**14:13**), but are to accept one another (**15:5, 7**) as Christ has accepted them.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How many references to the Holy Spirit can you find in the Book of Galatians? Why do you think there is such an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in this epistle? What ministries of the Holy Spirit are presented in this section?
- 2) What type of struggle do you see in your heart between your old sinful nature and the Spirit of God? How does the teaching of **Romans 6-7** help you to understand the reality of this struggle?
- 3) How does Jesus Christ model for us each of the fruit of the Holy Spirit listed here? Give specific examples from the gospel accounts.
- 4) How can we keep on renewing our commitment to walk by the Spirit? What specific steps can we take to make this a reality in our life? What role does our will and activity play in all of this process?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe: The Fifth Freedom** -- At the close of an important speech to Congress on January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt shared his vision of the kind of world he wanted to see after the war was over. He envisioned four basic freedoms enjoyed by all people: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. To some degree, these freedoms have been achieved on a wider scale than in 1941, but our world still needs another freedom, a fifth freedom. **Man needs to be free from himself and the tyranny of his sinful nature.**

The legalists thought they had the answer to the problem in laws and threats, but Paul has explained that no amount of legislation can change man's basic sinful nature. It is

not law on the outside, but love on the inside that makes the difference. We need another power within, and that power comes from the Holy Spirit of God.

**Scot McKnight:** The Galatian converts were insecure about their moral guidance and in particular about how to fight off the flesh. The Judaizers, having been taught that the law of Moses is God's moral guide, contended that it would enable the Galatian converts to fight off the flesh. Paul contends that the flesh has actually been put to death already and that the means of moral guidance has already been given: God's Spirit. For Paul, just as Jesus was the fulfillment of the law, so the Spirit is the replacement (and fulfillment) of the law as God's instrument for moral guidance. In other words, the Spirit takes the place of the law for the Christian. This is the historical context of Paul's application of the idea of freedom to the battle with the flesh.

**Chuck Swindoll:** Paul holds up a warning sign when he tells us “*that those who practice such [fleshly] things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (v. 21b). This verse sounds as if believers can lose their salvation, but it means nothing of the sort. The interpretive key lies in the tense of the Greek term translated *practice*. The tense is present, indicating a habitual continuation in fleshly sins rather than an isolated lapse. Paul's point is that continual trafficking in sin is evidence of a lack of spiritual life, whereas occasional lapses into sin are a sign of carnality in the saved.

**John MacArthur:** Among other things, walking implies progress, going from where one is to where he ought to be. As a believer submits to the Spirit's control, he moves forward in his spiritual life. Step by step the Spirit moves him from where he is toward where God wants him to be. So while it is the Spirit who is the source of all holy living, it is the believer who is commanded to walk. This is the apparent paradox of the divine and human that is seen in salvation (**John 6:35-40**), in Scripture inspiration (cf. **1 John 1:1-3** with **2 Pet. 1:19-21**), in eternal security (cf. **Rom. 8:31-39** with **Col. 1:21-23**), and even in ministry (**Col. 1:28-29**).

In emphasizing the central work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, some Christians have lost the tension between the human and the divine and have taught the idea suggested in such popular expressions as “Let go and let God” and “the surrendered life.” Rightly used, such expressions can be helpful. If they are understood to mean letting go of one's own resources and self-will and surrendering to God's truth and power, the idea is scriptural. But if, as is often the case, they are used to teach the idea that Christian living is little more than passive submission and yieldedness to God, they are contrary to all the militant terms and commands for great effort and commitment that pervade the New Testament (see, e.g., **1 Cor. 9:24-27**; **Heb. 12:1-3**).

**William Hendriksen:** What then does the *leading of the Spirit* -- to change from the passive to the active voice, for the sake of the definition -- actually mean? It means **sanctification**. It is that constant, effective, and beneficent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts of God's children whereby they are being directed and enabled more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God's commandments, freely and cheerfully.



**John Piper:** Because love is motivated by the joy of sharing our fullness, but the works of the flesh are motivated by the desire to fill our emptiness. The meaning of “flesh” in the book of Galatians is not the physical part of man, but man's ego which feels a deep emptiness and uses the means within its own power to fill that emptiness. If it is religious it may use law; if it is irreligious it may use booze. But one thing is sure: the flesh is not free. It is enslaved to one futile desire after another in its effort to fill an emptiness which only Christ can fill. So when Paul says in **verse 13**, “*Don't use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,*” he means, don't surrender the freedom that you have in the all-satisfying Christ to return to the unsatisfying desires for mere physical pleasures or self-exaltation.

So works of the flesh are motivated by a desire to fill our emptiness. But love is very different -- it is motivated by the joy of sharing our fullness. “*Love does not seek its own*” (**1 Cor. 13:5**). When we love we are not enslaved to use things or people to fill our emptiness. Love is the overflow of our fullness. Therefore, love is the only behavior that we can do in freedom. When God frees us from guilt and fear and greed and fills us with his all-satisfying presence, the only motive left is the joy of sharing our fullness. When God fills the emptiness of our heart with forgiveness and help and guidance and hope, he frees us from the bondage to accumulate things and manipulate people. People who devote large hunks of their life to surrounding themselves with the comforts of this world testify that God has not filled the void of their heart to overflowing. When God is our portion and we are truly free then we will serve one another through love. Freedom flows forth in love just as surely as a bubbling spring flows forth in a mountain stream.

**John MacArthur:** The Judaizers, and some of the immature Jewish believers, considered Paul to be antinomian, a lawless libertine. They did not realize that becoming a Christian involves having Christ's own nature and Spirit in personal residence and that motivation to obey the commands and restrictions of the New Testament is therefore not external. The Christian has the glorious privilege of living under the internal guidance, restraint, and power of the Holy Spirit, who energizes him to obey the will of God.

Because the opposite extremes of legalism and antinomianism are both **man-centered**, they have always been attractive to sinners. The legalist satisfies himself, and presumably God, by adhering to a strict external code of do's and don'ts, which he imagines demonstrate his self-righteous suitability for heaven. The antinomian, on the other hand, satisfies himself by rejecting all codes and living completely according to his personal lusts and desires.

Someone has pictured legalism and libertinism as two parallel streams that run between earth and heaven. The stream of legalism is clear, sparkling, and pure; but its waters run so deep and furiously that no one can enter it without being drowned or smashed on the rocks of its harsh demands. The stream of libertinism, by contrast, is relatively quiet and still, and crossing it seems easy and attractive. But its waters are so contaminated

with poisons and pollutants that to try to cross it is also certain death. Both streams are uncrossable and deadly, one because of impossible moral and spiritual demands, the other because of moral and spiritual filth.

But spanning those two deadly streams is the **bridge of the gospel of Jesus Christ**, the only passage from earth to heaven. The two streams lead to death because they are man's ways. The gospel leads to life because it is God's way.

The Old Testament governmental law was abolished altogether in Christ. The purpose of that form of the law was to set the Jews apart as God's distinctive chosen people and to picture the sacrifice of the coming Messiah, the Christ. When Christ came, the symbols of His sacrifice ceased to be necessary, because the completed and final sacrifice itself was fully and eternally made.

**Edward Morgan: Sermon Notes on vv. 16-26 --**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The Christian is totally dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit to live a Christian life.

### **I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT?**

Illustration of a girl who had to depend on her mother to enable her to walk because of physical problems:

- 1) she needed her mother's presence
- 2) her mother's help
- 3) she yielded to her mother's control (rather than fighting it or rejecting it)
- 4) she trusted in her mother's keeping

### Application

- 1) We need to count on the presence of the Holy Spirit in us -- **4:6; 1 Cor. 6:19-20**
- 2) We need to depend on the Spirit's help (as the Comforter, the Strengthener, the Helper) Why do you think the Lord sent the Holy Spirit to us?
- 3) We need to yield to the Spirit's control -- the Spirit will control that which we turn over to Him. Responding to the truth as the Spirit reveals it to us.
- 4) Trust in His working in us.

### **II. WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED RESULTS?**

- A. Victory over the flesh (**5:16**) -- over the old sinful nature, and its expression
- the flesh constantly lusts -- has desires it wants fulfilled;
  - creates a constant conflict in the Christian life (**:17**)

2 possible interpretations of this verse:

- 1) Rom. **7:17-24** -- the principle (force) of sin in our nature
- 2) the work of the Spirit of God keeps you from the things you would naturally desire to do

How is this victory over the flesh applied?

- 1) Spirit of God applies the truth of our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (**5:24**)

2) By the very nature that I cannot do 2 things at once

B. Christian Character is Produced

the fruit of the Holy Spirit; the production of the Christ-like life;  
these are both inner characteristics and outer conduct -- 3 groups of 3

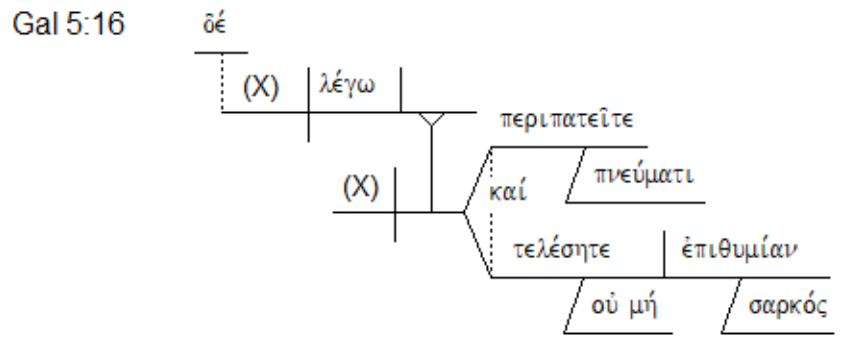
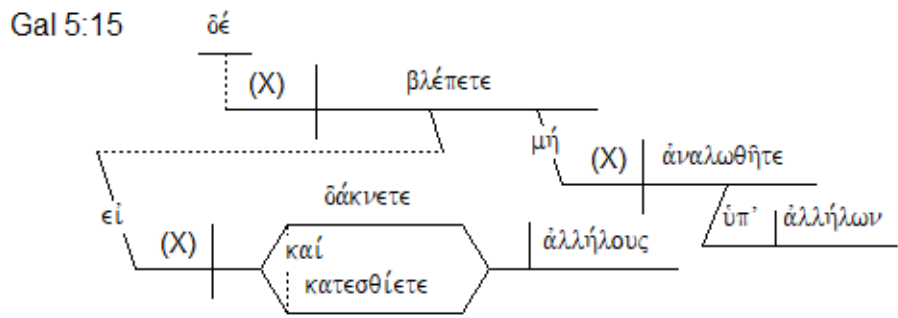
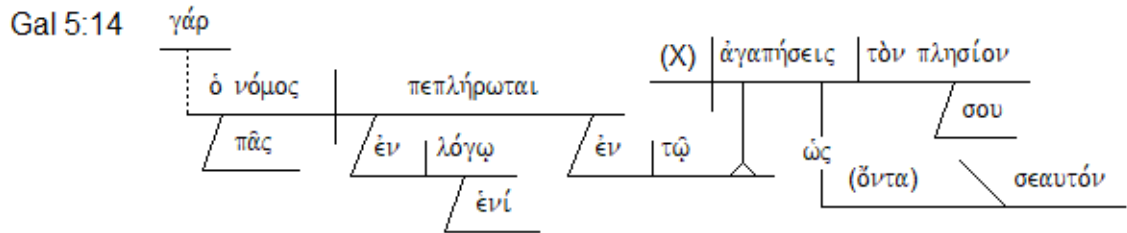
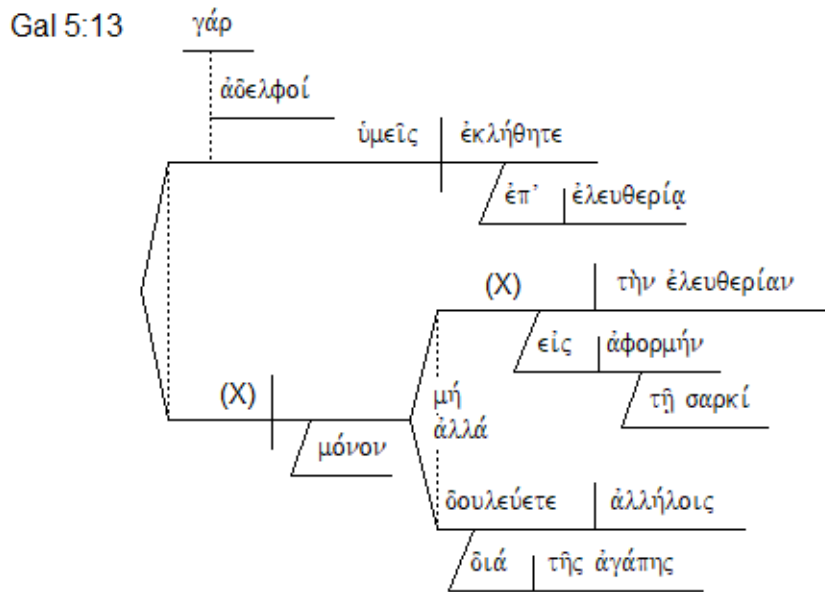
Quote from **Andrew Murray**:

Paul wants to teach the Galatians (and us) how the Spirit, and the Spirit alone, is the power of the Christian life, and how this cannot be except as the flesh is utterly and entirely set aside. So in the midst of his teaching about the walk in the Spirit he writes (**5:24**), *“They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.”* Here is the only way in which deliverance from the flesh is to be found.

