

*The Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians*

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Outline of the Epistle to the Galatians

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- 3. He did not consult with the Jerusalem apostles immediately after his conversion but saw them only briefly three years later (vv. 16b-24).*
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 - a. *Practical example of not walking by the Spirit (v. 26)*
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The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians

The Context and Purpose of Galatians

The book of Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul to a group of churches in the southern part of the province of Galatia which is now modern day Turkey. He had planted these churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe on his first missionary journey, and the record of his work in these four cities is recorded in Acts 13 and 14. On his second missionary journey, Paul passed through these same cities strengthening the churches as he went. You can read about this in Acts 15 and 16. Acts 18: 23 informs us that Paul visited these same churches again on his third missionary journey.

You can imagine that after such a large investment of time in these churches that Paul had a peculiar fondness for the people in Asia Minor. You might say that they were his babies because the Holy Spirit had used Paul to give birth to them and to nurture them in the faith during the time of their infancy. He even speaks this way in another place (Gal. 4: 19), “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” Paul was like a mother giving birth to these four churches and the pain involved in this labor was psychologically intense.

Given this very close relationship to the churches of Galatia, you would expect Paul to experience a great deal of anxiety over them when he found out that certain teachers had visited these churches, teachers who disagreed with the gospel which Paul was teaching. They were not teaching a way of salvation which Paul had taught them when he planted the churches on his first missionary journey. They were teaching what Paul called a “different gospel” which was really “not another” gospel but a distortion or twisting of the true gospel into a false gospel.

Well, if Paul could have boarded a plane, he would have flown to these churches as fast as possible, but there were no planes. And he was a long way from the Christians in Asia Minor, so he didn't have the time to take a long journey from wherever he was at the time, so he wrote them a letter instead. This letter is the book of *Galatians*. You will find in your reading of the NT epistles that they were always written for the purpose of clearing up specific problems in the church: theological problems, leadership problems, relational problems, moral problems, marriage problems, and so on. All the churches had problems which at this time in the early churches' history needed the input and authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ. The same was true in this case. A problem arose over the interpretation of the gospel itself. What was the gospel, and how could a person get saved? Paul had said one thing, and now these so-called apostles were saying something else. Who was right, and who had the apostolic authority to define the gospel?

This brings me to another problem which Paul is addressing in this letter. Not only had these false teachers questioned Paul's gospel, they were also questioning his authority as an apostle; they were attempting to slander the Apostle by saying that he really was no apostle at all. He didn't know what he was talking about, and they were there in Asia Minor to clear up what Paul had confused in the minds of the church. In answer to these men, Paul spends a considerable length of time defending his apostleship (his credentials) to the Galatian Christians. This part of the letter was distasteful to Paul since he didn't like to boast or talk about himself, but if he failed to establish his right and authority as an apostle, he was in danger of losing these churches to error—like a mother losing her babies. He was determined not to let this happen.

1. Introduction—Gal. 1: 1-10

A. The Greeting—1: 1-5

It is characteristic of Paul always to greet his audience. Whenever you are reading his letters, notice that these greetings are always at the very beginning of the epistles. This greeting is found in vv. 1-5, and for the most part there is nothing unusual about it. The words, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” are found in the greetings of most of Paul’s letters to other churches (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Philemon 1:3). But there are two things which are different about it.

First, there is something in the greeting which is different from most of the greetings of Paul. You will notice that he says he is an apostle. Well, there is nothing unusual about that, either, because he says that in all his letters, but he adds something else that is not found in any other letter but Galatians: “not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.” The emphasis here in v. 1 is on “not sent from men, nor through the agency of man.” What was Paul trying to get across to these Galatians? Namely, that his apostleship was not given to him by men or any man. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus Himself, the same way all the other original eleven apostles received their apostleship.

The reason for this explanation of his apostleship should be clear in light of what was going on in the Galatian churches. The false teachers who were coming into Galatia were telling these people that Paul was not a true apostle because he had not gotten his apostleship directly from Jesus like all the other apostles. They were saying that he was actually taught the gospel by the Apostle Peter when he came to Jerusalem shortly after he became a Christian. In 1: 12 through 2: 10, Paul goes to great lengths to explain that he did not learn the gospel from Peter or any other ordinary human being and had only spent 15 days with Peter after he became a Christian, hardly enough time to learn everything he needed to know about Christ. No, he received his credentials as an apostle directly from Christ, and he learned the gospel directly from Christ. This claim is documented in the ninth chapter of the book of Acts when Paul met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, particularly in 9: 15 when the Lord said to Ananias, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” So we see that even in the greeting to the Galatians Paul is focused upon defending his apostleship. Thus, even the greeting is part of his defense. Is Paul being boastful or arrogant? Not at all. We must understand that Paul was not defending his apostleship for the sake of his own ego, but for the sake of the Christians in Galatia. This will be explained more in detail later.

The second difference is that this greeting is shorter than usual. Many times Paul goes on to say in his greetings how much he gives thanks to God for the church he is writing to. We have an example of this in 1 Thes. 1: 3-4 in which he says, “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers” and Phil. 1: 3-7 in which he says, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you”. Then he goes on to compliment the churches for something good they had done. The Philippians had been very generous in supporting the Apostle Paul in his missionary endeavors, and the Thessalonians had a reputation for a steadfast faith and evangelism in the midst of hardship and persecution. But in this letter, he does not thank God for the Galatians, and he does not say anything good about them. In fact, the standard thanksgiving

and prayer of his other letters is replaced by the curse formula of vv. 8-9 (Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p. 370). This abruptness alerts the reader to the fact that Paul is terribly upset about something in this letter, and I have already told you what he is upset about. Furthermore, the Galatians who are reading this letter also know immediately that Paul is upset because they have already been told by the false apostles that Paul is not a true apostle. Therefore, after the first sentence of the letter, the Galatians are already bracing themselves for what is coming later in the letter.

B. Paul's Condemnation of the False Teachers—1: 6-10

You will notice that after a brief greeting, Paul gets right to the point, and he is really very abrupt in the way he goes about it. Africans do not like it when people are abrupt, but sometimes it is necessary to be abrupt. Look at verse 6. He tells the Galatians that they are deserting God who called them by the grace of Christ for a different gospel which amounts to no gospel at all. In v. 7 he says that this different gospel, or this new teaching which is not the gospel, is a distortion of the gospel—a twisting of the gospel into something else. [The Gk. word used is *metastrepho* which literally means to “turn about”, “twist” or to change completely into something else. For example, when a tadpole goes through *metamorphosis*, it changes into another form, a frog. The word “repent” is “metanoeo” from *meta* (change) and *noeo* (mind) literally meaning to change your mind]. What these false apostles were teaching changed the gospel into something which is not the gospel. Then in v. 8 he tells them that if anyone, including himself or even an angel from heaven, preaches a gospel other than the gospel which he has *already* preached to them, that man, that angel, or even Paul himself, will be accursed, another word for *being delivered over to divine wrath*. To put it in other words, if anyone should preach a gospel different from the one which Paul preached and taught, that man will go to hell.

It is clear from Paul's statement that these men were not preaching a false gospel out of ignorance. They were not simply mistaken about what Paul preached; they were purposely distorting his teaching. Their error was, therefore, malicious and intentional, and this caused Paul to speak this way. And just in case someone may have gotten the impression that Paul had spoken too rashly out of uncontrolled passion, Paul repeats what he says in v. 9. He wants them to know that he is in full control of his temper and his passions and that his condemnation of these men is deliberate.

The last thing he says in this section (v. 10) is that he is a bond-servant of Christ, implying that his service to Christ forces him to condemn anything which robs Christ of his glory. His opponents had accused Paul of merely being a man-pleaser who tried to be popular with the Galatians, but if this were so, why would he be admonishing them this way; why would he be using such harsh language? The only thing which mattered to Paul was pleasing Christ, and if he had to condemn false teachers and offend the Galatian Christians to please Christ, then so be it. Implicit (implied) in this statement is the accusation that the false teachers were doing just what they accused Paul of doing. They were attempting to please men in order to get a following; and by becoming men-pleasers, they failed to be bond-servants of Christ.

Application of the text

1. First, no person living today can claim to have apostolic authority, and no one can change the gospel.

The position of the original apostles in the history of the church was unique. While it is true that God still calls people into the ministry, no one can claim he received his call or the gospel directly from Jesus Christ. At some time and some place he received the gospel from someone who taught him the gospel, or he received it by reading the Bible, but he did not receive it through direct revelation. Don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise. If someone comes to you claiming to have received direct revelations from the Lord which cannot be found already in Scripture, be wary of such a person. Ask him for the proof that he received his information directly from God and not through what is already stated in Scripture. Paul gives the Galatian readers ample proof of his apostleship. He does not simply say, "The Lord told me this" as so many so-called apostles do today. If a person says that his word from the Lord is Scriptural, ask him to give you the place in Scripture where his teaching can be found. If it is truly Scriptural, then fine; but he did not get this teaching directly from the Lord but from the Scriptures.

There is a story about Charles Spurgeon, possibly the greatest preacher in London during the 19th century, who is approached by a stranger after a morning service saying, "Mr. Spurgeon, God told me that I was going to preach in your pulpit next Sunday morning." Spurgeon calmly replied, "That is very interesting, but God did not tell *me* that you were preaching in my pulpit next Sunday morning. And consequently, you will most assuredly *not* preach in my pulpit next Sunday." Preaching about those who claimed new revelation from the Holy Spirit, Spurgeon said,

Take care never to impute the vain imaginings of your fancy to Him [the Holy Spirit]. I have seen the Spirit of God shamefully dishonoured by persons—I hope they were insane—who have said that they have had this and that revealed to them. There has not for some years passed over my head a single week in which I have not been pestered with the revelations of hypocrites or maniacs. Semi-lunatics are very fond of coming with messages from the Lord to me, and it may spare them some trouble if I tell them once for all that I will have none of their stupid messages....Never dream that events are revealed to you by heaven, or you may come to be like those idiots who dare impute their blatant follies to the Holy Ghost. If you feel your tongue itch to talk nonsense, trace it to the devil, not to the Spirit of God. Whatever is to be revealed by the Spirit to any of us is in the word of God already—he adds nothing to the Bible, and never will. Let persons who have revelations of this, that, and the other, go to bed and wake up in their senses. I only wish they would follow the advice, and not longer insult the Holy Ghost by laying their nonsense at his door (quoted from *Strange Fire* by John MacArthur, p. 258).

There simply are *no* apostles living today with the authority of the original eleven and the Apostle Paul. That day has gone forever. We now have the completed Bible, and we need nothing else to guide us. What we do need are pastors and teachers to help us in our understanding of the Bible. We all need them, teachers and students alike. Most importantly, we need the Holy Spirit to help us understand the Bible and how the Bible applies to our lives.

We still have leaders in the church, but they are *not* apostles. The belief among Roman Catholics that the pope is endowed with the authority of the original apostles has no foundation in the Bible. The church is not our authority unless its teaching is in agreement with the Bible. It is not the church which determines what the gospel is; it is the Bible which reveals the gospel. The Bible is not dependent on the church, but rather the church is dependent on the Bible. The church is like a signpost directing someone to a road. It is the road (the Bible) which appears before the signpost (the church) in time. The road or way gives birth to the signpost, the signpost

does not give birth to the road (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, page unknown). The truth of the Bible, mediated through the Holy Spirit, gave birth to the church before being fully collected into a complete canon. But to say that the church gave birth to the Bible is like saying the child gave birth to his mother.

No one, not even Paul, and not even an angel from heaven, is allowed to change the gospel. It does not matter how smooth-talking someone is or how intelligent he is or how dynamic and powerful he is in the pulpit. It does not matter what office he holds in the church. If his message is not consistent with what we already have in the Bible, he is a false apostle and should be condemned. Paul is not talking about someone who may ignorantly *believe* the wrong thing. People who believe a lie should be pitied, and we should do everything we can to love them and help them understand the truth, including Muslims. Concerning such people who are simply ignorant and need instruction Paul tells Timothy, “And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth....(2 Tim. 2: 24-25).

However, a man should be avoided and censured who pretends to preach and teach the gospel and yet teaches a message of salvation by works or merit. Paul says that the wrath of God rests on this man. He is cursed with a curse because the Bible says “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them” (Gal. 3: 10, a quotation from Deut. 27: 26). Those who tell you to keep rules to be saved cannot keep them either, and they are cursed.

2. Second, there is only one gospel, once and for all delivered to believers in the Bible, and anything else is a false gospel.

There are many people who believe that there are many ways of getting to God or many different ways of being right with God, but the Bible teaches only one way. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father *but by Me*.” Paul knew that Jesus claimed to be the only right way to God. He was *the* way to the Father; He was not simply *a* way or *one* way among many alternatives. Do you see the difference? Even some professing Christians believe that it is okay to be a Muslim as long as you’re sincere in your faith, but this is not what Jesus said, and this is not what Paul said.

This is what makes Christianity so offensive to many people. They are offended by the fact that we claim the exclusive way to God. At least Muslims understand our exclusive claims to the truth because they also claim the exclusive way to God. But one thing is sure, the Christian and the Muslim cannot *both* be right. Either Christians or Muslims are right. A gospel which is different from Paul’s gospel is no gospel at all. And this leads me to the third application.

3. Third, the one and only gospel is a gospel of grace plus nothing. Any other gospel is a gospel of works which is not good news.

We will see more of this as we study the book of Galatians, but for now just remember that the word gospel means “good news.” It is good news because everything that *needed* to be done for our salvation *was done* for us by Jesus Christ when He lived a perfect life and died a perfect death on our behalf. There is *nothing* left for us to do but believe what He has already done for

us. The false teachers of Paul's day said that what Jesus did on the cross was good, but it wasn't enough. This is why their message was confusing and dangerous to the Galatians. Their message had just enough truth in it to be believable. They taught that to be saved you had to do more than simply repent of sin and believe in Christ; you also had to keep the ceremonial Law of Moses which included circumcision. However, if a person had to be circumcised to be saved, he also had to do everything else in the Law perfectly to be saved. He could not stop at circumcision; he had to be blameless in every way, precisely what the Apostle James tells us, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all" (James 2: 10).

But you can see that this is not the gospel of *grace*, and it is far from being *good news*. Let me tell you why it isn't good news. It is not good news because under these terms no one will ever be saved. This is what Paul says in chapter 2, verse 16, "by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." If we wish to be saved by keeping rules, we will have to keep them flawlessly without any failure. And these rules are not limited to what others expect of us or even what we expect of ourselves; they are only limited by what God expects of us, and He said, "Be perfect as I am perfect" (Matt. 5: 48) and "Do this [my law] and you will live" (Lev. 18: 5). That is not good news to someone who is trying to earn God's approval, because I can't keep God's rules perfectly and neither can you. Yet, this is what God requires. Now, we can attempt to meet this requirement in two ways. We can live a perfect life—not a *good* life but a *perfect* life. Or, we can put our trust in the One who succeeded in living a perfect life and died so that His perfection could be given to us as a free gift. This is the option of being saved by grace which is a free gift (Rom. 6: 23). The other option is earning your salvation by your performance—by works. There is no grace in that option. Which of these two options do you prefer?

Now let me be a little more practical with this. I have met many Ugandans who say they believe in Christ for their salvation, but when you press them they reveal that they are really trusting in their works or good deeds *in addition to the work of Christ*. But my question to them and to any of you who think this way is: What good deeds do you have to do to be saved? And we all know what some of the answers will be: You have to be baptized. You have to be married in the church. You have to give money to the church. You have to attend church every Sunday. And on and on the list goes. None of these things are bad, are they, but are they enough? If you do all these things, will they be enough to get you into heaven? How many good deeds does it take to get a person to heaven, and how many bad deeds will send you to hell? Does anyone know? Does the Bible give us this number of good deeds and bad deeds?

