

Notes on Galatians

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Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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

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

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

The traditional opinion held that the recipients lived in the geographical district known as "Galatia," located in the northern part of the Roman province, also called "Galatia," in Asia Minor.² This view holds that Paul founded these churches on his second missionary journey, after the Spirit forbade him to preach in the province of Asia (Acts 16:6). Paul therefore could have written this epistle during his third journey, either from Ephesus about A.D. 54, or from Corinth about A.D. 57.³



The main arguments for this "North Galatian theory" are as follows: First, the popular use of the term "Galatians" usually

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

²John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, p. xxviii; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:272-73.

³W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 477, preferred Corinth, as did J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, p. 55, and H. A. Ironside, *Expository Messages on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 9. Eadie, p. lii, preferred Ephesus.

signified people in this area. Second, in writing Acts, Luke normally referred to geographical districts, rather than Roman provinces. Third, there is some similarity between the "Galatians," as Paul referred to them in this epistle, and the Gallic inhabitants of northern Galatia. Fourth, Paul traveled through this region during his second journey (Acts 16:6-8).

The more popular view today, since about the middle of the eighteenth century, maintains that Paul wrote to the churches, located in the Roman province of Galatia, that he founded on his *first* missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:38-39, 46, 48; 14:3, 8-10).⁴ The arguments for this "South Galatian theory" are as follows:

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

If Paul wrote this epistle to the churches of South Galatia, as I think he did, he probably did so at one of two times. If Paul's visit referred to in Galatians 4:13 is the same one described in Acts 16:6, he must have written this epistle after the Jerusalem Council (i.e., in or after A.D. 49). Rendall and Ridderbos believed that Paul wrote it from Corinth, probably in A.D. 50 or 51.⁵ Nevertheless, it seems more likely that Galatians 4:13 refers to the visit described in Acts 14:21, so Paul must have written the epistle before the Jerusalem Council (i.e., before or in A.D. 49). Assuming the earlier date, Paul probably wrote Galatians from Antioch of Syria, shortly after his first missionary journey, and before the Jerusalem Council.⁶ This would make "Galatians" Paul's first inspired epistle. Another, less likely possibility, is that he wrote it from Ephesus during his third missionary journey.⁷

⁴F. Rendall, "The Epistle to the Galatians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:127; E. de W. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. xlv; Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, pp. 22-31; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 3-18; Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty*, pp. 51-54; James M. Boice, "Galatians," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 412-17; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 1-3; Longenecker, pp. lxxiii-lxx; Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, pp. 15-20; Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*; Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 27; Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 458-61; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:683; Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty*, pp. 9-13.

⁵Rendall, 3:17; Ridderbos, p. 31.

⁶Fung, pp. 22, 28; Longenecker, p. lxxxviii; Morris, p. 22; Campbell, p. 588; et al.

⁷See Richard B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 360; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:148..

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

The identity of the "Judaizers" is also important. Their method included discrediting Paul. The first two chapters of Galatians especially deal with criticisms leveled against him personally. His critics appear to have been Jews who claimed to be Christians, and who wanted Christians to submit to the authority of the Mosaic Law and its institutions. They probably came from Jerusalem, and evidently had a wide influence (cf. Acts 15). One man seems to have been their spokesman (3:1; 5:7, 10), though there were several Judaizers in Galatia, as the many references to "them" and "they," scattered throughout the epistle, suggest.⁸

"This short letter has an importance out of all proportion to its size. There is always a need for Paul's forthright setting out of the truth that justification comes only through faith in Christ, not by works."⁹

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

". . . what is indicated in the letter to the Galatians is *the inadequacy of the law for salvation*, and . . . what gets the emphasis in the letter to the Romans is this: that there is salvation *despite the transgression of God's holy law*."¹⁰

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

". . . there is not a single letter that is so generally regarded as authentic as is Paul's letter to the Galatians."¹¹

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-10
 - A. Salutation 1:1-5
 - B. Denunciation 1:6-10
- II. Personal defense of Paul's gospel 1:11—2:21
 - A. Independence from other apostles 1:11-24
 - 1. The source of Paul's gospel 1:11-17
 - 2. The events of Paul's early ministry 1:18-24

⁸For fuller discussions of these matters, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:72-89; Bruce, pp. 3-32, 41-56; Boice, pp. 412-20, and Fung, pp. 1-28.

⁹Carson and Moo, p. 473.

¹⁰Ridderbos, p. 22.

¹¹Ibid., p. 36.

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

MESSAGE

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

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

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

Galatians has been called the "Manifesto of Christian Liberty." This epistle explains that liberty: its nature, its laws, and its enemies. This little letter has at various times throughout church history called God's people out of the bondage of *legalism* back into

the "liberty of freedom." It has also been called "the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation."¹² Martin Luther loved it so much that he compared it to his wife.¹³

"He paid her the highest tribute when he called St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians 'my Katherine von Bora.'"¹⁴

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

The following three paragraphs will set forth its major revelations.

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

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

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

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

¹²Tenney, p. 15.

¹³Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke*, 40¹:2, cited by Longenecker, p. liii.

¹⁴Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 228.

All kinds of sin result from the tragedy of adding something to the one responsibility of faith.

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

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

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

Galatians also protests against the receivers of a different gospel (5:4). To add to faith is to trust ceremony, which is to deny Christ, which is to be cut off from Christ, which is to fall from grace. Ceremonies such as baptism and the Lord's Supper have a proper place in Christianity, but to make them necessary for justification is to deny Christ. A person is justified only when he or she says sincerely, "Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling." "Inviting Jesus into your heart" is not the biblical requirement for salvation. This metaphor describes what happens in regeneration, but it is not the clearest one to describe how to experience regeneration. Simply believing for oneself in Christ's saving work on the Cross is what is needed.

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

This letter warns us against adding any rite, or ceremony, or observance—to faith—in order to obtain God's acceptance. Such a practice cuts off those who rely on the ritual from Christ. Dr. William Culbertson, a former president of Moody Bible Institute, used to

say, "It's very hard to tell when the accretions to faith make faith invalid." Evangelists struggle with this difficulty when trying to assess whether a person is genuinely trusting Christ alone.

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

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

I sometimes compare the Christian life to a three-stage Saturn rocket. The first stage (*justification*) is an act of God alone, in which He starts us on our journey to a different world. Justification happens in a moment of time, when one trusts *in Christ alone* for his or her salvation. The second stage (*practical sanctification*) is a work that God does, but which the Christian can cooperate with by continuing to trust and obey the Lord, or can resist by saying no to the Lord. Christians play a part in their sanctification, which begins with justification and ends at glorification.

In our practical sanctification, we are moving away from where we have been, spiritually, toward where we will be, spiritually. The third stage is *glorification*. This is a work of God alone that takes place in a moment of time, like justification, and in which we finally touch down at our final destination spiritually. We do not need to do anything to qualify for glorification; God will glorify every true Christian, regardless of how far we have advanced in our sanctification. Glorification for Christians takes place at the Rapture of the church or at death, whichever comes first.

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

I like the story about the man who was standing at the pearly gates waiting to be admitted to heaven. Peter asked him, "Why should I let you into heaven?" The man replied, "I've been a good man." Peter responded, "Anything else?" The man said, "I've been a pastor." Again Peter asked, "Anything else?" The man said, "I was a missionary for 20 years." "Anything else?" repeated Peter. The man replied, "What's it going to take to get me in here, the grace of God?" Yes, it is only by God's grace that any of us will get into heaven.¹⁵

¹⁵Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:149-65.

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-10

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

A. SALUTATION 1:1-5

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

1:1 The nickname (cognomen) "Paul" is from the Latin *Paulus*, which means "little." The earliest physical description of Paul we have comes from a second-century apocryphal writing: *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. It described Paul 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."¹⁶ The apostle's Hebrew name was "Saul." As the apostle to the Gentiles, he consistently used his Gentile name, "Paul," in his epistles.

In his reference to himself, Paul emphasized his apostolic office. The Greek word translated "apostle" (*apostolos*) means "one who is sent." The New Testament uses this word in two ways: In its more restricted sense, the word means someone who had received a special commission from the risen Christ (i.e., Paul and the twelve apostles). In its more general sense, it refers to those sent with a message from God (as in Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). It even describes *Jesus* (Heb. 3:1). In Galatians, Paul always used "apostle" in the technical sense, to describe the Twelve and himself.

Paul contended that his apostleship did not originate "from men" (the apostles in Jerusalem, the leaders of the Antioch church, or others), nor did it come to him "through" men ("the agency of man"; e.g., Peter, James, Ananias, or whomever, as, for example, does the Roman Catholic papacy). Rather, "Jesus Christ," whom he described as equal with "God the Father," bestowed it on him: "through *Jesus Christ and God the Father*." Paul received his commission from Jesus in Damascus after his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:3-16).

¹⁶E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:354. For a photo of a portrait of Paul that exists in the catacomb of San Gennaro in Naples, Italy, see Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, fig. 171.

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

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

1:2 We cannot identify "all" the Christian brothers ("brethren," possibly included sisters) who were "with" Paul when he wrote this epistle, but certainly Barnabas and the Christians in the church in Syrian Antioch were likely part of this group.

The "churches of Galatia" were probably the churches in the southern Roman province of Galatia (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, et al.), rather than those in northern, ethnic Galatia.¹⁷ This is the only one of Paul's inspired letters that he addressed, that was neither to Christians in one specific town, nor to an individual.

". . . the Church as the total community is not a mere aggregate of individual congregations; rather the local church is the universal Church in its local manifestation."¹⁸

"The omission of any expression of praise in addressing the Galatians shows the extent of their apostasy . . ."¹⁹

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

"When Paul prays for grace on his friends, it is as if he said, 'May the beauty of the wonder of the undeserved love of God be on you, so that it will make your life lovely too.'"²⁰

The second word of greeting, "peace," defines not just the absence of hostility—but the totality of God's blessings. This word had become a standard Jewish greeting. Believers enjoy peace with God, and with other

¹⁷See the introduction to these notes above.

¹⁸Fung, p. 38.

¹⁹Lightfoot, p. 73.

²⁰William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 8.

people, because God has taken the initiative in extending His grace to them in Christ (cf. Num. 6:24-26). "Peace" always follows "grace" in Paul's salutations, because that is their logical and temporal order.

"In fact, 'grace' and 'peace' seem to be Paul's (and the NT's) shorthand way of epitomizing the essence of the gospel, with particular reference to its cause and its effect."²¹

The three-fold title "Lord Jesus Christ" indicates His exalted rank, His saving significance, and His divine commission—respectively.²²

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

"The Galatians had practically ignored the atoning death of Christ: comp. ii. 21, v. 4."²³

The purpose of the Lord's self-sacrifice was that He might "deliver us out of" the control of ("from") "this present evil age," i.e., the world system that dominates the inter-advent era during which we live. In contrast, the *age to come* (cf. Eph. 1:21) is the era in which righteousness dwells, when Jesus Christ—and later God the Father—will rule directly (i.e., the messianic kingdom and the new heavens and earth).

"'deliver' strikes the keynote of the epistle. The Gospel is a rescue, an emancipation from a state of bondage. See esp. iv. 9, 31, v. 1, 13."²⁴

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

²¹Longenecker, p. 7.

²²Fung, p. 39.

²³Lightfoot, p. 73.

²⁴Ibid.

"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."²⁵

"Another feature of this salutation is the extended description of the writer. . . . It conveys at once the impression of authority, which underlies the subsequent argument throughout the epistle."²⁶

B. DENUNCIATION 1:6-10

In these opening words, Paul rebuked his readers for turning away from the gospel that he had preached to them, and for turning toward "a different gospel." He accused them of being *religious turncoats!* He did so to impress them with the great folly of their action. Typically in Paul's epistles, he expressed his purpose for writing in his second paragraph. The fiery opening of this epistle presents it "like a lion turned loose in the arena of Christianity."²⁷

"An indignant expression of surprise takes the place of the usual thanksgiving for the faith of his converts. This is the sole instance where St Paul omits to express his thankfulness in addressing any church."²⁸

"The general proposition or *causa* of the letter is to persuade the Galatians to reject the Judaizers' nongospel and to continue in the true gospel Paul had preached to them."²⁹

1:6-7 In every other one of his canonical epistles (except 1 Timothy and Titus), Paul commended his readers before launching into the main subject of his letter, regardless of his general purpose in writing. Here he recorded no

²⁵Fung, p. 42. Cf. Ridderbos, p. 43; and Burton, p. 14.

²⁶Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 56.

²⁷Longenecker, p. lvii.

²⁸Lightfoot, p. 75.

²⁹Walter B. Russell III, "Rhetorical Analysis of the Book of Galatians, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):436. His previous article in this two-part series, "Rhetorical Analysis of the Book of Galatians, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:599 (July-September 1993):341-58, describes rhetorical analysis as an interpretive tool. See also Longenecker, pp. cv-cxiv, for rhetorical analyses and outlines.

such praise. Its absence stressed the seriousness of his readers' error and the urgency of his appeal.

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

The Galatian believers had begun to turn away "quickly," in the sense that not much time had elapsed between Paul's preaching to them and their turning away from his teaching, not that their apostasy had been rapid or speedy.³⁰ The Greek word *thaumazo* ("I am amazed") was a conventional expression in Greek letters that signaled astonishment, rebuke, disapproval, and disappointment.³¹ The Greek word *tacheos* ("quickly") also has the sense of easily (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 5:22). The One who had "called" the Galatians was God (cf. v. 15; 5:8).

". . . Paul's converts were in actuality recapitulating the scenarios of Israel's apostasies and rebuffing the very One whom they professed to be attempting to worship more adequately."³²

"Gospel," of course, means good news. However, the "gospel" that fascinated his readers was not good news. The Greek word *heteros*, meaning "another of a different kind," appears in verse 6, while *allos*, meaning "another of the same kind," occurs in verse 7. Sometimes these words are interchangeable (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:4), but here and elsewhere they indicate significant differences. Paul meant: "there is no other Gospel."³³ This new, "different" gospel was bad news. Teachers of false doctrine who were stirring up unrest had followed Paul. The root of the word translated "disturbing" (v. 7) is one that describes the opposite of what the word translated "peace" (v. 3) means. These false teachers were *distorting* the good news of Christ.

"The modern church has become less clear about the nature of the gospel, but it would do well to ponder the importance that Paul here attaches to distinctions between the true and false gospel."³⁴

³⁰Burton, p. 19.

³¹Longenecker, p. 11.

³²Ibid., p. 15.

³³Rendall, 3:152.

³⁴Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 62.

Paul consistently referred to the Galatian troublemakers in the third person, but addressed his readers in the second person. This strongly suggests that the false teachers originated outside the church, rather than from within it. We must deduce who they were from what Paul wrote about them in this epistle (cf. 1:6-9; 2:4-5; 3:1; 4:17; 5:10, 12; 6:12-13). Probably they were Jews who were putting pressure on Gentiles to believe and to live as religious Jews. This is the traditional view, as contrasted with the "two-opponent" view (i.e., Judaizers and libertinistic "pneumatics"), and the "Gnostic/syncretistic Jewish Christians" view (i.e., one group of opponents within Judaism with both Judaistic and libertinistic traits).³⁵

"The word *pervert* [or "distort"] is the Greek word *metastrepho*. It is a strong word, used by Dr. Luke in speaking of the sun *turned* to darkness (see Acts 2:20), and by James, speaking of laughter *turned* to mourning (see James 4:9). To attempt to change the gospel has the effect of making it the very opposite of what it really is. This is important to see."³⁶

1:8 Paul leveled his strongest verbal artillery against these teachers. Whoever they were, they apparently claimed the highest authority for their teaching, since Paul warned his readers to reject it—even if it were to come from angelic messengers sent directly from heaven. This is an example of hyperbole: exaggeration for the sake of emphasis.³⁷ By "accursed," Paul meant under God's judgment ("under the ban"), "set apart or dedicated to destruction." Islam claims that Mohammed received his revelations from the angel Gabriel, and Mormonism claims that Joseph Smith received his revelations from the angel Maroni.

"In Paul's eyes, the acknowledgment of Jesus as Messiah logically implied the abrogation of the law . . . If Christ displaced the law as the activating centre of Paul's own life, he equally displaced the law in the economy of God, in the ordering of salvation-history. Therefore, if the law was still in force as a way of salvation and life, the messianic age had not yet dawned, and Jesus accordingly was not the Messiah."³⁸

1:9 Paul even repeated his warning for emphasis. The prior warning ("as we have said before"), mentioned in verse 9, probably refers to what Paul had told them when he was with them in person, rather than to what he had

³⁵For further study of these views, see Walter B. Russell III, "Who Were Paul's Opponents in Galatia?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):329-50.

³⁶McGee, 5:153.

³⁷See Tenney, p. 138, for a chart of the figures of speech in Galatians.

³⁸Bruce, p. 83.

just said in verse 8.³⁹ "We" implies Paul and his fellow missionaries, not just Paul alone.

"The vehemence with which Paul denounces those who teach another gospel (literally, he says, 'Let them be damned') has bothered some commentators, as well as other readers of the letter. But this shows how little the gospel of God's grace is understood and appreciated and how little many Christians are concerned for the advance of biblical truth."⁴⁰

"Accursed" evidently refers to being under God's judgment, not just excommunication, since even an angel could be the possible object. Paul changed from the subjunctive mood of possibility, in verse 8, to the indicative mood of actuality in verse 9.

It is extremely serious to distort the gospel of God's grace and so mislead a person regarding his or her relationship to God. It can result in their eternal damnation!⁴¹

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

"There have always been preachers who have sought popular acclaim above all else, and there are some still. It is part of fallen human nature that even those charged with the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel can fall into the trap of trying to be popular rather than faithful."⁴²

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

". . . his uncompromising attitude as reflected in the severity of his language in condemning the counterfeit

³⁹Cf. Eadie, p. 28; Morris, p. 45; Burton, p. 29; Longenecker, p. 17.

⁴⁰Boice, p. 429.

⁴¹See Ironside, pp. 25-27.

⁴²Morris, p. 46.

gospel (vv. 8f.) is proof positive that he is no men-pleaser."⁴³

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

"Not long ago I listened to a local Southern California preacher on television. . . . He spoke of Christ's death and resurrection. But he failed to mention that the people to whom he was speaking were sinners and needed a Savior. He neglected to inform his audience that Jesus died for them and they needed to trust Him to be saved. Rather, he talked about commitment. He invited folk to commit their lives to Christ. Let us be honest, friend. Christ does not want your old life and He does not want mine. We have nothing to commit to Him. He wants to do something through us today. Oh, if only we could learn that!"⁴⁴

"Already in these opening verses the two key concepts in the letter have surfaced—gospel and grace."⁴⁵

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

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

". . . Paul was . . . following the logic of the Christian life: Because of who God is and what he has done (history) we must believe what he has said (theology) in order to live as he commands (ethics)."⁴⁶

A. INDEPENDENCE FROM OTHER APOSTLES 1:11-24

This is the first of three subsections in Paul's autobiographical account, which together comprise the historical portion of the epistle. This first section relates Paul's early Christian experience and his first meeting with the church leaders in Jerusalem. The other

⁴³Fung, p. 49.

⁴⁴McGee, 5:154.