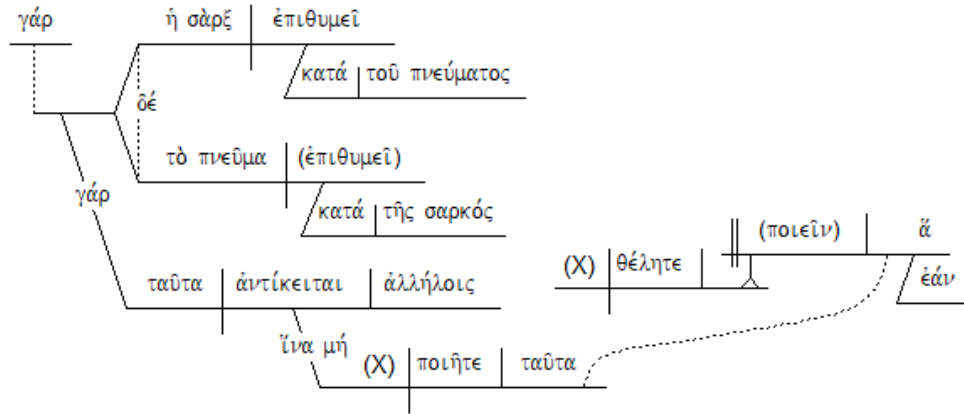
**Philip Ryken**: One helpful way to study this passage is to contrast the fruit of the Spirit with what might be called “the weeds of the devil.” Each fruit has its opposite, a weed that tries to choke it out. In fact, many of these weeds grow in Paul’s list of vices (**Gal. 5:19–21**). The weed that tries to choke out love is enmity. Dissension stunts the growth of peace. Patience is crowded out by anger. The weed that grows around self-control is sensuality; and so forth.

Another way to study the fruit of the Spirit is to compare it to the character of God. Love, peace, goodness, faithfulness—these are all divine attributes. We see them displayed in the work of God the Son, who was patient in suffering, faithful to his disciples, gentle with children, and loving in his kindness to sinners. **James Dunn** rightly calls **Galatians 5:22–23** a “character-sketch” of Christ. Since the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, it is only natural for him to reproduce the virtues of Christ in the life of the Christian. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches (**John 15:5**). The Holy Spirit connects us to the vine, and thereby produces in us the fruit of Christ himself.

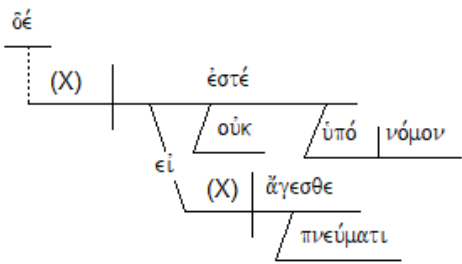
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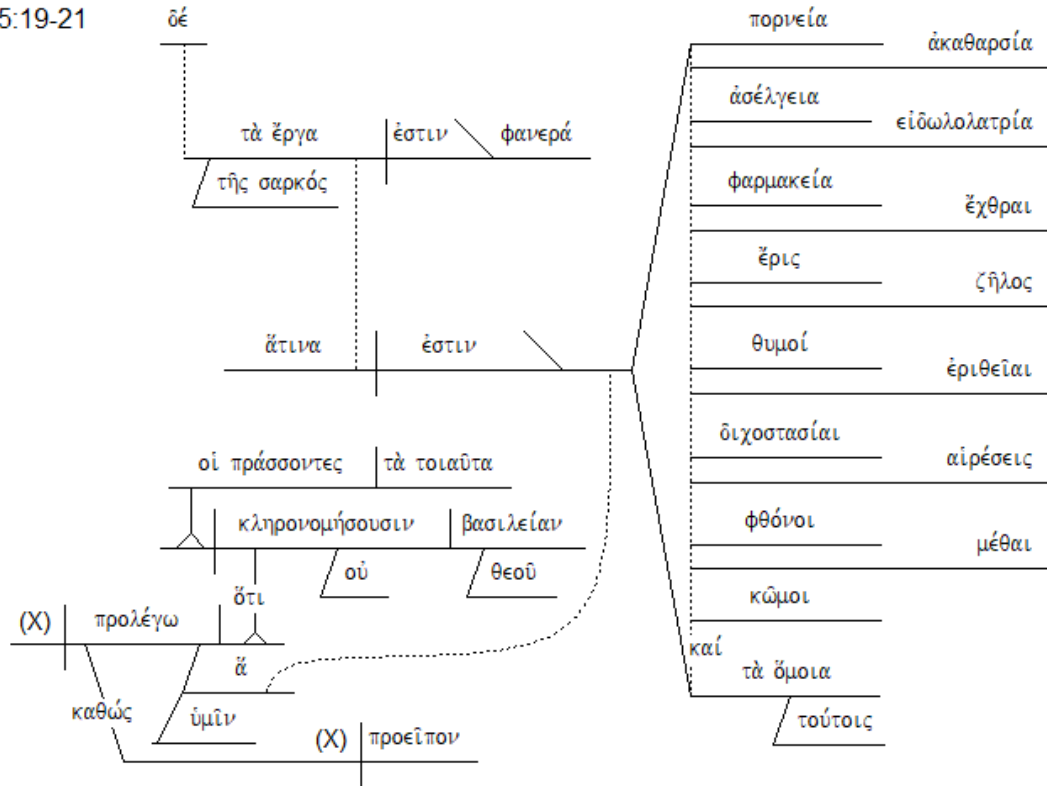
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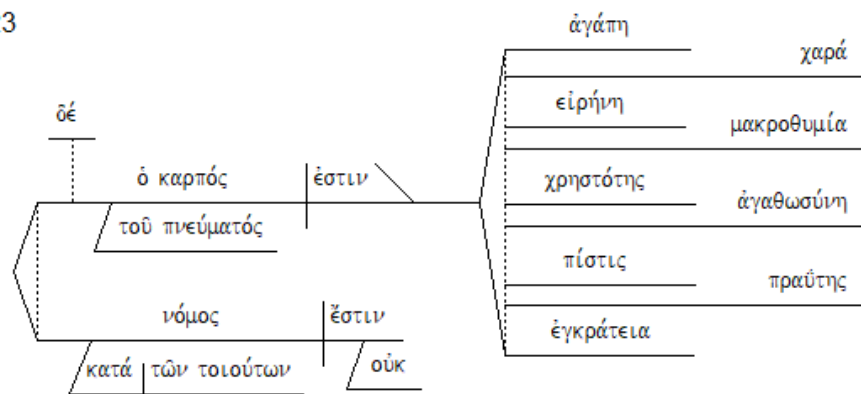
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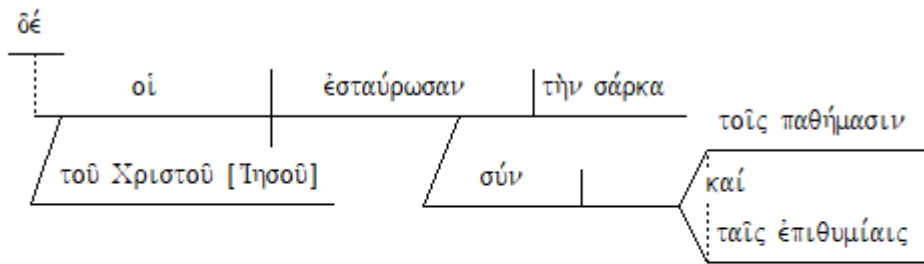
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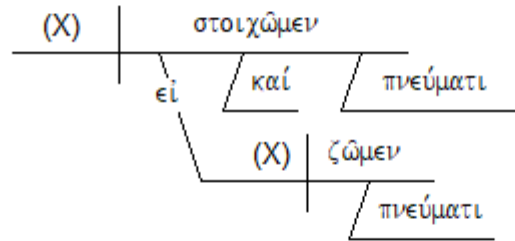
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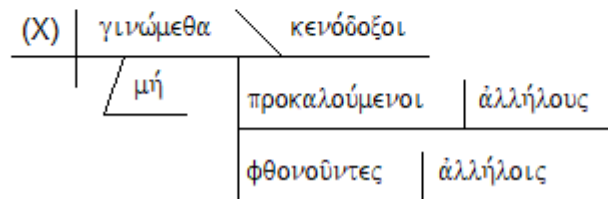
Gal 5:24



Gal 5:25



Gal 5:26



TEXT: GALATIANS 6:1-10

TITLE: DO GOOD – CLOSING PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS

**BIG IDEA:**

**2 PRACTICAL WAYS TO WALK IN LOVE BY THE SPIRIT**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Richard Longenecker:** In **6:1–10** Paul gives a series of instructions that spell out in practical terms what it means for his Galatian converts to “*live by the Spirit*” (**5:16, 25a**), to “*be led by the Spirit*” (**5:18**), and so to “*keep in step with the Spirit*” (**5:25b**). The instructions are given in the form of exhortations, with the exhortations generally expressing in somewhat blended fashion two main emphases:

- (1) personal responsibility and
- (2) corporate responsibility.

Yet the particular situations to which these exhortations speak are not stated, and so commentators are left without any real knowledge of the circumstances within the Galatian churches or how Paul’s exhortations fit those circumstances.

**J.M.G. Barclay:** They represent Paul’s desire to give concrete instructions, to spell out for the Galatians in practical terms what it means to “*walk in the Spirit*.” Many of these maxims function as practical illustrations of the ingredients of “*the fruit of the Spirit*”—e.g. *πραΰτης* (**6.2**), *ἐγκράτεια* (**5.26; 6.4**), *μακροθυμία* (**6.9–10**), and *ἀγαθωσύνη* (**6.6, 10**)—and thus serve to “earth” these abstract qualities in detailed moral instruction. Throughout Paul endeavours to remind the Galatians of their accountability to God and their responsibilities to one another, and he is especially concerned with the problems of pride and dissension in the Galatian churches which threaten to destroy them altogether. He appeals to them to sow to the Spirit, having shown that only the fruit of the Spirit can counteract and overcome these problems in their midst (Obeying the Truth, 167).

**6:1–10** is characterized by an alternation between corporate responsibility and individual accountability.

**6.1a** – corporate responsibility to correct a sinning Christian

**6.1b** – individual accountability – ‘look to yourself (you singular)

**6.2** – corporate responsibility to bear the burdens of one another

**6.3–5** – individual accountability – test your own works, bear your own load

**6.6** – corporate responsibility to support those who teach

**6.7–8** – individual accountability – how one sows will be how one reaps

**6.9–10** – corporate responsibility – everyone should do good to all, especially to Christians.



**Ben Witherington:** What Paul intends to do in this section is spell out what characterizes Christian inter-personal behavior, and so make clearer what walking in the Spirit and what the Law of Christ are. Paul will gradually work his way from how to relate to a Christian who has sinned, to how to evaluate one's own life including one's temptations and actions, to how to relate to one's teacher, and finally to how we may expect to be evaluated by God 'at harvest time'. In other words, Paul's ethics are given an eschatological sanction as is also true in **1 Cor. 15**. What stand in the background are God's past actions in Christ which set a pattern for believers; what stands in the foreground is God's future action which will bring the divine plan for God's people to completion. Between this already and that not yet stands the believer who is called upon to emulate the behavior of Christ, the ultimate burden bearer, who came to restore not condemn the sinner.

**Ronald Fung:** Following the general description of life in the Spirit (**5:13–26**), the present section consists of specific exhortations which may be summarized under two headings:

- (a) helping one another in the spirit of gentleness and humility (**vv. 1–5**) and
- (b) doing good in recognition of the rule of sowing and reaping in life (**vv. 6–10**).

**David Platt:** Main Idea: Paul urges Spirit-led believers to recognize and execute the practical responsibilities of the household of faith.

- I. Gentle Restoration (**6:1**)
  - A. The context of restoration: family
  - B. The need for restoration
  - C. The nature of restoration
  - D. The nature of the restorer
  
- II. Humble Burden Bearing (**6:2-5**)
  - A. Burdens are a reality in a fallen world (**6:2a**).
  - B. We are not self-sufficient (**6:2a**).
  - C. Burden bearing is a command to all believers (**6:2a**).
  - D. Burden bearing is how we fulfill the law of Christ (**6:2b**).
  - E. Pride hinders burden bearing (**6:3-4**).
  - F. Paul distinguishes between heavy burdens and light loads (**6:5**).
  
- III. Generous Sharing (**6:6**)
  - A. Responsibilities of the teacher
  - B. Responsibilities of the receiver
  
- IV. Personal Holiness (**6:7-8**)
  
- V. Practical Goodness (**6:9-10**)

## **I. (:1-5) HUMBLY HELPING YOUR BROTHER IN NEED**

### **A. (:1) Gently Restore a Brother Whom You Find Sinning**

1. The Responsibility = Applies to all believers -- not just the leaders  
*"Brethren"*

Don't try to pass this responsibility off to someone else.

This is a family responsibility that requires the loving network of family relationships.

**Hays:** [Paul] wants the members of the Galatian churches to see themselves not as rivals competing to see who can be the most devout (**5:26**), but rather as brothers and sisters, . . . supporting one another as they walk through perilous times of spiritual warfare.