Have you read the Ten Commandments? "Don't have any other gods besides the one, true God." Is something more important to you than God? Is money? I can't tell you how many times I have had Ugandans right off the street ask me for money, but I have never in over ten years had any Ugandan ask me to tell them how they can know God. Is sex your God? Sex is a great idol here even as it is in America because if it weren't a great idol there would not be so many people dying of AIDS. The Bible says, "You shall not commit adultery," and Jesus said that if you lust after someone in your heart you have already committed adultery with her or him. Do any of you ever lust after someone else besides your husband or wife? Is power your god? There have been many well-meaning men who became rulers in Africa who have been corrupted by the lust for power and money. The opinion of others may be your god. You may be far more concerned for your reputation in the community and what people think of you than what God thinks of you.

Maybe this is why so many Ugandans will give donations to parties but will not give to the church so their pastors can be paid and their churches built.

If these things are more important to you than God, it means that any one of these things or all of them is your god, and you have broken the Law of God by having another god or gods besides the true God. If you are attempting to be saved by works, this means you can't be saved, because by your own admission, the death of Christ on the cross is not enough; and by your own admission, your works are not enough either.

Most of the people who believe they must be saved by faith plus works do not understand the terms of such a salvation. They believe they can set the terms themselves. They can keep this law but not that one, or that law, but this one is too hard so they will ignore that one. How about this one? “You shall not covet.” Have you ever coveted something your neighbor had which you didn't have? We all have, haven't we? We cannot pick and choose which commandments of God are important and essential for salvation and which are not. God says they are all important. James the apostle understood this when he said, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2: 10), and Paul said in Galatians that if someone believes they must be circumcised to be saved, they also must keep the whole Law of Moses (5:3). It is all or nothing. Either we keep the whole law to be saved or none of our law-keeping will do us any good for our salvation. This is why Paul said that by the works of the law no one could be saved, simply because no one can keep the law perfectly.

God's law is a unit, and it is either perfectly kept or perfectly broken. If I take a drinking glass and smash it against a concrete floor into a thousand pieces, it is broken and will not hold water for drinking. But if I only drop the glass accidentally and break it into two pieces, it is still unfit for use. It is *just as broken* as the one I smashed to a thousand pieces, and it will not hold water. So whether I break the Law of God two times or a thousand times, the result is the same—I am a law-breaker, and I cannot be saved through keeping the Law. We cannot pick and choose which part of the law we will keep and which we will break. Even if we break only one law, we are disqualified from entering heaven and the presence of God.

Having said this, am I saying that keeping the Law is bad? Not at all. Keeping the law is good because “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7: 12). The real problem is not the law, but us; we cannot keep it because we are sinful. “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am [we are] of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Rom. 7: 14). On the other hand the gospel of grace is good news because salvation is a free gift to those who believe that what Jesus did for them is *good enough* to save them. If we have to add something to what Jesus did, we bring dishonor on Christ because we are saying that His work was not good enough. Furthermore, by adding our imperfect work to the work of Christ, we defile his work. If I added one drop of fresh cow manure to a cup of pure water and offered it to you, would you drink it? You would rudely refuse it, and no one should blame you. It only takes one drop of manure to pollute a whole cup of water. In the same way, if we add our polluted works to the perfect work of Christ, God will not accept us. Our imperfect works—even the works we think are good deeds—actually pollute the work of Christ. Isaiah recognized this fact when he proclaimed, “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (64: 6).

4. Fourth, pleasing God sometimes requires us to displease others.

In Uganda confronting people is very distasteful and done very seldom or not at all. We are afraid that we will offend people and destroy friendships and relationships. But you can't read the first few verses of this letter without realizing that Paul is confronting the Galatians about their error, and by doing so he runs the risk of hurting his relationship with them. But this is the most loving thing he can do for the Galatians. What if he had said to himself, "Well, confronting people is not a loving thing to do, so I will just let them believe a lie"? Would this be the loving thing to do? Would it be the loving thing to do to let people go to hell while believing a lie? If a doctor diagnoses a patient with a treatable disease, would it be loving to tell the patient that he is healthy just because that's what the patient wants to hear?

The wonderful thing about the Christian faith is that we are accountable to others for what we *believe* and for what we *do*. We cannot believe just what we want to or behave any way we want. We have leaders in the church ("overseers", Acts 20: 28) who should be watching over us for our good. This is their responsibility. We should also have friends in the church who are also watching over us in a non-official capacity to make sure we are walking the straight and narrow path which leads to life. This is also a responsibility. The correction of a congregation or an individual member, when done lovingly and with the motive of love, is the loving thing to do.

But there is a risk involved. People do not like to be accountable to others, and they don't like to be corrected by others, least of all their friends. So often, rather than displeasing our friends, we displease God instead. We keep silent or we say something nice and pleasant when we should be warning someone of their error. This is what Paul means when he says in v. 10 that he is a *bond-servant of Christ*. He belongs to Christ and no one else. He means that he is only responsible for pleasing one person, Christ, and in order to please Christ, he may often have to displease others. Are you willing to do that—to displease others in order to please Christ? If not, you are not acting like the slave of Christ; you are acting like the slave of other men and women.

II. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship—Galatians 1:11—2 : 14

A. Introduction to His Defense—vv. 11-12

In the next section of Galatians (1: 11-24), Paul gives the Galatians a detailed defense of his apostleship in the form of three narratives: 1: 13-24; 2: 1-10; and 2: 1-14 (Fee, p. 370). These three narratives are designed to demonstrate that his gospel was not "according to man" (v. 11) and was not "received from man" (v. 12) but was "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (v. 12). The word "received" is from the word *paralambano* which literally means "to take from." Paul emphatically did not take his gospel from any man, but from Christ. (The word order in the Gk. is emphatic: "For not I from man received it..."). This is why he dared to call it "his gospel" (Rom. 16: 25; John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 30).

This defense was necessary because the main argument of the false apostles was to show that Paul had received his gospel second-hand from someone else and not from the Lord Jesus. Therefore, their teaching was just as authoritative as his and should be considered on the same level as that of Paul's—so the argument went. Paul's defense is important for us because he wrote one-third of the volume of the NT and 13 out of 27 books of the NT. Furthermore, over half the book of *Acts* is devoted to his missionary journeys and almost another full chapter to his conversion and early ministry. If his gospel or his teaching is defective, then most of what we

know about Christ and the Christian faith is also defective even if we are reading the NT correctly. If Paul is not a true apostle, then the gospel is the biggest hoax (lie) propagated upon mankind.

To prove that he received his gospel directly from Christ, Paul divides his defense into three parts:

B. Paul's Apostleship Independent of the Apostles in Jerusalem (1: 13-24)

1. He was a fierce persecutor of the church and would have persecuted the Jerusalem apostles if he had had the opportunity (vv. 13-14).

Paul himself was convinced at one time that Christianity was a soul-damning lie threatening Judaism ever as much as the idolatry which plagued Israel throughout its tainted history. He was determined to stamp it out at all costs. According to v. 14, he was an up and coming star in Judaism. He was a big man among his religious peers with unquestioned authority and credentials. He was putting Christians in prison, and some of them he was putting to death. In Acts 7 he was there at the stoning of Stephen and was “in hearty agreement” with those who put Stephen to death, even watching over the garments of those who took part in the execution (7: 58). According to v. 14, he was extremely zealous for the traditions of the Jews who were monotheistic (believed in the existence of one God). Jesus had intruded into Paul’s world claiming to be God, and in Paul’s mind, and in the minds of many Jews, this was an admission of polytheism, the belief in two Gods. Paul sincerely believed that the followers of Christ were dangerous and would once again lead his people into serious error.

You see, Paul was very sincere in his faith, but he was also sincerely wrong. It doesn’t really matter if a person is very sincere in what he believes if he believes the wrong thing. He must be sincere in something which is also true, not something which is false. If I were crazy, I might sincerely believe that I could jump off a tall building and fly; but however sincere I was, I would still die when I reached the bottom. Or I might sincerely believe I could operate on someone who is sick and make him well, but the person would die just the same because all the sincerity in the world will not make me a skilled surgeon. Sincerity is not the test of one’s religion. The real question is: Is it true? Better to have a *weak* faith in Jesus than a *strong* faith in Allah or Mohammed or Buddha. We can bring a lot of harm on other people when we are sincerely wrong about our beliefs, especially if we are teachers.

But why would Paul retrace his pre-conversion experience? What relevance did this have to the defense of his apostleship? Well, if Paul was dedicating his life to destroying Christianity, it is not likely that he would have been easily persuaded by any human being that the Christian faith was true. In other words, it would not likely have done any good for Paul to have had a long, heart to heart talk with Peter, John, or any of the other apostles about the faith. He would have remained a hard-hearted sinner and a cold-blooded enemy of Christianity just the same. Paul thought he was doing God a favor by extinguishing Christianity (Stott, pp. 31-32).

There are people in the world today who are just like Paul was before he was converted. They think they are serving God by killing others—by killing the Jews in Jerusalem, Christians in Bangladesh and India; Americans all over the world. Osama bin Laden thought he was doing God a favor by killing Americans at the World Trade Center in New York. There could be

people in Mbarara and Kampala, Uganda who sincerely believe that Christians deserve to be murdered, and it would be humanly impossible to convince these people that they are wrong and Christianity is right. You could assemble the best group of preachers and theologians in Uganda to speak to these people, and they would still be convinced that Christians have no right to practice their faith or even the right to live. And this is just the way it was with Paul. Not even Peter, James and John themselves could have gotten through to Paul's mind and heart. And this is the argument Paul is making here in vv. 13-14. He did not get his gospel through another man because no *mere human being, not even the apostles themselves*, could have convinced him that he was wrong. Therefore, it was foolish for the false teachers to accuse Paul of getting his gospel from the other apostles. If he had had the opportunity, he would have murdered the other apostles.

2. He was converted through the direct revelation of Christ, not through the influence of the Jerusalem apostles (vv. 15-16).

No *mere human being* could convince Paul that he was wrong about Christ, but *God* could. God could convince him that he was wrong. We have read about this story in Acts 9: 1-19, how Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute other Christians and was struck blind on the road. He was then led by God into the company of Ananias, a Christian living in Damascus. After he met Ananias, his sight returned to him and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul was blind, but now he could see; his physical blindness had been a metaphor for his spiritual blindness, and now his renewed sight was a metaphor for his spiritual sight. The spiritual darkness surrounding him had been lifted, and now he was ready to follow Jesus Christ—and not only to follow Him, but to die for him if necessary. Only God could have done this miracle in Paul's life; no mere human could have done it. It is one thing for Paul to see the light and stop actively *persecuting* Christians; it was quite another to devote the rest of his life to *producing* Christians through his tireless witness. Notice several things Paul says about His conversion experience.

a. He was set apart from his mother's womb to become a Christian (v. 15).

What does Paul mean by this? We find a similar statement in Jer. 1: 5 where God tells Jeremiah that before he was born God had already chosen him to be a prophet to the nation of Israel. This is a very strange statement to us. Does Paul mean that before he came out of his mother's womb at birth, God had already chosen him to be an apostle? Does he mean that God had already chosen him before he was born to write most of the epistles in the NT? Does he mean that he was set apart to be an apostle before he became a vicious hater of the Christian faith? Well, yes, this is what it means. Paul was predestined by God to become a believer and an apostle before he was ever born, before he began to persecute the Church. You see, God was always in control of Paul's life, even while he was persecuting the church. And God is in control of your life as well.

b. He was called through the grace of God (v. 15).

This means that although he was set apart from birth to be a Christian and an apostle, there was a specific point in time in which God called him out of darkness and into the light of the gospel. Even though he was chosen from birth, he was not a Christian from birth. How did God do this? He did it through the Holy Spirit because we notice from the Acts 9 passage that when he came to Ananias, Ananias laid his hands on Paul, and he received the Holy Spirit. At that same

moment, the scales fell off his eyes and he could see physically. Again, his physical sight was a metaphor for his spiritual sight; he was no longer blind physically, and he was no longer blind spiritually.

Furthermore, his calling into Christ was by grace, not by works. Paul had done nothing to deserve God's grace; he deserved just the opposite of grace; namely, the justice and wrath of God for his part in persecuting Christians. God's grace is symbolized in Paul's conversion by his blindness. Paul was helpless; he had no cure for his blindness. Only God could give Paul his sight again. He also had no cure for his unbelief; only God could persuade Paul that he was a sinner in need of grace.

Paul's understanding of this grace progressed throughout his life, and this progression may be implied in his epistles. In his first letter to the Corinthians (written in 55 A.D.—*An Introduction to the New Testament*, D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, pp. 283-284; also *RSB*, p. 1797) Paul confesses, "For I am **the least of the apostles**, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15: 9). To the Ephesians (written in 60-62 A.D.—*RSB*, p. 1859) he writes, "To me, **the very least of all saints**, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ..." (Eph. 3: 8). But in his first letter to Timothy (dated 62-64 A.D. after his first imprisonment—*RSB*, p. 1906) he says, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners, among whom I am foremost of all**" (1 Tim. 1: 15). First, he was the "least of the apostles", then "least of all saints", then "the foremost of all sinners". If I am not reading too much into Paul's words, Paul's estimation of himself decreased as his estimation of Christ increased. Chamblin observes,

Vital to Paul's effectiveness as an apostle is that he never forget his days as a persecutor. Yet it could hardly be said that the memory leaves him paralyzed. On the contrary, [1Cor.] 15: 10 testifies to his superlative achievements. The explanation lies in God's grace, by which Paul has been liberated from the guilt of his sins and energized for apostolic service. An ongoing awareness of grace reminds Paul of the appalling sin from which he has been delivered; an ongoing awareness of the sin keeps him dependent on grace (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, pp. 24-25).

c. Paul was called for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 16)

God's call upon Paul's life had a specific purpose. Just as Peter and the other apostles had preached the gospel among the Jews, Paul was given the gospel to take to the Gentiles. As it turned out, no other apostle worked harder than Paul to bring men and women to a saving faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15: 10). No other apostle had to suffer as much as Paul or had to endure the number of dangers which Paul endured (2 Cor. 11: 23-27). Almost without saying a word, the manner of his life and his sacrifice could convince someone that the gospel was true.

But how do we apply Paul's experience to our own lives? None of us was ever struck blind, and none of us ever heard the **audible** voice of Jesus Christ from heaven. (For those of you who claim to have had this experience, please forgive my skepticism.) Paul's conversion experience is unique and different to anything we have ever experienced, but in another sense our conversion to Jesus Christ is just like his. How is this so?

(1) All of us who are now Christians were set apart for Christ before we were ever born.

In Ephesians 1: 4, Paul says that all Christians are chosen in Christ even before God made the world. "...He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him..." (I'm assuming here that none of you were born before the world began.) He had his hand upon all of us before birth and chose us to be His very own children. Even while we were living in rebellion against God, we were already marked out to be his children; our conversion to him was certain to come.

(2) At a particular time in our lives, God convinced us that Christianity was true.

No one else really could have done this. Yes, we may have heard many sermons before we were converted, and we may have had a significant person in our lives teach us the gospel. Unlike Paul, we did not get the gospel straight from the mouth of Christ. Nevertheless, only God could convince us that it was *true*. Paul says in 1 Cor. 2: 14 that the gospel is foolishness to the unsaved man because he just cannot understand it. He does not have the spiritual equipment to understand it. So why do we preach? We preach because through the power of the Holy Spirit working in men's hearts, they come to an understanding that this gospel is true.