⁴⁵Timothy George, *Galatians*, p. 102.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 66. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 3.

two subsections record his meeting with the Jerusalem leaders concerning the scope and sphere of his missionary work (2:1-10), and his confrontation with Peter in Antioch (2:11-21). The entire background section builds up to Paul's pronouncement that justification is *by faith alone*.

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

Paul clarified the source of his gospel message, in this pericope, to convince his readers that the gospel he had preached to them was the true gospel. What the false teachers were presenting, on the other hand, was heresy. He began an autobiographical section here (1:11—2:14). It fills one-fifth of the entire epistle. In this section, Paul went to great pains to prove that both his gospel, and his commission to preach it, came directly from Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road (vv. 15-16). It did not come to him from any intermediary. Wiersbe observed that Paul presented himself in this section as the persecutor (vv. 13-14), the believer (vv. 15-16b, 24), and the preacher (vv. 16c-23).⁴⁷

1:11-12 Whenever Paul wrote, "I would have you know" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; 15:1; 2 Cor. 8:1), he intended to draw special attention to what he was about to say. Paul did not receive his gospel from traditional sources (his teachers) nor did he learn it through traditional means (the curriculum of his formal education): "according to man . . . from man." "According to" (v. 11; Gr. *kata*) means "from." "The gospel" came to Paul as a special "revelation" *from* "Jesus Christ," and it was also, and primarily here, a revelation *of* Christ's Person—who Jesus Christ really is (v. 12)⁴⁸:

". . . it was the gospel of justification by faith which came to Paul as the result of a direct revelation of Jesus Christ."⁴⁹

". . . Christianity is not simply a religion, it is a divine revelation."⁵⁰

1:13-14 Paul's first step in proving that he had not received his gospel from men (vv. 11-12) was that, before his conversion, he was under no Christian influence whatsoever, but was, in fact, a violent opponent of the gospel.

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

⁴⁷Wiersbe, 1:686-89.

⁴⁸Burton, p. 43.

⁴⁹Fung, p. 54.

⁵⁰Ironside, p. 44.

42-48). Perhaps even the divine commendation of Phinehas' action in Num 25:11-13 rang in his ears . . . [cf. 2 Macc. 6:13]"⁵¹

Second, Paul (as Saul) had been an unusually promising young man, "advancing in Judaism" just before his conversion: "being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." Paul, as Saul, was at that very time surpassing his "contemporaries": he was then an "up and comer." As Saul, Paul had been in such a frame of mind as to make reception of the gospel impossible. The trajectory of his former life was aimed in the exact opposite direction from what it was now.

"This probably does not mean that he became more pious than they [Paul's contemporaries], but rather that he was more highly esteemed by those in positions of influence, which would have resulted in his being entrusted with more important assignments, such as the trip to Damascus during which he was converted."⁵²

The apostle's actions following that revelation on the Damascus Road were consistent with his having received a divine revelation. The whole direction of his life had changed. As "Saul" he had violently rejected the gospel—that as "Paul" he now preached—and had tried to stamp it out, believing it was blasphemous heresy. He had followed his "ancestral traditions" (his teachers' interpretations of the Old Testament). Moreover, he had been uncommonly "zealous" to obey them, to teach them, and to see that the Jews carried them out. "Beyond measure" (Gr. *hyperbole*) means "to an extraordinary degree."

"Paul's extreme zeal for the law as the reason for his persecution of the Church indicates that he probably belonged to the radical wing of the Pharisaic movement, perhaps the school of Shammai (certainly, Gal. 3:10 and especially 5:3 are more representative of that school than of the school of Hillel). If so, the likelihood is that he was rather hostile to the Gentiles and had little interest in winning them for Judaism."⁵³

"Paul's main point in vv. 13-14 was to show that there was nothing in his religious background and preconversion life that could have in any way prepared him for a positive response to the gospel. Quite the contrary."⁵⁴

⁵¹Longenecker, p. 28.

⁵²Morris, p. 53.

⁵³Fung, p. 72. His quotation is from S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, pp. 39-40.

⁵⁴George, p. 113.

"Paul was saved, not *in* Judaism, not *by* Judaism, but *from* Judaism."⁵⁵

1:15-17 Paul next drew evidence that his gospel did not come to him from other Christians who witnessed his conversion experience. What totally revolutionized Paul was God's choice to reveal Himself to him (cf. Isa. 6:1-9; 49:1-6; Jer. 1:4; Ezek. 1:4—3:11).⁵⁶ God had taken the initiative, completely "in (through) His grace," and Paul had simply responded to that grace. God's purpose for Paul, generally, was to manifest Christ through him ("was pleased to reveal His Son in me"), which is His purpose for every believer (cf. 2:20; 4:6). Specifically, God's purpose was that Paul would become an evangelist to "the Gentiles." This calling had been God's intent from the time of Paul's birth: "from my mother's womb" (cf. Isa. 49:1-6; Jer. 1:5; Rom. 1:1). Paul's conversion probably took place in A.D. 34.

"Paul had emphasized that he did not receive his message from men before or at the time of his conversion. Now he affirmed that he was free from human influences afterward as well."⁵⁷

Since his calling had been undoubtedly supernatural and abundantly clear, Paul did not need to "consult" with anyone natural (i.e., less than supernatural). The term "flesh" (v. 16) is important in Galatians. It has several meanings: sinful human nature, the physical body, and here the whole of humanity (cf. 2:16; Rom. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:29). It is a *synecdoche*, a figure of speech in which a prominent part stands for the whole, or vice versa.⁵⁸

Neither did Paul need the approval of the other apostles, who had also seen and received commissions by the risen Christ. Paul's revelation was just as authoritative as any they had received. Instead, he went to an undefined area of "Arabia." The geographical area of Arabia included the lands east of Palestine, south of Syria, and west of Mesopotamia. Damascus stood on its northwestern edge. Probably Paul retreated into the part of Arabia just south of Damascus.⁵⁹

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

⁵⁵McGee, 5:155.

⁵⁶See J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, pp. 24-35, for parallels between God's calling of Paul and His calling of Jeremiah and the Suffering Servant of the Lord.

⁵⁷Campbell, p. 592.

⁵⁸See Robert A. Pyne, "Dependence and Duty: The Spiritual Life in Galatians 5 and Romans 6," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 145.

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

the northwest section of Arabia, controlled by the Nabataeans."⁶⁰

Another guess is that he proceeded south to Mt. Sinai.⁶¹ He did so apparently to restudy the Scriptural revelations of Messiah.⁶² This seems more likely than that he went there to evangelize.⁶³ Arabia was sparsely populated, so it seems to have been an unlikely place to go to evangelize. Then he "returned . . . to Damascus," rather than Jerusalem, still feeling no need to obtain the blessing of the other apostles. Paul was not being arrogant or uncooperative by behaving as he did. He simply was preparing himself, since he believed in the divine origin and authority of his commission.

"Our study of vv. 11-17 has shown that Paul's conversion is to be understood as involving (a) recognition of the risen Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Son of God, (b) the experience of being justified by faith apart from legal works, (c) the revelation of the basic principles of the gospel, and (d) the call to be an apostle to the Gentiles."⁶⁴

Verses 11-17 constitute one of six New Testament passages that describe Paul's conversion and calling (cf. Acts 9:1-7; 22:6-10; 26:12-16; 1 Cor. 9:1-2; 15:3-11).⁶⁵

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

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

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

It was "three years" after his conversion, not after his return to Damascus, that Paul finally revisited Jerusalem and met Peter ("Cephas"), for the first time, and "James" (i.e., A.D. 37).⁶⁶ He went there "to get personally

⁶⁰Vos, p. 34.

⁶¹Lightfoot, pp. 88-89.

⁶²Burton, p. 55.

⁶³Fung, pp. 68-69.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 70.

⁶⁵See George Lyttelton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Saint Paul*.

⁶⁶Lightfoot, p. 84; Fung, p. 73; Morris, p. 59.

acquainted with" them, not to get information from them or to make inquiry of them.⁶⁷ These were hardly indications that he had to validate his message with them. Furthermore, he only stayed "15 days" in Jerusalem, and did not see any of the other apostles. If he had needed to work out a theology consistent with the teaching of the other apostles, extended meetings with all of them would have been necessary.

"These brothers [of the Lord] have been regarded (a) by the Orthodox churches as sons of Joseph by a previous marriage (the 'Epiphonian' view), (b) in Roman Catholic interpretation as Jesus' first cousins, the sons of 'Mary wife of Clopas,' who was the Virgin's sister (Jn. 19:25; the 'Hieronymian' view), and (c) by Protestant exegetes as Jesus' uterine brothers, sons of Joseph and Mary (the 'Helvidian' view). This last view accords best with the natural implications of Mk. 6:3, where the context suggests that the brothers, together with the sisters unspecified by name, were, like Jesus himself, children of Mary."⁶⁸

1:20 Paul may have added this parenthetical verse to help the Galatians to realize, not only that he was telling the truth ("not lying"; cf. 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31; 1 Thess. 2:5), but that he truly had received his gospel by divine revelation. The truth of the gospel, as he preached it, was at stake in the truthfulness of what he said, as was the error of what the false teachers were proclaiming.⁶⁹

". . . one can not but wonder why Paul should use such very strong language unless he had been charged with misstating the facts about his visits to the other apostles."⁷⁰

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

"From c. 25 BC Eastern Cilicia (including Tarsus) was united administratively with Syria to form one imperial province (Syria-Cilicia), governed by a *legatus pro*

⁶⁷O. Hofius, "Gal 1:18: *historesai Kephani*," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75 (1984):73-84. Cf. R. Schnackenburg, "Apostles before and during Paul's Time," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, p. 290, footnote 1.

⁶⁸Fung, p. 75. Cf. Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul*, p. 28; Lightfoot, pp. 252-91; Eadie, pp. 57-100.

⁶⁹Cf. J. P. Sampley, "'Before God, I do not lie' (Gal. 1:20): Paul's Self-Defence in the Light of Roman Legal Praxis," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976-77):481-82.

⁷⁰Burton, p. 61.

praetore with his headquarters in Syrian Antioch. This arrangement lasted until AD 72, when Eastern Cilicia was detached from Syria and united with Western Cilicia (Cilicia Tracheia) to form the province of Cilicia.

"At the time when both epistles were written [i.e., Galatians and 1 Thessalonians], the Roman province of Judaea included Galilee as well as Judaea (in the narrower sense) and Samaria (as it had done since the death of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44); 'Judaea' may then denote here the whole of Palestine [cf. 1 Thess. 2:14]."⁷¹

However, in Acts 9:31, "Judea" clearly refers to a division within Palestine.

Paul had so little contact with the churches in Judea, that even after several years of ministry, the people there could not recognize him "by sight." He was "becoming unknown" to them,⁷² because he had been away from Judea for so long. Therefore it was impossible that these churches would have influenced or instructed Paul in his gospel. They only knew him by reputation, and thanked God for what He was doing through him, the exact opposite reaction of Paul's Judaizing critics. Certainly the Judean Christians would not have been so happy, if Paul had preached a different "gospel" from the one the other apostles had been preaching—and if they had subsequently believed the wrong "gospel"!

"It is striking proof of the large space occupied by 'faith' in the mind of the infant Church [v. 23], that it should so soon have passed into a synonym for the Gospel. See Acts vi 7."⁷³

"*pistis* ["faith"] is not the body of Christian doctrine, in which sense the word is never [? rarely, cf. 1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21] used by Paul, but the faith in Christ which the preachers of the gospel bade men exercise."⁷⁴

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

⁷¹Bruce, p. 103. Cf. Fung, pp. 80-82.

⁷²Rendall, 3:157.

⁷³Lightfoot, p. 86.

⁷⁴Burton, p. 64.

B. INTERDEPENDENCE WITH OTHER APOSTLES 2:1-10

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

"While chapter 2 continues Paul's defense of his apostolic authority and the gospel he preached, he focused not on the source of his message but on its content."⁷⁵

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

". . . this is the third in a series of 'then' clauses Paul stitched together to form an airtight argument for his apostolic independence from the Jerusalem church (cf. 1:18, 21)."⁷⁶

Probably Paul calculated the "14 years" from his conversion date, rather than from his first visit to Jerusalem (cf. 1:18).⁷⁷ Paul visited Jerusalem at least five times, and the visit described here seems to have been his second (Acts 11:27-30).⁷⁸ It was not his third visit to participate in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29).⁷⁹ This seems clear from Paul's statement that it was a private meeting (v. 2).

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

⁷⁵Campbell, p. 593.

⁷⁶George, p. 135.

⁷⁷Eadie, pp. 102-3; Rendall, 3:157; Longenecker, p. 45. Lightfoot, p. 102, held the opposite view and dated the writing of Galatians after the writing of 2 Corinthians. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 36-56. See also Ridderbos, p. 76, who also believed that Paul dated the "14 Years" from his first visit to Jerusalem.

⁷⁸See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Chronological Problem of Galatians 2:1-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):334-40; George Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* pp. 56-57; Bruce, pp. 108-9; Longenecker, pp. 45-46; Joe Morgado Jr., "Paul in Jerusalem: A Comparison of His Visits in Acts and Galatians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):55-68; Fung, pp. 9-28, 86; Tenney, pp. 79-82; and Campbell, p. 593.

⁷⁹Advocates of this view include R. Jewett, *Dating Paul's Life*, pp. 52-54; Conybeare and J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 163, 821-28; Eadie, p. 140; Rendall, 3:157; Ridderbos, p. 80; McGee, 5:157; and Everett F. Harrison, "The Epistle to the Galatians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, pp. 1287-88.

"Since for the purposes of his argument that he had not been dependent on the other apostles (cf. 1:12, 17) it is his contacts with them that it is pertinent to mention, the fact that he speaks of these as visits to Jerusalem (cf. 1:18) indicates that throughout the period of which he is speaking Jerusalem was the headquarters of the apostles. And this being the case the denial, by implication, that he had been in Jerusalem is the strongest possible way of denying communication with the Twelve."⁸⁰

The references to Barnabas (vv. 1, 9, 13) suggest that the readers knew him. If Paul wrote this epistle to Christians living in South Galatia, they probably remembered Barnabas as Paul's fellow missionary who ministered to them on Paul's first missionary journey.⁸¹

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

Titus "possessed considerable people skills . . . and was a man of unquestioned integrity, especially with regard to financial resources."⁸²

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

"The use of the present tense, *kerusso* ["I preach"], reflects the apostle's thought that he is still at the time of writing preaching the same gospel which he had been preaching before he made this visit to Jerusalem."⁸³

Paul considered his calling to be to the people of Gentile *lands*, not just to the Gentile *people* (cf. v. 8; 1:16).⁸⁴

⁸⁰Burton, p. 67.

⁸¹See Richard Bauckham, "Barnabas in Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (January 1979):61-70.

⁸²Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 273.

⁸³Burton, p. 70.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

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

It seems, rather, that Paul feared that if he did not contact the Jerusalem apostles (Peter, James, and John), his critics might undermine his evangelistic work. They could have pointed to the fact that Paul had had no fellowship with the Jerusalem apostles. Then they might have gone on to suggest that the reason there was no fellowship, was because there was a difference of opinion between Paul and the other apostles over the gospel message. To avoid this possibility, Paul met with Peter, James, and John privately. They may have met "in private" because Paul was a wanted man in Jerusalem at this time, and a public meeting could have resulted in more harm than good.

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

". . . positively expressed, his concern was to assure that they would recognize his converts as genuine Christians and members of the Church. He was concerned, in other words, with officially securing the freedom of the Gentiles from the requirements of the law and their equality of status with Jewish Christians.

"Implicit in this concern for Gentile freedom was concern for the unity of the Church: Paul's anxiety was not lest refusal of recognition on the part of the Jerusalem authorities should thereby render his own work invalid and his Gentile Christians non-Christian, but lest such refusal should bring about a rupture of the one Church into two separate branches of Jewish and Gentile Christianity."⁸⁵

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

". . . Paul could never tolerate any presentation of Christianity which regarded it as a form of Judaism."⁸⁶

⁸⁵Fung, p. 90.

⁸⁶Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 67.

James, Peter, and John apparently agreed with Paul, the proof of which was their willingness to let Titus remain uncircumcised. Circumcision was a rite by which Gentile males became Jewish proselytes.

"Within the crosscurrents of political messianism and apocalyptic speculation, the idea grew that the Messiah would only come when the Holy Land had been purified of all uncircumcised Gentiles."⁸⁷

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

2:4-5 Verse 4 introduces another reason Paul went up to Jerusalem (v. 1). Evidently representatives of the "false teachers (brethren)" (counterfeit Christians) had secretly entered Paul's arena of ministry, representing themselves as true Christians. But they had opposed what Paul had taught. Their intent was to bring Paul and all other preachers and hearers of the true gospel "into bondage," by imposing circumcision as a condition for salvation. They were not successful. "The truth of the gospel" means "the gospel in its integrity . . . the doctrine of grace."⁸⁸ The "liberty" to which Paul referred is not freedom in the abstract, but a liberty that believers "have in Christ Jesus."⁸⁹

"It thus emerges that the interlopers were sham-Christians precisely because they had not really grasped the fundamental principle of the gospel—justification by faith apart from works of the law."⁹⁰

2:6 Paul's reference to James, Peter, and John may sound a bit insolent ("those who were of high reputation"), but his point was that they were not superior as apostles to him as an apostle. They "contributed nothing" to his authority or message.

"The repetition of the expression 'men of high reputation' from v. 2 (where NEB has 'men of repute' for the same Greek expression [*hoi dokountes*]) seems to indicate that it is a title given by the Jerusalem church to its leaders, which Paul uses, possibly with a tinge of irony, in depreciation of the arrogant and extravagant claims which the Judaizers were making for the Jerusalem leaders."⁹¹

⁸⁷George, p. 143.

⁸⁸Lightfoot, p. 107.

⁸⁹Morris, p. 69.

⁹⁰Fung, p. 94.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 95.

The expression "allows Paul both to acknowledge the fact that these men possess authority and power and to remain at a distance with regard to his own subservience to such authority."⁹²

2:7-9 James, Peter, and John did not seek to change Paul's message. They agreed with it. They shook hands in agreement over the gospel (gave them "the right hand of fellowship"), even though the focuses of their ministries were different. The Greek word *stylos*, translated "pillar," can also mean "tent-pole."

"Peter was the great missionary. Hence, when Paul is speaking of the ministry to the Jews, Peter is prominent and James is not mentioned (vv7, 8). In dealing with a particular and official act of the Jerusalem church, however, James (who apparently presided at the council) is mentioned in the first position with the names of Peter and John following."⁹³

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

"The use of the phrase *eis ta ethne* ["among the Gentiles"] rather than *tois ethnesin* ["to the Gentiles"] . . . favours the conclusion that the division, though on a basis of preponderant nationality, was nevertheless territorial rather than racial. . . . The whole evidence, therefore, clearly indicates that the meaning of the agreement was that Paul and Barnabas were to preach the gospel in Gentile lands, the other apostles in Jewish lands."⁹⁴

"In all likelihood, however, the issue of territory *or* race was not so sharply differentiated in the minds of early Jewish Christians as it is by commentators today. There could have been considerable overlapping between the two spheres."⁹⁵

"In Paul's eyes the compelling logic of the Christ-event pointed to the supersession of the age of law by the age of the Spirit (3:13f.); it was because there was now [still] but

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

⁹³Boice, p. 444.