2. The Occasion = Sin that is evident to you  
*"even if a man is caught in any trespass"*

Not saying that we are out spying on people trying to catch them.

3. The Qualification to Help  
*"you who are spiritual"*

Those who are walking in the Spirit, led by the Spirit, controlled by the Spirit, evidencing the fruit of the Spirit -- all of which will be needed for this interaction to be successful.

If you find yourself in some other less desirable state, the answer is not to forget about your responsibility to your brother, but rather to first address your own relationship issues and then in a renewed spirit to come alongside and help your brother.

**Max Anders:** In **chapter 6**, Paul applies freedom to our relationships. He's going to tell us that the Christian who walks in the Spirit is free from selfishness and so freed to love others unselfishly. He wants spiritual people to show concern for one another and respond properly to a fellow Christian who has fallen into grave sin. You who are spiritual, in this context, refers to those manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. These believers with Christlike character traits produced by the Holy Spirit encourage faltering Christians. The legalist is judgmental, harsh, and condemning toward those who struggle with sin (**Acts 15:10**). They know the law, and they know the consequences of falling short of obedience to the law. But they do not know mercy.

**Timothy George:** While all sin is detestable before God and should be resisted as the plague, certain transgressions are especially hurtful to the fellowship of the church and must be dealt with according to the canons of Christian discipline. Those who are spiritually minded, that is, those whose lives give evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, have a special responsibility to take the initiative in seeking restoration and reconciliation with those who have been caught in such an error.

**John MacArthur:** It should be noted that, whereas **maturity** is relative, depending on one's progression and growth, **spirituality** is an absolute reality that is unrelated to growth. At any point in the life of a Christian, from the moment of his salvation to his glorification, he is either spiritual, walking in the Spirit, or fleshly, walking in the deeds of the flesh. Maturity is the cumulative effect of the times of spirituality. But any believer, at any point in his growth toward Christlikeness, can be a spiritual believer who helps a sinful believer who has fallen to the flesh.

#### 4. The Mission

*"restore such a one"*

Not out to rebuke them and judge them critically; the mission is restorative.

Straighten things out, set a broken bone, mend the nets;  
Skill, firmness, gentleness needed for this work.

**Bruce Barton:** The word translated “*restore*” has a number of meanings, all of which help us understand how to restore someone who has been caught in sin:

- setting a broken bone. We should be helping to reduce pain and promote healing and rehabilitation.
- mending a fishnet. We should repair torn relationships in order that they might be returned to useful service.
- refitting a ship after a difficult voyage. We should fix the damage, restock the supplies, and prepare the vessel for its next voyage.

Restoration doesn't happen easily or simply. Sometimes those stung with self-discovery reject our efforts to help. We must persevere in the process because God views the restored person as very valuable.

**Philip Ryken:** Unfortunately, Christians do not always offer sinners very good treatment. Sometimes we ignore sin. Lacking the courage to confront it, we simply pretend it isn't there. We act like timid medical students who see a patient with a bone fragment sticking out of his arm, but are afraid to touch it. The bone is never set and the wound never heals. Sometimes Christians notice the broken bone of sin, but never get past making a diagnosis. They simply stand around talking about what bad shape the sinner is in. “Wow,” people say, “would you look at that broken bone! I mean, just look at the way it's sticking out! Boy, am I glad I don't have a fracture like that!” Meanwhile, the brother or sister continues in the pains of sin. This kind of treatment is better known as gossip. Sadly, there are even times when Christians condemn sinners, blaming them (or even punishing them) for needing to go to the spiritual emergency room in the first place. They treat them like outcasts, harshly scolding them for being spiritually out of joint and apparently forgetting that they themselves are sinners in need of grace.

When Christians are caught in sin, they do not need isolation or amputation; they need restoration. The proper thing to do is to help them confess their sins and find forgiveness in Christ, and then to welcome them back into the fellowship of the church.

## 5. The Attitude

*"in a spirit of gentleness"*

Not only important what we say and do, but how we say and do it.  
What is our tone and attitude, etc.

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

## 6. The Humility

*"each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted"*

**Ronald Fung:** Such vigilance is necessary because “anything can become a temptation” and because no one is above the possibility of succumbing to temptation (cf. **1 Cor. 10:12**). Awareness of this is conducive to the cultivation and manifestation of the spirit of gentleness enjoined here.

### **B. (:2) Lovingly Help Bear the Burden of a Brother Who is Weighed Down**

*"Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."*

Look at both:

- the command of Christ
- the example of Christ

**Warren Wiersbe:** There is no contradiction between **verses 2 and 5**, because two different Greek words for burden are used. In **verse 2** it is a word meaning “*a heavy burden*,” while in **verse 5** it describes “*a soldier's pack*.” We should help each other bear the heavy burdens of life, but there are personal responsibilities that each man must bear for himself.

**John MacArthur:** It is a misguided and unscriptural philosophy that causes some pastors to think they should not get too close to members of their congregation. Obviously they should never show favoritism, and there is danger in becoming too involved in superficial social relationships. But a pastor who does not intimately attend to the people under his care cannot possibly minister to them effectively.

**George Brunk:** The phrase *law of Christ* clearly refers to a standard or pattern of life that reflects what Christ stands for and expects of his followers. The implication is that Christians can and should apply their faith to their way of life. This is the sense of the passage presenting the only close parallel in Paul's letters (**1 Cor 9:21**). There he says that, in his identification with Gentiles who are not under the Mosaic Law, he

nevertheless is “*not free from God’s law but [is] under Christ’s law.*” A moral standard, defined by Christ, always guides Paul, and this standard also represents the will of God.

The law of Christ is the moral vision based on the example and teaching of Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. That vision is fundamentally in harmony with the Old Testament Law (**5:14**), though it modifies it in accordance with the truly new dimensions that Christ has brought (**4:4-7**). At the same time, that vision sees the role of (any) law not as a complete and fixed code of behavior, but as a pattern (paradigm) that the Spirit of God re-creates as living virtue in the believer (**5:16-23**) and reapplies dynamically in the changing contexts of life (**5:25**). The latter point may help explain why Paul so rarely cites the tradition of Jesus’ teaching. He wants to avoid the appearance of setting up a new law code to replace the Mosaic Law. At the same time, the law of Christ gives some specificity and definition to Christian morality, so that we do not confuse the mind of the Spirit with our own human or even demonic ideas.

Here Paul probably has in mind the example of Christ, who sacrificially bears the burdens of others and is therefore the standard for his followers in bearing one another’s burdens. That meaning fits well the present context of burden bearing. The cross is the central symbol of this self-giving (**Gorman** 2001: 174, 186). This example of Christ is a typical emphasis in Paul (e.g., **Phil 2:5-11; Rom 15:1-3**) and the dominant one in Galatians (**1:4; 2:20; 3:13**). Paul uses the concept of love to carry this meaning. He sees love as the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. That love is marked by service to others (see **5:13-14** and discussion there). The law of Christ is synonymous with love—the love that is defined by the example of the life of Jesus Christ (**Elias**: 338).

**John Piper:** We should probably define a burden then as anything that threatens to crush the joy of our faith --whether a tragedy that threatens to make us doubt God's goodness or a sin that threatens to drag us into guilt and judgment.

**Bruce Barton: May I Help You?**

No Christian should ever think that he or she is totally independent and doesn’t need help from others. And no one should feel excused from the task of helping others. The body of Christ, the church, functions only when the members work together for the common good. Do you know someone who needs help? Is there a Christian brother or sister who needs correction or encouragement? Humbly and gently reach out to that person, offering to lift his or her load (**John 13:34-35**).

**Timothy George:** We may gather four important truths about practical Christian living from Paul’s injunction to bear one another’s burdens.

The Reality of Burdens. All Christians have burdens. Our burdens may differ in size and shape and will vary in kind depending on the providential ordering of our lives. For some it is the burden of temptation and the consequences of a moral lapse, as in **v. 1** here. For others it may be a physical ailment, or mental disorder, or family crisis, or lack of employment, or demonic oppression, or a host of other things; but no Christian is exempt from burdens. . .

The Myth of Self-Sufficiency. We all have burdens, and God does not intend for us to carry them by ourselves in isolation from our brothers and sisters. The ancient philosophy of Stoicism taught that the goal of the happy life was *apatheia*, a studied aloofness from pleasure and pain, and self-sufficiency, the ability to brave the harsh elements of life without dependence on others. . .

The Imperative of Mutuality. Because all Christians have burdens and since none are sufficient unto themselves to bear their burdens alone, God has so tempered the body of Christ that its members are to be priests to one another, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

Living by the Law of Christ. . . . In sum, the "*law of Christ*" is for Paul "the whole tradition of Jesus' ethical teaching, confirmed by his character and conduct and reproduced within his people by the power of the Spirit" (cf. **Rom 8:2**).

### **C. (:3-5) Balancing Perspective: Humbly Take Responsibility for Your Own Load**

**Scot McKnight:** The problem that occupies Paul's attention while addressing restoration is pride on the part of the restorer. Pride is wrong (**v. 3**), and each restorer should check himself or herself out (**v. 4a**) and not find personal status by comparison with others, especially with sinning brothers and sisters (**v. 4b**). In the final analysis, each person is responsible before God for what he or she has done (**v. 5**).

#### 1. (:3) Watch out for Pride

*"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*

**Max Anders:** When a Christian sins, we easily fall into the temptation of pride. We commit this sin when we compare ourselves to those who have fallen morally and feel better than they. This comparison can lead to a condescending attitude that says, "You fell, and I didn't." We may secretly be glad that something bad has happened to him. If we take on this "holier than thou" attitude, we fall into the sin of pride. We also destroy any opportunity to have a restorative influence on the struggling believer. Yet Paul tells us that rather than experience prideful feelings of superiority, we should test ourselves through self-examination to see if there is any prideful breach in our moral armor.

**Ronald Fung:** Paul implies that those who imagine themselves to be somebody are unable to bear the burdens of others: fancying themselves to be without sin or weakness they are unable to sympathize with others or to concern themselves with their burdens; conversely, they are more likely to treat others with gentleness and humility if they feel their own weakness.

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** Both personal integrity and self-deception are revealed on the public stage. Those who think more of themselves than of others have an inflated

sense of self-importance that is corrosive to the church.

**Richard Longenecker:** His point, it seems, is that **conceit**—that is, thinking oneself to be something when in actuality we are nothing (as the maxim has it)—results in making one unwilling to bear others' burdens. In effect, the maxim quoted here roughly parallels the exhortation of **5:26**, with the warnings against conceit of **5:26** and **6:3** serving as something of an inclusio for the exhortations regarding restoring the wayward and bearing one another's oppressive burdens of **6:1–2**.

2. (:4) No Place for Competition -- Don't compare Yourself to Others

*"But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another."*

**William Barclay:** He goes on to rebuke conceit and gives a recipe whereby it may well be avoided. We are to compare our achievement not with the work of our neighbours but with what our best would have been. When we do that, there can never be any cause for conceit.

**Ronald Fung:** It is on his own conduct and performance that each person should concentrate, not the conduct and performance of others; he is to engage in self-assessment, not in critical evaluation of another.

**Timothy George:** There is a great difference between introspection and self-examination. The former can easily devolve into a kind of narcissistic, spiritual navel-gazing that has more in common with types of Eastern mysticism than with classic models of the devotional life in historic Christianity. True self-examination is not merely taking one's spiritual pulse beat on a regular basis but rather submitting one's thoughts, attitudes, and actions to the will of God and the mind of Christ revealed in Holy Scripture. To "test" or "prove" something presupposes that there is some external standard or criterion by which the quality or purity of the object under scrutiny can be measured with accuracy. No higher or better standard can be found for this important exercise than the law of Christ Paul had just extolled. This does not mean, of course, that we should not seek the assistance of fellow believers in the process of self-examination. An important part of bearing one another's burdens is to offer spiritual guidance and friendship to one another, holding one another accountable to the high calling of God in our lives.

**Richard Longenecker:** The warning here is not to live as spiritual people in a state of pride or conceit, always comparing one's own attainments to those of others and so feeling superior, but rather to test one's own actions and so to minimize the possibility of self-deception. Christian feelings of exultation and congratulation should spring from one's own actions as seen in the light of God's approval and not derive from comparing oneself to what others are or are not doing.

3. (:5) Bear Your Own Load

*"For each one shall bear his own load."*

**John Stott:** [Re the difference between the two “loads” in **Gal 6**] -- So we are to bear one another’s “burdens” which are too heavy for a man to bear alone, but there is one burden which we cannot share—indeed do not need to because it is a pack light enough for every man to carry himself—and that is our responsibility to God on the day of judgment. On that day you cannot carry my pack and I cannot carry yours.

## **II. (:6-10) HARVEST LAW OF CONSISTENTLY GIVING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS**

### **A. (:6) Priority of Mutual Sharing with Your Spiritual Teacher**

*"And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches."*

Question of whether or not this passage is talking about material and financial support for those who are ministering the Word of God to you. It is definitely talking about making sure that you are not just a "taker" but also a "giver" as you have opportunity.

**John MacArthur:** Good things could include material goods, but that does not seem to be the sense here... Paul is talking about mutuality, not of one party serving or providing for the other but of both parties sharing together. The one who is taught the word and the one who teaches have a common fellowship and should share all good things together. . .