In one sense of the word, every conversion experience is a miracle of the grace of God. It does not come with miraculous events like a bright light and the audible voice of God from heaven, but it is a sovereign and mighty work of God. It cannot be produced by man but only by God. God may use preaching to produce this change of heart, but He alone must convince our hearts that it is true; no one else can do that. The work of the Spirit is the primary means of conversion; preaching is the secondary means which the Spirit uses in conversion. In this sense we were all in the same condition as Paul, unwilling to be convinced of the truth, but *made* willing by the work of the Spirit.

(3) We were called by God through grace, not according to what we deserved.

Just like Paul, we didn't deserve grace; "deserving grace" would be a self-contradictory statement since grace is, by definition, undeserved favor. In Ephesians 2: 3, Paul says that "...we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest [of mankind]." We were no different from everyone else in the world. We were just as sinful, just as inwardly rebellious against God as the apostle Paul, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ..." (2: 4-5). Just as Paul received grace instead of justice and wrath, we also received grace rather than justice and wrath.

(4) Just as Paul was called by God for a specific purpose, we also are called by God for a specific purpose.

None of us are called to be apostles and to be the cornerstones of the church, but all of us are called by the grace of God to do something in this life as Christians. We may be called to be brick layers, carpenters, housewives, mothers, nurses, truck drivers, doctors or farmers. It really doesn't matter what God has called us to do; He wants us to receive our calling with a sense of purpose. With our work we worship God, and we witness to others about the grace of God in our lives. Whatever we do, we should do it heartily for the Lord because the one we are really serving is him (Col. 3: 23-24). ." All of us are called as believers to testify to the truth of the

gospel in our work. This is our calling in life, and it is the reason why we should do good work rather than poor work which is just enough to get a paycheck and nothing more.

3. *He did not consult with the Jerusalem apostles immediately after his conversion but saw them only briefly three years later (vv. 16b-24).*

In vv. 16-19, he explains that immediately after his conversion, he didn't go to anyone for consultation or advice, not even to Jerusalem to visit the original apostles. He went instead to Arabia for three years, probably a deserted place where many scholars believe he lived in solitude meditating on the O.T. Scriptures and coming to the realization that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the O.T. Also during this time he was receiving new revelation about Christ and the gospel recorded in Paul's epistles, things which would have remained unknown to us without this divine revelation. Then Paul returned to Damascus and went from there to Jerusalem where he spent only fifteen days with Peter and James (vv. 18-19; compare with Acts 9: 26-29).

Paul has already told us that he did not visit the apostles *before* he was converted to Christ; he would rather have seen them dead. The purpose of this part of the story is to show that Paul did not visit the original apostles immediately *after* his conversion. He went instead to Arabia where Christ taught him the gospel directly. It was only after his three year stay in Arabia that he visited Peter and James in Jerusalem (v. 19) and then only for 15 days. During a period of only 15 days, he could not have learned everything he needed to know about Christ. Such a short visit could not be interpreted as a period of discipleship by these two apostles. Besides, the account in Acts 9: 26-29 indicates that Paul was doing far more in Jerusalem during this brief stay than visiting with Peter and James. He also spent his time preaching and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews. In the three years previous to this 15 day visit, he never once consulted any apostle about the *content or accuracy* of his message (v. 18). There was no need for consultation; he had received his instruction from Jesus in person and needed no one else to teach him.

To add weight to his argument, Paul swears by an oath that he is telling the truth. God is his witness. An oath before God is not something Paul would have used on any and every occasion but was used in this case as a solemn testimony to the truth. (Paul calls upon God as witness on other occasions as well (See Rom. 1: 9; 9: 1; 2 Cor. 1: 23; 2 Cor. 11: 31; 1 Thes. 2: 5). He and his readers were well aware of the seriousness of such an oath. Further, he reports that he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia where there were no apostles (John Brown, *Galatians*, p. 27), but where he could, if necessary, marshal witnesses to prove that he had been in that region and not in Jerusalem. Additionally, there would be no witnesses in Jerusalem to claim that he had been there for more than the 15 days he claimed; note well that he was "unknown by sight to the churches of Judea". Had he been there a lot longer, he would not have been unknown to them.

But even though they did not know him, the churches in Judea were not unaffected by Paul. As a result of his preaching in Jerusalem, everyone in the churches of Judea was glorifying God because of him (vv. 22-24). They glorified God for two reasons: first, they saw how the grace of God could change even an evil man like Saul into a genuine Christian. If God could change a man like Saul, He could change anyone, even the worst of people. Second, since Saul, whose name was now Paul, was now a Christian, the Christians in Judea and the surrounding areas could now breathe a sigh of relief from persecution. Saul was primarily the person responsible

for bringing Christians bound in chains before the chief priests in Jerusalem, and now he was one of them.

We read in Acts 9: 31 that as a result of Paul’s conversion, “the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.” Before now, the name “Saul” had struck terror into the hearts of all the Christians in Jerusalem and in surrounding Judea. Now they were hearing that the same man who had terrorized the church had become a preacher. We can only imagine how happy this would make all the Christians living in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, but it would also have an effect upon those who had been exposed to the gospel but were not yet committed to it. Having a man like Paul completely turned around would be a strong apologetic (defense) of the gospel. Many of the Jews would be saying, “Well, this person Saul was so convinced he was right about Jesus Christ and was willing to give his whole life to destroying the church. Now it seems he is just as convinced that he was wrong. Maybe I need to reconsider the evidence for Christianity.” Consequently, many Jews who had been undecided would now be persuaded by the Holy Spirit to convert to the Christian faith. This is what we find in Acts 9: 31 when it is said that the church “continued to increase”.

4. For fourteen years He preached the gospel independently of the Jerusalem apostles and afterwards was received by them as an equal (2: 1-10).

Paul makes a second visit to Jerusalem after fourteen years. (The first visit was the inconsequential, relatively insignificant, 15-day visit of 1: 18-19.) It is impossible to determine when this period of 14 years begins. Was Paul counting from the time of his initial conversion or was he counting 14 years from his first visit with Peter and James? It doesn’t really matter as far as his argument is concerned. The important thing is that he was preaching and teaching for fourteen long years before making any significant contact with the apostles in Jerusalem. After fourteen years, the revelation of Christ was firmly fixed in his mind and there was no turning back.

Excursus: Was this visit at the same time as the Council of Acts 15?

Some scholars believe this was the visit of Acts 15, but this is not at all likely for the following reasons. **First**, in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas are commissioned by the leaders of the church in Antioch to attend a council of the apostles and elders in the church at Jerusalem. No “revelation” is mentioned (see Gal. 2: 2), and this council was a **public** affair, but the passage in Galatians 2 tells us that this second visit is a **private** affair between Paul and the apostles and not at all a public council.

Second, the incident with Titus is missing in Acts 15, and it would have been odd if Luke had left it out in that narrative since it was so important to the issues being discussed.

Third, the confrontation between Peter and Paul in Gal. 2: 11-14 takes place **after** the private meeting of 2: 1-10 (note the temporal indicator, “But when”) If, then, this meeting of 2: 1-10 is the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15, it would have been odd indeed for Peter to shun the fellowship of the Gentiles **after** his rousing speech in Acts 15 to the effect that Gentiles have equal standing with the Jews and should not be burdened with the yoke of the Mosaic Law (See Acts 15: 6-11). Further still, the formal proclamation of all the apostles and elders in Acts 15: 23-29 would have been a very strong deterrent to Peter’s inconsistent ostracism (shunning) of the Gentiles.

Fourth, it is inconceivable that Paul would not have mentioned the formal decree given by the council in Acts 15 in his argument in Galatians. This decree would have been the end of all argumentation. The only reason he did not use this decree in his argumentation in Galatians is that the council of Acts 15 had not occurred by the time Galatians was written (For further discussion, see F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 298-300).

The reason for this second visit is given in v. 2. It was because of a **revelation** that Paul went up to Jerusalem. What this revelation was we do not know for sure. Paul does not even say that it was a revelation given to him personally; it could have been a revelation given to someone else. This is the view of some commentators (John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p.41; Bruce, p. 244) who say that this revelation is recorded in Acts 11: 27-30 when some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch predicting a widespread famine which would also affect the Christians living in Judea. Agabus is one of the prophets who predicted the coming of this famine. It was decided at that time that a contribution be raised among the Christians in Antioch to send to the suffering Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. [Antioch was the largest city and the capital of Syria and apparently more prosperous than Judea. We should learn from this that even in the earliest days of Christianity, wealthier Christians were concerned for brothers and sisters who did not have as much material wealth as they did, even if they were hundreds of miles away.] According to the passage in Acts, this contribution would be delivered by Paul and Barnabas to the elders and apostles in Judea.

However, there is one small argument against Acts 11: 30 being the visit of Gal. 2: 1-10. In v. 10, Paul says that James, Cephas (Peter), and John asked him, Barnabas and Titus to “remember the poor”. If Paul went to Jerusalem “because of the revelation” (v. 2) of Agabus concerning a famine in Jerusalem, and if the very purpose of their visit was to deliver the relief gift from Antioch, then why did the Jerusalem apostles feel the need to ask them to remember the poor? This would seem unnecessary since the reason they came in the first place is to minister to the poor. It is possible that the revelation mentioned in v. 3 was a private revelation to Paul from God indicating that it was now time that Paul and the Jerusalem apostles met over the most important thing in the world—the gospel. The reader will have to decide which interpretation he prefers.

Whatever point of view we take, we must ask why Paul submits his gospel to the apostles. The gospel he submits to them on this occasion (Gal. 2: 1-10) is the same one he had been preaching among the Gentiles for the last fourteen years. Is he now having second thoughts about it? Does he personally need their approval and confirmation? Not at all. He doesn’t submit it to them because he needs their approval or because he is in the least doubt about what he has been preaching. He already knows that his gospel is the true gospel of Jesus Christ because he received it directly from Jesus. So if Paul is not trying to gain the approval of the apostles, why does he consult with them about the gospel after 14 years? The answer is found in the latter part of v. 2: “for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.” What does Paul mean by this?

After fourteen years of preaching, Paul recognized that many of his disciples could become confused and fall away from the faith *if they believed that the Jerusalem apostles and Paul were not fully agreed about the gospel*. Paul was not in doubt about it at all. Even if he found out that Peter and all the other apostles disagreed with him, he would not change his mind. He would not have changed his mind about the gospel even if the angels Gabriel or Michael the archangel had appeared in Galatia preaching a different gospel. After all, he had told the Galatians in no uncertain terms that even if he, or anyone else (even Peter) or an angel from heaven preached a Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com

gospel different from the one he had already preached to them, that man or angel or even Paul himself would be accused.

But there were other people to consider besides himself. What about all the Christians he had been teaching all these years? What if they heard a rumor that Paul and Peter were not in agreement? What then? He realized that all his labor (14 years of it) could be in jeopardy (“in vain”) if there was no substantial agreement between him and the Jerusalem apostles and if his converts knew about the disagreement. When leaders of the church disagree on fundamental issues, Satan will use this disagreement to weaken the faith of less knowledgeable Christians, and sometimes even knowledgeable ones. One Christian leader says this; another one says that. Who is right? What is the weaker Christian to believe when strong believers who are highly knowledgeable in their faith, or seem to be so, do not agree on fundamental issues? Full agreement on all issues is impossible; but on the gospel, agreement among the leadership is essential because men’s souls are at stake.

This can really be a problem in Africa. African churches are constantly receiving visiting preachers and teachers from the United States and other parts of the world. I think most of us are preaching the same gospel, but not all of us. A few visiting teachers are preaching a gospel which teaches that God wants all of us to be healthy and rich, and it is not His will for any of us to be poor and unhealthy. If we are poor and unhealthy, we must not have enough faith, or we have done something very bad for which God is punishing us. Well, I’m sure that there will never be any poverty and sickness in heaven; but we are not in heaven, and neither Jesus nor the apostles ever taught that it was a sin or a sign of weak faith to be sick or poor. Some of the strongest Christians in the Bible were poor, or unhealthy, or both. Paul himself is a perfect example, and he never taught that we should expect a carefree life while living on this earth. Jesus was a man who had “no place to lay his head” (Lk. 9: 58), and he promised us a life of tribulation, not riches and honor (Matt. 24: 9). The “health and wealth gospel” is a false gospel which is disturbing many people in Uganda, a false gospel which has been exported here from the United States and elsewhere and is continuing to be taught by Ugandan preachers.

On the other hand, when strong, intelligent leaders and teachers of the church do agree on important issues, especially the gospel, it is a very strong encouragement to the whole church, a confirmation of your faith in Jesus Christ. This was Paul’s goal when he held a private meeting with the apostles, not to clear up what was confused in his *own mind*, but to confirm in the minds of *others* the gospel he had been preaching. He was firmly convinced that he and the Jerusalem apostles were in strong agreement and reading off the same page, so to speak. *But it would be very important to everyone sitting under his teaching to know that he and the other apostles were in full agreement.* This was why he visited the apostles on this occasion.

One important application of this episode is that Christian leaders need to make sure they are all agreed on the fundamental issues affecting salvation. It is impossible for all teachers to be agreed on every point of the Bible, and there are many areas in which there can be legitimate disagreement. But if they are not agreed on the gospel itself their teaching will have the tendency to cancel each other out. The people who are listening to them will not know what to believe, and they may throw their hands up in confusion and give up on the Christian faith. Many people have already done that because there is so much disagreement among theologians in the West. And even if the issue does not affect one’s salvation, teachers ought to be concerned enough for the church to be willing to get together on the points of difference and attempt to resolve the differences through mutual study and discussion. Only God knows

everything, and teachers and preachers ought to be humble enough to admit that they could be wrong about something. Paul *knew* he wasn't wrong because he had received a direct revelation of the gospel from Christ, but he was still concerned enough for his converts and the church as a whole to meet with the apostles and make sure that their doctrine was the same as his.

In vv. 1 and 3, notice that Paul took Titus along with him and Barnabas to Jerusalem. This was a very important move on Paul's part because Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile who had been converted under Paul's ministry. After Titus was converted, Paul never insisted that he get circumcised. Why not? Because to require Titus to be circumcised would be a concession to the Judaizers, the false teachers, that everyone coming to Christ had to live like Jews and obey the ceremonial laws of Moses. Most importantly, it would prove that the Judaizers were correct in saying that the sacrifice of Christ was not enough; one also had to keep the whole Law of Moses to be saved. As we have already shown, this is not good news because no one can keep the law perfectly.

Now if Paul could bring this uncircumcised Gentile into the presence of the Jewish Christian leaders of the church without having to circumcise him, this would prove that the false teachers of Galatia were telling a lie about the differences between Paul's gospel and the gospel of the other apostles. It would prove that they were all saying the same thing, that the only thing necessary to be saved is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and nothing else—not circumcision and keeping the Law—nothing but trusting in Christ.

And this is just the way it turned out when Paul took Titus to Peter and the other apostles. Notice that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised by anyone (v. 3) even though there were many Judaizers in Jerusalem who put a lot of pressure on Paul to do so. They were insisting that it was not lawful for an uncircumcised Gentile to have fellowship with circumcised Jews. But Paul, along with the other apostles, did not yield to these false teachers even for one hour (v. 5) in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with all of Paul's converts and all the converts in Jerusalem. Yielding to those who were insisting on circumcision would have been to give up the liberty of the gospel and to be placed in bondage to a false gospel which said, keep the law and you will be saved. But *that* was no gospel at all.