⁹⁴Burton, p. 98.

⁹⁵Longenecker, p. 59.

one way of justification for Jews and Gentiles alike—justification by faith (cf. Rom. 3:29f.)—that 'in Christ Jesus' there was 'neither Jew nor Greek' (Gal. 3:28)."⁹⁶

"While every Christian has an important role to play in missions and evangelism, we must never forget that Jesus himself is the great Missionary, the Son who has been sent from the Father; and the Holy Spirit is the true Evangelist, the divine One who convicts and converts."⁹⁷

2:10 The only request that James, Peter, and John made of Paul was that he should not neglect the poor in his ministry. Paul had already made a commitment to do this ("the very thing I also was eager to do"). "The poor" could be a shorthand reference to the poor saints in Jerusalem.⁹⁸ Or it could simply be a reference to the poor in general.

"Thus the events of Paul's second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, like the events of his life both before and after his call by God, substantiate his claim that he received both his gospel and his apostleship directly from the risen Lord. If the earlier set of events supports this by showing that there was never a time when he was in a position to have derived his gospel and apostolic commission from the Jerusalem leaders, the events of the second visit support it by showing the full recognition given by those leaders to the gospel and apostolic office which already were his prior to the meeting of the two parties. A third major support will be furnished by the Antioch incident (2:11-21)."⁹⁹

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

C. CORRECTION OF ANOTHER APOSTLE 2:11-21

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

"In Antioch much more clearly than at Jerusalem the issue was made between legalism and anti-legalism. It was incidental to the event at Antioch, but from the point of view from which Paul introduced the matter

⁹⁶Bruce, p. 124.

⁹⁷George, p. 163.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 165; Fung, p. 102.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 104.

here, a matter of primary importance that on this occasion more decisively than ever before he declared his independence of Jerusalem and her apostles."¹⁰⁰

2:11 Peter had shaken hands with Paul in Jerusalem (v. 9). However, when Peter ("Cephas") "came to Antioch" (of Syria), Paul "opposed him." Luke did not record this later event in Acts, and we cannot date it exactly. It may have happened shortly after Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem to Antioch or, less likely, after the Jerusalem Council (cf. Acts 15:30). I think the second possibility is less likely, because I believe Paul wrote Galatians before the Jerusalem Council, as explained above.¹⁰¹

2:12-13 Peter at first "used to eat" meals with the Christians at Antioch, who were both Jews and "Gentiles," until some Jewish visitors came from Jerusalem (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3). They may have been from the group that believed Gentiles needed to undergo circumcision before they could become Christians. If so, they were not "from James" in the sense that James endorsed their views; he did not (v. 9). Perhaps they were simply Jews who came from the same church as James.¹⁰²

When these "certain men"—Paul did not call them brethren—came, they intimidated Peter (cf. Prov. 29:25), who gradually separated himself from the Gentile Christians, evidently to avoid conflict. Some other Jewish believers living in Antioch followed Peter's example, as did "even Barnabas." They were being hypocritical, saying one thing and doing another. Peter had a tendency to compromise his convictions when he was under pressure (cf. Matt. 16:16-23; 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27).

"It is perhaps curious that nobody seems to have recalled that Jesus ate 'with publicans and sinners', which can scarcely mean that he conformed to strict Jewish practice."¹⁰³

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

¹⁰⁰Burton, p. 114.

¹⁰¹So also Longenecker, pp. lxxvii-lxxxvii, 71.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁰³Morris, p. 77. Cf. Mark 7:19.

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

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

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

2:15-16 Some interpreters believe Paul's words to Peter continue through the end of chapter 2 (e.g., NASB, NIV, NKJV).¹⁰⁴ Others believe they end with verse 14 (e.g., RSV, NRSV, NET). It seems more likely to me that they end with verse 14.

"This verse [15] and the next form a single, overloaded sentence in the Greek; they have been aptly described as 'Paul's doctrine of justification in a nutshell' . . ." ¹⁰⁵

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

"This characterization at once focuses attention on the sharp distinction between Jew and Gentile, for what made the Gentiles sinners in the estimation of the Jews was not only that they did not observe the law but also that they did not even possess it and consequently lacked the possibility of obtaining righteousness through it." ¹⁰⁶

Paul went on to remind Peter that both of them knew that God does not justify people (declare them righteous) because they keep the Mosaic Law ("works of the Law"), part of which involved dietary regulations.

¹⁰⁴See also *The New Scofield Reference Bible* note.

¹⁰⁵Fung, p. 112. His quotation is of W. Schmithals, *Paul and James*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶Fung, p. 113.

"To be justified, *dikaiousthai*, is to be accounted by God acceptable to him, to be approved of God, accepted as being such as God desires man to be."¹⁰⁷

"By *erga nomou* ["works of law"] Paul means deeds of obedience to formal statutes done in the legalistic spirit, with the expectation of thereby meriting and securing divine approval and award, such obedience, in other words, as the legalists rendered to the law of the O. T. as expanded and interpreted by them."¹⁰⁸

Other scholars, following E. P. Sanders, however, have denied that first-century Jews were legalistic, and believe that these Jews were not attempting to gain favor with God by Torah observance, but were only expressing their convictions in a lifestyle that was compatible with Jewish traditions.¹⁰⁹

". . . Paul's recital of his address to Peter in Antioch is progressively colored by polemic against his Galatian detractors and, as it were, gradually shades into a theological discussion with his readers."¹¹⁰

". . . Paul intends by the phrase 'works of the law' the Jewish way of life, described in 2:14 by the word *iodaikos* [like a Jew], characterized by exclusiveness and epitomized by the murder of Christ and the persecution of his followers, and argues that to return to that way of life would be to make Christ a servant of sin."¹¹¹

Justification comes by believing in Christ, period (cf. Acts 16:31). Paul, Peter, and the other believers assembled had simply believed in Christ (cf. Job 9:1-2). Paul stated as a maxim that obedience to ("works of") "the Law" never justified anybody (Rom. 3:20).¹¹²

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

¹⁰⁷Burton, p. 119.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁰⁹See, for example, Longenecker, p. 86.

¹¹⁰Fung, p. 105.

¹¹¹R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "Sacred Violence and 'Works of Law.' 'Is Christ Then an Agent of Sin?' (Galatians 2:17)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52:1 (January 1990):62. Cf. Todd Scacewater, "Galatians 2:11-21 and The Interpretive Context of 'Works of The Law,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):307-23.

¹¹²On Paul's relationship to Judaism, see Heikki Raisanen, "Galatians 2.16 and Paul's Break with Judaism," *New Testament Studies* 31 (October 1985):543-53. For a chart of the differences between grace and law in Galatians, see the Appendix at the end of these notes.

"The threefold repetition of the doctrine of justification by faith in this one verse is important, because it shows the importance the apostle gives to the doctrine. Besides, the three phrases increase in emphasis."¹¹³

"This verse will upset every legal system there is today. To say that you have to add *anything* to faith in Christ absolutely mutilates the gospel."¹¹⁴

"Knowing that a man.' . . . This is something you can *know*—you can know whether you are saved or not."¹¹⁵

"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."¹¹⁶

"To be justified means to be declared righteous before God, that is, to enjoy a status or standing of being in a right relationship with God, of being accepted by him."¹¹⁷

In verses 15-21, Paul was evidently answering charges that his critics had leveled against him. It would be easier for us to interpret these verses if we knew what those charges were. As things stand, we can only infer what they were from Paul's answers.

2:17-18

Paul refuted the charge of the Judaizers that justification by faith led to lawless behavior. He said this made "Christ," in effect, a promoter ("minister") "of sin." This could "never be"! If a Christian puts himself or herself back under the Law, the Law will show him or her to be a sinner, since no one can keep the Law perfectly. These verses are a strong testimony that Christians are free from the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

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

"Here he [Paul] may simply mean that when law-abiding Jews like Peter and himself cease to look to the law as the basis of their justification before God and find that

¹¹³Boice, pp. 448, 449.

¹¹⁴McGee, 5:160.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶George, pp. 191-92.

¹¹⁷Fung, p. 113.

justification in Christ instead, they put themselves effectively on a level with 'sinners of the gentiles': they have, in that sense, 'been found sinners'—they themselves (*kai autoi*) as much as lesser breeds without the law. But this applies to all Jewish Christians, even to those who have not appreciated the law-free character of the gospel: by yielding faith to Christ they have in logic, if not in consciousness, abandoned faith in the law, and have had to take their place as sinners, utterly in need of God's justifying grace."¹¹⁸

". . . Paul is arguing that although it is true that in order to be justified in Christ it is necessary to abandon faith in the law as a means of salvation (premise 1) and hence to become sinners in the sense of being reduced to the level of the 'Gentiles and sinners' of v. 15 (premise 2), the conclusion does not follow that Christ thereby becomes an agent of sin (in the sense of a promoter of actual wrongdoing), support for this statement being given in vv. 18-20."¹¹⁹

The "For" at the beginning of verse 18 is probably coordinate with the "For" at the beginning of verse 19. Both verses give reasons "it must never be" (v. 17). Verse 18 gives the hypothetical negative proof: actual transgression inevitably follows when the Law becomes the authority in the believer's life. Verse 19 gives the actual positive proof.

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

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

¹¹⁸Bruce, pp. 140-41.

¹¹⁹Fung, pp. 119-20.

that the believer is set free from the dominion of the law (under which there is transgression, Rom. 4:15) for a life of consecration to God (cf. Rom. 7:6)."¹²⁰

2:20

"As a result of his participation in Christ's death on the cross, Paul now explains . . ., the life he now lives is not lived by him—by the 'I' of v. 19, the self-righteous Pharisee who based his hope for righteousness and salvation on strict observance of the law—but by Christ, the risen and exalted One, who dwells in him."¹²¹

When a person trusts Christ, God identifies him or her *with Christ*, not only in the present and future, but also in the past. The believer did what Christ did. When Christ died, I died. When Christ arose from the grave, I arose to newness of life. My old self-centered life died when I died with Christ. His Spirit-directed life began in me when I arose with Christ. Therefore, in this sense, the Christian's life is really the life of Christ ("Christ lives in me").¹²²

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

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

Paul's reference to "the flesh" here is literal. It means our physical bodies. We can see Paul's great appreciation of God's love for him. He said Christ loved "me" and gave Himself for "me."

"The whole of Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men."¹²³

"It is not law on the *outside*, but love on the *inside* that makes the difference."¹²⁴

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 123.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12, for discussion of the Christian's essential identity. See also Robert A. Pyne and Matthew L. Blackmon, "A Critique of the 'Exchanged Life,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):131-57.

¹²³James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p. 151.

¹²⁴Wiersbe, 1:716. Cf. Ps. 40:8.

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

"The man on the cross is facing in only one direction. He is not going back, and he has no further plans of his own."¹²⁵

"Nothing but love would have been a sufficient motive for God to send his Son to the cross, nor for the Son voluntarily to accept it."¹²⁶

2:21 Paul concluded by affirming that he did "not set aside (nullify) the grace of God," as Peter had done by his behavior. Peter had nullified God's grace by implying that it was not enough. He did this by putting himself back under the Law, saying in effect that obedience must accompany grace to make it sufficient. If that were true, Paul ended, "then Christ died needlessly." It would then be obedience that saves, not Christ.¹²⁷

One writer pointed out five basic Christian doctrines that Peter was denying by separating from the Gentiles: the unity of the church (v. 14), justification by faith (vv. 15-16), freedom from the law (vv. 17-18), the very gospel itself (vv. 19-20), and the grace of God (v. 21).¹²⁸

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

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

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

A. VINDICATION OF THE DOCTRINE CH. 3

Paul explained the meaning of justification and sanctification by faith alone. He argued their validity from experience (3:1-5), from Scripture (3:6-14), and from logic (3:15-29), to dissuade his readers from returning to reliance on the Mosaic Law. In 3:1-18, Paul argued against legalism, the belief that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by keeping rules.¹²⁹ In 3:19—4:7, he argued against nomism, the belief that we need to make law the ruling governor of our lives.¹³⁰

¹²⁵A. W. Tozer, "Total Commitment," *Decision* (August 1963), p. 4.

¹²⁶Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 91.

¹²⁷For another exposition of 2:15-21, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Pattern for Maturity*, pp. 105-15.

¹²⁸Wiersbe, 1:694-96.

¹²⁹Cf. Tom Thatcher, "The Plot of Gal 3:1-18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:3 (September 1997): 401-10.

¹³⁰Longenecker, p. 97.

"Paul's Galatian letter, it must always be remembered, is not concerned just with 'legalism,' even though sadly it is often understood only in those terms. Rather, Galatians is principally concerned with 'nomism' or whether Gentiles who believe in Christ must also be subject to the directives of the Mosaic law."¹³¹

"Gal 3:1-18 is one of the most familiar and closely studied portions of Paul's letters. That is so because of its concentration of themes central to the Christian gospel, its attack against legalism, and the complexity of Paul's arguments in support of a law-free gospel."¹³²

1. The experiential argument 3:1-5

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

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

To bring them to their senses, Paul asked four more questions of them in verses 2-5. He probably intended his introductory rhetorical question in this verse as a rebuke.¹³³ "Fools" in Scripture are people who disregard God's revelation (cf. Ps. 14:1; Luke 24:25).

". . . Paul regards his Galatian converts as having unwittingly come under the spell—the hypnotic effect—of the false teachers . . ."¹³⁴

"It is quite possible for one to have been truly converted and to have begun with a clear, definite knowledge of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus, and then because of failure to follow on to study the Word and to pray over it, to come under the influence of some false system, some unscriptural line of teaching. And so often when people do come under some such influence you find it almost impossible to deliver them. They seem to be under a spell."¹³⁵

The public portrayal of "Christ . . . crucified" (Gr. perfect participle *estauromenos*, crucified with continuing results) probably refers to the fact of Jesus' death as the crucial event in salvation history. It probably does

¹³¹Ibid., p. 219.

¹³²Ibid., p. 98.

¹³³F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, §146.2.

¹³⁴Fung, p. 129.

¹³⁵Ironside, pp. 88-89.

not refer to some description of the Crucifixion that Paul or someone else had presented to them, nor to Christ as presently still crucified in some sense.¹³⁶ The Galatians would not have found false teaching attractive if they had truly appreciated the major significance of Jesus' crucifixion.

"The suggestion is that anyone with spiritual perception ought to be able to see the impossibility of legal efforts to save a man. This idea Paul proceeds to develop."¹³⁷

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

"The only real evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (see Rom. 8:9)."¹³⁸

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

". . . those who stressed the law put no emphasis on the Holy Spirit. But from the day of Pentecost on, the Christians emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit for Christian living."¹³⁹

3:3 Question 2: How is God sanctifying you? Their justification had been a work of the Holy Spirit in response to believing faith. Likewise their sanctification was also a work of the Holy Spirit in response to believing faith. The idea that keeping the Mosaic Law will somehow help the Holy Spirit is a fallacy that persists to our day.

"The Judaizers in Galatia, it seems, claimed not to be opposing Paul but to be supplementing his message, and so to be bringing his converts to perfection . . ."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶Fung, p. 129.

¹³⁷Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 91.

¹³⁸Wiersbe, 1:698.

¹³⁹Morris, p. 95.

¹⁴⁰Longenecker, p. 106. Cf. Betz, p. 136.

"Flesh" here refers to one's sinful human nature, the seat and vehicle of sinful desires. This is a metaphorical use of the word.¹⁴¹ Notice that reception of the Spirit does not mark a second or higher stage after justification, a "second blessing." It belongs to initial justification, and now (since Pentecost) takes place at the moment of conversion (cf. John 7:39; 16:7; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:38; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

"Some people find it difficult to distinguish between a hatred of false doctrine and a love for the people themselves who have come under the influence of it. When we stand up for the truth of God and warn people against false teaching, that does not imply for one moment that we have any unkind feeling toward those taken up with that false teaching. We love such a person as one for whom Christ died, and pray that he may be delivered from his error and brought into the light of the truth."¹⁴²

3:4 Question 3: Have your experiences been useless? "Suffer" can mean suffer persecution or simply to experience something. In the former case, it would refer to the persecution the Galatians had experienced since they became Christians (cf. Acts 14:21-22). The point would be that all of those afflictions would have been needless or purposeless suffering. In the latter case, it would refer to all the experiences that the Galatians had gone through, good and bad, since their conversion. The point would be that all of those experiences would have been meaningless. Perhaps we should prefer the wider significance here, since the other questions in this pericope concern positive benefits the Galatians had received from God by faith.¹⁴³

3:5 Question 4: What accounts for the miracles you witnessed (cf. Acts 14:3, 8-10)? God did not perform them because the Galatians did something special to earn them. He gave them freely, in response to their believing the gospel.

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

¹⁴¹See I. Howard Marshall, "Living in the 'Flesh,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002):387-403, for an excellent word study of "flesh."

¹⁴²Ironside, pp. 94-95.

¹⁴³See Longenecker, p. 104.

These "miracles" may have been those which the Holy Spirit continued to work among the believers even after Paul left. Note the present tense of the word translated "works" (or "working(s)"; Gr. *energon*). He continues to do miracles in and through believers even today, not the least of which is the miracle of regeneration.¹⁴⁴ However, Paul was speaking of the miracles that his original readers had witnessed.

Lightfoot believed that a better rendering of "works miracles *among* you" is "works miracles *in* you," on the basis of Paul's similar statement in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 28-29 (cf. Matt. 14:2; Mark 6:14).¹⁴⁵ The Greek preposition *en* can be translated either way. Probably Paul's reference to "miracles" was more broad than just to visible miracles and included other demonstrations of spiritual power.¹⁴⁶

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

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

2. The Scriptural argument 3:6-14

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

The blessing of faith 3:6-9

3:6 The Judaizers, in emphasizing the Mosaic Law, appealed to Moses frequently. Paul took them back further in their history to "Abraham," the father of the Jewish nation. He cited Genesis 15:6 to prove that God justified Abraham by faith, not because he kept the Law. Abraham "believed" the promise that God would bless him. Abraham could and did do nothing but believe God's promise that He would do something supernatural for him (cf. Rom 4:3). One writer suggested that the best commentary on Galatians 3 is Romans 4.¹⁴⁷ Abraham's faith was his trust in God.

". . . Paul takes it for granted that Abraham's being justified by faith *proves* that the Galatians must have received the

¹⁴⁴See Ironside, pp. 95-96.

¹⁴⁵Lightfoot, p. 136.

¹⁴⁶Vos, p. 53.

¹⁴⁷George, p. 219.

Spirit by faith also; and this argument from Scripture falls to the ground *unless* the reception of the Spirit is in some sense equated with justification. For if this were not so, it could be objected that even though Abraham was indeed justified by faith, it does not necessarily follow that reception of the Spirit also has to be dependent on faith; conceivably while justification is by faith the gift of the Spirit could be conditioned on works. We may take it, then, that Paul conceives of receiving the Spirit in such close connection with justification that the two can be regarded in some sense as synonymous, so that in the Galatians' receiving the Spirit their justification was also involved."¹⁴⁸

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

This verse introduces Paul's major explanation of salvation history. It is a bridge concluding one section of his argument (3:1-6; "even so") and introducing the next (3:6-9; "Therefore," v. 7).