The most common term for material things that are favorable, or good, is *kalos*. But *good things* translates the plural of *agathos*, which is used in the New Testament primarily of **spiritual and moral excellence**. Paul uses this word in describing the gospel itself, the “*glad tidings of good things*” (**Rom. 10:15**). The writer of Hebrews uses it in the same way, of “*the good things to come*” of which “*Christ appeared as a high priest*” (**Heb. 9:11**) and of which the law was “*only a shadow*” (**10:1**).

#### Alternative View:

**Warren Wiersbe:** But we must realize the spiritual principle that lies behind this precept. God does not command believers to give simply that pastors and teachers (and missionaries, **Phil. 4:10-19**) might have their material needs met, but that the givers might get a greater blessing (**Gal. 6:7-8**).

**Ronald Fung:** Paul’s exhortation indicates that the “teacher” had a fixed status; even if the teacher was not a full-time instructor in the faith, his work of teaching and preparation for teaching must have taken enough of his time that the community had to be responsible for his material support. Here, then, we have probably the earliest extant evidence for a form of full-time or nearly full-time ministry supported by the congregation in the early Church.



## B. (:7-9) Inescapable, Fundamental Principle of Sowing and Reaping

### 1. Validity of the Principle

*"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked."*

### 2. Statement of the Principle

*"for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap."*

**Richard Longenecker:** Paul's emphasis in the use of this maxim seems to be twofold:

- (1) that there is a direct correlation between sowing and reaping, which is how God has established matters; and
- (2) that the onus rests on the person (ἄνθρωπος) himself as to whether life eventuates in blessing or judgment, for God is not a deity who reverses his laws or can be tricked into believing something to be so when it is not.

Thus, generally the maxim supports the proverb: "*God is not mocked*" by mankind's attempts to ignore the cause-and-effect relationships of justice or to trick God into bestowing blessings instead of judgment.

### 3. 2 Contrasting Applications of the Principle

#### a. Negative Example

*"For the one who sows to his own flesh  
shall from the flesh reap corruption"*

**Thomas Schreiner:** Not only are there two different kinds of sowing, but two contrasting results are also envisioned. Those who sow to the flesh "*will reap corruption*" (θερίσει φθοράν). The future tense "*will reap*" points to the last judgment. What is the nature of the corruption in view here? It could merely be a general term, indicating lack of fruitfulness in this life or the failure to receive rewards above and beyond eternal life (with eternal life itself being secured). But the contrast indicates that corruption refers to final destruction and final judgment, for those who sow to the Spirit "*will reap eternal life*" (θερίσει ζωὴν αἰώνιον). Since "*eternal life*" is contrasted with "*corruption*," the latter means that one will not enjoy the life of the coming age, while the former refers to the eschatological reward of life that is promised to those who sow to the Spirit. Paul's gospel of grace in Galatians does not countenance moral laxity. Righteousness is not based on works, but those who do not practice good works will not receive the final inheritance. The Pauline gospel of grace does not provide a foundation for license.

#### b. Positive Example

*"but the one who sows to the Spirit  
shall from the Spirit reap eternal life"*

**Timothy George:** **Eternal life**, of course, is not merely life that lasts eternally. It is rather God's own life, the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, graciously bestowed upon the children of God through faith in the Redeemer. Eternal life is the present possession of all who truly trust in Christ as Savior and Lord (**John 3:36**;

**11:25–26**). But Paul had in mind here the final consummation of salvation that will be ushered in by the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. Paul was using “*eternal life*” in the same sense Jesus did when he responded to Peter’s complaint, “*Look, we have left what we had and followed you,*” to which the Master replied, “*Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers or sisters, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come*” (**Luke 18:28–30**). The splendor of the age to come and the glory of heaven beckon us forward just as the lights of the Celestial City summoned Bunyan’s Christian toward the final goal of his pilgrim travels. In the Institutes of the Christian Religion Calvin devoted an entire chapter to “Meditation on the Future Life.” He concluded that discussion with these words: “If believers’ eyes are turned to the power of the Resurrection, in their hearts the cross of Christ will at last triumph over the devil, flesh, sin, and wicked men.”

#### 4. Need for Perseverance

*"And let us not lose heart in doing good,  
for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."*

**Timothy George:** Throughout **Gal 5–6** Paul had instructed the Christians of Galatia to do a number of specific things: expel the agitators, love your neighbor as yourself, keep in step with the Spirit by manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in your lives, practice church discipline by restoring those who have fallen, bear one another’s burdens, examine yourself in light of the judgment seat of Christ, and provide material support for those who instruct you in the faith. In this verse Paul summarized all of these duties under the general rubric of “*doing good*.” Doing the good in this sense is the same thing as fulfilling the law of Christ. . .

Paul’s message to the Galatians is, “Don’t quit!” Faced with the temptation of legalism on the one hand and libertinism on the other, many of Paul’s converts in Galatia were beginning to lose heart. Having begun well in the life of the Spirit, they were in danger of losing their first love, being diverted from witness and service into petty bickering and greedy self-concern. To these fatigued and spiritually exhausted Christians, Paul made his appeal: “*Let us not get tired of doing good*.”

**Philip Ryken:** The apostle Paul knew how easy it is to slack off in the Christian life. Human beings are weak. This is why it is so hard for ministries to maintain their spiritual vitality, and why so many Christians who are active in ministry get burned out. People grow tired. They are tempted to sin. They experience opposition, sometimes from the very people they are trying to help. And they get discouraged when they do not see results. In an accelerated culture, people get used to instant gratification; it is hard to wait for things to grow. Then there is the sheer immensity of human need. As we have learned from Galatians, there are neighbors to love, sinners to restore, burdens to bear, and ministers to support. And this is only the beginning. There is always someone who needs more help. But who has the time or the energy to help everyone? Sometimes it is tempting simply to give up.

**C. (:10) Urgency of Doing Good Whenever We Can and To Whomever We can**  
*"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men,  
and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."*

**Ronald Fung:** Here the distinction between the family of faith and “*all people*” (cf. **1 Thess. 5:15**) shows that for Paul the time-honored division of mankind into Jew and Gentile was less significant than the believer-unbeliever distinction; indeed, the racial and religious distinction of Jew and Gentile lost all significance for him (**Gal. 3:28; 5:6**). He reckons that the Christian has a greater responsibility toward his fellow-believers than toward other people in general.

**Douglas Moo:** The general call to do “*good*” fits with the people for whom that good is to be done: “everyone” (πάντας, *pantas*). As the next phrase makes clear, this “*all*” is without boundaries, including unbelievers as well as believers. Amid the vital theological issue with which they are wrestling and the internal divisions this issue has created, the Galatian Christians are to continue to manifest the love of Christ and grace of God to all the people they come into contact with. When Paul then adds, “*especially to the household of faith*” (μάλιστα δὲ πρὸς τοὺς οἰκειοὺς τῆς πίστεως, *malista de pros tous oikeious tes pisteōs*), this is meant “not as a narrowing of the general obligation, but as the most immediate way of giving it effect” (Dunn 1993a: 333). Calling the fellowship of believers a “*household*” has OT roots (“*the house of Israel*” [e.g., **Lev. 10:6; Num. 20:29; Judg. 2:1 LXX**]) and brings to expression one of the key NT images of the church, an extended spiritual family (see οἰκεῖος in Eph. 2:19; and οἶκος in **1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; 4:17; Heb. 3:6**; and, of course, the ubiquitous address “*brothers and sisters*”). Paul may choose this particular expression in order deliberately to mark out the church as the new covenant counterpart to Israel (see **6:16; Dunn** 1993a: 333; Garlington 2003: 279; the objection of **Hays** [2000: 337] rests too much on lexical difference between οἶκος [in the OT] and οἰκεῖος). The language also provides the community with a status that they would readily recognize and that would enable them to confirm their identity as a cohesive group within their culture (**Esler** 1998: 224–25, 233–34). It is also no accident that Paul uses the word “*faith*” to characterize this new spiritual family. As he has argued throughout Galatians, faith (in Christ) is the fundamental and transforming mark of God’s new covenant people.

**Nijay Gupta:** The last question we must address is this: why does Paul emphasize goodness toward the “family of believers”? We have to remember how the biological family unit was the most fundamental identity group in the ancient world. The early Christians reconceived that framework by rebuilding it around the person of Jesus, regardless of blood ties. What came to matter most in terms of belonging and group identity was not who one’s biological father or brother was, but the connection to Jesus and the church (**Matt 12:50**). While this may have been liberating for some (who had no support through family connections), it would have also been challenging for many believers who harbored prejudice against fellow Christians from certain social, ethnic, or cultural groups. When we look at Rome, we see Christian groups divided based on food rituals and rules, and calendar observances (**Romans 14–15**). When we look at Corinth, we see Christians divided based on their favored leaders (**1 Cor 1**). When we

look at Galatia, we can detect a rift between Jews and gentiles, or perhaps between those gentiles who want to become circumcised and those who don't. Rather than seeing rivalry and hostility in the family of faith, Paul wanted to see unity and mutuality, care and concern, love and generosity. When all are living together in union with Christ, those differences of ethnicity and ritual, sex and gender, or status and power are put aside. Family doesn't compete; family supports and cheers on the other. Family finds a way to come together despite disagreements and differences.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) To whom are most of the cautions addressed in this situation?? To the erring brother or to the one coming alongside to help?? Why do you think this is? Why do we see so little in-depth involvement of believers in each other's life? Does this passage say anything about the advisability of using non-Christian psychiatrists to try to solve moral and spiritual problems?
- 2) Why do we try to build ourselves up by pulling others down and comparing ourselves with others? What type of spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment should we find in examining our own work before the Lord? Are we satisfied when we have done the best for the Lord that we can?
- 3) What other passages have bearing on our need to adequately support those who labor full-time in the gospel ministry -- especially those who have spiritually benefited us?
- 4) How does Paul present the proper balance in this passage between mutual accountability and personal responsibility?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** The legalist is not interested in bearing burdens. Instead, he adds to the burdens of others (**Acts 15:10**). This was one of the sins of the Pharisees in Jesus' day ... (**Matt. 23:4**). The legalist is always harder on other people than he is on himself, but the Spirit-led Christian demands more of himself than he does of others that he might be able to help others...

Instead of trying to restore the erring brother, the legalist will condemn him and then use the brother to make himself look good. This is what the Pharisee did in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (**Luke 18:9-14**)... The legalist rejoices when a brother falls, and often gives the matter wide publicity, because then he can boast about his own goodness and how much better his group is than the group to which the fallen brother belongs.

**John Piper:** The main point of **Gal. 6:1-5** is given in a general way in **verse 2** and a specific way in **verse 1**. **Verse 2:** *“Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* If a Christian brother or sister is weighed down or menaced by some burden or threat, be alert to that and quickly do something to help. Don't let them be crushed. Don't let them be destroyed. Don't be like the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said, *“They bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger”* (**Mt. 23:4**). Don't increase burdens. Make them lighter for people. Some of you wonder what you are supposed to do with your life. Here is a vocation that will bring you more satisfaction than if you became a millionaire ten times over: Develop the extraordinary skill for detecting the burdens of others and devote yourself daily to making them lighter.

In this way you fulfill the law of Christ (**6:2**). That's an odd phrase in a book that says (**5:18**): *“If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.”* And (**3:13**): *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.”* Have we been freed from the curse and burden of the Mosaic law just to be burdened down with a more radical law of Christ? No. The difference is that Moses gave us a law but could not change our hearts so that we would freely obey. Our pride and rebellion was not conquered by Moses. But when Christ summons us to obey his law of love he offers us himself to slay the dragon of our pride, change our hearts, empower us by his Spirit and fulfill his law. That is why, even though Christ's law is more radical than the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, he can say, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”* (**Mt. 11:28-30**). The law of Christ is not easy because it's greasy, or permissive. It is easy because when we are weak he is strong. It's easy because he produces the fruit of love: *“I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...”*

**Robert Gromacki:** Re sowing and reaping -- This basic principle has three obvious aspects.

1. *First*, like begets like. Righteousness is not produced by the sowing of sin.
2. *Second*, the more one sows, the more one reaps. The apostle explained: *“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully”* (**II Cor. 9:6**).
3. *Third*, one reaps more than what he sows. One seed can produce many fruits. Hosea charged that the who have sown the wind will reap the whirlwind (**Hosea 8:7**). The effects of sin are greater than the sin itself.

**Chuck Swindoll:** None of us are totally self-reliant. At times, life depresses us and temptation threatens to crush us. Our knees begin to buckle under the oppressive weight of our loads. During these struggles we need other believers to come alongside to help share our burden. Conversely, when we see fellow Christians wavering under the strain of their loads, we need to come to their aid and help shoulder the weight.

**Scot McKnight:** The judgment of God, then, is a motivational force for the Christian. Someday we shall stand, each of us, before God. That realization makes us different and changes our lives, or it ought to... we must each give an account and “*the one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life*” (v. 8). Let us not garble this demand of God on our lives by minimizing the judgment; behind the judgment stands a holy and loving God who will always act in accordance with his love and his holiness. Judgment is inevitable for such a God.