Everything which Paul had *hoped* to accomplish on this trip *was* accomplished: (1) First, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised which was a powerful illustration of the agreement Paul had with the Jerusalem apostles. (2) Second, Peter and the other apostles did not attempt to add anything or subtract anything from the message that Paul was already preaching (v. 6). Notice the words in the text, "those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me." That is, the Jerusalem apostles offered no changes to what Paul was already preaching which means that they were preaching the same thing as Paul. The words could also mean that they offered no additional authority to Paul than what he already possessed. (3) Paul and Barnabas received the right hand of fellowship from the Jerusalem apostles who recognized that Paul was the apostle chosen by God to go to the Gentiles while Peter, James, and John were chosen by God to take the gospel to the Jews (vv. 7-9). The only thing they really asked of Paul and Barnabas was to remember the poor Christians in Judea in every place they preached the gospel among the Gentiles, something which Paul was only happy to do (v. 10). Remember that this is possibly why he and Barnabas were in Jerusalem in the first place. They had been sent there by the church in Antioch (Acts 11: 30).

As a result of this meeting, no one could claim that there was a difference between Paul and Peter and the other apostles. They were all preaching the same thing. And not only this, Paul was officially recognized by the Jerusalem apostles as being an apostle on the same level as they were with only one difference—he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

Now, some other applications of this text need to be made lest anyone think that this passage of Scripture has nothing to do with us who are living in Uganda in the 21st century. The passage is relevant and important to us in every way.

(1) First, we have already seen how important it is for Christian leaders to consult with one another on their teaching, even if they are convinced their teaching is correct.

Even Paul, who received the gospel directly from Christ, wanted to make sure that there were no differences between him and the other disciples which would confuse the church. It is encouraging to other Christians when Christian teachers are agreed on the fundamentals. This would solve many problems in the church today, but often the leaders of the church are too proud to hold themselves accountable to others for their teaching. Notice also that the established leaders of the Jerusalem church—James, Peter, and John—did not stand in Paul’s way when they found out that his doctrine was true. It did not matter to them that Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles or that he had not “sat at their feet” to be discipled by them. They recognized that he had received the gospel directly from the Lord Jesus and that his authority was from the Holy Spirit. (It should be repeated here that no one living after the apostolic age could make the same claims as Paul. No one else can receive his doctrine directly from Christ.)

Ecclesiastical pride often hinders the progress of the gospel. Many who may have Biblical authority are not recognized by the hierarchical leaders of the church. There is something to be said for proper church authority as long as we understand that every authority in the church is subject to examination. We will see this very powerfully in Gal. 2: 11-14 when Paul confronts Peter for his error in dealing with the Gentiles. God the Holy Spirit does not recognize our ecclesiastical boundaries, and he teaches those who outside those boundaries. We cannot contain God in the box of our ecclesiastical traditions.

(2) Second, the passage teaches us today that there is no difference in the message of Paul and that of Peter or James or John or any of the other apostles who wrote parts of the NT.

There are many liberal scholars today who would have us believe that Paul’s message was different from Peter’s and Peter’s message was different from John’s and so forth. They would like to show us contradictions between the book of *Galatians* and the book of *James* or *Romans* and *James*. If they had their way, they would divide the NT into a vegetable stew of different messages and emphases which were only remotely related to one another. But this passage proves otherwise. When Paul finally submitted his teaching to the scrutiny of Peter, James, and John, they did not want to add anything to it or change it in any way. And the reason they didn’t want to change it is that they were in full agreement with it. Essentially they were all teaching the same message each with a different audience with different needs, and this is why there are different points of emphasis in each to their writings.

Many have attempted to show that Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith is different from James’ doctrine of justification by faith plus works (Compare Gal. 2 with James 2). If James

were really teaching justification by the works of the law in that chapter, then there would surely have been a heated difference of opinion between James and Paul in this second Jerusalem visit. But there was no such difference and we are obligated to believe that Paul did not contradict James (since *James* is written before *Galatians* or *Romans*). And if we carefully examine *Romans* 6, we will see that Paul and James are in perfect harmony concerning the necessity of the works of holiness as evidence of true faith.

There simply are no contradictions between Paul's teaching and the teaching we will find anywhere else in the NT or the OT. Educated people have been trying to prove contradictions in the Bible for hundreds of years, and they have utterly failed in their efforts to do so. For every contradiction they claim, there is always an explanation by a conservative scholar.

Furthermore, it did not take the apostles many years of putting their heads together to formulate a consistent gospel message. The gospel is not the result of a theological conference involving Peter, James, John and Paul and all the other apostles. All of the apostles were simply *given* the gospel by Jesus Christ; the gospel is not the product of a committee of theologians. It just so happened that Paul got his installment of the gospel *later* than the others, but there was nothing different about it. I mention this fact because there are modern scholars who maintain that the gospel of the apostles evolved over a long period of time. They even maintain that the history of Christ in the Gospels is the creation of his disciples who wanted to keep the Christian church together after the death of Jesus. We don't have to worry ourselves over such distorted "scholarship" based on speculation rather than fact. Conservative theologians have already answered these critics who wish to rob us of the supernaturalism of the Bible.

(3) Third, there can be no fellowship with those who teach a false gospel.

As much as we would like to fellowship with everyone, it simply is not possible since there is no foundation for this fellowship. Notice in v. 4 that Paul does not say that the false teachers are merely *mistaken Christians*; he says that they are *false brethren* who had sneaked into the church as "spies" seeking to bring people into "bondage." Of course, we need to make a distinction between people who are just confused in their own minds and people who are trying to win people to a false doctrine. We must be gentle with some, but with false teachers, we need to show them the back door of the church. The apostle John tells believers not even to let them through the door. "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting" (2 Jn. 10). We see, then, that the apostles were also agreed about what must be done about false teachers in the church. Paul was not in a bad mood the day he told the Galatians, "If anyone brings a gospel different from the one I have already brought you, let him be accursed." John felt the same way as Paul.

We should be able to mark the difference between those who are simply mistaken and those who are troubling the church. We must first try to reason with people from the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2: 24-26). To do that we must know the Scriptures ourselves or find a knowledgeable Christian who will help us with this person. If he or she will not listen to sound reasoning, we have no choice but to shun fellowship with such a person.

(4) Fourth, notice in v. 10 that the poor are always on the hearts of the apostles.

Paul came to Jerusalem on this second trip to bring relief to the suffering Christians in Jerusalem. At the end of his meeting with them, the one thing they wished to urge upon him was to remember the poor. We also find in v. 10 that Paul was eager to do whatever he could to help the poor. Remember that these were the best minds in the church—the men who wrote most of the NT. James wrote one epistle, Peter two, John wrote three epistles plus the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation, and Paul wrote thirteen epistles. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these four men wrote 78 percent of the NT. To Paul God gave the task of formulating most of the doctrines of salvation. (Jesus wrote no books, but left His Spirit to inspire others to write.) Yet these great theologians of the church were concerned for the needy people in the body of Christ.

What do we learn from this? We learn that if a man's theology does not produce compassion and practical deeds of kindness and love, his theology falls far short of the theology of these great men. It doesn't matter how intelligent or educated a man is, if he has no heart for the suffering people of the world, particularly those who are right under his nose, his faith is meaningless. Isn't this what James tells us in his epistle, the same James who urged Paul to remember the poor? "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2: 15-17). We see, then, that Paul and the Jerusalem apostles were not only in agreement about the gospel but the application of the gospel. The church cannot be a healthy church without strong theology and the consistent application of theology. In the words of John Brown, Paul "was persuaded that few things had a greater tendency to break down the walls of prejudice between Jewish and Gentile believers than this fellowship of love—this communion of giving and receiving" (Brown, *Galatians*, p. 32).

We now return to the *fifth* point in Paul's defense of his apostleship. (See the outline of Galatians.)

5. On one occasion he had to correct Peter whose behavior contradicted his gospel (2: 11-14).

The importance of this story to Paul's argument is obvious. He is not attempting to discredit Peter but to establish the fact that his apostleship has not been dependent upon the Jerusalem apostles in any way. In fact, at one point he has to confront Peter for an improper application of the gospel. His persecution of Christians, his conversion experience and call as an apostle, his independent ministry for 14 years, and his being received by Peter, James, and John as their equal all prove that his apostleship is independent of Jerusalem. With this story, he proves that he has the authority to correct the Jerusalem apostles if their doctrine or practice is contrary to the gospel. Although central to his argument, the story has much more value to us than Paul's verification of his apostleship. As we will see, the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul has some very important lessons to teach the church with this conflict. Conflict in the church is not always bad; sometimes good results come from it.

Peter, also called Cephas, came to Antioch after Paul's visit to Jerusalem. At first Peter made it a habit (imperfect tense in the Gk.) of eating with the Gentile Christians in Antioch and having social fellowship with them, but later, when some Jews came who *claimed* to be sent from James the apostle in Jerusalem (but weren't; see Acts 15: 24), he became afraid to mingle any longer with the Gentiles. We don't know exactly what he was afraid of. The text only says that he was

“fearing the party of the circumcision” (v. 12), people who claimed that a person had to be circumcised to be saved, people who denied the very gospel which Peter, Paul, James, and John had *already* agreed upon earlier (Gal. 2: 1-10).

Peter should have understood that these men couldn't represent James' viewpoint simply because James was one of the apostles who did not require *Titus* to be circumcised (v. 3). The text doesn't tell us why Peter and Barnabas were confused and acting contrary to the gospel. They were both yielding to the pressure from these men claiming to be from James, and many other Jewish Christians living in Antioch were making the same mistake—refusing to have fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles (v. 13) in the presence of Jews but “living as Gentiles” otherwise (v. 14). Such hypocrisy was bound to be confusing.

Perhaps Peter thought James had changed his mind about the gospel, but even if he had, Peter should feel no pressure to change *his* mind. Paul would never do that, no matter what happened or who differed from him. But the only thing the text tells us is that Peter was afraid of the men who were from James. Perhaps he was afraid that they would be so disgusted seeing him eat with Gentiles that they would renounce Christianity and go back to Judaism (Brown, p. 34). In other words, Peter didn't want to be the cause of stumbling for weaker Jewish Christians.

But this view makes little sense. If the welfare of Jewish Christians was Peter's motive, Paul would not have dealt so severely with him. Even if this was Peter's motive, the proper motive alone does not justify one's actions. We may have a good motive for what we do, but the motive alone will not make what we do the right thing to do.

Possibly, Peter was simply intimidated by men who seemed to be better educated than he was. After all, he was only a simple fisherman. He was a more timid man than Paul and had yielded to intimidation before when he denied Christ three times the night of His arrest. The strange thing is that this episode took place *after* he received the Holy Spirit and *after* he preached to several thousand Jews on the Day of Pentecost and *after* he stood up to the Jewish leaders who warned him not to preach about Jesus any more saying, “We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4: 20). Peter had been ready to die for his faith rather than quit preaching the gospel. It doesn't make sense that he could show so much courage on *some* occasions and not on *this* one. Why should he be afraid of just a few Jews who showed up from Jerusalem and disagreed with his doctrine?

But fear is often not very rational (reasonable). Sometimes we are fearful of something or someone when we really have nothing to fear but God. I remember one time talking to a woman who said that she would become a Christian but that she feared the rejection of her husband. Her husband did not like Christianity, and she was afraid that he would leave her if she became a Christian. She feared the rejection of her husband more than she feared God, and this was just the issue with Peter. He feared these men from Jerusalem more than he feared God. He *already* knew that God had accepted uncircumcised Gentiles into the same church with the Jews. He had learned this the same way Paul had learned it—by direct revelation from God. This was the story of Cornelius the centurion and how God had given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit and had taught Peter that no people were to be considered unclean, no matter what race they were (Acts 10—11: 18).

Surely, he had not forgotten this lesson because he was still living “like the Gentiles” (v. 14). Because of peer pressure from influential people, he was not practicing the truth. It is one thing to *know* the truth and another thing to *practice* the truth. He was acting contrary to what he knew to be true. But it just goes to show you that even strong Christians like Peter and Barnabas may yield to the fear of men who have a different opinion from their own. We shouldn’t be too haughty or sure of ourselves thinking that we would never be afraid of what other people think of us. Too often, we *are* afraid of people even when we are sure about the truth; and when we are afraid of *people*, we are no longer afraid of *God* who *is* the truth.

Whatever Peter’s reasons for being afraid, they were not good enough reasons for Paul. Paul was watching him, and he was watching other Jewish Christians, including his close friend and companion, Barnabas, being sucked into the mire of Peter’s hypocrisy. By refusing to eat or socialize with the Gentiles, Peter was in danger of compromising the very truth of the gospel which said that both Jews and Gentiles were on equal standing before Christ. You did not have to become a Jew to become a Christian. Now, even *Paul* was afraid—not of *people*, but afraid that all his work in the gospel would be in vain because of Peter’s hypocrisy, preaching one thing but doing another. Furthermore, Paul feared what *God* would think and do if he refused to confront this error head on and face to face.

Most people would have let the issue go because most people would rather sacrifice the truth than have controversy in the church. They don’t seem troubled about trivial and unimportant controversies, but no one seems to want to argue about theology—about truth. “After all,” they would say, “no one is perfect, and what harm could it do if Peter refused to eat with Gentiles? Surely they would get over it! There is no need to start any trouble.” But Paul could see the issue as clearly.

There were two important problems which would arise if Paul didn’t speak out against what Peter was doing. The first problem would be the root cause of the second problem.

(1) First, the gospel itself would be compromised.

Notice in v. 14 that Paul believed Peter was not being “straightforward about the truth of the *gospel*.” Peter’s conduct was not a slight mistake but a serious error which compromised the gospel. What he and others were doing would naturally lead the Gentiles to believe that something more than faith in Christ was necessary for salvation. It would lead them to believe the false doctrines of the Judaizers who said that one must also keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Even though Peter was preaching the true gospel with his *words*, he was preaching a false gospel with his *actions*. To be effective as ministers of the gospel, our actions must agree with our words. The same is true of every Christian in the church. To be effective as a Christian, your conduct must be in agreement with the gospel which you believe.

This was the real issue which affected every other issue. Is a person saved simply by believing in Jesus Christ as his Savior or is he saved by believing in Christ *plus* something else—plus circumcision, plus baptism, plus going to church a certain number of times per year, plus being married in the church. By yielding to peer pressure (the opinions of one’s family, close friends, or relationships) from the party of the circumcision, Peter was essentially agreeing that they were correct about the necessity of circumcision and the works of the law to be saved. At the same time, he was playing to both sides of the issue. When he was with Gentile believers only, he

“lived like the Gentiles” (v. 14), but when the Judaizers were around, he shunned fellowship with Gentiles. Such behavior would have been very confusing. This is primarily why Paul had to make such an issue about all of this. He couldn’t let this go, because to let it go would be to let the gospel go. It would be compromised, and people’s souls would be endangered by a false gospel of works—do this and that, and you will be saved by how well you do in life.

For this reason, Paul had to meet the problem head-on, and because Peter’s conduct had been in full public view of all the Christians in Antioch, Paul decided that he must rebuke Peter publicly to correct the harm that he had done to the gospel. Later on, when Paul wrote Timothy in Ephesus, he made a point of saying that elders who sinned publicly must be rebuked publicly to discourage others from sinning (1 Timothy 5: 19-20). He did not rebuke Peter publicly to gain standing over Peter so that people would respect him more than Peter. This was the farthest thing from his mind. His singular motive was to protect the gospel and to protect people from a false gospel. It was a very tense moment in the history of the church. A huge split could have occurred between Peter and Paul and between the Gentile church and the Jewish church. The Gentile church would have believed in salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, while the Jewish church would have believed in salvation by faith in Christ plus good works—a gospel which is a contradiction in terms and not really the gospel at all.