3:7-9

"In this verse [v. 7] Paul extended his argument from Abraham to his posterity and raised for the first time the question that would dominate the remainder of Gal 3 and 4: Who are the true children of Abraham? This train of thought will find a conclusion in the allegory of the two mothers, Sarah and Hagar, and their two sons, Isaac and Ishmael (4:21-31)."¹⁴⁹

The *spiritual* "sons of Abraham," Paul contended, were not his physical descendants, but "those who" believed God ("are of faith")—whether they were Jews or Gentiles.¹⁵⁰ He expounded Genesis 12:3c and 22:18a (in the LXX) to prove his point. We should understand this promise to include salvation. Paul clarified that this is what God intended. However, it is only those who trust God who enter into God's blessings for believers. Paul was not a universalist; he did not believe everyone will eventually go to heaven. Personal appropriation of God's gift is necessary for salvation.

"He is said to be justified in God's sight who is both reckoned righteous in God's judgment and has been accepted on account of his [i.e., God's] righteousness."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸Fung, p. 136.

¹⁴⁹George, p. 223.

¹⁵⁰See Michael H. Burer, "'Sons of Abraham' in Galatians 3:7 as a Spiritual, Qualitative Designation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:691 (July-September 2016):337-51.

¹⁵¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:11:2.

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

Paul argued that it was not circumcision that made a person a son of Abraham—but "faith." He treated circumcision as a part of the Law because, even though God instituted it many generations before He gave the Law, He reaffirmed it and incorporated it into the Law (Lev. 12:3).

"What endeared Abraham to many Jewish thinkers were his virtues and his deeds. They understood him to have kept the law before it was written."¹⁵²

The curse of works 3:10-14

"In vv. 6-9 Paul set forth a positive argument for justification by faith. In vv. 10-14 he turned the tables and argued negatively against the possibility of justification by works."¹⁵³

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

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

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

¹⁵²Morris, p. 98.

¹⁵³George, p. 227. Cf. Lightfoot, p. 137.

give medals for keeping the law in Pasadena. If I had kept every law for twenty years and then stole something or broke a speeding law, I would be arrested. You see, the law does not reward you. It does not give you life. The law penalizes you."¹⁵⁴

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

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

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

In verse 10, Paul argued that anyone who seeks justification by works of the Law will suffer God's curse. He or she will be "cursed" because he or she cannot keep the Law perfectly. In verses 11-12, he argued that justification by the works of the Law is impossible by definition.

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

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

¹⁵⁴McGee, 5:168.

3:13

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

"He neutralized the curse for them, so that they, on whom the curse rightfully falls because of their failure to keep the law, now become free from both its demands and its curse. . . .

"Verse 13 thus represents Christ's death as a vicarious bearing of the curse of the law which delivers his people from the same curse. This is in simple terms Paul's Christian interpretation of Christ's death on the cross."¹⁵⁵

"Hebrew thought tended to identify the man on whom a curse was laid with the curse, as it identified the sin-offering with the sin, calling it *hamartia* [sin] (Lev. iv. 21-25)."¹⁵⁶

"Christ has done all that is necessary and his death is the means of making sinners free."¹⁵⁷

The proof that Christ became "a curse for us" was the fact that His executioners hung Him "on a tree." Under the Law, this was the fate of criminals whom God had cursed. Note that God did not curse Christ because He hung on a tree, but Christ hung on a tree because God had cursed Him. Paul again quoted Deuteronomy (21:23).

"The Jews did . . . as a mark of ignominy hang bodies on a post or stake (not a tree) by the hands after the individual had been killed in some other way."¹⁵⁸

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

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

¹⁵⁵Fung, pp. 149-50.

¹⁵⁶Rendall, 3:169.

¹⁵⁷Morris, p. 106.

¹⁵⁸Vos, p. 60.

to Dt. 27:26) by all who fail to continue in obedience to the law."¹⁵⁹

3:14 Christ's death has resulted in two blessings: The "blessing" of *justification* that Abraham enjoyed has become available "to the Gentiles," and the "blessing" of the promised *Holy Spirit's ministry* to believers (Acts 1:8, 2:33).

". . . at several points in the argument of Galatians 3 Paul so parallels or intertwines the categories of being justified and receiving the Spirit that we can draw the conclusion: the experience of the Spirit and the status of justification are, for the apostle, inconceivable apart from each other."¹⁶⁰

The contrasts between faith and law-keeping, presented in this section, would have been especially persuasive to people, such as the legalists of Paul's day, who regarded the Old Testament Scriptures as authoritative. They help us too, of course, to see the issue clearly, and they help us to deal with the legalistic false teachers of our day.¹⁶¹

Paul was not saying that the Mosaic Law is valueless for Christians. The Mosaic Law is a part of the Old Testament, all of which is profitable for Christians (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He was saying that obeying the Mosaic Law never results in the justification or sanctification of anyone, Jew or Gentile.

3. The logical argument 3:15-29

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

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

3:15-16 Paul now turned to the objection, that when God gave the Law, He terminated justification by faith alone. He reminded his readers, with a human analogy, that even wills and contracts made between human beings remain in force until the fulfillment of their terms. Likewise, the covenant God made with Abraham remains in force until God fulfills it completely. The promises made to Abraham extended to his descendants as well as to him personally. They even extend to "Christ," the descendant ("seed") of Abraham, who became the greatest source of blessing that God promised would come through Abraham's descendants.

¹⁵⁹Fung, pp. 147-48.

¹⁶⁰Sam K. Williams, "Justification and the Spirit in Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (February 1987):97.

¹⁶¹See James D. G. Gunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14)," *New Testament Studies* 31:4 (October 1985):523-42.

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

The Hebrew word for "seed" or "offspring" (*zera*, v. 16) is a collective singular, that can refer either to one descendant or many descendants. An English collective singular, for example, is "sheep"—that can refer to one sheep or many sheep. Both "seed" and "offspring" are also collective singulars in English. Paul explained that the "seed" God had in mind, in Genesis 13:15 and 17:8, was the one descendant: "Christ."¹⁶²

"The term *seed* not uncommonly denotes all the descendants of some great ancestor, but it is not normally used of one person. Used in this way it points to the person as in some way outstanding; the *seed* is not simply one descendant among many but THE descendant."¹⁶³

"Just as in Genesis 21:12 the person of Isaac is designated by the word seed in distinction from that of Ishmael, though not, of course, by exclusion of Isaac's descendants, so, according to Paul, the singular of the noun is also a designation of the one Christ in distinction from all other indiscriminate descendants of Abraham together, but not in exclusion of those who are bound with Christ by faith (cf. verses 26-29)."¹⁶⁴

THE FOUR SEEDS OF ABRAHAM IN SCRIPTURE
<p>Natural Seed All physical descendants of Abraham Genesis 12:1-3, 7; et al.</p>
<p>Natural-Spiritual Seed Believing physical descendants of Abraham Isaiah 41:8; Romans 9:6, 8; Galatians 6:16</p>
<p>Spiritual Seed Believing non-physical descendants of Abraham Galatians 3:6-9, 29</p>
<p>Ultimate Seed Jesus Christ Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 2:16-17</p>

¹⁶²See Robert A. Pyne, "The 'Seed,' the Spirit, and the Blessing of Abraham," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):214-16.

¹⁶³Morris, p. 110.

¹⁶⁴Ridderbos, p. 134.

3:17-18 Paul summarized his point in verse 17.

The "430 years" probably began with God's reiterating the promises to Jacob at Beersheba as he left Canaan to settle in Egypt (in 1875 B.C.; Gen. 46:2-4). They probably ended with the giving of the Mosaic Law (in 1446 B.C.; Exod. 19).



The "inheritance" (v. 18; cf. v. 29; 4:1, 7; 5:21) refers to what God promised to Abraham and his descendants, including justification by faith implicit in blessing. Reception of this did not depend on obedience to the Law, but God guaranteed to provide it nonetheless. The idea of inheritance dominates much of the discussion in the following chapters.¹⁶⁵

". . . the inheritance of Gal. 3:18 and 4:30 is parallel not with the land promises, Canaan, but with the gift of justification to the Gentiles. This is the major passage in the New Testament used to equate the inheritance of the land of Canaan with heaven, but the land of Canaan is not even the subject of the passage!"¹⁶⁶

The purpose of the Law 3:19-22

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

There have been four primary interpretations of what "because of transgressions" means. First, some take it to mean, "to restrain

¹⁶⁵George, p. 249. See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):448-49.

¹⁶⁶Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 90.

transgressions."¹⁶⁷ This seems legitimate, since all law has a restraining effect. Second, some understand the phrase to mean, "to reveal transgressions."¹⁶⁸ This seems valid in view of other statements Paul made (cf. Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13).

Third, it may mean, "to provoke transgressions."¹⁶⁹ This, too, seems legitimate. A "Do not touch! Wet paint!" sign on a bench tempts people to touch the bench to see if the paint really is wet. Fourth, some have understood that Paul meant, "to awaken a conviction of transgressions." This seems less likely, in this context, since Paul showed more concern with the objective facts of salvation history, than he did with the subjective development of faith in the individual.¹⁷⁰

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

"The N.T. refers three times to the interposition of angels in the promulgation of the Law: God's intercourse with Moses through the angel of His presence was evidently a common topic in Jewish schools of theology."¹⁷¹

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

"Just as it [the Law] had a point of origin on Mount Sinai, so also it had a point of termination—Mount Calvary."¹⁷²

Paul clarified that the Law was only a temporary measure designed to function "until" Christ came.¹⁷³

"The function of the law was to point people to Christ, not to provide for all time the way the people of God should live."¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷E.g., David J. Lull, "'The Law Was Our Pedagogue': A Study in Galatians 3:19-25," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105:3 (September 1986):482.

¹⁶⁸E.g., Eadie, p. 264; Longenecker, p. 138.

¹⁶⁹E.g., Ridderbos, pp. 137-38.

¹⁷⁰Fung, pp. 159-60.

¹⁷¹Rendall, 3:171-72.

¹⁷²Fung, p. 254.

¹⁷³See J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):21-35; and Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

¹⁷⁴Morris, p. 113.

"He [Paul] conceives of a sequence which may be summarized as follows: age of promise, age of law, age of Christ, the last being conceived as a fulfillment of the age of promise."¹⁷⁵

The Christian Reconstruction movement answers Paul's question, "Why the Law then?" (v. 19) this way: God gave the Mosaic Law to provide a framework for the operation of every nation's government.¹⁷⁶

"Reconstructionists anticipate a day when Christians will govern using the Old Testament as the law book"¹⁷⁷

"Reconstructionism" rests on presuppositional apologetics, theonomy (lit. the rule of God), and postmillennialism. Other names for it are the "theonomy movement" and the "Chalcedon school." It has gained many followers, many among charismatic evangelicals. Its popular appeal is that it claims God wants America and every other nation to function as God intended Israel to function, namely, as a theocracy. It fails to make a distinction, however, between God's unique purpose for Israel and His purpose for other nations throughout history.¹⁷⁸

3:20 The meaning of this verse has drawn numerous different explanations.¹⁷⁹ I think Paul probably meant that a "mediator" (here the "angels," v. 19) is necessary when two parties making an agreement both assume responsibilities, as in the reciprocal Mosaic Covenant.¹⁸⁰ However, a mediator is not necessary when the covenant is unilateral, as when God made the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant.

". . . the inference intended to be drawn is that the law, being given through a mediator, came from God indirectly. That the promise came directly is not affirmed, but assumed to be in mind."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 104.

¹⁷⁶See Gary DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*.

¹⁷⁷Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy," *Christianity Today* (February 20, 1987), p. 17. This article is an excellent popular evaluation of the movement.

¹⁷⁸Other helpful critiques include the following: Thomas D. Ice, "An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:579 (July-September 1989):281-30; Robert Lightner, "Theological Perspectives on Theonomy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:569 (January-March 1986):26-36; 570 (April-June 1986):134-45; and 571 (July-September 1986):228-45; Meredith Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41:1 (Fall 1978):172-89; and Douglas Chismar and David Raush, "Regarding Theonomy: An Essay of Concern," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:3 (September 1984):315-23.

¹⁷⁹Lightfoot, p. 146, mentioned 250 to 300, and Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, with a Revised Translation*, p. 83, estimated over 400.

¹⁸⁰Longenecker, pp. 141-42.

¹⁸¹Burton, p. 190.

3:21-22 Do the Law and the promises contradict each other? Never! God designed them for two different purposes. The purpose of the Law was never to provide justification. It served as a mirror to show people their sinfulness, and that they are slaves of sin: "the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin." When they realize they cannot save themselves, they will be open to receiving salvation as a gift by faith. By "the Scripture," Paul may have meant the teaching of the Old Testament in many places, or he may have had in mind a specific text, such as Deuteronomy 27:26.¹⁸²

"The Law is a mirror that helps us see our 'dirty faces' (James 1:22-25)—*but you do not wash your face with a mirror!* It is grace that provides the cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:7b)."¹⁸³

"God always intended to save by faith, apart from law. God gave the law, but he gave it in order that it would condemn all and thus prepare negatively for redemption on the basis of faith (3:22, 24, the purpose clauses conveying God's intention). The law was not given to make alive (3:21)."¹⁸⁴

"It rivets upon us the conviction that we cannot be justified by anything we can do. Like the Israelites in Egypt, we are commanded to make bricks without straw, to be perfectly holy when we have none of the makings of holiness—to love God with all our hearts and the neighbor as ourselves when we are without divine charity."¹⁸⁵

"A law can lay down what people ought to do, but it cannot give them the power to overcome the temptations to do evil."¹⁸⁶

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

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

"Continuing the perspective of salvation history introduced in vv. 13f. and developed in vv. 15-22, Paul gives further consideration to the place of the law in the divine economy by showing the relation between law and faith as two distinct dispensations."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁸³Wiersbe, 1:703.

¹⁸⁴E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 68.

¹⁸⁵A. R. Vidler, *Christ's Strange Work*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁶Morris, p. 115. See also Barclay, p. 32.

¹⁸⁷Fung, p. 167.

In another sense, the argument returns to its starting point in verse 7.¹⁸⁸

3:23-27 Paul pictured Israel before the advent of Christ as a child. The coming of faith (v. 23) is synonymous with the coming of Christ in Paul's view of salvation history.

In Paul's day, it was common for children between age six and 16 to be under the care of a pedagogue ("tutor").¹⁸⁹ The pedagogue protected them from evil influences and demanded their obedience.

". . . while today we think of pedagogues as teachers, in antiquity a *paidagogos* was distinguished from a *didaskalos* ('teacher') and had custodial and disciplinary functions rather than educative or instructional ones."¹⁹⁰

"No doubt there were many pedagogues who were known for their kindness and held in affection by their wards, but the dominant image was that of a harsh disciplinarian who frequently resorted to physical force and corporal punishment as a way of keeping his children in line."¹⁹¹

The Law did just that for Israel.¹⁹² The Law was essentially a disciplinarian for the Israelites. However, the need for that kind of assistance ended when Christ came.

The Mosaic Law was never intended to provide salvation for lost Israelites. God gave it to His redeemed people, after the Exodus, to let them know their responsibilities as redeemed people. It had a *regulatory* purpose and a *revelatory* purpose, but never a *redemptive* purpose. It *led them* "to Christ" in the sense that it prepared them for the coming of Christ, by showing them that human righteousness was inadequate, and that they needed a righteousness that only God could supply.

". . . the Jews were not *born* through the Law, but rather were *brought up* by the Law. . . . So, the Law did not *give* life to Israel; it *regulated* life."¹⁹³

"Christ is the real teacher, who takes us in hand and shows us the way of God in terms of grace."¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸Burton, p. 198.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁹⁰Longenecker, p. 146.

¹⁹¹George, p. 265.

¹⁹²See Michael J. Smith, "The Role of the Pedagogue in Galatians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):197-214.

¹⁹³Wiersbe, 1:703.

¹⁹⁴Harrison, p. 1292.

Now all who trust in Christ are adult "sons" (Gr. *huioi*), "no longer" children ("under a tutor"). It is "faith in Christ Jesus" that makes one a "son" of God (v. 25). The coming of faith ("now that faith has come") is identical to the giving of the gospel.¹⁹⁵

"The article ["the," *tes* with *pisteos*, "faith"], though ignored in our versions, is essential to the sense. By the coming of *the* faith is meant the historic fact of the Christian religion, the spread of the Gospel on earth."¹⁹⁶

"Now the focus shifts from the historical to the personal, from the institutional to the individual. Paul has discussed the inheritance promised to the children of Abraham; now he zooms in on the heir who claimed his bequest."¹⁹⁷

George suggested that verse 26 is the center of a chiasm.¹⁹⁸ The first half of the chiasm has a Jewish emphasis, whereas the second half has a Gentile emphasis.

- A Promise (Abraham) 3:6-14
- B Law (Moses) 3:15-22
- C Faith (Christ) 3:23-25
- D "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." 3:26
- C' Faith (Spirit) 3:27—4:7
- B' Law (stoicheia tou kosmou [elements of the world]) 4:8-11
- A' Promise (Sarah) 4:21-31

What unites us to Christ is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that takes place at the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 12:13). Paul's original readers may have taken his reference to baptism as being water baptism, but water baptism illustrated what happened to them when the Spirit baptized them. When a Roman male child reached "son" status, his father exchanged his *toga praetexta* ["bordered toga"] for the *toga virilis* ["manly toga"] that identified him as a responsible citizen.¹⁹⁹ Paul compared that toga to Christ (v. 27).

"To put on Christ' is to become as Christ, to have his standing; in this context to become objects of the divine favour, sons of God, as he is the Son of God."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵Burton, pp. 201-2.

¹⁹⁶Rendall, 3:173.

¹⁹⁷George, p. 271.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 271-74.

¹⁹⁹Rendall, 3:174.

²⁰⁰Burton, p. 203.

God has dealt with humanity as a father deals with his children. When children are young, having limited information and experience, a good father makes allowances for their immaturity, but when they become mature, he deals with them as adults. The differences in the house rules that Paul spoke of here reflect different dispensations (i.e., economies, Gr. *oikonomos*, lit. house law). It is interesting that even non-dispensational commentators admit that the coming of Christ, as Paul spoke of it here, inaugurated a new dispensation in God's dealing with humanity.

3:28 Another difference is that under faith, all believers share the same privilege and position. Paul was not saying that all distinctions between people have ceased. Obviously people are still either Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, and male or female. His point was, that within the body of Christ, all have the same relationship to God. All are of equal value. Paul may have used a fragment of an early Christian hymn here (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 3:9-11).

"The three pairs of opposites Paul listed stand for the fundamental cleavages of human existence: ethnicity, economic capacity, and sexuality. Race, money, and sex are primal powers in human life."²⁰¹

Most of the evangelical feminists regard this verse as the major passage that teaches the abolition of male leadership in Christianity. One such writer, Paul Jewett, believed that Paul's teaching that woman is subordinate to man, for whose sake God created her, came from rabbinism rather than revelation.²⁰² Daniel Fuller reflected the same conclusion, but for a slightly different reason.