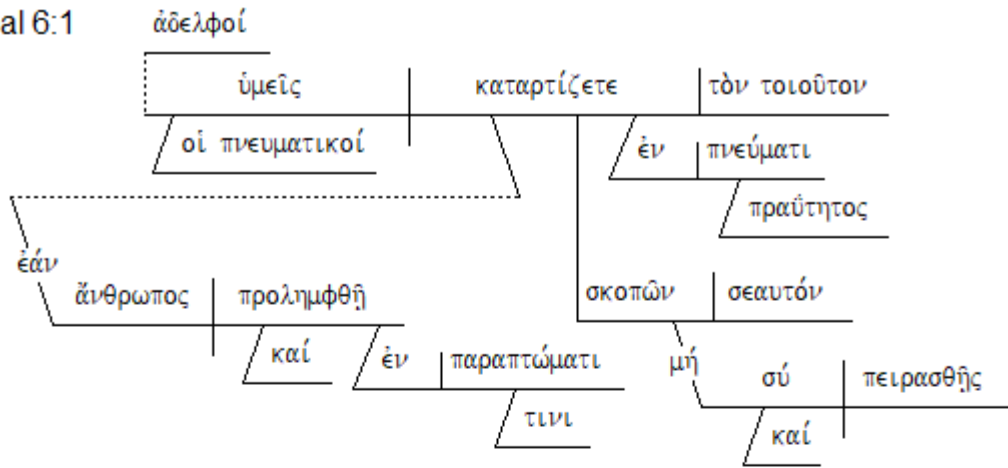
**William Hendriksen:** Well-doing requires continued effort, constant toil; but human nature, being fond of ease, lacks staying-power, is easily discouraged. This is especially true when results are not always apparent at once, when those who should help refuse to co-operate, and when no reward seems ever to be coming our way. It is entirely possible that it was especially this last thought--namely, the apparent delay with respect to the fulfilment of the promise regarding Christ's return to reward his servants--that troubled the Galatians.

**David Croteau:** (:1-3) – The following admonitions (four imperatives in vv. 1-6) flow from the exhortation to keep in step with the Spirit (5:25). Rather than provoking each other, believers who keep in step with the Spirit will care for each other. When believers are caught in sin, they need to be restored. Paul’s words here echo Jesus’ words regarding the first step in church discipline (Mt 18:15-20). Those whose lives are characterized by keeping in step with the Spirit should be involved in the restoration of the sinning believer. They should enact this restoration with a gentle and humble spirit (in contrast to the description in Gal 5:26). The goal of all Christian relationships is to build each other up (1Co 10:23-24). Since every believer has the capacity to sin, Paul warns those restoring the sinning believer that they must do so while keeping watch over their own lives to avoid falling into temptation themselves.

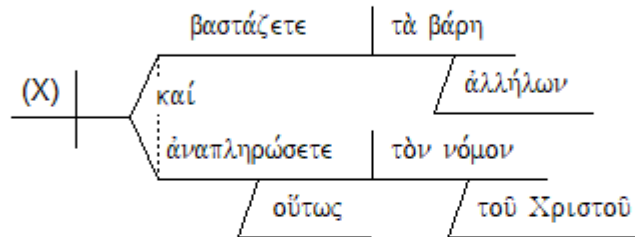
The general command in Galatians 6:2 not only includes restoring those who are caught in sin but is more generic to include other burdens that happen in a believer’s life: illness, marital strife, financial problems, and persecution. Paul’s reference to fulfilling the law of Christ is to remind the Galatians of the similar language in 5:14, which connects the underlying ethic of the commands in this section with loving others. The idea of thinking more of yourself than you should connects 6:3 with 5:26: those who are arrogant fill their minds with thoughts of themselves rather than love for others.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

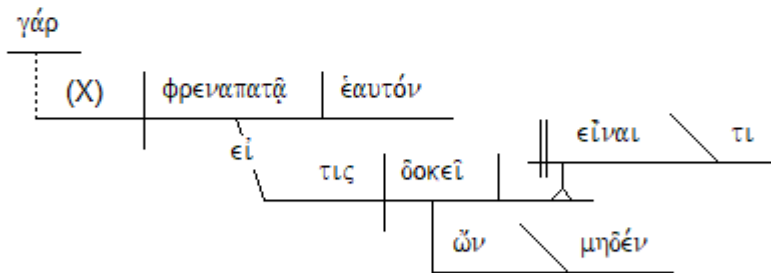
Gal 6:1



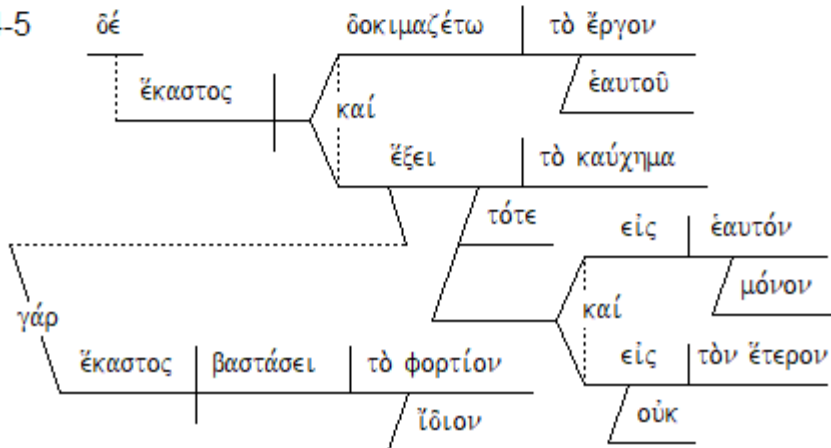
Gal 6:2

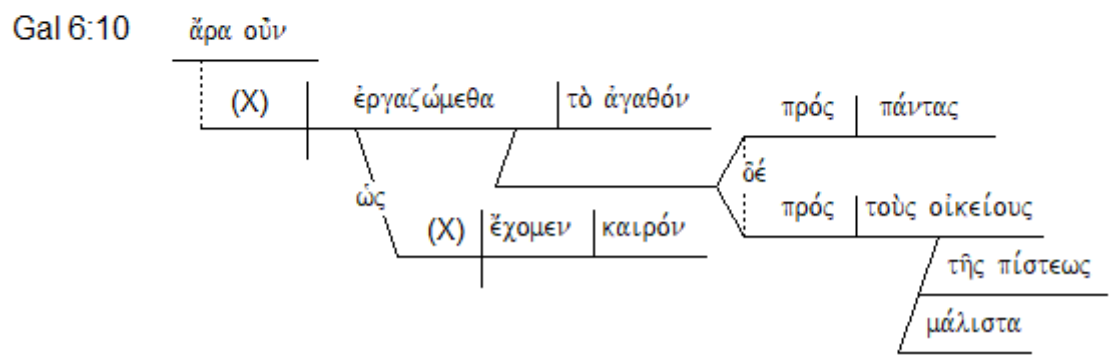
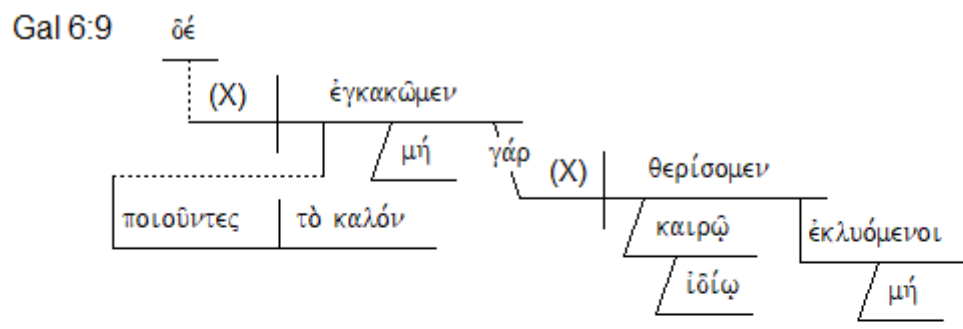
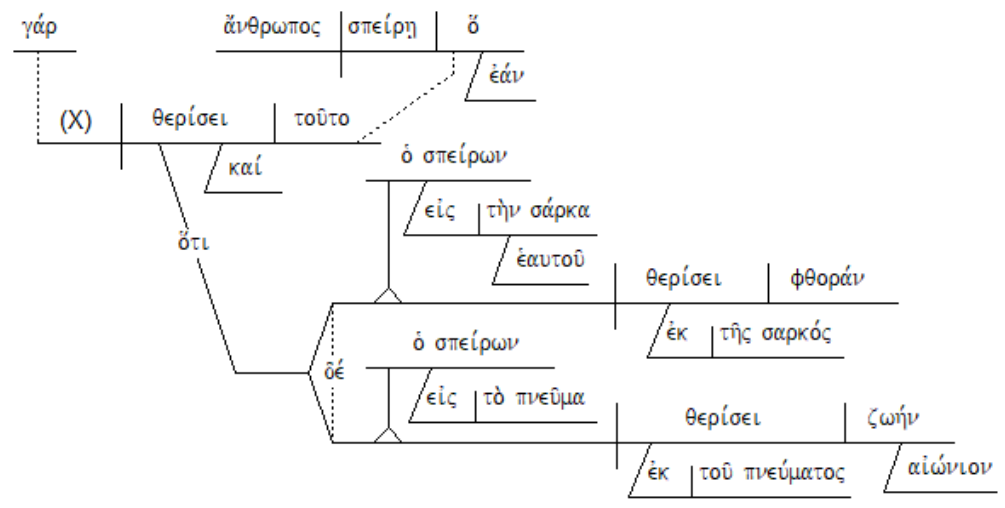
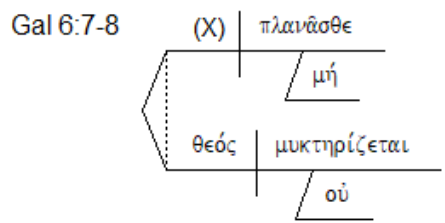
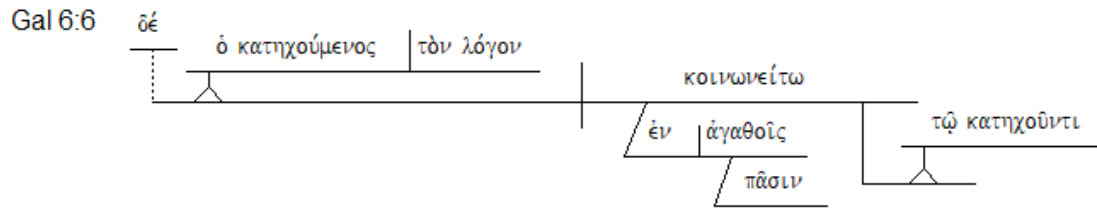


Gal 6:3



Gal 6:4-5







TEXT: GALATIANS 6:11-18

TITLE: CLOSING SUMMARY -- THE BRANDMARKS OF FREEDOM

**BIG IDEA:**

**BOAST ONLY IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND THE CORRESPONDING SCARS OF IDENTIFICATION WITH THE CROSS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Thomas Schreiner:** Galatians 6:11–18 should be categorized as a **letter closing**. The exhortation section has concluded with 6:10, and Paul now touches on several major themes of the letter. **Cosgrove** underestimates the role of the conclusion when he says that “the postscript itself affords no immediate entrée into the inner logic of the epistle.” The central themes of the letter are touched upon in the conclusion so that the Galatians are reminded of what is at stake in the controversy. . .

Paul’s letters typically conclude with a prayer for grace (6:18). What is striking here is that two verses earlier we also have a prayer for peace and mercy (6:16). Still, most of the elements of the conclusion are unique to Galatians and are best explained by the situation addressed in the letter. . .

Paul teaches that the **cross of Christ** is the decisive turning point in history so that the new creation is inaugurated. Hence, those who are still advocating circumcision have denied the cross and belong to the present evil age (1:4).

**Final Summary (6:11–18)**

- A. The Importance of the Conclusion (6:11)
- B. The Opponents’ Desire to Avoid Persecution (6:12)
- C. The Opponents’ Desire for Adulation (6:13)
- D. Boasting Only in the Cross (6:14)
- E. Centrality of the New Creation (6:15)
- F. Peace and Mercy for the Israel of God (6:16)
- G. Paul’s Sufferings for the Cross (6:17)
- H. Prayer Wish: Grace (6:18)

**Douglas Moo:** The structure of the passage is **concentric**. The reference to Paul’s own “signature” in **verse 11** and the grace wish in **verse 18** provide a formal frame around the passage. Paul’s rebuke of the agitators in **verses 12–13** is matched by his plea that such people no longer “give him trouble” in **verse 17**. And at the center of the passage are the **key theological images**—crucifixion to the world; new creation; and believers as the “Israel of God,” maintaining this new-creation perspective—that should reorient the mind-set of the Galatian Christians. The passage is characterized throughout, as **Weima** (1994: 161) has noted, by **antitheses between the agitators and Paul**: they are motivated by selfish considerations while Paul is motivated by Christ’s cross; they focus on the physical mark of circumcision, Paul on the “marks” of Jesus; they are

bound to this world, and Paul is bound to the next world (see also **Witherington** 1998: 445). And the creator of all these antitheses is the **cross of Christ** (vv. 12, 14).

**Scot McKnight**: There are two sections here: Paul's critique of the Judaizers (vv. 12–13) and his evaluation of himself (vv. 14–17).