As a matter of fact, a split just like this has already occurred in the history of the Church. Evangelicals believe in salvation by faith in Christ alone, while Roman Catholics believe that good works must be added to one’s faith in Christ. Genuine faith in Christ, they say, is not enough—one must also improve on the work of Christ by adding personal works. Therefore, the ground of one’s faith is finally not what Christ has done, but what the Christian does.

I am afraid that we as evangelicals can send the same message to people. We can add conditions for salvation which are not in the Bible. For example, people are told they cannot be communing members of the church if they are divorced. (See my Systematic Theology on “Marriage” and especially, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* by Jay Adams.) They are also told they cannot be Christians if they drink alcoholic beverages. I know a woman in Mbarara who says that you are not “born again” if you drink any alcohol. I suppose, then, that Jesus was not a very good Christian—not “born again”—since he not only drank wine but turned water into wine. Or maybe Paul was not a very good Christian for advising Timothy to take a little wine for his frequent illnesses (Compare Lk. 7: 33-34; Jn. 2: 3-9; Eph. 5: 18; 1 Tim. 3: 8; 5: 23 in which the same Greek word *oinos* is used in every verse).

Beware of adding conditions which the Bible does not add. If we forbid what God allows, we will soon allow what God forbids. And if we begin to manufacture a gospel of do’s and don’t’s, we will soon have a different gospel from the one we are given in the Scriptures.

(2) *Secondly, without the true gospel, there was no basis for genuine fellowship in the church.*

If Jews could not even socialize and eat with the Gentiles, how could they worship together with them in the same church? If you are too high and mighty to eat a meal with me, then how does our relationship change all of a sudden when we attend worship together? The point is: it doesn’t change. If you are superior to me *outside* the church building, then you are superior to me *inside* the church building as well. So how can we have true fellowship together if you think you are better or more important than I am or if I think I am more important than you are? Genuine fellowship is a product of the true gospel.

Tribalism in Africa has in many ways compromised the gospel. In Rwanda, and now in South Sudan since December 2013 until now (July 2014), tribal hatred between Hutu and Tutsi and between Dinka and Nuer has almost destroyed the witness of the church. Tribal loyalties are more important to many professing African Christians than fellowship in Christ. Sub-Saharan Africa claims to be primarily Christian, but African Christians have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that African Christianity is nominal (name-only) Christianity. This must change if the church in Sub-Saharan Africa survives the 21st century.

The Bible tells us that we are all sinners in need of God's grace, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. None of us is more important than the rest of us because God is no respecter of persons or tribes. Paul had already said this in 2: 6 concerning him and the other apostles in Jerusalem, "God shows no partiality". Later on in Galatians he says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3: 28). Why did he say this? Well, these people were thinking that Jews had special privileges in the church over Gentiles, males had special privileges over females, and certainly free men should be given special distinction over slaves.

No, says Paul, this is muddled thinking. As Christians you are all equal before God. You may have different *functions* in the church and in the family and at work. People in the church should submit to their leaders, wives should submit to their husbands, and slaves should submit to their masters (employees to their employers). But as you all stand at the foot of the cross of Jesus, you are all equal. Jesus suffered just as much for the slave as the master, and just as much for the female as the male, just as much for children as adults. All this positioning to be the favored group in the church or to be the big man or the big woman in the church has nothing to do with Christianity. It is straight out of hell.

Whatever a man or woman has from God is not something to boast about, and it is not something to set him or her apart from other Christians, but something to thank God for. Paul clearly teaches this in 1 Cor. 4: 7: "For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" He also said, "...God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God" (1 Cor. 1: 27-29).

God dislikes our boasting because men have nothing to boast about. Setting ourselves up as superior to others—for whatever reason—is a form of boasting, and showing favoritism to others on the basis of race, or tribe, or social and economic standing is a form of boasting in *man*. God has given to each of us our race, our tribal background, our social standing, our education, and our money. None of this is anything to boast about.

People with money often get special treatment. Maybe they made some wise business decisions. But who gave them the intellectual ability to make wise investments? God did. If they received government jobs which pay well, who gave them that job? God did, and He will hold them accountable for what they do with their power. He will also hold the wealthy man accountable for how he spends his money. If we boast in anything, Paul says, we should be boasting in Jesus Christ and what He has done. He says so in Gal. 6: 14, "But may it never be that I should boast,

except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Paul was crucified to the world and all of its boasting in man and in man’s achievements. The only thing important to him was Christ and all of *His* achievements.

If Paul had allowed Peter to go unchallenged, the door to favoritism in the church would have been thrown wide open. The Jews would have been considered *first-class* Christians and Gentiles would have been considered *second-class* Christians. Eventually this distinction would have divided the church into a Jewish church and a separate Gentile church, then into a white church and a black church, and on and on and on. (Just look at the harm that has been done to the gospel in South Africa by apartheid and in the US by racism against black people.) Paul could not tolerate this possibility because this would mean that the body of Christ was divided. You would have arms and legs in one place and shoulders, neck, and chest in another place. Ears and noses would have been scattered everywhere; the body of Christ would have been mutilated. Pretty soon, *other forms of favoritism* would have cropped up in the church.

Paul was not the only one who saw the issues clearly. The Apostle James, the brother of Jesus, also saw them. James noticed that in some of the churches the rich were being favored over the poor (James 2: 1-13). Basically, he tells us that rich visitors coming into the church were given the best seats in the house while the poor were treated with disrespect and told to sit on the floor. James objects to this as a violation of the sixth commandment which says, “You shall not kill.” To demean a person on the basis of social or economic status is a form of murder. In some sense, you are murdering his *person, his essence, as the image of God*. The only thing which really makes us special is that we all are made in God’s image. Otherwise we are only intelligent animals. If we disrespect this image, we also disrespect God in whose image we are made. And *that*, says James, is a form of murder. If you don’t like James’ reasoning on this point, you need to argue with James, not me.

III. Paul’s Defense of the Gospel (Galatians 2: 15-6: 10)

A. Introduction to Paul’s Defense (2: 15-21)

Commentators are divided on the issue of where Paul’s address to Peter ends and his address to the Galatians begins. One view is that vv. 15-21 is addressed to the Galatians and not to Peter. Another view is that vv.15-16 is part of his address to Peter but vv.17-21 is addressed only to the Galatians. I take the view that vv.15-21 is included in Paul’s address to Peter “in the presence of all”. There seems to be no natural break in the dialogue with Peter which begins in v. 14b until we get to 3: 1 in which Paul clearly addresses the Galatians. Second, the presence of the first person plural pronoun “we” appears to indicate that Paul is still speaking with Peter (vv. 15, 16, 17), although this is not conclusive. The presence of the first person singular pronoun “I” in vv. 18-21 does not conflict with this view since the argument from v. 18 on is clearly connected with the argument in vv. 15-17 by the explanatory “for” (*gar*) in vv. 18 and 19. The translators of the New American Standard Bible have included vv. 15-21 as part of Paul’s address to Peter by placing the remarks in quotation marks (“...”).

Whatever view we take has little relevance for the proper interpretation. While much of the address includes doctrine Peter already knew, it was doctrine he needed to practice. In this address, Paul proceeds to explain the gospel more clearly in a way that everyone could understand, the church in Antioch as well as the church in Asia Minor.

1. Justification has never been by the Law, but only by faith (vv. 15-16).

a. The Jews were never justified by the Law.

I will attempt to give you a paraphrase of what Paul means in vv. 15-16. (For a more complete analysis see Stott, pp. 59-64.) “We are Jews according to birth, and not Gentile ‘sinners’, as we Jews have commonly called them. And we Jews have always considered ourselves to be righteous people set apart from these sinful Gentiles. But, Peter, we both know, *even as Jews* who have received the law and the promises, that no man or woman can be justified by the Law, but only by believing in Christ. We Jews, as a nation, have already tried being justified by the works of the Law, and this attempt did not work for us.”

b. “We” (Paul and Peter) were never justified by the Law.

“But not only this, Peter, you and I *personally* know that this has been true in our own lives. We personally have believed in Christ so that we can be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law. We believed in Christ because we know that a righteousness based on law-keeping did not work for you and me personally any more than it worked for the Jewish nation. We have put God to the test and have found the gospel to be wholly true in our lives.”

c. Universally, no one (“no flesh”, Jew or Gentile) has ever been justified by the Law.

“Thirdly, Peter, it is *universally* true that no flesh will be saved by keeping the Law. It does not matter what a man’s race or background is, he cannot be saved by keeping the Law.”

What was Paul’s purpose in using the term, “Gentile sinners”? You would think that Paul would avoid any statement which would add fuel to the fire of Jewish racism and the assumed superiority of Jews to Gentiles (See John Brown, *Galatians*, p. 36). By using the terms “sinners from among the Gentiles” Paul is not referring to the moral superiority of the Jew, something he expressly denies in Romans 1-3 where he emphatically affirms that Jews are no better than Gentiles and that “both Jews and Greeks are all under sin” (3: 9). Rather, he is using the terms to highlight the superior privileges and advantages of the Jews in being placed in a special covenantal arrangement with God. While the Gentiles were left in spiritual darkness and heathenism, God had put a hedge (or fence) around Israel with the Law of Moses to protect them from idolatrous practices.

Notwithstanding (in spite of that fact), the Jews had failed to be justified by the law. This is the meaning of the first part of v. 16 in which Paul affirms, “Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, *even we* have believed in Christ Jesus....” The words “even we” refer to Paul and Peter personally since most of the Jewish nation had remained in unbelief. Paul is emphasizing the fact that even with their distinctive privileges, Paul and Peter had found it necessary to abandon the law in order to be saved by faith in Christ. Why then, Paul is arguing, should we expect the “sinners from among the Gentiles” to be saved by keeping the law when even we Jews were not able to obtain salvation by that method? (For a more detailed discussion of this view, see Calvin, *Galatians*, pp. 65-67; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. 6, Galatians*, p. 656.)

Notice that the word “justified” (*dikaioo*) is used three times in v. 16 and “faith in Christ” is mentioned twice. The “works of the Law” are also mentioned three times. Paul is going to extremes in emphasizing the difference between “justification by faith in Christ” and “justification by the works of the Law” (See also Rom. 3: 20, 28). These are presented here as *two methods of justification*, or *two ways of salvation*. They are opposed to one another, and they cannot be mixed together (John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 63).

Let me define the word, “justification”. In justification, God declares the sinner to be not guilty. It is a legal declaration. Justification presents the picture of a courtroom with God the Father sitting as the Judge. Satan stands against you as your prosecutor (accuser; Rom. 8: 33-34) arguing his case with God, “Why should you forgive this man? Look what a sinner he is! Look what he has done! There is no reason why he should be acquitted of his crimes against your holy law.” Now, if you are a Christian, Christ is there beside you as your advocate or lawyer. He also argues His case in court before God the Father, the Supreme Judge of all the earth saying, “This man is not guilty of any crime against the law of God. Show me the evidence of one single crime he has committed.” And Satan will demand that the record books be brought into the courtroom which record the history of everyone’s sin, and Satan gleefully waits for the record book to be opened, knowing well that you have committed many crimes against the Law of God.

But when your record book is examined, no evidence of sin can be found—the pages are blank. Why? Your record of sin has been wiped clean. The pages and pages of sin recorded in your book have been ripped out of the book and thrown away. Jesus Christ has already paid the penalty of your sins, and they are completely forgiven and forgotten as far as God the Judge is concerned. There is, therefore, no more record of them. God will not punish Christ for your sins and then punish you for the same sins. This would be the same as saying that the death of Christ did not accomplish anything. If you as a Christian are still guilty of your sins, then Christ died for nothing.

Think of the word “justify” in this way: As far as God the Father is concerned, it is “*just-as-if-I-had never sinned*”. I know that I have sinned thousands of times. But as far as my *record* is concerned, I have never sinned because Christ has paid the penalty of my sin and wiped my record clean.

We are not justified by sheer hard work (Stott, p. 61). Salvation is not something we achieve. I have asked many people the question, “If you died tonight and stood before God, and He asked you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ what would you say?” Many people don’t know how to answer this question. Some tell me, “I don’t know what I would say.” Others tell me, “I’m trying to live a good life.” Still others would tell God, “I have done many good things in my life, so you should save me because of the good I have done.”

But what would you say? I will tell you what God will say to you if you said to Him, “I’m trying to live a good life.” He will say to you, “Sorry, your life is not good enough and never will be. I see here in your record that you have many blots on your record. I can only accept a perfect record because I am a holy and perfect God, and yours is far from perfect. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.” This is what God will say to you. The only acceptable record is a perfect record, and the only person who ever earned a perfect record is Christ. If you believe in Christ, He will give you His perfect record in exchange for your imperfect record, and He will

take your imperfect record and nail it to His cross, and its penalty will be paid in full (the Greek word, *tetelestai* [Jn. 19: 30], a debt discharged or paid in full—“it is finished”).

God will never accept you or me on the basis of our own sinful record, but on the basis of Christ’s record alone. This is the gospel; this is justification. Justification was hard work for Christ who suffered the penalty of our sin and was temporarily abandoned by His Father. It is not *hard* work for you and me; it is *impossible* work for you and me—something we could never achieve even if we lived a million years. What we must do is repent of our sins and believe in what Christ has accomplished for us.

2. Objection to justification by grace: If having been justified by grace we are still sinful in our behavior, then Christ has given us a gospel which promotes sin (v. 17).

Paul’s opponents had the following criticism which he anticipates in v. 17: “If we are saved by faith in Christ plus nothing else, and if we are still found to be sinful in practice, then we can say that Christ is a minister of sin. After all, Paul, you say that this is the gospel that Christ taught you, but this *kind* of gospel allows people to continue in sin and to neglect the commandments of God because they are not essential for salvation. If good works and keeping the law are not a necessary part of salvation, the *natural thing* for people to do is to ignore the law and to ignore good works. They can simply be saved by believing in Christ and nothing else, and they will continue living sinful lives as a result. After all, if good works and keeping the law have nothing to do with your salvation, then what is the purpose of doing good works?” (See also Stott, p. 64.) “If this is what Christ taught you, then Christ Himself is leading people into a way of salvation which leaves them in their sinful condition. He is therefore a “minister of sin” (See John Calvin on Galatians 2: 17).

Therefore, Paul’s opponents were saying, “Paul, your gospel is too cheap. With your gospel, you can live like a child of the devil and still go to heaven.” In other words, they were saying that Paul’s gospel did not solve the problem of sin—it left men in their sinful condition and made Christ the minister of sin. For this reason, a person still needed to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses to be saved. In this way, he could live a pure life.

But Paul makes it clear that this accusation cannot be true. Christ would never lead us into a way of salvation which leaves us in our sinful condition. Justification by faith in Christ could never leave us unchanged as this argument is suggesting. “May it never be!” As John Stott has correctly observed, “Justification is not a legal fiction, in which a man’s status is changed, while his character is left untouched” (p. 65).

The interesting thing about this objection is that Paul has to confront it again in his Epistle to the Romans. In chapters 3, 4 and 5 of Romans, Paul lays out in detail the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. There he gives us much more detail than he does in Galatians. At the end of Romans 5, in v. 20, he says, “And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” In other words, as the revealed will of God expressed in the Law increased the realization and culpability (accountability) of sin, the grace of God increased even more in order that men’s sin might be forgiven. God’s grace was found to be more abundant than all of man’s sinfulness. From this verse an old hymn was written, “Wonderful the grace of Jesus, greater than all our sin.”