". . . he [Paul] supported, by way of accommodation, a Christianized slavery and patriarchalism, but with regard to both he left sufficient clues for the church to have understood that these teachings no longer applied after the 'neither Jew nor Greek' issue had been settled."²⁰³

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

"The first stipulation here . . . is that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek . . .; the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between these two was fundamental to Paul's gospel (Eph. 2:14f.). By similarly excluding the

²⁰¹George, p. 284. See his excursus "Was Paul a Feminist?" pp. 286-93, which also relates this passage to liberation theology.

²⁰²P. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, p. 112.

²⁰³D. Fuller, "Paul and Galatians 3:28," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* 9:2 (November-December 1985):12-13.

religious distinction between slaves and the freeborn, and between male and female, Paul makes a threefold affirmation which corresponds to a number of Jewish formulas in which the threefold distinction is maintained, as in the morning prayer in which the male Jew thanks God that he is not a Gentile, a slave or a woman. . . .

"The reason for the threefold thanksgiving was not any disparagement of Gentiles, slaves or women as persons but the fact that they were disqualified from several religious privileges which were open to free Jewish males."²⁰⁴

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

"Galatians 3:28 says nothing explicitly whatsoever about how male/female relationships should be conducted in daily life. Even the feminists acknowledge that the context of Galatians 3 is theological, not practical.²⁰⁵ Paul is here making a theological statement about the fundamental equality of both men and women in their standing before God. Thus any ideas about how this truth should work itself out in social relationships cannot be drawn from Galatians 3:28, but must be brought to it from one's broader understanding of the nature of things."²⁰⁶

The statement does not mean "that all male-female distinctions have been obliterated in Christ, any more than that there is no racial difference between the Christian Jew and the Christian Gentile."²⁰⁷

3:29 A third change is that those joined "to Christ" by faith have become spiritual "descendants of Abraham," and beneficiaries ("heirs") of some of God's promises to him. This does not mean Christians become Jews.

²⁰⁴Bruce, p. 187.

²⁰⁵Footnote 21: Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, pp. 18-19.

²⁰⁶A. Duane Litfin, "Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:543 (July-September 1979):264. For a good evaluation of the feminists' arguments, see *ibid.*; and Roger Oldham, "Positional and Functional Equality: An Appraisal of the Major Arguments for the Ordination of Women," *Mid-America Theological Journal* (Fall 1985):1-29; Kenneth Gangel, "Biblical Feminism and Church Leadership," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (January-March 1983):55-63; and H. Wayne House, "Neither . . . Male nor Female . . . in Christ Jesus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):47-56.

²⁰⁷Fung, p. 175. See also Vos, p. 70.

Christians are Christians; we are in Christ, the Seed of Abraham (cf. v. 16). God promised some things to all the physical descendants of Abraham (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3, 7). He promised other things to the believers within that group (e.g., Rom. 9:6, 8).

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

"Throughout the whole vast earth the Lord recognizes *one*, and *only one*, nation as His own, namely, the nation of believers (1 Peter 2:9)."²⁰⁸

Why can the amillennialist position represented above not be correct? The reason is that Scripture speaks of the church as a nation distinct from Israel (Eph. 2:11-22).²⁰⁹ Jews, and Gentiles who had to become Jews to enter Israel, made up Israel. The church consists of both Jews and Gentiles, who enter it as Jews or Gentiles (Eph. 2:16; cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). Furthermore, Paul called Jewish and Gentile equality in the church a "mystery," something unique, not previously revealed in Scripture (Eph. 3:5). The church began on the day of Pentecost, not in the Old Testament (Acts 1:5; 11:15-16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18). Believers of all eras are *all* "the people of God." Nevertheless God has dealt with different groups of them, and has had different purposes for them as groups, in various periods of human history.

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

B. CLARIFICATION OF THE DOCTRINE CH. 4

In chapter 3, the Jews' preoccupation with the Law of Moses was foremost in Paul's mind. In chapter 4, he reiterated his argument for the benefit of Gentiles, for whom religious syncretism and pagan idolatry were primary concerns. Whereas in chapter 3

²⁰⁸William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians*, p. 151. Cf. Ridderbos, p. 150.

²⁰⁹See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israel and the Church," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 113-30, especially pp. 126-27.

Paul dealt mainly with justification (cf. 3:20), in chapter 4 his emphasis was primarily on sanctification (cf. 4:3).

1. The domestic illustration 4:1-11

Continuing his case for faith over the Mosaic Law, Paul cited an illustration from family life. He did this to clarify the condition of believers, as contrasted with nomists, and to warn his readers to abandon nomism.

The illustration 4:1-7

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

Paul contrasted the spiritual immaturity, of those living under the Mosaic Law, with the spiritual maturity of those living by faith in Christ. Now, as then, a very young child is under the direction of others, even though he may be the heir of a vast inheritance. Similarly, people, before their coming to Christ by faith, were under "bondage." In the case of Jews, their bondage was to the Law. In the case of Gentiles, it was the restraints of pagan religion. The "rite of passage" into adulthood took place in Jewish circles when a son reached the age of 12. In Greece, it was at age 18, and under Roman law, it was between 14 and 17.²¹⁰

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

"The word *stoicheia* [elemental things] means primarily things placed side by side in a row; it is used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and then, because the learning of the ABCs is the first lesson in a literary education, it comes to mean 'rudiments,' first principles (as in Heb. 5:12). Again, since the letters of the alphabet were regarded as the 'elements' of which words and sentences are built up, *stoicheia* comes to be used of the 'elements' which make up the material world (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10, 12). This would be the natural meaning of *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* [elemental things of the world] unless the context dictated otherwise . . ."211

²¹⁰Barclay, pp. 36-37.

²¹¹Bruce, p. 193.

Some scholars have understood these "elemental things" as basic philosophical or religious teachings.²¹² Others believe Paul was referring to the material components of the universe: earth, water, air, and fire.²¹³ Still others believe he meant the host of spiritual beings that Satan heads up.²¹⁴ Other names for this vast company of demonic beings are "principalities," "powers," "the enemies of God," and "the rulers of this age" (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; 15:24, 26).

Another view is that the elemental things are elementary stages of religious experience.²¹⁵ It seems to me that the context favors the first of these views: elementary teachings. Verses 4 and 5 refer to "the Law" as that from which Christ redeemed "us" (i.e., his Jewish readers). For a Gentile, the "elemental things of the world" would have been the teachings of pagan religion.

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

4:4-5 "God," the father of the child in the illustration, "sent forth" Christ when He determined "the time" was right ("the fullness of time").

"It would seem that 'when the time had fully come' (RSV, NIV) does not mean that a certain divinely appointed period had elapsed (so NEB?), or that certain divinely ordained events had to transpire (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3ff.), or that God sent his Son into the world when all the conditions were ripe for his appearance. In view of the fact that the word 'came' denotes in the context (cf. 3:23, 25) the eschatological event of the coming of Christ and of the principle of justifying faith, the thought is rather that the appearance of the Son brought the 'fulness [*sic*] of the time,' marking the end of the present aeon (cf. 1:4) and ushering in the future aeon."²¹⁶

"Sent forth" may refer to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, not just His birth.²¹⁷

²¹²E.g., Lightfoot, p. 167; Burton, pp. 215-16; Barclay, p. 38; Harrison, p. 1293; and Bruce, pp. 202-3.

²¹³E.g., E. Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 18, 20," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988):455-68.

²¹⁴E.g., George, pp. 298-99; and Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 113.

²¹⁵Campbell, p. 601.

²¹⁶Fung, p. 184.

²¹⁷Burton, p. 217.

Redemption has a double aspect: it delivers *from* bondage to the law, and it delivers *to* sonship. God sent His Son to free those children whom the Law held in bondage, and to elevate them to the status of ("adoption as") full "sons." In Roman culture, the father determined the proper time to conduct the ceremony of passage. He took his child out from under the tutelage of his professional guardians, and made him a *free* (redeemed) son. Normally he did this when his child turned 14.²¹⁸

Paul referred to both Christ's divine nature ("His Son") and human nature ("born of a woman"). The Messiah was born under the Mosaic Law, that He alone fulfilled by keeping it perfectly (cf. Matt. 5:17).

"We meet certain professed Christians today who deny what is is [*sic*] called the Eternal Sonship of Christ. They tell us He was not Son from eternity. They admit He was the Word, as set forth in John 1:1, but they say He became the Son when He was born on earth. Verse 4 definitely denies any such teaching."²¹⁹

"Verses 4-5 contain one of the most compressed and highly charged passages in the entire letter because they present the objective basis, the Christological and soteriological foundation, for the doctrine of justification by faith."²²⁰

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

"However, we oversentimentalize this word when we refer to it as mere baby talk and translate it into English as 'daddy.' The word *Abba* appears in certain legal texts of the Mishna as a designation used by grown children in claiming the inheritance of their deceased father.²²¹ As a word of address *Abba* is not so much associated with infancy as it is with intimacy. It is a cry of the heart, not a word spoken calmly with personal detachment and reserve, but a word we 'call' or 'cry out' (*krazo*). . . .

²¹⁸For more information about the Jewish, Greek, and Roman customs involving a son's rite of passage, see Boice, p. 471.

²¹⁹Ironside, p. 137.

²²⁰George, pp. 299-300.

²²¹Footnote 192: See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*abba*," by G. Kittel, 1(1964):5-6.

". . . it would be presumptuous and daring beyond all propriety to address God as *Abba* had Jesus himself not bidden us to do so."²²²

"Most of the Jews knew both Greek and Aramaic. But there remains the question why Jesus used both in his prayer. Was it not natural for both words to come to him in his hour of agony as in his childhood? The same thing may be true here in Paul's case."²²³

"The presence of the Spirit is thus a witness of their sonship."²²⁴

"The purpose of the Son's mission was to give the rights of sonship; the purpose of the Spirit's mission, to give the power of using them."²²⁵

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

"When a sinner trusts Christ and is saved, as far as his *condition* is concerned, he is a 'spiritual babe' who needs to grow (1 Peter 2:2-3); but as far as his *position* is concerned, he is an adult son who can draw on the Father's wealth and who can exercise all the wonderful privileges of sonship."²²⁶

"All Christians are heirs of God by faith alone. But like the Old Testament there are two kinds of inheritance: an inheritance which is merited and an inheritance which belongs to all Christians because they are sons, and for no other reason."²²⁷

The appeal 4:8-11

Paul next reminded his readers of their former way of life, the transformation that their adoption into God's family had wrought, and his concern that they were in danger of trading their future for a mess of pottage.

²²²George, pp. 307, 308.

²²³Robertson, 4:302.

²²⁴Lightfoot, p. 169.

²²⁵H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 204.

²²⁶Wiersbe, 1:705.

²²⁷Dillow, p. 89.

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

"To recognize oneself to be the centre of divine attention [v. 9a] is one of the profounder aspects of Christian conversion."²²⁸

"For all the basic differences between Judaism and paganism, both involved subjection to the same elemental forces. This is an astonishing statement for a former Pharisee to make; yet Paul makes it—not as an exaggeration in the heat of argument but as the deliberate expression of a carefully thought out position.

"The *stoicheia* to which the Galatians had been in bondage were the counterfeit gods of v. 8; the bondage to which they were now disposed to turn back was that of the law."²²⁹

"The demonic forces of legalism, then, both Jewish and Gentile, can be called 'principalities and powers' or 'elemental spirits of the world.'"²³⁰

However, these "elemental things" probably refer to all the things in which people place their trust apart from the living God.²³¹ Both Jewish and Gentile converts had lived bound to worldly elemental forces until Christ released them. These forces, even today, include everything in which people place their trust apart from God: their gods to which they become slaves.

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

"They were 'dropping out' of the school of grace and enrolling in the kindergarten of Law!"²³²

²²⁸Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 116.

²²⁹Bruce, pp. 202-3.

²³⁰G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, p. 51.

²³¹Fung, p. 191.

²³²Wiersbe, 1:707.

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

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

". . . Judaism speaks of itself as being Torah-centered and Christianity declares itself to be Christ-centered, for in Christ the Christian finds not only God's law as the revelatory standard preeminently expressed but also the law as a system of conduct set aside in favor of guidance by reference to Christ's teachings and example and through the direct action of the Spirit."²³³

". . . the Sabbath day of the Jews has found its fulfillment in Him who said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11:28)."²³⁴

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

²³³Longenecker, pp. 176, 177.

²³⁴Ironside, p. 148.

"In recent years some have argued that all or at least most of the laws that these interlopers were pressing on the Galatians were the legislative pieces that established 'boundary markers'—the practices that differentiated Jews from other people, in particular circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath. Paul wants those things dropped because he wants to build a unified church composed of Jew and Gentile alike, and the boundary markers inevitably provoke division. Certainly Paul is constantly at pains to unite Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Nevertheless, this 'new perspective' on Paul is too narrow. Paul cast the function of the law in more sweeping terms than boundary markers (esp. chap. 3), not least its capacity to establish transgression (3:19), and he ties the heart of his debate to the exclusive sufficiency of the cross of Christ to see a person declared 'just' before God."²³⁵

2. The historical illustration 4:12-20

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

"If the reader is inclined to think Paul has been impersonal in dealing with the problems at Galatia, that he has been arguing as a scholar and not as a pastor, the present passage should disabuse him of this idea."²³⁶

"Paul was a wonderful spiritual father; he knew just how to balance rebuke with love. Now he turns from 'spanking' to 'embracing' as he reminds the believers of their love for him and his love for them."²³⁷

"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."²³⁸

"Rhetorically, a major shift in Paul's argument occurs at 4:12. There are, of course, still elements of forensic rhetoric to be found in what follows, particularly in Paul's accusations against the errorists (4:17; 5:7-12; 6:12-13) and his statements of self-defense (4:13-16; 5:11; 6:14, 17). But the dominant tone from 4:12 onwards is that of deliberative rhetoric, not

²³⁵Carson and Moo, p. 466. See also pp. 470-72.

²³⁶Boice, p. 477.

²³⁷Wiersbe, 1:707-8.

²³⁸George, p. 319.

forensic rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric, rather than taking a judicial or defensive stance, seeks to exhort or dissuade an audience regarding future actions by demonstrating that those actions are expedient or harmful . . . In 4:12ff. Paul is no longer so much concerned to accuse or defend as to persuade his Galatian converts to adopt a certain course of action."²³⁹

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

"In seeking to win other people for Christ, our end is to make them like us, but the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. If they are to become one with us in Christian conviction and experience, we must first become one with them in Christian compassion."²⁴⁰

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

The commentators have suggested many different ailments that might have been Paul's including: severe headaches, malaria, epilepsy, ophthalmia, exhaustion, and others.²⁴¹ Obviously it was something repulsive (v. 14). However, there is not sufficient information in the text to be dogmatic. Whatever it was, the Galatians knew to what Paul referred. This affliction may or may not have been Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

"The reference to the bodily weakness which was the occasion of his preaching to them had for its purpose in Paul's mind to remind them of their affectionate attitude towards him and to renew it."²⁴²

The Galatians had received Paul with the honor and credence that they would have given "an angel of God," not that they had viewed him as a superhuman.²⁴³

²³⁹Longenecker, p. 184.

²⁴⁰John R. W. Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians*, p. 113.

²⁴¹See Eadie, pp. 329-45; Longenecker, p. 191; and Lightfoot, pp. 186-91, who preferred epilepsy.

²⁴²Burton, p. 237.

²⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 242.

4:15-18 The Galatians were losing their good attitude toward Paul and its accompanying sense of blessing. They had appreciated Paul so much that they would have given him their most precious possessions. "Plucked out your eyes" is probably a figurative expression similar to "given your eye teeth."²⁴⁴ However, some interpreters believe that Paul had some affliction of the eyes.²⁴⁵ Now the Galatians were regarding Paul suspiciously as an enemy. The Judaizers were seeking to "shut" the Galatians "out" of the sphere of Paul's influence and the gospel's, so that his readers would become dependent on them. Paul "sought" his readers for the right reason ("in a commendable manner"), namely, their need to grow in grace, not only while he was with them but always.

4:19-20 Paul's loving affection for the Galatians comes through more strongly here than before. The tender expression "my [dear] children" (Gr. *tekna mou*) occurs only here in Paul's writings. Paul felt as if he was going through "labor" pains "again" for them. He had agonized for them before, when he had evangelized Galatia, but now he had to repeat his laborious work for them.

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

"The Galatians who a moment ago were described as being formed in the womb were now spoken of as expectant mothers who themselves must wait for an embryonic Christ to be fully developed (*morphoo*, a medical term for the growth of the fetus into an infant) within them."²⁴⁶

Paul wished he could be "present" with them personally, to communicate the nuances of his feelings better ("change my tone"). Their irrational desire to become slaves to the Mosaic system, and followers of the legalistic false teachers, "perplexed" him.

3. The biblical illustration 4:21-31

Paul interpreted allegorically (i.e., figuratively, NIV), features of the history of Abraham's two sons, to convince his readers that they were in danger of joining the wrong branch of Abraham's family. The apostle appears to have used the story of Abraham the way he did, because this was a common rabbinic method that the Judaizers

²⁴⁴See *ibid.*, pp. 243-44; and Longenecker, p. 193.

²⁴⁵E.g., Ironside, p. 155.

²⁴⁶George, pp. 329, 330.

probably employed in their teaching in Galatia.²⁴⁷ Paul used the same method on the false teachers, but taught his readers truth, rather than falsehood, with it.

"We have one Old Testament story, but two complementary interpretations of it. The first [vv. 22-27] defends the equation of existence *hupo nomon* [under law] with *captivity* and thus takes up a theme from what precedes. The second [vv. 28-30] makes a statement about the *freedom* of the believer in preparation for what is to come."²⁴⁸

The biblical story 4:21-23

4:21 Paul challenged his readers, who claimed to value the Law so highly, to consider what it taught. He chose his lesson from Genesis, a book in the "Law" section of the Old Testament. Thus he used the term "law" to refer to two different things in this verse: the Mosaic Law (in its larger sense of the Torah or Pentateuch; cf. Luke 24:44; Rom. 3:21) and the Old Testament (cf. Rom. 3:19).²⁴⁹ Again Paul returned to Abraham, the founder of Judaism.

4:22-23 He pointed out two contrasts between Ishmael and Isaac. First, Ishmael's mother was a slave ("bondwoman"), but Isaac's mother was "free." These conditions affected the status of their sons in Abraham's household. Second, Ishmael was born naturally, but Isaac was born supernaturally, in fulfillment of God's promise.

"In the scriptural record of the birth of these two sons of Abraham Paul recognizes the same opposition between reliance on self ('according to the flesh') and reliance on God ('through promise') as exists between those who would be justified by legal works and those who are justified by faith."²⁵⁰

The allegorical interpretation 4:24-27

4:24 Paul then interpreted these events figuratively. Note that he said the story "contained" an allegory, not "was" an allegory (lit. "which things are allegorized").²⁵¹ He acknowledged the historicity of the events. Paul saw in this story an illustration of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, nomism and spirituality. He was calling allegory what we

²⁴⁷R. Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, pp. 128-29. Longenecker wrote an excursus on "The Hagar-Sarah Story in Jewish Writings and in Paul," pp. 200-6.