Paul finds four problems with the Judaizers: (1) Their method is force (v. 12a); (2) their motive is fear (v. 12b); (3) their consistency is flawed (v. 13a); and (4) their goal is to flaunt (v. 13b). He then evaluates himself by (1) revealing his goal (v. 14), (2) reiterating his perspective on nationalism (vv. 15–16), (3) and declaring his justification for being right: he has been persecuted (v. 17).

**David Platt**: Main Idea: Paul summarizes some of the major themes of the letter as he contrasts his cross-centered ministry with the self-exalting ministry of the false teachers.

## **I. A Cross-Centered Conclusion (6:11)**

### **II. Cross-Centered Contrasts (6:12-18)**

- A. A cross-centered life is humble not prideful (6:12-13).
- B. A cross-centered life boasts in the cross not self (6:14a).
- C. A cross-centered life treasures Christ not the world (6:14b).
- D. A cross-centered life values spiritual transformation not external ritual (6:15-16).
- E. A cross-centered life walks in truth not error (6:16).
- F. A cross-centered life seeks to please Christ not man (6:17-18).

**Richard Longenecker**: The subscription of Galatians (6:11–18) highlights three matters that are to the fore in all that Paul has written regarding the judaizing threat previously in the letter:

- (1) the motivation of the Judaizers as Paul saw it (vv 12–13);
- (2) the centrality of the cross in the Christian gospel (v 14); and
- (3) the nature of a proper Christian lifestyle as believers attempt to express their faith in the circumstances of their day (v 15).

Then there is an expanded peace benediction pronounced on all those who view the Christian life in such a way as set out in v 15 (v 16), which is followed by a further comment of warning and authority (v 17) and a grace benediction (v 18). Thus the subscription provides important clues for understanding the issues discussed throughout Galatians, particularly those having to do with the judaizing threat brought into the churches by certain legalistically oriented Jewish Christians, for it not only summarizes the main points dealt with earlier in the letter but also allows us to cut through all of the verbiage and see matters in their essence as Paul saw them.

**David deSilva:** The peroration (or conclusion) of an address could be expected to attend to a number of goals.

- It might provide a **closing summary** of the position advanced or course of action urged in the address.
- It might seek to **arouse strategic emotions** among the audience, to leave them in a frame of mind especially well suited to adopt the speaker's agenda for their situation.
- It might give some parting attention to **issues of credibility**, both affirming the speaker's own credibility and taking parting shots at the credibility of rival speakers or opponents, thus "disposing the hearer favourably towards oneself and unfavourably towards the adversary" (Aristotle, Rhetoric 3.19.1).

Paul's closing lines in Galatians admirably and succinctly achieve all of these purposes for his own communiqué to his converts as they stand poised to make a decision about what course of action they will take (individually or collectively). Paul reaffirms his own credibility and his investment in his hearers (6:11, 14, 17–18), suggests two self-centered motives driving the rival teachers and calling their reliability and good will into question (6:12–13), and reminds the hearers of the major issues at stake here (6:15–16).

#### (:11) **ASIDE: AUTHENTICITY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE EPISTLE**

*"See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."*

**Timothy George:** But why did Paul write in such large letters, that is, in Greek uncials rather than in the smaller cursive script? Much speculation has been given to this question. Was it Paul's poor eyesight (cf. 4:15) that required him to write in this unusual manner? Or was his writing hand twisted or defective as a result of some harsh persecution he had received? Was Paul simply reflecting the fact that he wrote not as a professional scribe but as a workman whose hands were more accustomed to shaping leather and making tents than to cultivating the kind of precise penmanship many of his readers would perhaps expect from a religious teacher? Do the "large letters" signify that Paul was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" more familiar with the large Semitic characters of his mother tongue than with the congested traffic of a Greek sentence? All of these are intriguing possibilities, but none of them can be set forth with certainty. It is more likely, as Lightfoot said, that "the boldness of the handwriting answers to the force of the apostle's convictions. The size of the characters will arrest the attention of his readers in spite of themselves." So, in addition to authenticating the letter as genuine and attesting that he had "meant what he said," Paul wanted to underscore and reemphasize both the central message of the letter and his own personal investment in it.

**Donald Guthrie:** At this point the apostle may have taken the pen from the amanuensis and have added the concluding remarks in his own handwriting. If so, he felt it to be necessary to draw special attention to this, no doubt because the change of script would

have been noticed only by the reader when the epistle was read aloud, and even he might well have overlooked the significance of the change.

**David deSilva:** The amplitude of the characters signals the urgency of the matters he raises and his own investment in the outcome.

**Ben Witherington:** **Gal. 6:11** reminds us that Paul is not simply offering a speech or a discourse, but rather doing these things within an epistolary framework. As we shall see shortly, Paul is far more concerned with following rhetorical rather than epistolary conventions as he concludes Galatians, but nonetheless he does not fail to give at least a nod in the direction of the rules of first-century letter writing, as is evident here in this verse.

**Philip Ryken:** What had probably happened was this: According to his usual custom (e.g., **Rom. 16:22**), Paul had dictated most of this epistle to his amanuensis, or secretary. But he finished the document in his own handwriting, personally adding his autograph in order to give his letter to the Galatians the stamp of his apostolic authority. And he wrote his signature in large letters to underscore his conclusion. The last section of Galatians, therefore, is more than a hastily written postscript, the afterthought of an apostle. Instead, these verses constitute a **summary** of the entire letter. They place circumcision over against the cross, showing that justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone means boasting in the cross alone. To understand this is to understand Galatians. More than that, it is to understand the gospel.

**John MacArthur:** Paul may have used the somewhat unsightly lettering as a statement, saying, in effect, “Because of my poor eyesight, you know how hard it is for me to write by my own hand, but what I have to say is so important and urgent that I want you to have this letter in your hands as soon as possible, with as bold lettering as possible. Unlike the Judaizers, I have never tried to impress you with my scholarship, personal skills, or superficial formalities. When I first came to you, you accepted my message with gladness, although my bodily presence was unattractive. This epistle is not written attractively, either, but I hope you will receive its message with the same urgency with which it is sent.”

**Richard Longenecker:** The subscription of Galatians contains no greetings, whether directly from Paul himself, indirectly using the readers as his agents, or simply passing on the greetings of others (the reference to “*all the brothers with me*” at **1:2** of the salutation is no exception, for there endorsement rather than greeting is to the fore)—probably reflecting something of the strained relations between Paul and his converts that is evident throughout the body of the letter. Likewise, the subscription has no expression of joy, no request for prayer, and no doxology. Each of these items would have assumed a relationship of fellowship and thankfulness between Paul and his readers such as cannot be found elsewhere in the letter.

## **I. (:12-13) LEGALISTS SHUN THE PERSECUTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

### **A. Concerned with Their Worldly/Religious Reputation = Man-pleasers**

*“Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh”*

**Ben Witherington:** We must presume, I think, that the agitators were concerned about their honor rating and relationship with local Jews in Galatia, and wished to be able to report to them that they were proselytizing Gentiles and that in due course they would come around to accepting the Mosaic Law including circumcision in addition to what they believed about Jesus. Gradualism was after all a widely accepted approach in early Judaism to the acceptance of Gentiles within the people of God, as the existence of God-fearers in the synagogues shows. In this way the agitators could maintain friendly contact in and with the local synagogues as well as with the Christian community in Galatia, and furthermore could report to Jerusalem that an approach satisfactory to the most conservative Jewish Christians, and presumably various Jews as well, was being pursued on the mission field. The above scenario best accounts for all the data in Galatia.

**Ronald Fung:** The three motives are closely related: a good showing in the flesh provides not merely an escape from persecution (by humans) but also a ground of boasting (before both humans and God). Of these three, it is the last—that of boasting—which appears to be the basic motive.

### **B. Conformed to the Accepted Legalistic Rites of the Culture = Compromisers**

*“try to compel you to be circumcised”*

**George Brunk:** **Galatians 6:12** is the clearest statement that the opponents were trying to convince the Galatian Gentile Christians to be circumcised (cf. **5:2**). In recounting the Jerusalem meeting in **2:3** Paul used the word *compel* to describe the pressure that some were exerting on others to be circumcised. The NRSV translation *try to compel* implies that the teachers may not yet have succeeded in their compelling. This rendering of the Greek verb is possible, but a more straightforward translation would be *those who are compelling you to be circumcised*, without implying either success or lack of success in that effort.

### **C. Concealed from Persecution for the Cross of Christ = Cowards**

*“simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ”*

**Robert Gromacki:** If the Judaizers had disavowed the necessity of circumcision, they would have been ostracized by the Jewish communities. They would have been excommunicated from the synagogues, exploited financially, and probably harmed physically. The Judaizers knew that, thus they were afraid to take a stand for justification by faith alone. They were more closely identified with the Pharisees and the priests than they were with the apostles.

**Thomas Schreiner:** Paul insists that their avoidance of persecution reflects their dismissal of the cross of Christ. One is righteous either by circumcision or by the cross as far as Paul is concerned—either by the law or by Christ. By promoting circumcision these opponents avoided the offense of the cross (cf. **5:11**). At the same time they lost any benefit in what Christ has done (**5:2–4**). One cannot trust in circumcision and the cross at the same time, for the cross assigns salvation to the Lord, while circumcision focuses on human obedience.

**Philip Ryken:** The Judaizers said that circumcision was necessary to belong to God’s covenant, but their real motivation was fear. They were afraid of what other Jews would say and do if they found out that they were worshiping with Gentiles. It would be much easier to defend their involvement with Christianity if they could say that the Gentiles in their house church kept the law of Moses. If only the Gentiles would agree to be circumcised like Jews, it would solve everything. Deep down, they were not willing to be persecuted for the cause of Christ.

**D. Confused about Their Own Obedience to the Law = Hypocrites**

*“For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves”*

**E. Conceited because They Have Been Successful in Attracting a Following = Selfishly Ambitious**

*“but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh”*

**Robert Gromacki:** The Judaizers were a bossy bunch. They attempted to impose legalism on the Galatians. They wanted to make converts.

**Philip Ryken:** This was a strange boast to make, and it shows how important circumcision had become to the Jews. Apparently, the more foreskins they collected, the more impressed people would be back home in Jerusalem. The Judaizers were not really concerned about whether or not the Galatians kept God’s law; they just wanted to brag about how many converts they had made. . . Their ministry was all for show.

Showing off is one of the differences between true and false religion. False religion gets caught up in externals, like attendance figures and worship rituals. Outward religion is what cult leaders strive for when they pressure members to recruit new “converts.” It is what churches are after when they seek to entertain rather than to edify, or when they base salvation on what people do for God rather than on what God has done for them.

**John MacArthur:** The Judaizers who were circumcised did not even sincerely try to live by the standards of the Mosaic Law, much less by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were not even honest Jews, much less genuine Christians, Paul implies. Their religion was pure pretense, a sham display put on for the benefit of others. They performed the easy, outward surgery on each other, but never lived out the rest of God’s law.

They were greatly concerned about making proselytes to their perverted form of the gospel, which was symbolized not by baptism but circumcision. They desire to have

you circumcised, Paul told the Galatians, in order that they may boast in your flesh. Although they themselves never kept it, the Judaizers zealously worked to win converts to the Law, so they could brag about their effectiveness in gaining proselytes.

## **II. (:14-16) LEGITIMATE DISCIPLES BOAST ONLY IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND FOCUS ONLY ON THE NEW CREATION =THE ONLY 2 THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER**

### **A. (:14) The Cross of Christ Means Everything = Objective Focal Point**

#### 1. It Is the Only Source for Boasting

*“But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”*

**Ben Witherington:** In Paul’s view the present evil age exists, but has been dealt a death blow by the crucifixion of Jesus. All of the world’s basic values and assumptions and operating procedures have been put on notice that they are passing away (cf. **1 Cor. 7:31**). What really matters are the new eschatological realities brought about because of the death of Christ. In Paul’s view, even the Law, as well as other good things about the material world, are part of the things that are passing away or are fading in glory (cf. **2 Cor. 3**). Having lost their controlling grip on a human life when Christ came and died, one must not submit to such forces again, but rather live on the basis of the new eschatological realities. The new age has already dawned and Christians should live by its light and follow the path it illuminates.

**Philip Ryken:** We can boast about Christ crucified, however, only if we renounce anything and everything we can do to save ourselves. When it comes right down to it, although there are many religions, there are only two religious options: **glorying in ourselves and glorying in the cross**. To glory in the cross is to stop trusting in our own merits—our church attendance, worship style, devotional habits, social involvement, theological orthodoxy, or number of converts—and to start trusting in the merits of Jesus Christ alone. The cross rejects any merely human attempt to please God. It declares that “sinners may be justified before God and by God, not because of any works of their own, but because of the atoning work of Christ; not because of anything that they have done or could do, but because of what Christ did once, when He died.”

**Kathryn Greene-McCreight:** For Paul, conforming to the cross is his pride. Boasting is, in itself, not the problem; the danger lies in the object of the boasting: “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord*” (**1 Cor. 1:31**). Even the places where Paul might seem to boast in his own ministry, he makes clear that his pride is in the power of God working through him. Paul speaks of boasting in Christ and in his converts, especially among the Corinthians. Here in Galatians, Paul boasts specifically in the cross, the instrument of execution that, through the power of Christ’s resurrection, brings life (**2:19–21; 5:24**).