Paul knew that this statement of God's abundant grace would lead naturally to a certain question. This question is found in v. 1 of chapter 6. If, indeed, when man's sin increases, God's grace increases even more abundantly, should we then continue sinning all the more so that God's grace would increase even more? In other words, the worse our sin looks, the better God's grace looks; therefore, let's keep on sinning so that God's grace will look better and better. To this suggestion Paul says, "God forbid." And the argument against this kind of thinking is found in the remainder of Romans 6. The argument amounts to this: As Christians we have been united to Jesus Christ. We have been united to Christ in his death, in his burial, and finally in His resurrection. Just as sure as Christ has died, we have died with Him. Just as sure as He has been buried, we have been buried with Him. And just as sure as He was raised again from the dead, we also have been raised with Him "to walk in newness of life." The purpose of our being united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection is that we can make a *complete break* with the life of sin we once had and can now begin to walk in a new life, the life we have with Christ.

Our *old man* without Christ has been decisively crucified with Christ on the cross. The old man is the man who was in bondage to sin; he was controlled by sin. But that man is now dead and is not coming back to haunt us; he is dead. And "he who has died is freed from sin". Christ Himself died to sin and is now no longer under the power of sin which is death, and He will never have to die again. Sin can no longer be master over Christ who died because of the sin of man imputed to him. The Christian, who has died with Christ in His death, has also died to the dominion, reign and rule of sin. He can no longer *practice* sin as a way of life because he is dead to that life, and sin has no reigning or controlling power over him. When a man dies to this physical world, he no longer lives in the realm of his world; he is dead to it. Analogously, if we consider sin as a realm or domain where one lives, the Christian no longer lives in that realm or domain; nor can he return to it because he has died to it.

This is the short explanation of Romans 6. (For a fuller explanation, see my "Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper".) Paul explains how it is *impossible* for the true believer who is united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection to *return* to the life of sin he once lived. Paul recoils in horror at the suggestion that a person united to Christ can live in sin by saying, "May it never be!", essentially the same response he makes to this suggestion in Galatians 2: 17. How could anyone accuse Christ of giving us a gospel which encourages us to sin? "May it never be!" The very thought is unthinkable, particularly so when we remember that the very reason Christ came was to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3: 8). The argument in Romans 6 is the same argument Paul made earlier in Galatians 2: 18-20 in a much shortened version. (*Galatians* was written before *Romans*.)

The pure gospel of grace always lends itself to misinterpretation. It is naturally ingrained in man to believe that there is something he must do, and could do, to earn salvation. Martin Lloyd-Jones maintains that if our preaching of the gospel does not lend itself to this misunderstanding, we have not properly preached the gospel (*Romans, Vol. 5, p. 8*). This is why the gospel requires more explanation than a simple five-minute presentation. It is more complicated than that, and it can easily be misinterpreted as a license to sin as we please.

3. Answer to the Objection: Far from promoting sin, the gospel of pure grace is the only gospel which delivers us from sin to a life of righteousness (vv. 18-21).

We now return to the argument in Galatians 2. Paul has said that Christ would never give us a gospel which leaves a man in his sinful condition or which encourages him to sin. “On the contrary,” Paul says in v. 18, “just the opposite is true. It is when I abandon the true gospel that I become a real transgressor and a sinner. I have sinned against the truth by rebuilding a false gospel of justification by the works of the Law. I have also left myself in a sinful condition since it is not the Law which acquits me of sin and delivers me from sin, but only the gospel. By abandoning justification by faith and rebuilding justification by works, I have ‘proved myself to be a transgressor.’” Paul has already been down the road of justification by the works of the law and found that this way of salvation did not work; it did not justify us before God, and it did not make us “righteous” in behavior. By the preaching of the true gospel, he had *destroyed* the doctrine of justification by works. So Paul is saying, “If I now begin to require circumcision, I *rebuild* a false gospel which I have been preaching against.”

Verse 18 has been interpreted in many different ways. Our interpretation depends on whether we connect it with the preceding verses or the verses which follow. If we connect it with v. 17 alone, the meaning seems to be this: “It is absurd to accuse Christ of being a minister of sin by accusing Him of teaching a way of salvation which is calculated to promote sin as a way of life ‘for’ (v. 18) the very reason that Christ died was to ‘destroy’ sin’s control over the Christian. Thus, if Christ teaches a doctrine which ‘rebuilds’ a life of sin, and if I teach this doctrine, I prove myself to be a transgressor and Christ with me” (cf. *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XXI, Galatians, p. 72). Paul does not include Christ in v. 18 because the whole accusation against the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ was abhorrent to him. Christ came not to promote sinfulness but to destroy sin.

A second interpretation is that of John Stott (p. 65). “If after my justification I am still a sinner, it is my fault and not Christ’s. I have only myself to blame; no-one can blame Christ.” It appears that this interpretation puts the emphasis upon the word, “myself”. In other words, if after being justified by faith I am still a sinner, this is no reflection upon Christ or his doctrine, it is a reflection upon me alone—“I prove *myself* [not Christ] to be a transgressor.” The problem is not with the doctrine which is provided to make us free from sin, but with us. This is consistent with what Paul says in v. 17 about the doctrine of justification by faith alone making Christ a minister of sin.

But there are other possible interpretations. It is possible that Paul is still speaking with Peter who, by his conduct, was overthrowing the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The word “for” in v. 18 could be connected, not simply with v.17 but with vv. 15-17 and with what follows in vv. 19-21. Verse 18 is a continuation of the whole argument begun in v. 15 which includes Paul’s exposition of the gospel. Both Paul and Peter had laid aside all hope in justification by works and had embraced the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone. Now, by his conduct, Peter is “rebuilding” what he once “destroyed”, that is, the doctrine of justification by works. He thereby becomes a “transgressor” of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Thus, v. 18 is directed to Peter in such a way that is least likely to humiliate Peter any more than Paul has already done (See John Brown, p. 37). Rather than using the second person singular pronoun, “you”, he uses first person singular, “I”, hypothetically.

It appears to me that this last interpretation is the best one. It fits in better with the context of what is going on in the Galatian churches and Peter’s hypocrisy. The false gospel of the Judaizers and the conduct of Peter together were “rebuilding” the false doctrine of justification

by works which Christ and His apostles, including Peter, had “destroyed”. It also fits in better with the remainder of Paul’s argument in chapter 2.

I would add the following additional comments. The accusation of Paul’s opponents in v. 17 is that justification by faith in Christ leaves a man in his sinful condition and makes Christ a minister of sin. Paul says in effect, “May it never be! For on the contrary, if I rebuild the false gospel of justification by works which I have destroyed, it is *then* that I become a true transgressor since I have transgressed against the only true gospel and against Christ who is the author of it. Furthermore, it is then that I am a true transgressor because through the Law I am not justified, but left in my sinful condition.” What follows in v. 19 lends credibility to this interpretation because the Law brings about death and not a life of godly living (“For through the Law I died to the Law”), and the gospel brings about a life of godly living, not the sinful condition of spiritual death (“that I might live to God”).

Paul continues his argument in v. 19, and it naturally follows from his statement in v. 18. He refuses to rebuild what he once destroyed, namely, justification by the works of the Law. The Law (or the commandments) does not justify. The only thing the Law can do for the unjustified sinner is to kill him. That is what it did to Paul, and that is what it will do to us once we truly understand it. Notice what he says, “For through the Law I died to the Law.” What does Paul mean?

One possible explanation is that Paul died to the Law in the crucifixion of Christ. This may be supported by the context in v. 20 in which Paul says he has been crucified with Christ. When Christ died to the dominion of sin (our sin, not His) and the curse of the law, Paul was in union with Christ in that death. When Christ died, Paul died. This interpretation is plausible (acceptable), but it would make v. 20 redundant (unnecessarily repetitious). Furthermore, it is never said that Christ died to the law, but that he died to sin—that is, the power of sin which results in death. That being the case, Paul’s union with Christ is union with Christ in his death to sin, not to the law. It is more plausible to interpret v. 19 in light of Rom. 7: 9-11 where a similar expression is used, “And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.”

In that passage, Paul is describing the self-complacency and self-congratulations he once enjoyed when he believed himself blameless in regard to the law. But when he came to a clear understanding of the commandment, “You shall not covet”, he realized that the requirements of the law were far more demanding than he had ever believed. They were not merely outward but inward, dealing not only with one’s actions but with inward motivations and thoughts. When the commandment (“you shall not covet”) “came”, that is, when it came to his full consciousness and understanding, he died. In other words, the Law had accomplished God’s designed intention of putting Paul’s self-complacency and self-righteousness to death—killing all his hopes of being saved by law-keeping. This is the pedagogical function of the law found later in Galatians 3, a “tutor” leading us to Christ. This was its design from the beginning of its inauguration at Sinai and continues to be its design in the life of every unsaved sinner who comes to repentance and faith. However, the only way for the law to fulfill this intended function is for the Holy Spirit to open the sinner’s eyes to the true, spiritual meaning of the law. Only then will salvation by law-

keeping be seen as the hopeless endeavor that it is. (For further explanation, see John Murray, *Romans*, p. 251).

“For through the Law I died to the Law” is the same as saying, “through the instrumentality of the Law’s intended purpose, I died to the hopes of being saved by keeping the law.”

Likewise, the latter part of Gal. 2: 19, “that I might live to God”, more naturally parallels Paul’s comments in Rom. 7: 4, “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God.” In the context of this passage, the woman who has lost her husband (Rom. 7: 3) is free to be joined to another man in marriage because her former husband is dead. Because he is dead, the woman is also dead to any binding contractual arrangement which joined her to her deceased husband. She is now free to be joined by contractual arrangement to another man. Analogously, the believer, through the dead body of Christ on the cross, is also dead to any contractual arrangement between him and the Law. As far as any covenantal obligations to the effect, “Do this and you will live”, they are now null and void as far as the believer is concerned. He is now free from the Law’s contractual demands and is joined (married) to Christ who is also raised from the dead.

Paul continues the marriage metaphor in the last part of 7: 4 by saying that the offspring of this union with Christ is spiritual fruit—“that we might bear fruit for God.” Fruit is the natural result of something which living. The Christian, dead to the Law, is now alive through the death and resurrection of Christ and will produce the fruit which is characteristic of life, namely, obedience to God. Paul expresses this same truth in Rom. 6: 4 when he says, “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too *might walk in newness of life*”, an obedient life.

It is ordinarily believed that the Law is what produces the spiritual fruit of obedience, but this is not what Paul teaches in *Romans* or *Galatians*. Though the Law *describes* obedience, it does not *produce* it. Only the life of Christ in the believer—lived by faith—produces obedience. “For what the Law **could not do**, weak as it was through the flesh, **God did**: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8: 3-4). The Law is weak through our flesh. There is nothing wrong with it; the problem is with us because we are sinful. Yet, God accomplished in the cross what He did not accomplish (nor did He intend to accomplish) with the Law, namely, the obedience of those who have faith in Christ.

In Gal. 2: 20, the theme of union with Christ is continued. Paul has been crucified with Christ, and by virtue of that crucifixion he has died. But even as Christ’s death leads inevitably to resurrected life, Paul’s death leads to resurrected life (Compare Rom. 6: 4-5). The life he now lives is not the life of the old man who died with Christ (Rom. 6: 2, 6), but the life of Christ who lives in him through the Holy Spirit producing the new creature or new man in Christ (2 Cor. 5: 17). Christ “lives in” him (v. 20) so that he cannot practice sin as a way of life. This life on earth, still lived in the physical flesh, is not lived by faith in the unconquerable merit and will-power of the human spirit to keep the Law, but “by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

This argument of new life in the Spirit is the introduction to a more detailed account of life in the Spirit later in chapters 5 and 6. And while *Galatians* has traditionally been interpreted as a treatise on justification by faith, the resultant sanctification by the Spirit has often been ignored as a major emphasis in the epistle (Gordon Fee, p. 421).

So we see that Paul's gospel was not the kind of gospel which leaves a man in his sinful condition. To repeat Stott, "Justification is not a legal fiction in which a man's status is changed while his character is left untouched" (p. 65). Fiction is make-believe. Fictional books are about stories which the author derives from his imagination. But the gospel, which says that faith in Christ breaks the power of sin in our lives, is not make-believe or wishful thinking. It is actual fact. The gospel does not change our *legal standing* before God without changing *us* as well.

Finally, in v. 21, if righteousness (both judicial and experiential) comes through the instrumentality of the Law (law-keeping), then there was no need for Christ to die at all; we could simply earn righteousness by keeping the Law. But if we can be saved by keeping the Law, we make the grace of God—*undeserved* favor—null and void. Grace and works are antithetical (opposed) to one another. "... if it [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 11: 6).

Paul uses the word "righteousness" (*dikaioisune*) in v. 21. Theologically, righteousness is the result of the verb "to justify" (*dikaioo*) in v. 16. Notice the similarity of the words which have the same root. God declares us to be righteous in his sight when we have faith in Christ. This is justification (*dikaioo*). The result of being declared righteous is for us to actually possess the righteousness (*dikaioisune*) which God declares us to have. This is what is known as *positional* righteousness. As far as God is concerned, we are righteous in his sight. But God does not stop there; he wants us to actually *experience* the righteousness which we possess positionally. To accomplish this he gives us the Holy Spirit to produce experientially (in our experience) the righteousness which he declares us to possess. Our righteousness, therefore, is not a legal fiction (make-believe) but becomes actual through the progressive work of the Spirit.

To put it another way, we are like children who will inherit our father's wealth (righteousness). Legally we have his wealth already (positional righteousness) because he has declared us to be the benefactors of his will (justification). But as minors we cannot spend this fortune because it is still in the father's bank account. He will give us what we need as we need it. His wealth will not be given to his children all at once, but will be distributed through a trust fund little by little in monthly installments (experiential righteousness through the progressive work of the Holy Spirit). Of course, all analogies are doomed to failure at some point, but I hope you get the picture. As inheritors of the father's estate, the child is not simply theoretically wealthy, but truly wealthy. The older he gets, the more of his father's wealth he will realize and enjoy. Likewise, God did not justify us merely to make us theoretically (positionally) righteous, but to make us really (experientially) righteous. The Law failed on both points, neither making us right before God or right in our behavior. The gospel succeeds at both points.

At this point in the letter, Paul has answered his opponents' objection to the gospel of pure grace which is called *antinomianism*. It is the same argument Paul confronted in Rom. 6, but in *Galatians* Paul answers the objection more briefly than in *Romans*. His answer, in summary, is this: Christ would never give us a gospel which promotes living in sin. The Law itself is designed to show us the impossibility of being justified or sanctified (made holy) through its

demands. We must be crucified with Christ and raised up with Christ by faith in order to live the Christian life. Beginning in chapter 3, he lays out a more detailed defense of the gospel which incorporates a comprehensive view of Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New Covenants. In a few chapters, Paul provides us with a Biblical Theology which sorts out the differences and similarities of these three covenants. Some of the most disputed Scriptural texts in the Bible are found in these chapters, texts which divide knowledgeable evangelicals committed to Biblical inerrancy and conservative theology.

B. Defense of the gospel from the Galatians' personal Christian experience (Gal. 3: 1-5) (See Stott, pp. 71-72)

He begins the chapter with the same kind of benevolent scolding with which he addressed the Galatians in chapter one: “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you...” This corresponds with “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel” (1: 6). The word “bewitched” comes from the Gk. word *baskaino* which has the connotation (meaning) of casting a spell on someone by means of the evil eye (witchcraft or hoodoo), a prevailing idea in ancient Palestine during the sojourn of the Israelites and apparently in Asia Minor during Paul’s day. The words “shall be hostile toward” (Dt. 28: 54) are translated “his eye shall be evil toward” in the margin of the *RSB* and the *New American Standard Bible* (A.T. Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures*, quoted in *Bible Works*, software program; see also J. B. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, pp. 133-134). The false teachers of Galatia had fascinated (mesmerized) the Galatian Christians into believing their false doctrines as if by magic. Paul knew that behind all false teaching was the activity of Satan who is able to blind the eyes of the unbelieving. He is “the father of lies” (Jn. 8: 44).