²⁴⁸Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Law Has Given Sarah No Children [Gal. 4:21-30]," *Novum Testamentum* 29:3 (July 1987):235.

²⁴⁹Lightfoot, p. 179.

²⁵⁰Fung, p. 206.

²⁵¹See Robertson, 4:306-7.

refer to as analogy.²⁵² An "allegory," as we use that term today, is a story in which the events are not historical.

"Since the kind of OT exegesis found in this passage is by no means generally characteristic of Paul, the natural inference is that there was a special reason for its use here. The reason is not far to seek: if the Judaizers in Galatia were using a similar kind of argument to persuade the Christians that sonship to Abraham entailed circumcision and observance of the law, it would be especially appropriate for Paul to turn his opponents' own weapons against them."²⁵³

"The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that in him and his offspring all nations would be blessed (cf. 3:8, 16). The law, which was given later, was a parenthetical dispensation introduced by God for a limited purpose; its validity continued only until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ, and even while it was valid it did not modify the terms of the promise (cf. 3:17-25)."²⁵⁴

4:25 "Hagar" represents the Mosaic Covenant, made at "Mount Sinai," in Paul's analogy (illustration). Her descendants represent the Israelites who lived in bondage under the Law. Sarah, not mentioned in verse 25, represents the Abrahamic Covenant, and her descendants are free, living under the promise.

The earliest identification of Mt. Sinai with Jebel Musa in the Sinai Peninsula, the most popular probable site, comes from the writing of Egeria in the fourth century A.D. It is possible that in Paul's day, the Sinai Peninsula was part of Arabia.²⁵⁵ Another possibility is that the real Mt. Sinai was in ancient (and modern) Arabia, perhaps just east of the Gulf of Aqabah.

"Paul is apparently viewing Arabia as the land of Hagar's descendants and the land of slaves; it was not the holy land that God gave Israel."²⁵⁶

²⁵²See Longenecker, p. 209.

²⁵³Fung, p. 219.

²⁵⁴Bruce, p. 219.

²⁵⁵Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, p. 239.

²⁵⁶Morris, p. 146.

4:26 "Hagar" also represents old ("present," v. 25) "Jerusalem," enslaved under Rome and the Mosaic Law, which Paul did not mention in verse 26. "Sarah" represents the heavenly city of Jerusalem ("Jerusalem above"), the final destiny of departed believers, which is free. She is also the mother of all true believers.

The main features in this analogy are as follows.

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

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

The practical application 4:28-31

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

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

4:30 Third, Christians should exclude ("cast out") legalists from their midst, since legalists have no inheritance with the legitimate sons of God. As Abraham cast Ishmael out of his household, so the Galatians should cast the Judaizers out of the church. This does not mean church leaders should excommunicate all legalistic Christians. However, it would be wise (and Scriptural) to exclude promoters of legalism and nomism, especially, if they do not change their teaching. Paul's point was that nomists will not inherit as much blessing from God as those who live by the Spirit.

"The Apostle thus confidently sounds the death-knell of
Judaism at a time when one-half of Christendom clung to

the Mosaic law with a jealous affection little short of frenzy, and while the Judaic party seemed to be growing in influence and was strong enough, even in the Gentile churches of his own founding, to undermine his influence and endanger his life."²⁵⁷

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

"Nomism" is the belief that we need to make *law* the ruling governor of our lives. It sees law as the most important factor in people's relationship with God. *Nomism* focuses on law, whereas "legalism" focuses on rules. As a practice, legalism is the keeping of rules with a view to gaining merit with God.

"Legalism is one of the major problems among Christians today. We must keep in mind that legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards, it means worshipping these standards and thinking that we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards."²⁵⁸

"Some run from rules, claiming it is legalism.

"It is not. Legalism is not the law. There has always been law in the world. Since Moses, there has always been law in the Bible. Even in the New Testament, we have law. As believers, we operate under 'the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2). The commands of the New Testament provide this code for us. And this law is good and beneficial for us, since it comes from God. So, legalism is not the presence of law or moral code.

"Legalism is an attitude. Legalism exists when you conform to a rule or code with the motivation of exalting yourself. You may pretend it helps sanctify you. For instance, you could claim a vegan diet accelerates our

²⁵⁷Lightfoot, p. 184.

²⁵⁸Wiersbe, 1:712.

personal spiritual growth. On the outside, that may seem plausible. But because your motivation is wrong and you have exalted yourself, you actually stunt growth."²⁵⁹

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

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

"Many people talk about salvation by grace who do not seem to have the least conception of what grace is. They think that God gives them the grace to do the things that make them deserving of salvation. That is not it at all [cf. Rom. 3:24]."²⁶⁰

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵⁹J. Paul Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian*, p. 111.

²⁶⁰Ironside, p. 163.

A. BALANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE CH. 5

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

Balance is extremely important in theology and the Christian life. Probably most of the errors that Christians get into, in both areas, result from failure to balance biblical revelation on various complementary subjects. Here Paul stressed balance between living without law and living without license.²⁶¹

1. Living without the Law 5:1-12

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

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

"Before plunging into this third section of his letter, Paul interjects a verse that is at once a summary of all that has gone before and a transition to what follows. It is, in fact, the key verse of the entire Epistle. Because of the nature of the true gospel and of the work of Christ on his behalf, the believer is now to turn away from anything that smacks of legalism and instead rest in Christ's triumphant work for him and live in the power of Christ's Spirit. . . . The appeal is for an obstinate perseverance in freedom as the only proper response to an attempt to bring Christians once more under legalism."²⁶²

"One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a 'second childhood.'²⁶³

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

²⁶¹See Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*; and Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, for excellent discussions of many important areas of theology and practice that need balancing.

²⁶²Boice, p. 486.

²⁶³Wiersbe, 1:705.

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

Calvin and many reformed theologians have answered this question this way. They have said the ceremonial laws (e.g., animal sacrifices, dietary restrictions, feast days, etc.) are no longer binding on Christians because of the death of Christ. Nevertheless the moral laws (the Ten Commandments) are still binding. God has done away with the moral laws only in the sense that they no longer condemn us (Rom. 8:11).²⁶⁴

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

Some reformed theologians, following Calvin, believe that God abolished Sabbath worship along with the ceremonial laws.²⁶⁵ This seems somewhat inconsistent. Others, following the Westminster Confession, regard Sunday worship as a continuation of Sabbath worship.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless it is, of course, very different.

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

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

²⁶⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:2:11:4.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 1:2:8:33, 34.

²⁶⁶*The Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large*, 21:7.

"May this procedure not be likened to the various codes in a household with growing children? At different stages of maturity new codes are instituted, but some of the same commandments appear often. To say that the former code is done away and all its commandments is no contradiction. It is as natural as growing up. So it is with the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ."²⁶⁷

"The 'yoke' was used in current Jewish parlance in an honorable sense for the obligation to keep the law of Moses, and the Judaizers may well have urged the Galatians to 'take the yoke of the law' upon themselves. But Paul bluntly points out that the ordinances of the law as demanded by the Judaizers constitute a slave's yoke, so that he uses the word in the bad sense of an imposed burden, like slavery (cf. Acts 15:10; 1 Tim. 6:1)."²⁶⁸

"Sad to say, there are some people who feel very insecure with liberty. They would rather be under the tyranny of some leader than to make their own decisions freely. There are some believers who are frightened by the liberty they have in God's grace; so they seek out a fellowship that is legalistic and dictatorial, where they can let others make their decisions for them. This is comparable to an adult climbing back into the crib."²⁶⁹

5:2 Paul now began to attack the Judaizers' teaching about circumcision. Insistence on "circumcision" was a central feature of the false gospel that the Judaizers were promoting. It was the practice around which the whole controversy swirled.²⁷⁰

"At this point St Paul assumes a severer tone in condemning the observance of the law. It is not only a useless imposition, a slavish burden; it is pernicious and fatal in itself."²⁷¹

"The false teachers said, 'Except ye be circumcised, you cannot be saved;' and the apostle affirms, in the teeth of this declaration, 'Of what advantage shall Christ be to you, if you are trusting in something else than Christ—in the blood of your foreskin, and not in His atoning blood?'"²⁷²

²⁶⁷Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):247.

²⁶⁸Fung, pp. 216-17.

²⁶⁹Wiersbe, 1:714.

²⁷⁰See Monte A. Shanks, "Galatians 5:2-4 in Light of the Doctrine of Justification," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:674 (April-June 2012):188-202.

²⁷¹Lightfoot, p. 203.

²⁷²Eadie, p. 380.

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

"The acceptance of circumcision is in principle the acceptance of the whole legalistic scheme."²⁷³

"It is not the fact of their *having been circumcised* which St Paul condemns (for this is indifferent in itself), but the fact of their *allowing themselves to be circumcised*, [while] being free agents."²⁷⁴

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

"Certainly he is not suggesting that the Galatians had 'lost their salvation,' because throughout this letter he deals with them as *believers*. At least nine times he calls them *brethren*, and he also uses the pronoun *we* (Gal. 4:28, 31). This Paul would never do if his readers were lost. He boldly states, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father"' (Gal. 4:6). If his readers were unsaved, Paul could never write those words."²⁷⁵

The legalists appear to have been claiming that circumcision was a necessary step in the process by which people become acceptable to God. These steps, from their viewpoint, were: faith in Christ, reception of the Spirit, and circumcision of the flesh. Paul argued that anyone who submits to circumcision to gain acceptance with God really believes in salvation by law-keeping. If one believes in law-keeping for salvation, he must keep "the whole Law," not just the requirement of circumcision. That is impossible for sinners to do. Rather than gaining acceptance with God, circumcision would be the very thing that would separate them from Christ.

²⁷³Burton, p. 274.

²⁷⁴Lightfoot, p. 204.

²⁷⁵Wiersbe, 1:715.

5:5-6

Paul's approach, and the one he tried to persuade the Galatians to adopt, was simply to trust God to deliver all that we anticipate in the future, based on the fact that we are now already righteous (justified).²⁷⁶ This "hope" includes our ultimate glorification (cf. Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Pet. 1:3-4, 13). We do not work for this, but we wait for it. Paul typically used "righteousness" to describe what we have now, which comes with justification, but he used "salvation" to stress our future deliverance.²⁷⁷

"The hope of righteousness' is the only prophetic reference in the entire epistle. This is quite remarkable, because in all Paul's epistles he has something to say about the rapture of the church or about Christ's coming to earth to establish His kingdom."²⁷⁸

God does not care if a Christian has a circumcised body or not. What does matter is that we trust God because we love Him. Paul united the three basic Christian virtues in these verses: faith, hope, and love. The Holy Spirit makes all three possible.

"For the disclosure of the apostle's fundamental idea of the nature of religion, there is no more important sentence in the whole epistle [than verse 6], if, indeed, in any of Paul's epistles."²⁷⁹

"This verse [v. 6] on its own merits would show that Paul is not out of harmony with James' doctrine of faith plus works (Jas 2.24ff.)."²⁸⁰

"When you live by grace, you depend on the power of the Spirit; but under Law, you must depend on yourself and your own efforts."²⁸¹

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

²⁷⁶Fung, pp. 225-26.

²⁷⁷"Eagerly await" (Gr. *apekdechometha*) appears seven times in the New Testament in reference to Christ's return (Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28).

²⁷⁸McGee, 5:185.

²⁷⁹Burton, p. 279.

²⁸⁰Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 130.

²⁸¹Wiersbe, 1:715.

properly an essential trait of faith; on the contrary, faith animates the love in which it works."²⁸²

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

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

"It is important to note that Paul never uses the image of the race to tell people how to be saved. He is always talking to Christians about how to live the Christian life. A *contestant in the Greek games had to be a citizen before he could compete*."²⁸³

The "leaven" in Paul's proverb (v. 9; 1 Cor. 5:6) could refer to the error in the church, the leading false teacher in their midst (the bad apple in the barrel, cf. v. 10), and the single requirement of circumcision already mentioned (vv. 2-3). I think it probably refers to *the Judaizer* or *the Judaizers*, rather than to the legalistic teaching.²⁸⁴ Paul was "confident" that the Galatians would side with him ("adopt no other view"), and that they or God would judge the false teacher or teachers. "Whoever he is" may allude to the high standing of the false teacher in the Galatians' minds (as in: "Whoever he thinks he is"), rather than expressing Paul's ignorance about his identity.²⁸⁵ On the other hand, "the one who is disturbing you" probably refers to anyone who might hereafter disturb them (cf. v. 12; 1:6).²⁸⁶

5:11 Evidently some people were saying that Paul advocated "circumcision." He may have preached it before his Damascus Road conversion, but since then he had stopped. Probably Paul meant that the accusation from his critics, that he preached circumcision whenever it suited him, was not true (cf. 1 Cor. 7:18).²⁸⁷ Paul thought it wise for some Christians, such as Timothy, to undergo circumcision for the sake of effective ministry (Acts 16:3). However, he did not teach that it was necessary for salvation.²⁸⁸

²⁸²Bornkamm, p. 153.

²⁸³Wiersbe, 1:715.

²⁸⁴Lightfoot, p. 206.

²⁸⁵Fung, p. 238.

²⁸⁶See Burton, p. 285.

²⁸⁷Boice, p. 490.

²⁸⁸See Longenecker, p. 232, for other possible reasons for this charge against Paul.

Paul's point here was that if he was teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation, the Judaizers would not have "persecuted" him. If people need circumcision, they do not need the cross of Christ. The legalists opposed Paul's preaching of the Cross, because it pointed out that people are unable to please God themselves.

"The *skandalon* [stumbling block] of the cross, for Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), lay in the curse which it involved for one who was hanged on it (cf. 3:13). That one who died such a death should be proclaimed as Lord and Christ was intolerable. In the eyes of Gentiles the idea that salvation depended on one who had neither the wit nor the power to save himself from so disreputable a death was the height of folly. But there is a more general *skandalon* attached to the cross, one of which Paul is probably thinking here: it cuts the ground from under every thought of personal achievement or merit where God's salvation is in view. To be shut up to receiving salvation from the crucified one, if it is to be received at all, is an affront to all notions of proper self-pride and self-help—and for many people this remains a major stumbling-block in the gospel of Christ crucified. If I myself can make some small contribution, something even so small as the acceptance of circumcision, then my self-esteem is uninjured."²⁸⁹

"Actually, the cross of Christ is an offense to all that man prides himself in. It is an offense to his morality because it tells him his work cannot justify him. It is an offense to his philosophy because its appeal is to faith and not to reason. It is an offense to the culture of man because its truths are revealed to babes. It is an offense to his sense of caste because God chooses the poor and humble. It is an offense to his will because it calls for an unconditional surrender. It is an offense to his pride because it shows the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart. And it is an offense to himself because it tells him he must be born again."²⁹⁰

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

5:12 The Judaizers had gone too far with circumcision. Paul's wish, that the Judaizers who were so keen on circumcision "would even mutilate (i.e., castrate) themselves," reflects his deep feelings about the seriousness of

²⁸⁹Bruce, pp. 237-38.

²⁹⁰McGee, 5:186.

their heresy (cf. Phil. 3:2). If God granted Paul's wish, they could not produce converts, figuratively speaking. And they would be excluded from the congregation of the Lord (cf. Deut. 23:1). Priests of the Cybele cult in that region practiced castration.²⁹¹

"The remonstrance is doubly significant as addressed to Galatians, for Pessinus one of their chief towns was the home of the worship of Cybele in honour of whom these mutilations were practiced . . ."²⁹²

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

". . . for Paul to compare the ancient Jewish rite of circumcision to pagan practices even in this way is startling. For one thing, it puts the efforts of the Judaizers to have the Gentiles circumcised on the same level as abhorred pagan practices. For another, it links their desire for circumcision to that which even in Judaism disbarred one from the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:1)."²⁹³

Therefore, Paul's desire for the false teachers seems to have been that they would "cut themselves off" from the company of believers.²⁹⁴

"Most often Galatians is viewed as the great document of justification by faith. What Christians all too often fail to realize is that in reality it is a document that sets out a Christ-centered lifestyle—one that stands in opposition to both nomism and libertinism. Sadly, though applauding justification by faith, Christians frequently renounce their freedom in Christ by espousing either nomism or libertinism, and sometimes (like the Galatians) both. So Paul's letter to the Galatians, though directly relevant to the Galatian situation, speaks also to our situation today."²⁹⁵

2. Living without license 5:13-15

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

"Christian freedom is not licence [*sic*] for the simple but tremendous reason that the Christian is not the man who has become free to sin, but the man, who, by the grace of God, has become free *not to sin*."²⁹⁶

²⁹¹Rendall, 3:185; Burton, p. 289; Barclay, p. 48; George, pp. 371-72.

²⁹²Lightfoot, p. 207.

²⁹³Boice, p. 491.

²⁹⁴Fung, p. 242.

²⁹⁵Longenecker, p. 235.

²⁹⁶Barclay, p. 50.

"The theme of love . . . informs all of Paul's exhortations vis-à-vis the Galatians' libertine tendencies . . .

"Yet undergirding all of Paul's admonitions regarding love and service is the reality of life lived 'by the Spirit,' with references to the Spirit being more frequent in 5:13—6:10 than references to either love or service."²⁹⁷

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

"The word *sarx* ["flesh"], previously in this epistle a purely physical term, is used here and throughout this chapter (see vv. 16, 17, 20, 24) in a definitely ethical sense, 'that element of man's nature which is opposed to goodness, and makes for evil,' in which it appears also in Rom., chap. 8. . ."²⁹⁸

It is possible to conclude logically, that since it is unnecessary to keep the Law to be saved, it is unnecessary to pay attention to the Law for any reason. However, Paul was not urging his converts to burn their Old Testaments. The Law has values, as he previously pointed out, one of which is to reveal how to express love for God and other people. Actually the whole Law is a revelation of how to love (Lev. 19:18; cf. Mark 12:28-31).

"The true ideal of the Christian is not freedom, but unfettered service to the love of God and man, which annihilates self, and subordinates all selfish desires to perfect love."²⁹⁹

Under grace we are free to fulfill the Law by loving one another. For the Christian, the Mosaic Law has *revelatory* value (2 Tim. 3:16-17), even though it does not have *regulatory* value, controlling our behavior.³⁰⁰ Two of the *revelatory* purposes of the Mosaic Law are: to show us how to express love for God and others, and to teach us by Israel's example (Rom. 15:1; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Another view is that Paul meant divine law in a general sense here, i.e., "natural law" or the law of conscience, rather than the Mosaic Law or "law" legalistically interpreted.³⁰¹ If so, he used "law" here in a different sense than he used it previously in this epistle.

²⁹⁷Longenecker, p. 236.

²⁹⁸Burton, p. 292.

²⁹⁹Rendall, 3:186.

³⁰⁰See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:511 (July-September 1971):227-33.

³⁰¹Burton, p. 294.

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

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

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

"There is a play on two meanings of the Greek word *peplerotai*, translated 'summed up' [NIV, or fulfilled, NASB]. On the one hand, it refers to the fact that the law can aptly be summarized by the words of Leviticus 19:18. This idea was a commonplace of rabbinic opinion and Jesus endorsed it in Matthew 22:39 and Luke 10:25-28. On the other hand, the word can also mean 'fulfilled' (as in Rom 13:8), and in this sense Paul is suggesting that it is actually out of the new life of love made possible within the Christian community through the Spirit that the law finds fulfillment."³⁰²

". . . the primary meaning is not that we must properly love ourselves before we can love others (although this is true in itself), but that we are to love our neighbor with the same spontaneity and alacrity with which we love ourselves."³⁰³

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

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

³⁰²Boice, p. 493.