#### 2. It Is the Instrument of Death to the World in My Life

*“through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”*

**John MacArthur:** The first reason Paul gives for his glorying in the cross is its power to free him from bondage to the world system of evil. The world translates *kosmos* (the opposite of *kaos*, from which we get the English chaos) and speaks of an ordered system. Our word cosmetic (derived from *kosmos*) has the basic meaning of covering up disorder with something that brings order. In the New Testament, *kosmos* refers to the order of the evil world system ruled by Satan and his agents (see **John 12:31; 14:30; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; Eph. 2:2**). The life of a person apart from Jesus Christ is the life of a victim of that system. It is a meaningless life, a life with no hopeful plan, purpose, or reason for being. It is also a life ruled by the flesh, which naturally and inevitably follows the system of evil promoted by the world, whether in gross immorality or simply in day-to-day self-gratification.

The person without Christ is often haunted by the past. He cannot free himself from the guilt of things he has done and failed to do. Yet he has no way of relieving his guilt or his anxiety. He is often enthralled with the future, continually expecting tomorrow to bring better things and more meaning; but it never does, and life becomes a pile of frustrated dreams. Or he may decide hedonistically to live just for the day, taking all he can while he can. Because physical life is all he can see or cares about, he declares with ancient Greeks who denied the resurrection, “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (**1 Cor. 15:32**). In one way or another, every unbeliever is in bondage to the futilities and frustrations of the world.

The person who belongs to Jesus Christ, however, is freed from the world’s evil and hopelessness. He knows that his past, present, and future sins are forgiven through Christ’s death, that his present life is in the Holy Spirit’s care and strength, and that his future life is as secure in heaven as if he were already there. Everything a believer ultimately treasures is in heaven. His heavenly Father is there, his Savior is there, his eternal home is there, and his reward is there. His greatest hopes are there and, although they are yet to be realized, they are assured and secured by the Lord. “*He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus,*” Paul declares (**Phil. 1:6**).

But a believer’s blessings are not all in the future. In this present life he has the awareness of God’s presence and love and peace, the consciousness that God is alive and that he himself is alive because of what Christ accomplished on the cross on his behalf. He knows that he has been blessed “*with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*” chosen “*in Him before the foundation of the world, [to] be holy and blameless before Him,*” in love “*predestined . . . to adoption as [a son] through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,*” and that he has “*redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of [his] trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*” (**Eph. 1:3-8**).

In light of the immeasurable blessings of the cross, Paul therefore says, the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. As noted earlier, *kosmos* (world) here refers to Satan’s spiritual system under which humanity is now in bondage because of sin. In a more specific aspect it refers to Satan’s vast system of false religions, all of which are grounded in human merit and works righteousness. “*The whole world lies in the power*



*of the evil one,” John declares (1 John 5:19). Whether a person is religious or atheistic or agnostic, if he does not know Christ he is captive to the satanic system of the world. Reminding them of their pre-Christian lives, Paul told the Ephesians, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph. 2:1-3).*

The world is corrupt (2 Pet. 1:4) and is going to be judged (1 Cor. 11:32), and everyone who is identified with that system is corrupt and will be judged with it. But the Christian is freed from the world’s corruption and judgment. The idea of the world and the believer being crucified to each other means they are dead to each other. As in the case of the flesh being crucified (5:24), it does not mean the world has no more influence over the believer, but that its dominion is broken and he is no longer in total bondage to it. The death blow has been dealt to the world system, so that soon it will not exist at all. It is still in the throes of dying, and it can still touch the believer with its corruption. In the meanwhile, the Christian’s citizenship is no longer in the evil world system but “*in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).*

*“I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world,” Jesus prayed to His Father. “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. . . . And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. . . . I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:6, 11, 15-16).*

The phrase the world has been crucified to me also relates to the believer’s spiritual position before God, to the historical fact of his trusting in Christ for salvation and his spiritual union with Christ through His death on the cross. “*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world,” John tells us, “and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).* When a person receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, sin becomes a dead issue, the law becomes a dead issue, and the world becomes a dead issue.

In light of the specific danger of the Judaizers, Paul was saying, in effect, “That part of the world system called Judaism is crucified to me and I to Judaism. It is dead to me and I am dead to it. We no longer have any part in each other.” Whatever the particular manifestation of the world system a person is trapped in, his only escape is through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which he becomes dead to his old life and his old life becomes dead to him. “*Our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin*

*might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:6-7).*

The phrase *and I to the world* relates to the Christian’s practical living before God. The faithful believer has no more compelling interest in the things of the world, though he still falls prey to its lusts. Just as they have become dead to him, he becomes dead to them. Obviously it makes no sense to associate with a corpse, which is the reason Paul asked the Colossians, “*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? . . . If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 2:20-22; 3:1-3).*

**B. (:15) New Life -- Not Dead Flesh – Should be the Subjective Focal Point**

*“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”*

**David deSilva:** Inclusion in the household of God, among the children of Abraham, is not effected through circumcision, nor does uncircumcision exclude one.

**Richard Longenecker:** The nub of Paul’s purpose in writing Galatians and the focal point of his subscription is to be found here in v 15. He has spoken of the Judaizers’ motivation in vv 12–13 and the cross of Christ as bringing an end to any “mode of life which is characterised by earthly advantages” in v 14. Now he applies all this to the Galatian situation, stating the essence of his position in a maxim. Following the statement of this maxim, Paul pronounces a “peace benediction” on “*all those who follow this rule*” in v 16. . .

What, then, is the epitome of Paul’s teaching vis-à-vis the Judaizers’ claim that all Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles, must live a nomistic lifestyle in conformity to the Mosaic commandments? It is simply this: that all external expressions of the Christian faith are to be understood as culturally relevant but not spiritually necessitated, for all that really matters is that the Christian be “*a new creation*” and that he or she express that new work of God in ways reflective of being “*in Christ*” and directed by “*the Spirit*.” Paul is not against external expressions of one’s faith per se, nor against all cultic rituals. One’s spiritual life cannot be simply internal; it must also be expressed externally in acts of worship to God and service on behalf of God to people. But Paul is against the Judaizers’ attempt to make Gentile believers conform to Jewish laws. For while maintaining continuity with his redemptive activity for his people Israel, God has done a new thing through the work of Christ. For life now “*in Christ*” is to be lived not in the context of laws but in the context of “*the Spirit*.” It is not just “*re-creation*” that God effects “*in Christ*” and by “*the Spirit*,” thereby taking believers back to some primordial state. Rather, what God has done “*in Christ*” and by “*the Spirit*” is to effect a “*new creation*.” Therefore, “*all that matters*” (ἅλλᾶ) for the Christian is the fact of

being “*a new creation*,” with that newness of creation reflected externally in culturally relevant lives of worship and service.

**Ronald Fung:** Paul is saying in these two verses (vv. 14f.) that Christ, by virtue of his coming and his atoning death on the cross, has inaugurated and brought about a **new creation**: his cross marks an absolute break between the new and the old world. Therefore, what matters now is no longer circumcision or uncircumcision, since that distinction belongs to the old world, but participation in the new order of existence. This new order is characterized by a new relation to God which is bound to Christ and accepted by faith. The cross symbolizes this break, both in its objective significance and in its subjective meaning for Paul, and so has become Paul’s sole object of boasting. Here, too, we may discern an underlying connection between justification by faith and salvation history: the cross, which marks the line of demarcation between the old world and the new creation, also marks the line of demarcation between circumcision and the law on the one hand and justification by faith on the other, in that it rendered the former inoperative as a means of justification and brought the principle of faith into effect.

### C. (:16) The Blessing of God Falls Upon All Who Boast Only in the Cross

*“And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”*

**George Brunk:** The word *rule* does not mean regulation or law, but **standard of measurement**. Paul may have chosen the word deliberately to avoid the connotation of law while preserving truth as a standard (cf. *the truth of the gospel* in 2:5, 14; and *truth* in 4:16; 5:7) that governs the church. The Greek word is literally **canōn**, which later came to designate the Christian Scriptures as the standard of truth, or rule, for the church.

**John MacArthur:** The *Israel of God* refers to **Jewish believers in Jesus Christ**, to those who are spiritual as well as physical descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:7) and are heirs of promise rather than of law (v. 18). They are the **real Jews**, the true Israel of faith, like those referred to in **Romans 2:28-29** and **9:6-7**.

Alternate View seems preferable in light of the context:

**Richard Longenecker:** All of the views that take “*the Israel of God*” to refer to Jews and not Gentiles, while supportable by reference to Paul’s wider usage (or nonusage) of terms and expressions, fail to take seriously enough the **context** of the Galatian letter itself. For in a letter where Paul is concerned to treat as indifferent the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christians and to argue for the equality of Gentile believers with Jewish believers, it is difficult to see him at the very end of that letter pronouncing a benediction (or benedictions) that would serve to separate groups within his churches—whether he means by “*the Israel of God*” a believing Jewish remnant within the broader Church of both Jews and Gentiles, a nonjudaizing group of Jewish Christians in Galatia, or an eschatological Israel that is to be saved at the time of

Christ's return. Certain elements within Paul's other letters may be used to support one or the other of these views, but Galatians itself cannot easily be used in such a manner.

Rather, it seems better to argue that here Paul is using a self-designation of his Jewish-Christian opponents in Galatia—one that they used to identify their type of fulfilled Judaism vis-à-vis the official Judaism of their national compatriots (so, tentatively, **Betz**, Galatians, 323). Furthermore, this was a self-designation that they must have included in their message to Paul's Gentile converts, assuring them that by observing the God-given Jewish laws they would become fully "*the Israel of God*." The phrase itself is not found in the extant writings of Second Temple Judaism or later rabbinic Judaism, and does not appear elsewhere in Paul's letters. So it may be postulated that it arose amongst the Judaizers and became part of their message to Paul's Galatian converts. If that be the case, then Paul here climaxes his whole response to the judaizing threat in something of an ad hominem manner, implying in quite telling fashion that what the Judaizers were claiming to offer his converts they already have "*in Christ*" by faith: that **they are truly children of Abraham** together with all Jews who believe, and so properly can be called "*the Israel of God*" together with all Jews who believe.

**Nijay Gupta:** Paul's main point in **Galatians 6:16**, often lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate, is that Jew and gentile are both welcome and blessed in the household of God, not because of circumcision (or uncircumcision) but simply because of Jesus, crucified and risen, Lord and friend, Son and brother, opening up a pathway to include many brothers and sisters in the family (**Rom 8:29**). The rival teachers made their arguments for a circumcision-oriented path to Abrahamic sonship—they saw that as the only way to blessing and peace and mercy. Paul rejected that idea firmly. The circumcision requirement belongs to an old era; what matters now is Christ's work in new creation and living by faith expressed in love.

### **(:17) VALIDATION OF THE APOSTLE'S SPIRITUALITY = THE SCARS OF PERSECUTION (FROM IDENTIFICATION WITH THE CROSS OF CHRIST)**

*"From now on let no one cause trouble for me,  
for I bear on my body the brandmarks of Jesus"*

**Philip Ryken:** In the Greek world, the word *stigmata* was sometimes used to refer to the branding of a slave. Such usage would be appropriate in Paul's case because his scars marked him as a servant of God. But **John Calvin** drew a different comparison. After describing all the "imprisonment, chains, scourging, blows, stonings and every kind of ill treatment which he [Paul] had suffered for the testimony of the Gospel," **Calvin** said: "For even as earthly warfare has its decorations with which generals honour the bravery of a soldier, so Christ our leader has His own marks, of which He makes good use in decorating and honouring some of His followers. These marks, however, are very different from the others; for they have the nature of the cross, and in the sight of the world they are disgraceful.

**David deSilva:** Paul's scars are the marks that show whose he is, in whose service he labors. They are also the marks of his sincerity in his preaching. Despite the opposition he encountered and the physical pains he endured, Paul had not altered the message that God had entrusted to him, but rather had proven himself a loyal messenger. He was not a coward, nor was he an opportunist. Unlike the rival teachers (**6:12–13**), he has been willing to suffer beatings and whippings for telling the truth about what God has done in Jesus, however unpopular this stance has made him with those same people whom the rivals fear. These same scars are also proof that Paul has not “preached circumcision” where it suited him (**5:11**); he has preached the Torah-free gospel wherever he has gone, even when it meant being whipped for it. The absence of such marks on the bodies of the rival teachers becomes, at the same time, a stroke against them. Their smooth skin proves that they are unwilling to face the hostility that the “*truth of the gospel*” arouses (**6:12**). Paul thus asserts here at the end the physical evidence of his unassailable credibility. On this basis he commands that “*no one keep making trouble for me*” by calling his gospel or apostleship into question, as the rival teachers have done.

**Ronald Fung:** The “*brand-marks of Jesus*” in Paul's body stand in antithesis to the mark of circumcision in the flesh of the Judaizers' converts: if the Judaizers boast in circumcision as the sign of God's covenant with Israel (cf. **Rom. 2:25–29**) and in the circumcised flesh of their converts (**Gal. 6:13**), Paul appeals to the marks of Jesus as the new eschatological sign marking the Church as the true circumcision (**Phil. 3:3**) and the new Israel.