He follows through with this allusion to the “evil eye” with a reference to what they had seen with their own eyes. Through his teaching the Galatians had beheld Christ, as if by their own eyes, as publicly crucified. The expression, “publicly portrayed” has the meaning of posting something in public as in posting a placard or notice in the town square. Through Paul’s vivid account of the crucifixion of Christ, he had painted a picture, so to speak, of the crucifixion event, and it was Jesus crucified which served as the basis of the gospel. But rather than being captivated by this vivid picture of Christ crucified for their sins, they had been captivated by the “evil eye” of Paul’s opponents who were teaching a false gospel—a gospel of performance and self-righteousness.

But the gospel is not the declaration of moral purity, and it does not consist of the stories of Jesus as the healer, or teacher, or preacher—although He did teach moral purity, healed and preached. Muslims will also recognize the importance of Jesus as a teacher of moral purity. What they do not recognize, and what the Jews did not recognize then or now is the significance of Jesus crucified on a cross to pay the penalty of sin. It is this crucifixion which exhibits a gospel of *believing* and not a gospel of *doing*. As Paul so energetically expressed in 2: 21, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law [*that is, through doing*], then Christ died needlessly [*that is, there is no need for a gospel of believing*].” Salvation by doing and believing are two entirely different things. If it is by doing, Christ did not have to die. The verb “crucified” is *estauromenos* which is a perfect participle indicating that Christ’s crucifixion is completed action in the past with continuing results or benefits in the present and future (Stott, p. 70; Spiros Zodhiates, *Key Word Study Bible*, p. 1703). The crucifixion of Christ did not merely make it possible for us to be forgiven of *past* sins, but all our sins both *present and*

future. Christ crucified is a declaration that no one can attain to moral purity apart from the grace of God in the gospel.

1. How did you receive the Spirit?

Beginning in v. 2, Paul begins to ask a series of questions which are designed to remind the Galatians of the way in which they began their journey in the Christian faith. And these are questions which we also must ask ourselves.

First, he asks, “How did you receive the Holy Spirit?” Did you receive the Holy Spirit by being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses, or did you receive the Holy Spirit by “hearing with faith?” It was an established fact that the Galatians had never experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit in all the years that many of them had attended the Jewish synagogues (See Acts 13-14. Paul’s practice was to begin his evangelism in the synagogues). Furthermore, the “God-fearing” Gentiles had to be circumcised before they were admitted into the synagogues, but having received circumcision, none of them had received the Holy Spirit. Yet, when Paul came to the cities of Galatia preaching Christ crucified, those who had faith in Him had been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 52).

“So,” Paul asks the Galatians, “when did you first experience the filling of the Holy Spirit: when you followed the requirements of the Law according to the Judaizers and were circumcised, or when you believed in Christ?” In other words Paul is asking them, “What part did *you* play in receiving the Holy Spirit? Did you *earn* Him by keeping the Law or did you simply *receive* Him through faith?” (See Stott, p. 71) Paul knew the answer to that question. He knew that the gift of the Spirit was just that—a *gift* and not something *earned* through merit. This was the way they began their journey in the Christian faith. By faith in Christ they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, not by keeping the Law and being circumcised.

How did you begin your journey? When did the love of God fill your heart, and when did you experience repentance toward sin and the burning desire to follow the Lord in obedience for the first time? When did you first decide to surrender your life to God? Was it when you were trying with all your might to live a good life—a life which was always beyond your reach? Or was it when you realized for the first time that Christ Jesus died on the cross for you personally? When did you experience the burden of sin and guilt lifted from your shoulders like a heavy weight—when you were trying hard to be a Christian, or when you gave up trying to be good and trusted in the one who kept the law for you and took your guilt upon Himself at the cross?

2. Having begun the Christian life by the Spirit, will you complete it by the flesh?

Second, Paul asks them, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” You began by the Spirit; will you now end your journey by human effort? Will you become complete by human effort? In Chapter 5: 16-25, Paul makes a vivid contrast between walking by the Spirit and walking by the flesh. The flesh signifies human effort separated from the enabling power of the Spirit. This effort always produces the deeds of the flesh found in vv. 19-21, but walking by the Spirit or by the power of the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit found in vv. 22-23. Thus, in v. 3 Paul is introducing a subject which he will bring up later, the deeds of flesh in contrast to the fruit of the spirit. Here in v. 3 he simply asks the question: “If you began the Christian life only by the power of the Spirit, how do you expect to be complete, perfect, or

sanctified by the efforts of human flesh? What good can the flesh be against the power of sin, the world, and the devil?”

3. Was all your suffering for the gospel in vain?

Third, he asks, “Was all your suffering at the hands of the Jews in vain?” Many of Christians in Galatia had been persecuted by the Jews for believing in the gospel, especially the ones who had been Jewish proselytes and regular attendees at the synagogues. We have no direct reference to their persecution in the Book of Acts but we do have direct reference to the persecution of Paul and Barnabas in these same cities of Galatia (Acts 13: 50; 14: 5, 19-20). It is reasonable to assume that the Jews in these cities gave the first Christians the same treatment which they gave the Apostle Paul, and verse 4 is a confirmation of this fact.

4. Did you witness miracles by keeping the Law or by hearing the gospel?

Fourth, Paul asks, “Was the giving of the Spirit or the miracles done among you accomplished by the works of the Law or were they performed through the power of the Spirit through the instrumentality of faith?” (v. 5) In other words, “Before we brought the gospel to you, did you ever experience the miracle of a lame man walking (Acts 14: 3, 8-10) or a man nearly stoned to death getting up as if from the dead?” (14: 19-20a) The answer to this question was also obvious: No. Nothing like this had ever been experienced by these Galatians until Paul showed up with the gospel. The Jewish leaders in the synagogues had never done such things either before or since.

Between v. 2 and v. 5, the Spirit is mentioned three times: receiving the Spirit, having begun in the Spirit, being provided with the Spirit. Paul has not yet commented on the significance of the Spirit’s work, but he will do so later on in chapter 5. However, we can see that the reception of the Holy Spirit was all-important in Paul’s conception of the Christian life. The beginning of the Christian life, its progress, and its completion were dependent upon the Spirit’s work.

C. Defense of the Gospel from the Superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant to the Mosaic Covenant (Gal.3: 6-29)

1. The Gospel to Abraham (vv. 6-9)

With a reference to Abraham in v. 6, Paul presents the OT confirmation that justification has always been by faith and not by works. “Even so” (NASB) or “Just as” (NKJ) indicates that v. 6 follows from what Paul has said in vv. 1-5. Just as believers in Asia Minor were justified by faith, Abraham their forefather was also justified by faith. The Judaizers, who were teaching circumcision, threw in their lot with Moses, misunderstanding the function of the Law of Moses to justify. Paul spends a considerable length of time in chapter three proving that the Law of Moses was never intended to justify and did not “invalidate” (annul or put out of effect) the covenant with Abraham based on God’s promise (Gen. 15). Paul extends his argument to a period 430 years before Moses and says that Abraham was not justified by works but by faith. He quotes Gen. 15: 6 in which Abraham is said to have believed the promise God made to him to have as many descendants as the stars of the heavens. At the very moment Abraham believed that promise, his faith was reckoned to him or accounted to him as righteousness—that is, he was *justified*. Those Christians in Galatia who knew their OT Scriptures should have known that his

faith was reckoned as righteousness *before* he received circumcision and not *after* receiving circumcision.

When he believed the promise Abraham was somewhere between 75 and 86 years old (Gen. 12: 4 and 16: 16), but when he was circumcised he was 99 years old (Gen. 17: 24). Paul makes a big point of this in Rom. 4: 9-12 arguing emphatically that Abraham's faith was reckoned as righteousness *before* he was circumcised that he might be the "father of all who believe *without being circumcised*" and the father of those "who also follow in the steps of faith of our father Abraham which he had while *uncircumcised*." Abraham's justification before circumcision was deadly to the Judaizer's argument for the necessity of circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses. Circumcision originated with Abraham, not Moses, yet even Abraham was saved (justified) without it.

What's more, in vv. 7-8, Paul indicates that the true descendants of Abraham are those who share Abraham's faith, Jew or Gentile. Even when God first called Abraham out of his homeland at 75 years of age, He had promised that in him *all the nations*—not just the Jewish nation—would be blessed. Paul interprets this promise in Gen. 12: 3 as the promise "that God would justify the *Gentiles* by faith" and calls this the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham (v. 8). Now this should have been of particular interest to the Galatians who for the most part were Gentiles and not Jews. The gospel preached to Abraham from the very beginning of his call was the gospel which encompassed all people, even the Gentiles, but now they were in danger of being hoodwinked (deceived) by Judaizers who demanded that they become Jews to become Christians.

Who then, are those who are blessed with Abraham? The answer comes in v.9—those who are of the same faith as Abraham and not necessarily those who are circumcised. He is saying the same thing here in Galatians which he writes later to the Romans, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter..." (Rom. 2: 28-29a). A further commentary on this principle of faith comes in Rom. 9: 6-8, "But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: 'through Isaac your descendants will be named.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." While in Gal. 3: 7, Paul briefly mentions that the true sons of Abraham are those who possess his faith, in Rom. 9: 6-9 he expressly affirms that the promises of the covenant with Abraham were *never* intended for Israelites who were *mere physical descendants*. They were only intended for those who were "children of the promise"—elect Israelites who believed (see also Rom. 9: 9-33).

Thus, all the insistence about the necessity of circumcision totally ignores the historical roots of the Christian faith in the covenant with Abraham. It also ignores the tragic history of Israel who failed to lay hold of the promises by faith and depended on physical circumcision and ancestry to receive the Abrahamic blessings.

Christians often ignore this important argument when debating the issue of baptism and covenant children. The children of Christian parents should be baptized in obedience to the instructions given to Abraham to have the sign of the covenant applied to all male members (Gen. 17). And since the new covenant inaugurated by Christ is broader in scope than the Abrahamic covenant—

in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, male and female—the covenant sign is also applied today to female members as well. Baptism is important, but it is not as important as the necessity of every member of the covenant community sharing the faith of Abraham. Circumcision of the flesh never saved anyone, and baptism with water never saved anyone. Physical descent from Jews or Christian parents never saved anyone. Only circumcision of the heart and baptism by the Holy Spirit will save. “And if you belong to Christ, then are you Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3: 29).

2. The Curse of the Law (vv. 10-14)

Paul continues to argue from the OT in v. 10, laying out the differences between the Law and the promise, a distinction he continues to explain throughout chapter 3 and 4. The false apostles in Galatia were confused about the design and function of the Law of Moses. They were convinced that by keeping the law a person could earn his acceptance with God. Paul makes clear in this section that the Law could not provide the justification the Judaizers were looking for. As a matter of fact, those who were relying upon the Law for justification did not realize that they had already come under its curse.

To be “of the works of the Law” (v. 10) means to be trusting in the Law for justification (Calvin, *Galatians*, pp. 88-89). Those whose trust lies in this means of justification are under the curse of the Law for the Law does not lend itself to partial or incomplete compliance (obedience). Either you keep all the Law or you might as well keep none of it as far as your justification is concerned. Notice the verse carefully, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by **ALL** things [not **SOME** things] written in the book of the Law, to perform them.” God does not grade each of us in comparison to how our neighbor is doing; he demands 100% performance of the Law to give us a passing grade. When I went to college, my chemistry professor would grade the class on a curve. He did this because only a handful of over 100 students could do well on his difficult tests. If the highest score on an exam was 86 (and sometimes it was), he would grade this score as 100%, because it was the highest score. Someone with an 80 would get a 94 and someone with a 75 would get an 89. Each score would be raised 14 points. Normally anything below a 70 was considered an F or failing, but under the curve, if the highest grade was an 86, then a 56 would be raised 14 points to a 70 and would be considered passing. Get it?

This is what most people think about God’s grading system—that he is grading us on a curve based on how the best man performs on his exam, the Law. As long as we outperform most of the people taking the exam—the whole human race—then we will be okay because God is grading us on how well we stack up *compared to everyone else*. But this is not what Paul is indicating in v. 10. In God’s grading system, a passing grade is 100%. If you make 99% on the exam, you fail and are “cursed”. To fail means everlasting punishment in hell without getting the chance to retake the exam; you only have one shot at it.

Lest we think Paul is not properly interpreting the Law, we only have to examine the quotation from Deut. 27: 26 taken from the Law. If we examine this text we will notice the word “all” is not there, but we cannot accuse Paul of distorting the text. He is simply borrowing the word “all” from the verse which follows in Deut. 28: 1 in which we find the words, “being careful to do **all** His commandments”. That Paul has not misinterpreted the strictness of the Law is also evident from Deut. 28: 15 which says, “But it shall come about, if you will not obey the LORD

your God, to observe to do *all* His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you” (cf. Deut. 27: 1).

Furthermore, the curses promised for individual sins in Deut. 27 indicate that each sin received its own individual curse. For example, in Deuteronomy 27:19, “Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow. And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’” The Law does not say that a man is cursed for distorting justice *unless* he does well on the other laws. He will be cursed if he failed on this one law regardless of how he performs on others. The Apostle James, the Lord’s brother, was also clear about this, “For whoever keeps the **whole law** and yet stumbles in **one point**, he has become guilty of all” (James 2: 10).

[We must also take into consideration that Paul was an apostle called by the Spirit and given the responsibility of sorting out most of the theology of the NT; therefore, Paul and the other NT writers are at liberty to use and interpret the OT in ways that we are not. But it is evident upon the examination of these other texts from the Law that he and James have remained faithful to the text of the OT Scripture.]

Galatians 3: 11

Galatians 3: 11 is a quotation from Habakkuk 2: 4, “Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.” The Greek translation of Hab. 2: 4 may also read, “But he who is righteous by faith shall live.” Paul uses a text which originally had reference to the calm assurance of the faithful Israelite living under the shadow of the Babylonian invasion. The “proud one” has a dual reference. On the one hand it must refer to Nebuchadnezzar who was poised at that time to consume Israel as he had other nations (v. 5). This is the same man who, standing on the roof of his palace in Babylon declared, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan. 4: 30) His heart was lifted up with the pride and arrogance of his own power and ability to subjugate the nations. As such, Nebuchadnezzar’s pride is an example of all human pride which seeks to exalt itself on the basis of human merit rather than accepting blessing from God on the basis on grace.

Nebuchadnezzar’s downfall will come in due time (Hab. 2: 15-16). The righteous man, on the other hand, is one who will live by faith. The verb is future tense (“shall live”) signifying the continuation of blessing to the faithful in contrast to the temporal, short-lived success of the proud. The Jews in Judea who were hearing this prophecy understood the danger they were facing from the Babylonians and were encouraged by the prophet to put their faith not in their military ability to withstand Babylon but in God’s promises to those who put their total trust in Him.

If scholars are correct in dating *Habakkuk* just before 605 B.C. when Pharaoh Neco of Egypt was defeated at Carchemish (2 Kings 23: 34-24: 1), then Judah’s military might was finished long before this time. Before becoming a puppet king under Nebuchadnezzar, King Jehoiakim of Judah had already served as a puppet to Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. If Judah was inferior militarily to Egypt, it was surely inferior to Babylon who appeared certain to destroy Egypt. Thus, military resistance to Babylon was useless and the Judean in Habakkuk’s day had nothing left to rely on but his faith in the covenant promises of God to those who trusted him and believed in him.