³⁰³Fung, p. 246. Cf. Ridderbos, pp. 201-2.

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

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

The promise of victory 5:16-18

"In this passage the Spirit is doubly contrasted, first, with the *flesh*, and secondly, with the *law*. The flesh and the law are closely allied: they both move in the same element, in the sphere of outward and material things. The law is not only no safeguard against the flesh, but rather provokes it; and he who would renounce the flesh, must renounce the law also. We have here germs of the ideas more fully developed in the Epistle to the Romans."³⁰⁴

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

"'Walk by the Spirit' means 'let your conduct be directed by the Spirit.'"³⁰⁵

"Regulate your lives by the rule of the spirit."³⁰⁶

"To 'walk by the Spirit' means to be under the constant, moment-by-moment direction, control, and guidance of the Spirit."³⁰⁷

"Walking is a metaphor used from time to time in Scripture to denote spiritual progress. People in the first century could not travel as fast as we do, with our cars, planes, trains and the like, but even so, for them as for us, walking was the slowest way of going places. But even though walking was slow and unspectacular, walking meant progress. If anyone kept walking, she or he would certainly cover the ground and eventually reach the destination. So for the apostle walking was an apt metaphor. If any believer was walking, that believer was going somewhere."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴Lightfoot, p. 209.

³⁰⁵Bruce, p. 243.

³⁰⁶Rendall, 3:186.

³⁰⁷Fung, p. 249.

³⁰⁸Morris, p. 167.

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

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

"The contrary way of living is to *fulfil the lust of the flesh*. The *flesh* is the physical part of our being and stands accordingly for that which is opposed to our spirit as well as to the divine Spirit. Our *flesh* is characterized by *lust*, which stands for the strong, but sometimes evil, desires that are associated with bodily living."³⁰⁹

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

5:17

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

"So long as we remain in this present life, we never outgrow or transcend the spiritual conflict Paul was describing in this passage. There is no spiritual technique or second blessing that can propel the believer onto a higher plane of Christian living where this battle must no longer be fought."³¹⁰

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

³⁰⁹Ibid., p. 168.

³¹⁰George, pp. 387-88.

Finally, the nature of the conflict is different: In Galatians, it is normal Christian experience; in Romans, it is abnormal.³¹¹

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

5:18

If we are "led by the Spirit," we are "not under the Law." This statement is a first class condition in the Greek text, indicating that the writer assumed the statement was true for the sake of his argument. Other information about what he said determines whether it is really true. In this case, Paul apparently believed that the Holy Spirit does indeed lead every Christian (cf. vv. 24-26; Rom. 8:14). The question is, will we follow His leading and walk after the Spirit (v. 16), or will we walk after the flesh? The "if" in this sentence has the force of "since." However, we should not conclude that the Spirit forces us to do God's will. He does not lead us that strongly.

"The *if ye are led* does not imply that believers are passive; it is at the same time a matter of [purposely, submissively, and prayerfully] letting themselves be led (cf. verse 16)."³¹²

"To be led by the Spirit, in the full sense of it, is to be under His benign and powerful influence in all thoughts, aspirations, and acts,—to be yielded up to His government without reserve,—to have no will without His prompting it, no purpose without His shaping it,—is to be everywhere and in all things in willing submission to His control, and always guarding against any insubordination which may 'grieve the Holy Spirit of God.' . . . To be led by the Spirit is much the same as to walk by the Spirit, ver. 16."³¹³

The Holy Spirit leads us to do the moral will of God. He does this primarily through Scripture, by helping us understand the will of God as He has revealed it there. In addition, He motivates us to do what we know

³¹¹See Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contrast between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):310-14.

³¹²Ridderbos, p. 204.

³¹³Eadie, p. 412.

to be right, and He provides the power for us to obey God (Phil. 2:13). We can overcome the flesh by siding with the Spirit.

"Walking by the Spirit, the antidote to nomism [living by the law] of every kind, calls for resolution and staying power, as is made plain by Paul's frequent use of athletic metaphor for the Christian life."³¹⁴

"Being led by the Spirit does not imply passivity but rather the need to allow oneself to be led. Responding to the Spirit is described by three mutually interpreting words in vv. 16, 18, and 25—'walk' (RSV), 'led,' and 'live.'"³¹⁵

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

The works of the flesh 5:19-21

The deeds of the sinful human nature are as evident as fruit on a tree.

"This does not mean to say that they always happen in public; it means rather that they can plainly be recognized as works of the flesh (*cf.* Rom. 1:19)."³¹⁶

Behavior normally demonstrates nature. Paul identified five categories of sins here. He seems to have been saying ironically: "Look at the accomplishments of the flesh!"

Sexual sins (v. 19)

"Immorality," fornication (Gr. *porneia*, all types of forbidden sexual relationships)

"Impurity," uncleanness (Gr. *akatharsia*, all moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed)

"A Welshman said, 'I cannot help it if a bird alights on top of my head, but I can help it if he builds his nest in my hair,' and so you may not be able to help it if evil thoughts come surging into your mind, but you can help indulging in those thoughts."³¹⁷

³¹⁴Bruce, p. 246.

³¹⁵Boice, p. 495.

³¹⁶Ridderbos, p. 205.

³¹⁷Ironside, p. 207.

"Sensuality," licentiousness, indecency debauchery, lasciviousness (Gr. *aselgeia*, the open, shameless display of these sins)

"But why begin with these? It may be because of the prevalence and apparentness of them in Paul's time. They were much in evidence in the pagan background from which the Galatians had come. Indeed they were sanctioned in the rites of pagan worship."³¹⁸

Religious sins (v. 20)

"Idolatry" (Gr. *eidololatria*, worship of anything but God and the practices associated with that worship)

"Sorcery," witchcraft (Gr. *pharmakeia*, attempts to aid the powers of evil and the practices associated with that)

Societal sins (vv. 20-21)

"Enmities," quarrels, hatred (Gr. *echthrai*, hostilities)

"Strife," discord, variance (Gr. *eris*, antagonism)

"Jealousy," envy, emulation (Gr. *zelos*, self-centered animosity)

"Outbursts of anger," fits of rage, wrath (Gr. *thymoi*, temper eruptions)

"Disputes," strife, factions selfishness, selfish ambition (Gr. *eritheiai*, putting others down to get ahead)

"Dissensions," divisions, seditions (Gr. *dichostasiai*, disputes over issues or personalities)

"Factions," heresies, party spirit (Gr. *haireseis*, divisions over issues or personalities)

"Envy[ing]s," jealousies (Gr. *phthonoi*, wrong desires to have another's possessions)

"The Arab said, 'Once I felt bad and I complained because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet.'"³¹⁹

"The general impression created by these words is one of chaos."³²⁰

Intemperate sins (v. 21)

"Drunkenness," drinking bouts (Gr. *methai*, excessive use of intoxicants)

"Carousings," revelings, orgies (Gr. *komoi*, parties involving excessive eating and drinking)

³¹⁸Guthrie, *Galatians*, pp. 136-37.

³¹⁹Ironside, p. 208.

³²⁰Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 137.

Other sins (v. 21)

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

"The common feature in this catalogue of vices seems to reside not in the precise ways in which these fifteen items manifest themselves but in the self-centeredness or egocentricity that underlies all of them.³²¹

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

Most interpreters understand Paul's words here to mean that people who practice these types of sins are not the kind of individuals who will inherit the kingdom (i.e., they are unbelievers).³²² Those who hold this view usually equate inheriting the kingdom with obtaining eternal life (cf. John 3:3-5). Some who hold this view concede that these vices may characterize some Christians, but Paul mentioned the fate of these sinners so the Galatian Christians would avoid these vices.³²³ Others who hold this view believe that no genuine Christian would practice these sins.

The second view is that Paul meant that Christians who practice these vices will have less inheritance (reward) in the kingdom than Christians who do not practice them.³²⁴ Those who hold this view often equate inheriting the kingdom with obtaining an inheritance in the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

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

The fruit of the Spirit 5:22-23

Paul had just identified the behavior that results when we rebel against the Holy Spirit's leadership, and follow the dictates of our sinful nature (cf. v. 17). He next listed the behavior characteristics that become evident when we allow the Spirit to control us rather than the flesh.

³²¹Longenecker, p. 266.

³²²E.g., Bruce, p. 250; Boice, p. 497; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 283.

³²³E.g., René A. López, "Paul's Vice List in Galatians 5:19-21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:673 (January-March 2012):48-67.

³²⁴See Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 76-77; Dillow, p. 90; Bob Wilkin, "Galatians 5:19-21: Who Will Inherit the Kingdom?" *Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter* (December 1987), p. 2.

Note that he called what issues from our sinful human nature "deeds" or "acts" (v.19), but he called what issues from the Holy Spirit "fruit" (v. 22). This contrast is consistent with Paul's emphasis throughout the epistle. He repeatedly contrasted working and trusting. "Fruit" is singular, suggesting the unified Christ-like character that the Holy Spirit produces. This fruit comes in nine delicious flavors. Both deeds and fruit are the behavioral manifestations of the driving forces within the Christian: his or her sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit.

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

Mental or God-ward qualities (v. 22)

"Love" (Gr. *agape*, self-sacrificing affection for others)

"Joy" (Gr. *chara*, deep-seated gladness regardless of circumstances)

"Peace" (Gr. *eirene*, inner quietness and repose regardless of circumstances)

Interpersonal or other-ward qualities (v. 22)

"Patience" (Gr. *makrothymia*, forbearance even under provocation)

"Kindness" (Gr. *chrestotes*, benevolence and graciousness)

"Goodness" (Gr. *agathosyne*, constructive action reaching out to others)

General or self-ward qualities (vv. 22-23)

"Faithfulness" (Gr. *pistis*, reliability, trustworthiness)

"Gentleness" (Gr. *praytes*, acquiescence to authority and consideration of others)

"Self-control" (Gr. *enkrateia*, ability to master oneself)

"Again, it appears that Paul is not so concerned with precisely how each of these matters works out in practice, but with the underlying orientation of selfless and outgoing concern for others. For in commitment to God through Jesus Christ one discovers a new orientation for life—an orientation that reflects the selfless and outgoing love of God himself."³²⁵

³²⁵Longenecker, p. 267.

"Christian character is not mere moral or legal correctness, but the possession and manifestation of the graces of vv. 22-23. Taken together they present a moral portrait of Christ, and may be understood as the apostle's explanation of 2:20."³²⁶

There are laws in society against the deeds of the flesh, because they are destructive, but there are none against the fruit of the Spirit, because *it* is edifying (cf. Rom. 8:1). The works of the flesh *know* no law, but the fruit of the Spirit *need* no law. This fruit involves both character and conduct.³²⁷

". . . the law is not *against* those who walk by the Spirit because in principle they are fulfilling the law (verse 14)."³²⁸

"Law exists for the purpose of restraint, but in the works of the Spirit there is nothing to restrain . . ."³²⁹

PERSONALITY TRAITS FOR MEANINGFUL MINISTRY³³⁰
This past June [1985], Rick Rood attended a conference on Student Development in Theological Education held in Deerfield, Illinois. At the conference John L. Davis, of the North Central Career Development Center, New Brighton, Minnesota, spoke of nine "personal and social formation characteristics." His staff identified these as being significant for the practice of ministry. . . .
1. Ego-strength or inner resiliency to cope with personal and professional stress; sense of self-worth.
2. Integrity about one's inner being; a willingness to . . . share selectively and appropriately about one's regrets, fears, needs, aspirations, and visions.
3. Discriminatingly assertive; self-starting; resourceful, energetic, poised, interdependent; even some degree of entrepreneurship.
4. Inquisitiveness; openness to learning; avoidance of rigidity.
5. Healthy skepticism; evidence of questioning, probing, doubting.
6. Presence of joy, humor, hope.
7. Patience; long endurance.

³²⁶The New Scofield Reference Bible, p. 1270.

³²⁷For a helpful exposition of what is and what is not within the scope of the fruit of the Spirit, see James E. Rosscup, "Fruit in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):56-66. See also Charles C. Ryrie, "What is Spirituality?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:503 (July-September 1969):204-13.

³²⁸Ridderbos, p. 208.

³²⁹Lightfoot, p. 213.

³³⁰Roy B. Zuck, "The Dean's Doodlings," 1:2 (October 1985):1.

8. Adaptability; willingness to come to terms with role expectations in ministry without violating one's inner conscience.
9. Demonstration of a collegial attitude and behavior; avoidance of an authoritative or laissez-faire approach to leadership; leadership sometimes described as participating and/or consultative.
Sounds almost like the fruit of the Spirit, doesn't it?

The provision for victory 5:24-26

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

5:25 Now since (or "if," another first class condition in Greek that here states a condition true to reality) God has given us new life, we should do something. We should "walk" ("keep in step," NIV, as soldiers do when they march) daily "by (with) the Spirit" (i.e., in dependence on Him). He is God's provision for us to live victoriously. The Holy Spirit *leads* every Christian, but not all choose to "walk by the Spirit" (i.e., follow His leading).

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

"In verse 16 we were given the principle of walk; here in verse 25 it ["walk"] means to learn to walk. Just as we learned to walk physically by the trial and error method, so are we to begin to walk by the Spirit—it is a learning process."³³¹

One writer argued that "flesh" and "spirit" were "... theological abbreviations in Paul's argument that represent the two competing identities of the people of God in Galatia. The 'flesh community' (Judaizers) is a community

³³¹McGee, 5:192.

identified with the Mosaic law era and is therefore a community identified and characterized by a person bodily in his or her frailty and transitoriness and not indwelt by God's Spirit. This community is representative of a person before or apart from Christ's liberating death, burial and resurrection. By contrast the 'Spirit community' is a community identified and characterized by a person bodily aided and enabled by God's presence and also bodily liberated from sin's dominion, a person experiencing the full liberation of Jesus' death and resurrection. Such persons are experiencing the freedom that Christ set them free to experience (Gal 5:1)."³³²

This community view does not commend itself to me as much as the individual view.

"Stated simply, the flesh is the individual behaving independently of the Spirit."³³³

Living "by the Spirit" is similar to walking by the Spirit. The former term looks at the Spirit as the source and sustaining power of the believer's spiritual life, whereas the latter one views Him as the regulative principle in his or her conduct.³³⁴

"The Christian life is not a balloon ascension with some great overpowering experience of soaring to the heights. Rather it is a daily walk; it is a matter of putting one foot ahead of the other, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit."³³⁵

5:26 This last verse seems to be an application of this principle to the specific Galatian situation.

"This is a very instructive verse because it shows that our conduct to others is determined by our opinion of ourselves."³³⁶

"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."³³⁷

³³²Walter B. Russell III, "Does the Christian Have 'Flesh' in Gal 5:13-26?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:2 (June 1993):186-87.

³³³Pyne, "Dependence and . . .," p. 148.

³³⁴Fung, p. 275.

³³⁵McGee, 5:192.

³³⁶Stott, p. 156.

³³⁷Fung, p. 277. Cf. Burton, p. 324.

Liberty lies between legalism and license. That balance is central in chapter 5. The key to being fruitful as a Christian is being submissive to the Holy Spirit, following His leading, walking in dependence on Him (cf. John 15:4-5).

Is the fruit of the Spirit the same as the gifts of the Spirit? In one sense, everything that God gives us is a gift, since we do not deserve it, including love, joy, peace, etc. However, in the apostles' references to gifts of the Spirit, the emphasis is on service, abilities God gives us with which to serve Him. In their references to the fruit of the Spirit, the emphasis is on personal character and general conduct. Personal character is, of course, essential for effective service. Thus it should be no surprise to find Paul's emphasis on love, a fruit of the Spirit, in the middle of his discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12—14.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE 6:1-10

Being free from the Mosaic Law does not mean being free from responsibility. In this section, Paul explained various responsibilities that Christians have to one another, to clarify the will of God for his readers. Manifesting the fruit of the Spirit is not a mystical experience. Paul said spirituality is evident in personal relationships (vv. 1-5) and in the use of money (vv. 6-10).

1. Toward sinning Christians 6:1

"Walking by the Spirit will mean not only avoidance of mutual provocation and envy (5:26) but also, positively, the rehabilitation of those who have lapsed into sin."³³⁸

The situation Paul envisioned here is that of sin *overtaking* a Christian like when a runner overtakes a walker. It is not that God has "caught" him in the act of sinning, as much as that sin has gotten the better of him in a particular instance. He has been surprised by sin, rather than detected in it. "Trespass" (Gr. *paraptoma*) is not a habitual action, but an isolated act. Neither is it intentional sin, but instead inadvertent wrongdoing (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11; Rom. 16:17). Peter was overtaken by a temptation in the courtyard of the high priest and, before he realized what he was doing, he had sinned. Even though a person strives to walk by the Spirit, he or she will occasionally sin. Thus the need to help those who stumble.

The spiritual Christian should restore such a person, help such a one to his or her feet. Elsewhere the Greek word, *katartizo*, refers to mending nets (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19) and setting a fractured or dislocated bone.³³⁹ This may involve confrontation (cf. Matt. 18:15-17). However, the "spiritual" Christian is the one that should do this, namely, one whose life bears the fruit of the Spirit because he or she habitually walks by the Spirit (5:16, 25). The more spiritually mature he or she is, having walked by the Spirit for some time, the better (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15; Heb. 5:13-14). The spiritual Christian must restore the Christian

³³⁸Fung, p. 284.

³³⁹Lightfoot, p. 215.

who has stumbled: gently, carefully, and cautiously (cf. 5:23). The Lord Jesus restored Peter after he had stumbled egregiously. The spiritual Christian can avoid a spirit of self-righteousness, in dealing with those who stumble, by remembering his or her own personal vulnerability to temptation.³⁴⁰

"The spirit of meekness compassionates while it must blame, soothes while it may expostulate; its fidelity is full of sympathy—itself the image of that gentleness which in the benign Exemplar did not 'break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.'"³⁴¹

"It [the restoration in view] concerns restoration to a former spiritual condition. Absent from the context is any indication that Paul was concerned with restoration to leadership. Rehabilitating the sinner, not reinstating the leader, was the primary issue. However, these situations, though not identical, need not be mutually exclusive. It certainly seems reasonable to suppose that Paul envisioned restoration to some sort of usefulness, which in some cases might involve the restoration to leadership. Therefore Galatians 6:1, while not referring specifically to reinstating a fallen leader to his former position, certainly leaves open that possibility."³⁴²

2. Toward burdened Christians 6:2-5

6:2 In view of the context, probably the type of "burden(s)" Paul had in mind was an excessive burden of particular temptation and struggle with the flesh (cf. Rom. 15:1). McGee suggested that this type of burden includes our personal faults, tensions, and griefs.³⁴³ These could be "burdens" caused by social, economic, spiritual, or other conditions. Verse 1 deals with restoration, and this section (vv. 2-5) with prevention. We can "bear one another's burdens" by praying and perhaps counseling together.