### **(:18) CLOSING BENEDICTION**

*“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.”*

**Howard Vos:** Then, after all the sorrow and anxiety the Galatians had cost him, Paul ends the epistle with “*brethren*” (it comes at the end of the verse in the original). Of all the benedictions at the end of Paul's epistles, only this one has this term of endearment. In this way he reminds them of their unity in the faith and their relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Nijay Gupta:** Galatians, this fiery, radical message of cruciformity and Spirit-transformation, ends with a **word of grace**. Paul's ultimate desire for the Galatian church was that they know deeply the love and grace of God shown in Jesus Christ. Before the final “*amen*” of the letter, we find the crucially important reference to the Galatians as “*brothers and sisters*” (adelphoi). This beautifully sophisticated letter is all about **family**. This is a household of faith welcome to all, where everyone has equal standing, and grace and love abound. To add “*amen*” is to commit oneself to believing that Spirit is stronger than flesh, faith is stronger than law, and the cross is the true sign of life in the age of new creation. To confess “*amen*” six chapters and eighteen verses into Galatians is to say, Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: A simple life of faith in Jesus, following the man of the cross, and keeping in step with the

Holy Spirit, is all it takes to find your place in the great household of God, by God's grace and sacrificial love in Jesus Christ.

**Bruce Barton: No Turning Back –**

Paul's letter to the Galatians boldly declares the **freedom of the Christian**. Doubtless these early Christians in Galatia wanted to grow in the Christian life, but they were being misled by those who said this could be done only by keeping certain Jewish laws.

How strange it would be for a prisoner who had been set free to walk back into his or her cell and refuse to leave! How strange it would be for an animal, released from a trap, to go back inside it! How sad it would be for a believer to be freed from the bondage of sin, only to return to rigid conformity to a set of rules and regulations!

If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have been set free. Instead of going back into some form of slavery, whether to legalism or to sin, use your freedom to live for Christ and serve him as he desires.

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) In what practical ways do we truly *make our boast in the cross*, despite any hostility or opposition or persecution. Do we stay focused on the simplicity of the gospel or does our Christian testimony get diluted into too many side issues?
- 2) What do we do just to gain the praise of men... just to "*make a good showing in the flesh*"? How concerned are we with how others evaluate us? How secure are we in living simply to be well-pleasing to our Lord and Savior?
- 3) What is there in the world system -- with its wealth and material possessions and variety of entertainment -- that still holds enough of an attraction for us to distract us from living for Christ? Have we experienced this same *crucifixion to the world* that the Apostle Paul talks about?
- 4) Do we bear any *brandmarks of persecution* for our identification with the Cross of Christ? Why do we feel that others should consider our testimony to be authentic?

\* \* \* \* \*

**QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:**

**John Piper:** " all is said and done and the pen is in his own hand the two things he wants to warn us against most are these: the fear of human opposition and the love of human praise.

Why are these so dangerous? Because if your mindset is governed by the fear of being rejected and the love of being praised you cannot embrace Christ crucified. Legalists have to substitute morality for the cross of Christ because the cross puts an end to all pride and lays you open to persecution. But according to these two verses they want to avoid persecution and they are proud of their religious zeal. And so they reject the cross. The cross of Christ is a great stumbling block for people who do not have the grace to humble themselves before God and man.

**David Holwick:** First Century had even greater problems with the cross than us.

- 1) Polite Roman society would never mention the word “*cross*.”
  - a) Instrument not just of death, but torture.
  - b) Citizens could not be crucified - reason Paul beheaded.
- 2) Jews had further stumbling block that a crucified person is cursed by God, according to OT.

**William Barclay:** Often a master branded his slaves with a mark that showed them to be his. Most likely what Paul means is that the scars of the things he had suffered for Christ are the brands which show him to be Christ's slave. In the end it is not his apostolic authority that he uses as a basis of appeal; it is the wounds he sustained for Christ's sake.

**Scot McKnight:** Paul's conclusion to his letter to the Galatians does not contain the greetings, request for prayer, or doxology section that are often found in his other letters. Furthermore, his emphasis here is the “Concluding Summary.” In no other Pauline letter do we find such an emphasis... one final time he evaluates the issue of the Judaizers (**vv. 12-17**). This conclusion brings everything to a head. What confronts us here is Paul's adamant opposition to the nationalism of the Judaizers and their cultural imperialism. He is set against any presentation of the gospel that does not let surrender to Christ and life in the Spirit have their full sway. All that matter now, after Christ and the Spirit, is the “*new creation*” . . .

Paul finds four problems with the Judaizers:

- (1) Their method is force (**v. 12a**);
- (2) their motive is fear (**v. 12b**);
- (3) their consistency is flawed (**v. 13a**); and
- (4) their goal is to flaunt (**v. 13b**).

He then evaluates himself by

- (1) revealing his goal (**v. 14**),
- (2) reiterating his perspective on nationalism (**vv. 15-16**),
- (3) and declaring his justification for being right: he has been persecuted (**v. 17**).

**Herman Ridderbos:** Re the **Benediction** -- The grace represents the summary and the presupposition of all that Christ gives. The notion of the unearned, the undeserved, is contained in it. And also the fulness of this good, this salvation, now and in eternity.

Once more he mentions all the names of the Lord. They emphasize His glory, His saving significance, and His divine commission, respectively.

**Thomas Schreiner: The New Creation**

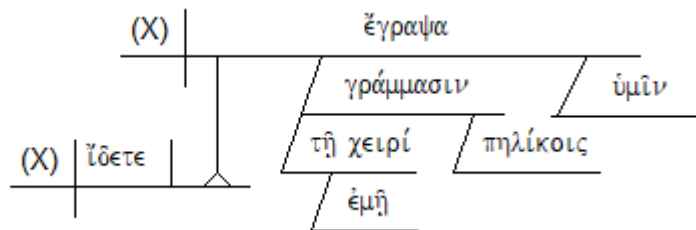
What matters in life, Paul reminds us here, is the **new creation**. Our future inheritance does not involve a disembodied existence. We will not float on clouds in the sky in an ethereal and immaterial sphere. We will be raised from the dead and enjoy the coming physical new heavens and new earth (**2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1**; cf. **Isa 65:17; 66:22**). The curse that blights the present world (**Gen 3:17–19**) will be lifted, and “*sorrow and sighing will flee away*” (**Isa 35:10**). The groaning of the present creation will cease, and the liberty promised to the children of God and to the created order will dawn (**Rom 8:18–25**). The promise of a new creation teaches us that issues like circumcision and uncircumcision do not ultimately matter. Rituals and human practices are not fundamental; what is important is whether someone is a new creation in Christ (**2 Cor 5:17**).

In addition, the teaching on the new creation shows us that our work in this world is significant. The created world is not a necessary evil. It is the good and beautiful work of God, and hence our work in this world has significance. Every painting, every building, every meal made, and every work of landscaping image the work of our Creator and must not be dismissed as insignificant. The current world order is passing away. Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a futility in our work in this world.

There is both continuity and discontinuity with the world to come, and hence we must not think that our labor in this world will ever bring in the new heaven and new earth. Any utopian scheme is destined to fail before the arrival of the new creation. We must beware of the siren song of human perfectability, which sings the chorus that we can enjoy paradise during the present evil age. As believers we are to be optimistic but realistic, full of faith and hope without denying the curse that still rests on the present world.

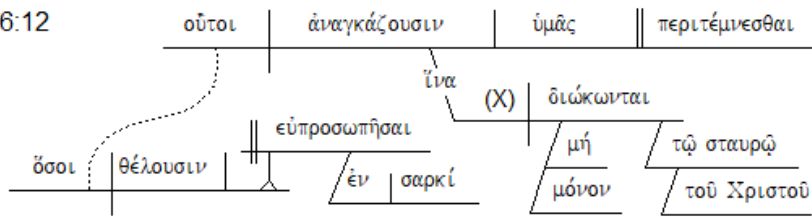
**Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:**

Gal 6:11

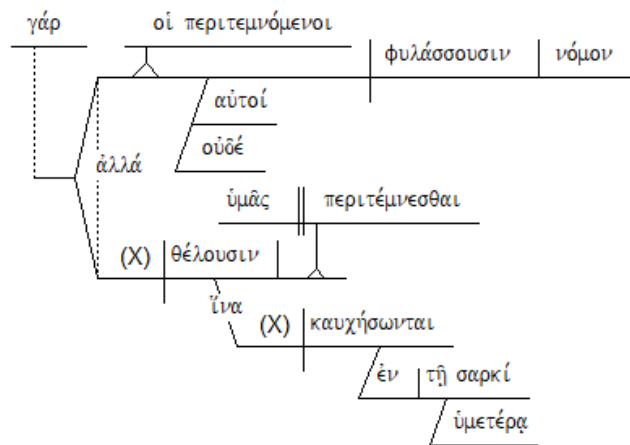




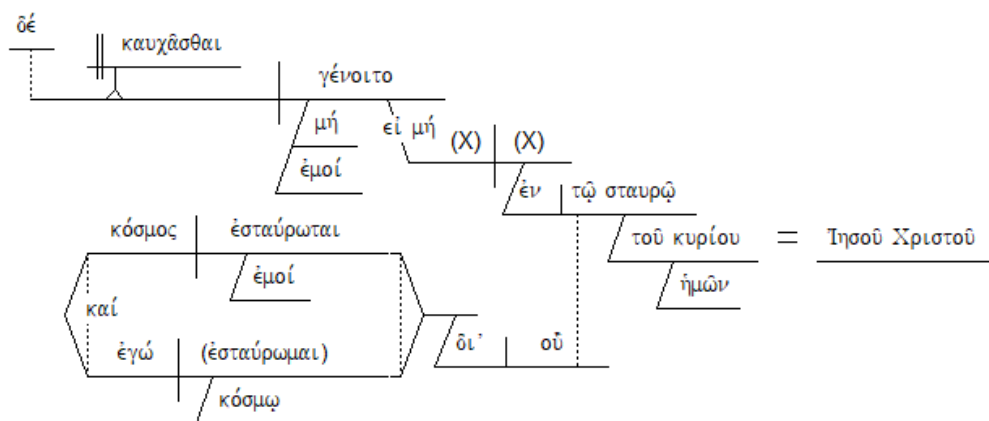
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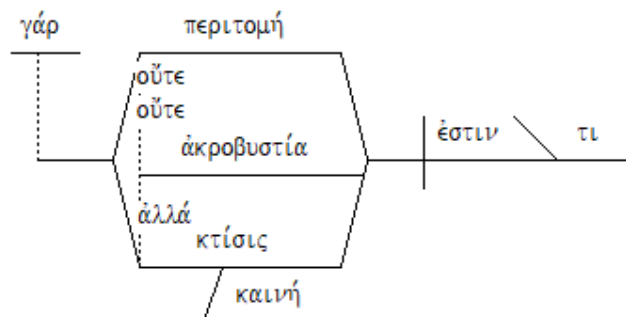
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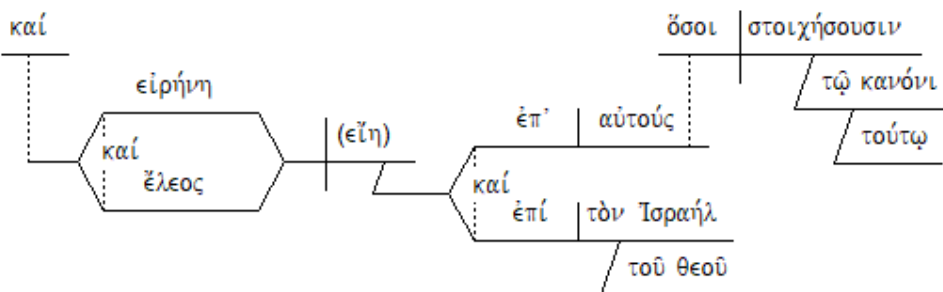
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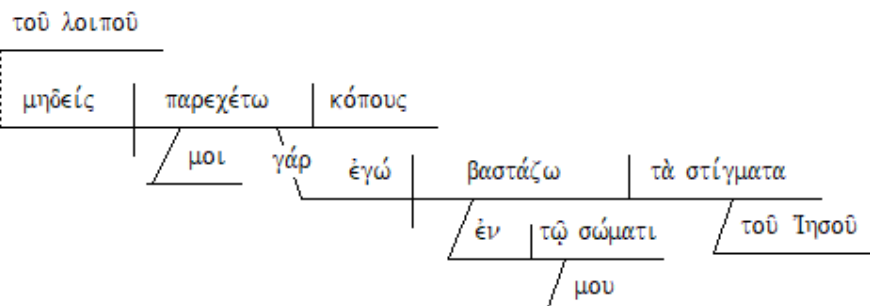
Gal 6:15



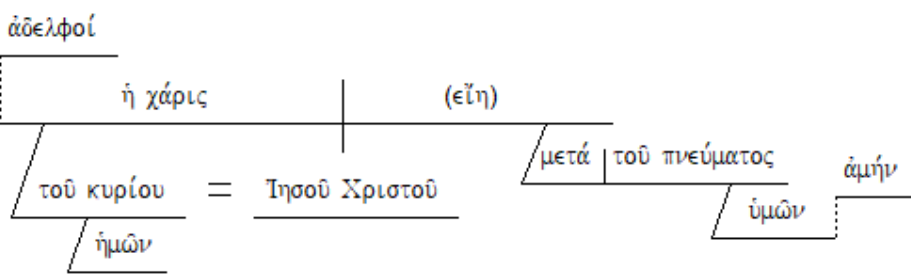
Gal 6:16



Gal 6:17



Gal 6:18



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