"Human friendship, in which we bear one another's burdens, is part of the purpose of God for his people. So we should not keep our burdens to ourselves, but rather seek a Christian friend who will help to bear them with us."³⁴⁴

Paul probably referred to the "law of Christ" (cf. 5:14; John 13:34; 1 Cor. 9:21) here, to help his readers realize that freedom from the Mosaic Law does not mean freedom from all responsibility. The "law of Christ"

³⁴⁰For general studies of church discipline, see J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):353-64; and Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):201-13.

³⁴¹Eadie, p. 434.

³⁴²Jay E. Smith, "Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):468.

³⁴³McGee, 5:195.

³⁴⁴Stott, p. 158.

encompasses the whole of Jesus' teaching in person, while He was on earth, and through His apostles and prophets from heaven following His ascension (cf. Acts 1:1-2). It boils down to the command to love God wholeheartedly and one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; 15:12; 1 John 3:23).

"Galatians, which in attacking 'Jewish' legalism proclaims the true freedom based on Christ, consequently contains more exhortation, admonition, and summons to obey the 'law of Christ' . . . than any other letter, and to quite a remarkable degree—a third of the whole letter."³⁴⁵

The "law of Christ" is the code of commandments under which Christians live. It is the same as New Covenant responsibility.³⁴⁶ Some of the commandments Christ and His apostles gave us are the same as those that Moses gave the Israelites. However, this does not mean that we are under the Mosaic Code. Residents of the United States live under a code of laws that is similar to, but different from, the code of laws that govern residents of England. Some of our laws are the same as theirs, and others are different. Just because some laws are the same, we should not conclude that the codes are the same. Christians no longer live under the Mosaic Law; we live under a new code, the law of Christ (cf. 5:1).

At first this may sound as if we are under law, as Christians, after all. Paul contrasted law with grace, because the primary characteristic of the Mosaic Law was its legal character, whereas the primary characteristic of the "law of Christ" is its gracious character. He did not mean that there is no law under grace, any more than he meant that there was no grace under the Mosaic Law. The motivation for keeping the Mosaic Law was external for the Old Testament believer, but the motivation for keeping the "law of Christ" is internal. Our motivation comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13), though Paul did not emphasize this motivation in chapter 6.

6:3-4 In the context, the *high-minded* person probably is one who "thinks" of himself as being above helping another bear an excessive burden. One remedy for this is to remember that we are not intrinsically superior (cf. Rom. 12:3). An objective review of our accomplishments should also remind us that the only legitimate ground for justifiable self-satisfaction is God's working through us (v. 4). The emphasis is on personal responsibility.

"Two errors might keep a believer from fulfilling this role [of bearing one another's burdens]. The first is conceit, that is, thinking himself to be more important than he is. . . .

³⁴⁵Bornkamm, p. 83.

³⁴⁶Femi Adeyemi, "The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):438-52.

The second . . . is to be always comparing himself and his own work with others [v. 4]."³⁴⁷

". . . 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."³⁴⁸

6:5 This verse gives a reason for the injunction in verse 4. Every Christian is responsible to carry his own weight. We all have a "load" to "bear," but it is comparatively light (Matt. 11:30). The burden(s) in verse 2 is an excessive burden. For example, the hurt of suffering, death, judgment, and sin are some of the burdens that each person must bear; we cannot share these with anyone else.³⁴⁹ The "load" in verse 5 is our normal burden of responsibility.³⁵⁰ Paul used two different Greek words to describe these two kinds of burdens (*bare* and *phortion* respectively).

"It is the man who knows he has a burden of his own that is willing to bear his fellow's burden."³⁵¹

"If my car breaks down, my neighbor can help drive my children to school, but he cannot assume the responsibilities that only belong to me as their father."³⁵²

"Those are best able to sustain another who have proved their own power to be sustained in trials of their own."³⁵³

3. Toward teachers 6:6-9

6:6 Here is a specific example of mutual burden-bearing. Perhaps the Judaizers had been instructing the Galatians not to financially support those who taught them. Under Judaism, pupils paid a tax, and the teachers' pay came through the Jewish government. The Galatian Gentiles

³⁴⁷Boice, p. 502.

³⁴⁸George, p. 417. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:28.

³⁴⁹McGee, 5:196-97.

³⁵⁰For instances of similar paradoxes of expression by Paul, see 2 Corinthians 12:10 and Philippians 2:12-13.

³⁵¹Burton, p. 334.

³⁵²Wiersbe, 1:722.

³⁵³Guthrie, *Galatians*, pp. 144-45.

customarily paid fees for services rendered. The concept of voluntary giving, out of love for the teacher, was new and different. Those who learn from Bible teachers, who provide the spiritual needs of others, should provide them with "all good things"—including, but not limited to, their physical needs (cf. Luke 10:7; Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:11; 2 Cor. 11:7-12; Phil. 4:10-19; 1 Thess. 2:6, 9; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

"The word translated 'communicate' [or 'share'] really means 'to share with,' and 'all good things' has a far more general meaning than worldly goods; probably it refers to blessings of the Christian faith."³⁵⁴

Paul regarded the acceptance of gifts as a right that one could claim, or not claim, depending on other factors. He did not regard accepting such gifts as the teacher's duty, but that offering them was the learner's duty.

"This is probably the bluntest verse in the Bible."³⁵⁵

6:7-9 Paul introduced these verses with an abrupt warning ("Do not be deceived, God is not mocked"; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9). Sowing inevitably leads to reaping.

"Someone may say, 'I got converted.' That is wonderful, but you are still going to have a payday someday. You will still reap what you have sown."³⁵⁶

If a person selfishly withholds what he has, he will not see God multiply it and bless him with it. If he follows the prompting of his sinful nature in his investments ("sows to his own flesh"), he will "reap" death ("corruption"), but if he follows ("sows to") "the Spirit," he will "reap eternal life." This is not saying he will necessarily die, but that his sowing will yield a disappointing harvest. Neither is it saying that he can earn justification. It is saying that his continuous, abundant, and Spirit-motivated sowing will yield the best harvest. Our harvest will suffer if we "grow weary" and stop sowing. Remember that the context of this section is the support of Christian workers, though these principles certainly have wider application.

"Paul here seems to regard the whole of a man's earthly life as a period of sowing, with harvest awaiting him on the last day: the eschatological yield is determined by present sowing."³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴Vos, p. 113.

³⁵⁵McGee, 5:198.

³⁵⁶Ibid., 5:199.

³⁵⁷Fung, p. 295.

The term "eternal life" has two different, though related, meanings in the New Testament. Essentially it is the *life of God* that He shares with believers. On the one hand, the New Testament writers spoke of it as a gift that one receives by faith (John 10:28; et al.). However, it also refers to the quality of the believer's life, that depends on the extent to which he or she walks with God in fellowship (John 10:10). In this second sense, some believers experience eternal life to a greater extent than other believers do. It is in this second sense that Paul spoke of "eternal life" here.³⁵⁸

"It is extremely important to note that in every place where eternal life is presented as something which can be obtained by works, it is contextually *always* described as a future acquisition. Conversely, whenever eternal life is described as something in the present, it is obtained by faith alone."³⁵⁹

Paul did not refer to the concept of eternal life as much as John did.

"The continued and willful indulgence of our unrenewed nature becomes its own penalty, as it does not realize the end of its being, and unfitting itself for blessedness, sinks and darkens into ruin; but the work of the Spirit of God, fostered within us and consciously elevated into predominant and regulative influence, ripens surely into blessedness."³⁶⁰

Not growing weary is the condition for this reward. The same root expression ("grow weary") describes a bowstring that has become unstrung.³⁶¹ *Losing heart* is what causes this sad state. Giving up mentally leads to growing faint spiritually.

". . . in *well* doing let us not show an *ill* heart."³⁶²

"It is easy for the servants of God to become discouraged: the opposition they meet is so constant and the good they are trying to do is so hard to accomplish."³⁶³

In a manufacturing town in Scotland, a young lady began teaching a Sunday school class to poverty-stricken boys. The most unpromising youngster was a boy named Bob. After the first two or three Sundays, he

³⁵⁸See Dillow, pp. 135-45; Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 81; and Bob Wilkin, "Sow for It! Reaping Abundant Eternal Life as a Reward (Galatians 6:8-9)," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 5:8 (August 1990):2.

³⁵⁹Dillow, p. 140.

³⁶⁰Eadie, p. 448.

³⁶¹Robertson, 4:317.

³⁶²Lightfoot, p. 219.

³⁶³Morris, p. 183.

did not return. So the teacher went to look for him. Although the superintendent had given Bob some new clothes, they were already worn and dirty when the teacher found him. The teacher gave him more new clothes, and he came back to Sunday School. But soon he quit again, and the teacher went out once more to find him. When she did, she discovered that the second set of clothes had gone the way of the first. "I'm completely discouraged about Bob," she told the superintendent. "I guess we must give up on him." "Please don't do that," he pleaded. "I believe there is still hope. Try him one more time."

So they gave Bob a third change of clothes, and this time he began to attend faithfully. It was not long until he became a Christian, and eventually even taught in that same Sunday school. Who was that obstinate, ragged boy who for a time seemed so unreachable? He was none other than Robert Morrison, who later became the first Protestant English missionary to China. He translated the Bible into Chinese and brought the Word of God to countless millions of Chinese people.

4. Toward all people 6:10

Christians have a responsibility to "do" what is "good to all people," including the unsaved. We have a special responsibility to other Christians ("those who are of the household of faith") as we "have opportunity," when we hear of a need and have the resources to help. Like in a home, family needs come first, then those of the neighbors.

"Every poor and distressed man had [*sic*] a claim on me for pity, and, if I can afford it, for active exertion and pecuniary relief. But a poor Christian has a far stronger claim on my feelings, my labors, and my property. He is my brother, equally interested as myself in the blood and love of the Redeemer. I expect to spend an eternity with him in heaven. He is the representative of my unseen Savior, and he considers everything done to his poor afflicted as done to himself. For a Christian to be unkind to a Christian is not only wrong, it is monstrous."³⁶⁴

V. CONCLUSION 6:11-18

In this section, Paul summarized some of his more important points. He also appealed to his readers again, urging them to follow through and put into practice what he had taught them.

"Before concluding his letter Paul returns once more to the antithesis of cross and circumcision, setting them forth this time as representing respectively the true and the false ground of boasting, and thus carrying a stage further his polemic against the Judaizers and their way of legal observance (cf. 5:2-12)."³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴J. Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 348.

³⁶⁵Fung, p. 300.

". . . the subscription [6:11-18] 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 verbage [*sic*] and see matters in their essence as Paul saw them."³⁶⁶

6:11 Evidently Paul wrote the rest of this letter himself. He probably dictated the former verses to a scribe (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21-24; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17-18).

"Hellenistic letters in Paul's day usually exhibited two styles of handwriting: a more practiced, carefully constructed script of an amanuensis or secretary in most of the letter and the cruder or more casual style of the sender in the subscription . . ."³⁶⁷

The "large letters" were probably capitals (ALL CAPS), used for the sake of emphasis, and to distinguish Paul's handwriting from his secretary's. Perhaps Paul also intended the boldness of his handwriting to emphasize the force of his convictions.³⁶⁸

Betz observed that what Paul wrote with his own hand "contains the interpretive clues to the understanding of Paul's major concerns in the letter as a whole and should be employed as the hermeneutical key to the intentions of the Apostle."³⁶⁹

6:12-13 The Jews would not "persecute" the false teachers as much as they would the apostles, since the false teachers required their converts to undergo *circumcision*. Also they desired to please men, and they wanted to "boast," inappropriately, about their converts in Galatia ("in your flesh").

"Whereas Paul was concerned about the Spirit's inward work in his converts, so that Christ should be 'formed' in them (cf. 4:19), the Judaizers' concern was for an external mark, a mark produced in the 'flesh' of those whom they could win over to their side."³⁷⁰

"The cross of Christ" (v. 12) stands here for the whole doctrine of justification by faith alone that Paul had been defending in this epistle.³⁷¹

³⁶⁶Longenecker, p. 301.

³⁶⁷Ibid., p. 289.

³⁶⁸Lightfoot, p. 221. Cf. Burton, p. 348.

³⁶⁹Betz, pp. 312-13.

³⁷⁰Bruce, p. 268.

³⁷¹Fung, p. 305.

6:14-15 Paul boasted *only* in Christ's "cross," the work of Christ for him. That was *all* that he took pride in. The Cross was a symbol of shame to the world. But because of the Cross, ironically, the world system had lost its appeal to Paul, and he had lost his appeal to the world. Now "circumcision" was unimportant ("not anything"). Only being a "new creation" in Christ mattered (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

"It is difficult after sixteen centuries and more during which the cross has been a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and loathing which the very mention or thought of the cross provoked in Paul's day. The word *crux* was unmentionable in polite Roman society . . . ; even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used an archaic formula which served as a sort of euphemism . . .

"But Paul, Roman citizen by birth and religious Jew by upbringing, not only dismisses as the merest refuse (*skubala*, Phil. 3:8) those things in which he had once taken a proper pride but embraces as the most worth-while goal in life the knowledge of the crucified Christ and boasts in his cross—a shocking paradox indeed."³⁷²

"I remember some brethren who were talking about a Christian's relationship to oath-bound secret societies. (This Book tells me concerning the Lord Jesus that He said, 'In secret have I said nothing' (John 18:20), therefore I know that He never was inside of an oath-bound secret order, and He has called upon me to be a follower of Him.) One of these brethren said to the other, 'You belong to such-and-such an order.' 'Oh, no,' he said; 'I do not.' 'Why, you do; I was there the night you were initiated, and once a member of that you are a member until death.' 'Exactly; I quite admit what you say, but I buried the lodge member in Lake Ontario.' He meant that in his baptism the old order came to an end."³⁷³

6:16 Paul wished for God's "peace and mercy" for all "who [would] walk by" the "rule" he had expounded, namely: faith apart from works.

"It is interesting that he goes on: *according to this rule*, for he has been opposing people who subjected believers to strict rules. But rule (= 'straight rod', BAGD) points us to the authentic way, the one right path on which to walk."³⁷⁴

³⁷²Bruce, p. 271.

³⁷³Ironside, pp. 230-31. Paragraph divisions omitted.

³⁷⁴Morris, p. 190. BAGD is Walter Bauer's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, revised and augmented by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (5th ed., 1979).

"This conditional blessing at the end of the letter stands in marked contrast to the conditional curse with which Paul opened his epistle (1:6-9)."³⁷⁵

Additionally, and probably with even greater feeling, he wished this for the "Israel of God." This unusual title refers to saved Jews. It describes a second group in the verse, not the same group. Note the repetition of "upon" that makes this distinction. Also, "Israel" always refers to physical Jews everywhere else in the New Testament (65 times).³⁷⁶ So we would expect that meaning here, unless clues to a different meaning were present, which they are not. Furthermore, it would be natural for Paul to single out Christian Jews for special mention, since in this epistle he sounded almost anti-Semitic. Therefore it is better to take this phrase in its regular usage, than as a unique designation for the church as a whole as many non-dispensationalists do.³⁷⁷

"Strong confirmation of this position [i.e., that "Israel" refers to Jews in the New Testament] comes from the total absence of an identification of the church with Israel until A.D. 160; and also from the total absence, even then, of the term 'Israel of God' to characterize the church."³⁷⁸

"The conclusion is that the church is never called a 'spiritual Israel' or a 'new Israel.' The term Israel is either used of the nation or the people as a whole, or of the believing remnant within. It is never used of the church in general or of Gentile believers in particular. In fact, even after the Cross there remains a threefold distinction. First, there is a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles as in 1 Corinthians 10:32 and Ephesians 2:11-12. Second, there is a distinction between Israel and the church in 1 Corinthians 10:32. Third, there is a distinction between Jewish believers (the Israel of God) and Gentile believers in Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16."³⁷⁹

6:17-18 In closing, Paul appealed to his readers to end the controversy in Galatia, that had caused him so much trouble and distraction as Christ's bond-slave. He cited the scars ("brand-marks") he had received as the target of

³⁷⁵George, p. 439.

³⁷⁶See Longenecker, p. 297.

³⁷⁷See Rendall, 3:191; S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "Paul and 'The Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 181-96; Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 198-202; Harrison, p. 1298; Ironside, p. 234. For the covenant theology position that equates Israel here with the church, see Lightfoot, p. 225; or Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Church As the New Israel and the Future of Ethnic Israel in Paul," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 3:3 (April 1983):17-38.

³⁷⁸Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, p. 83, n. 2.

³⁷⁹Fruchtenbaum, p. 126.

persecution, in contrast to circumcision, as his final proof of his devotion to Christ (cf. Deut. 15:17). He may have received some of these scars when the people of Lystra stoned him during his preaching tour of Galatia (Acts 14:19-20; cf. 2 Cor. 11:25). Paul was not a "people-pleaser."

"If a thing costs us nothing men will value it at nothing."³⁸⁰

"These genuine and honorable marks in the body contrast strikingly with the ritualistic and now meaningless mark (circumcision) the legalizers wished to impose on the Galatians."³⁸¹

". . . Paul's readers immediately would have identified the branding of the flesh with slavery, for slaves in the ancient world frequently were marked with the insignia of their master as a badge of identification."³⁸²

"A class of slaves (*hierodouloi*) attached for life to the service of a temple were branded with the name of the deity. Paul likens himself to these in respect of his lifelong dedication to the name of Jesus, and of the marks imprinted on his body, by which he was sealed for a servant of Jesus in perpetuity."³⁸³

Paul finally appealed for God's "grace" to be the portion of the Galatians (cf. 1:3). "Your spirit" means "you." As in no other of his epistles, he bid farewell by referring to his readers tenderly as "brethren."

Whereas this epistle began very solemnly and harshly (1:6-9), Paul's tone mellowed as he proceeded (e.g., 4:19). It ends on an uncommonly loving note (cf. Phile. 25; Phil. 4:23).

³⁸⁰Barclay, p. 11.

³⁸¹Boice, p. 508.

³⁸²George, p. 442.

³⁸³Rendall, 3:191.

Appendix

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GRACE AND LAW	
"Grace . . .	Law . . .
• is based on faith (2:16).	• is based on works (2:16).
• justifies sinful men (2:16, 17).	• is incapable of resulting in justification 2:16; 3:11).
• begins and ends with Christ (2:20).	• makes Christ nothing (5:2-4).
• is the way of the Spirit (3:2, 3, 14).	• is the way of the flesh (3:3).
• is a 'blessing' (3:14).	• is a 'curse' (3:13).
• is God's desired end for His people (3:23-25).	• was intended to be only a means to an end (3:23-25).
• results in intimacy with Christ (3:27).	• results in estrangement from Christ (5:4).
• makes one a son of God and an heir of Christ (4:6, 7).	• keeps one a slave (4:7).
• brings liberty (5:1).	• results in bondage (5:1).
• depends on the power of the Holy Spirit (5:16-18, 22, 23).	• depends on human effort (5:19-21).
• is motivated by love (5:13, 14).	• is motivated by pride (6:3, 13, 14).
• centers on the cross of Christ (6:12-14).	• centered on circumcision (5:11; 6:12-15)." ³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴The Nelson Study Bible, p. 1976.

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