In citing this OT text, Paul assumes that he has put an end to all argument that one can be justified by the law, for he makes no further comment on the passage. (“It is clear”, he says. See 1 Cor. 3: 13 and 2 Pet. 1: 14 in which the same Gk. word is used.) Just as human effort—for example, military resistance to Babylon—was useless in Habakkuk’s day, so human effort in keeping the law was equally useless for justification. To paraphrase, “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident” (that is, it is clear), “for only the righteous man who lives by faith will enjoy the covenant blessings of God. The rest who trust in human merit will be swept away even as the Jews were swept away by Babylon.”

Paul was so confident in this OT object lesson about the distinction between trusting in human merit and living by faith that he also used it in Rom. 1: 17. The writer of *Hebrews* also makes use of it (Heb. 10: 38).

Galatians 3: 12

Continuing in v. 12, he cites another OT text in support of his argument; but first he points out the distinction between righteousness by law and righteousness by faith. The two things are like oil and water—they cannot be mixed. “The Law is not of faith...” Calvin interprets this by saying, “The law is not of faith; that is, it has a method of justifying a man which is wholly at variance with faith....The difference lies in this, that man, when he fulfills the law, is reckoned righteous by a legal righteousness which he proves by a quotation from Moses” (*Galatians*, p. 90). In theory a man can either be justified by personal achievement (performance) or he can be justified by faith, but not both. They are two entirely different methods. That this distinction is accurate is evident, as Calvin observes, from the OT passage cited—Lev. 18: 5, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.”

What exactly did Yahweh mean by this statement? On the surface of things, he appears to be offering a way of salvation by keeping the Law—a way which is contrary to faith. And this is not the only place in the OT where we find this statement (Deut. 30: 16, 19-20; Neh. 9: 29; Ezek. 18: 9; 20: 11, 13, 21; 33: 11). But why would Paul use such a text which appears to prove the very doctrine his opponents are teaching—that salvation is through law-keeping? It appears from these texts that the OT is on their side for there is no mistaking the meaning—the Law of God promises life to those who keep it. “The irrevocable word of God still remains valid, that he who observes the law perfectly will live” (Geldenhuis, *Luke*, p. 312). This appears to be Paul’s meaning in Rom. 7: 10, “...and this commandment, which was to result in life...”

If we are alarmed that the OT appears to teach a legal method of righteousness or justification, we may be even more alarmed that Jesus appears to do the same (Luke 10: 25-37; 18: 18-27; Matt. 19: 16-26; Mk. 10: 17-27). In all of these passages, which cover two different events, the question is asked, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And in each passage Jesus’ answer amounts to the same thing, “Keep the Law.”

Let us “unpack” Matthew 19: 16-26 the following way: (1) the lawyer puts Jesus to the test, asking him what he must do to inherit eternal life. (2) Jesus asks him what the Law says. (3) The lawyer responds with a summary statement of the Law found in Deut. 6: 5 and Lev. 19: 18. (4) When the lawyer answers with this summary, Jesus does not correct him or scold him for being a legalist. In fact he says, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live” (Lk. 10: 28). If Jesus had only said, “You have answered correctly,” we might conclude that he is only

acknowledging the correct quotation of the summary but not approving of the Law as a means of earning life. But he does not stop there; he quotes Lev. 18: 5. With this admission, Jesus agrees that the Law genuinely promises life to those who keep it.

Commenting on this passage, Calvin observes, “Now it is certain that in the Law there is prescribed to men a rule by which they ought to regulate their life, so as to obtain salvation in the sight of God....though no man is justified by the Law, yet the Law itself contains the highest righteousness, because it *does not falsely hold out salvation to its followers, if any one fully observed all that it commands*” (*Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. 3*, pp. 56-57; emphasis mine). Commenting on Habakkuk and Leviticus, John Stott concurs.

We must look carefully at these two statements. Both come from Old Testament Scripture, the first from the prophets (Hab. 2: 4), the second from the law (Lev. 18: 5). Both are therefore the word of the living God. Both say of a certain man that ‘he shall live’. In other words, both promise him eternal life.

Despite these common features, however, the two statements describe a different road to life. The first promises life to the believer, the second to the doer. The first makes faith the way of salvation, the second, works. The first says that only God can justify (because the whole function of faith is to trust God to do the work), the second implies that we can manage by ourselves (p. 78).

If we examine the other synoptic passages above, we will find Jesus doing the same thing, quoting the Law’s promise of life to those who keep it. He does not claim in any of these passages that the lawyer or the rich ruler has somehow misinterpreted what the Law promises. Commenting on Matthew 19, John Frame acknowledges that Jesus holds out for the rich young ruler a way of salvation based upon keeping the law. “In short, Jesus indicated that by obeying the Ten Commandments, a person can earn eternal life. Of course, Jesus also taught that no one is good enough to obey these commandments” (Third Millennium, *Making Biblical Decisions*, Lesson Four, p. 12).

(5) Jesus provides further clarification about the meaning of the law. With the rich young ruler, (Matt. 19) He takes the initiative by telling the man that he lacks something in his obedience. He needs to sell his assets, give them to the poor, and follow him. With the lawyer (Lk. 10), he makes a clarification only after the lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor,” after which Jesus tells the parable of the “good Samaritan”. In that parable, he removes any ground of self-justification or rationalizing for ignoring the needs of those we despise—in the lawyer’s case, the Samaritans or perhaps people in a lower socio-economic status. What was Jesus doing with this parable? He was expounding the radical demands of the Law to love and help everyone who is in need regardless of race, tribe, or socio-economic status while at the same time exposing the deficiency of the lawyer’s self-righteousness. The Law cannot be “watered down” or diluted into something less radical and demanding to preserve our sense of self-righteousness.

We are not told in this incident how this man responded to Jesus’ demand at the end of the parable (v. 37), but we are not left with much hope of his repentance. With the rich young ruler we are told that he walks away sadly, not willing to admit that he was a miserable failure as a law-keeper and actually broke the law on every crucial point—to love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. The lawyer failed in the same way by attempting to “justify himself”. (See also Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished syllabus, pp. 159-160.)

In spite of appearances, therefore, we must not accuse Christ of giving either of these men the false hope that they could earn eternal life through the Law. Rather, by exposing their deficient self-righteousness, Christ was leading them to grace—a grace which apparently they refused. Christ was simply using the Law the way it is supposed to be used—a “disciplinarian to lead us to Christ” (Gal. 3: 24). The Law beats us up, so to speak, exposing our sin and failed self-righteousness and by doing so makes us aware of our need for grace. But it only functions this way for those who truly understand it—those who are illumined by the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7: 9; see discussion above). The Law genuinely promises life to the one who keeps it, but the problem is that none can keep it, a fact well-illustrated by the rich young ruler, the lawyer, and Saul of Tarsus who confessed, “But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me” (Romans 7:8-10 NASB). The hopelessness of keeping the law to earn eternal life is also illustrated in Adam’s fall in the garden. A sinless man in a sinless environment was still not able to resist Satan’s temptation, and neither can any sinful man today living in a sinful environment. The entire history of Israel presents a vivid object lesson that men cannot keep the law for salvation, in spite of the fact that God dwelled among them in the tabernacle and worked miracles among them.

Further commentary on Galatians 3: 12 is provided in Rom. 10: 5-6. Paul is quoting the same OT passage from Lev. 18: 5. As in Gal. 3: 11-12, a contrast is being made in Rom. 10: 5-6 between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of the Law. The same Greek verb *poieo* (“to do” or “practice”) is used in both passages. If a man “practices” the law (any of God’s laws, including the Law of Moses) as a means of justification, he will live if he is successful in keeping it. This is what we have discussed previously in our interpretation of Lev. 18: 5. The difficulty of this passage is Paul’s use of Deut. 30: 11-14 which is a reference to the Mosaic Law (Dt. 30: 10). It seems odd that Paul would use this passage as a reference to the “righteousness of faith” when it appears in its original context to be a reference to the righteousness of the Law. To answer this question, we will have to examine the text of Deut. 30.

What did Moses mean when he said, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too *difficult* for you, nor is it out of reach” (NASB)? Throughout *Galatians* Paul has been saying that perfect obedience to the law is not only difficult, but impossible, and that no one can be justified by law-keeping. But in this verse Moses says that the commandment is “not too difficult.” The translation of the word, “difficult” (*pala* in Hebrew) is critically important for our interpretation. The KJV translates the word “hidden” and the NKJ uses “mysterious.” Both of these translations are better than the NASB which gives the impression that the Law is not difficult in terms of *performance*. But Moses is not talking about the difficulty of performance but the difficulty of *understanding*. The Law was not written in “mysterious” or esoteric language which only a select few could understand. The Law was not written for intellectuals, philosophers, and theologians but for ordinary people: farmers, carpenters, housewives, and children. Keil and Delitzsch translate the text as “hard to grasp or unintelligible” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Deuteronomy*, p. 454). Matthew Henry likewise comments,

“...nor is the commandment within the reach of those only that have a great estate or a refined genius....It is not communicated in a strange language; but it is in thy mouth, that is, in the vulgar tongue that is commonly used by thee....It is not wrapped up in obscure phrases or figures....Thou

hast therefore no reason to complain of any insuperable [hard to overcome] difficulty in the observance of it” (*Deuteronomy*, pp. 853-854).

Calvin’s interpretation is similar.

...God does not propound [set forth] to us obscure [hard to understand] enigmas [confusing statements] to keep our minds in suspense, and to torment us with difficulties, but teaches us familiarly whatever is necessary, according to the capacity, and consequently the ignorance of the people....But Moses here invites them to learn, because they had an easy and clear method of instruction set before their eyes....Moses, therefore, declares that the Law is not hard to be understood, so as to demand inordinate fatigue in its study; but that God there speaks distinctly and explicitly, and that nothing is required of them but diligent application (*Deuteronomy*, p. 412).

But Calvin later distinguishes between the easy intelligibility of the Law and its performance.

Does he [Moses] state that the keeping of them is within the compass of our strength? Surely the words convey nothing of the sort; neither can this sense be elicited from them, if his intention be duly weighed. For he merely encourages the Jews, and commands them to be diligent disciples of the Law, because they will easily understand whatever is enjoined [required] by God therein. But the power of performance is a very different thing from understanding (p. 413).

As already mentioned, Dt. 30: 12 is employed by Paul to preach the gospel, not the Law (Rom. 10: 6). In this verse, notice that Paul does not say that “Moses” speaks this way, but that “the righteousness based on faith” (personified) speaks this way. This is understandably confusing since he is quoting directly from Dt. 30:12 in which *Moses* is speaking about the Law. He also quotes from Lev. 18: 5 which is also a reference to the Law. So how do we make sense of this? The answer is that Paul sometimes uses Scriptural language to express ideas which may be only obliquely (indirectly) related to the subject under discussion. For example, in Rom. 10: 18 he uses a quote from the Psalms to express the idea that the Jews (or Gentiles; See Hodge, *Romans*) had adequately heard the gospel. The passage, Ps. 19: 4, is talking about the witness of *creation*, not the witness of the *gospel*, but Paul uses it to express the witness of the gospel.

He is doing the same thing in v.6, using Scriptural language to express his own ideas. He is not putting the gospel into Moses’ mouth, but is simply using Moses’ words to express the gospel (Murray, *Romans*, Vol. 2, p. 52). Moses uses this expression to explain that the words of the Law are not unintelligible or difficult to understand; therefore, no one should claim any necessity to send someone to heaven or across the sea to receive the word of God; the word of God was already accessible to them in the form of the written code and in their hearts if they would simply heed it. The question to the Israelites was this: Will you submit to the Law?

In the same way (Rom. 10: 6-8) there is no necessity to send someone up to heaven to bring Christ down from heaven; He has already come down out of heaven in the incarnation. And there is no need to descend into the abyss (the place of the dead) to bring Christ up from the dead because He has already risen from the dead. Just as the Law was intelligible and easy to understand in the form it was given, the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected is also easy to understand. It is not hidden to us. It takes no special intelligence to understand it, and it is easily accessible. The question is the same to us as it was to the ancient Israelites: Will we submit to it; do we believe the gospel? Do we believe that God became a man in the person of Jesus, and do

we believe that he died and rose again from the dead? If we believe we will be saved by believing.

Galatians 3: 13-14

What has Christ done for us? Paul has been careful to point out that the way of salvation cannot be through the law—***not because the law never promised life***, but because men are sinners who cannot keep the law. Far from bringing life, the Law brings a curse. Recall the curses of the covenant given in Deuteronomy 27 and 28. We may recall the words of Paul in Romans 7: 10 which have been quoted above: “and this commandment, which was to result in life...” I will now quote the last part of this verse, “proved to result in death for me...” The Law promised life to those who kept it but proved to result in death because none kept it, even a rigorous Pharisee like Paul. ***Life and death*** are clearly set before us as the two alternatives, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity....I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the ***blessing*** and the ***curse***. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants...(Deut. 30: 15, 19).

This brings up the question: If we are under the curse of the Law for our disobedience to the Law, how can we be acquitted of this curse? This is the subject of vv. 13-14. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law. The word, “redeemed” (*exagorazo*), literally means to “buy back”, to “buy out of” or to “ransom”. It is derived from the word *agorazo*, (to purchase) which is found in 1 Cor. 6: 20 and 7: 23, the word used as a simple inscription for the purchase of slaves (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, quoted in *Bible Works*). As sinners we have forfeited our lives just as a murderer forfeits his life by taking the life of another. Since God is infinitely holy, every sin demands the death penalty. How then can one sentenced to death be released from the obligation of death? The answer is that his life must be ***bought back*** or ransomed by someone else, and this is what Christ does. His life is given voluntarily as the ransom or the purchase price for our lives. And since He is God, His life has infinite worth sufficient for the life of every person on earth and many more besides. He takes upon Himself our curse, and we go free.

In the OT theocracy, the body of a man who is executed for a serious crime was publicly hanged on a tree to illustrate the curse of the Law (Dt. 21: 22-23). Being hanged on a tree was not the cause of the curse, but he was cursed because he broke the Law. Thus, being hanged on a tree merely indicated that he had received the curse he deserved. When Christ was crucified, His body was nailed to a wooden cross (made from a tree) and raised up for all to see—the same as being hanged on a tree in public view. For the Jews, this was the stumbling block of the Christian religion. How could their Messiah become accursed and be hanged on a tree? (Stott, p. 81) Surely this accursed man, Jesus, could not be the promised Messiah! But He was the Messiah, and the curse he bore upon the cross was not for his own sin but for ours. This is the explanation of Jesus’ awful cry upon the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” At that point in time, God the Father had indeed forsaken Him because He had become a curse for us, and God was giving Him the punishment which our sin deserved—a curse that His justice and holiness demanded for disobedient sinners.

Paul says in 2 Cor. 5: 21: “He [God the Father] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Note well that Paul does not say that Christ became a *sinner*, but that Christ became *sin*. In the same way, Paul does not specifically say that Christ was *cursed* by God but that he *became* a curse for us. In our finite

human minds, we cannot possibly understand all the spiritual implications of the crucifixion. Perhaps all we can say is that Christ was truly abandoned and rejected by the Father while at the same time retaining the essence of God. God cannot be divided from himself. We are also reminded of Christ's statement to the repentant thief being crucified beside him. "Today [not three days from now] you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43). But we must not take the bitterness out of His abandonment at the cross; it is the only thing which can sufficiently explain the agony of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26: 38-39).

By becoming a curse, Christ fulfilled the obligations of the curse of the Mosaic Covenant, the Law, presented in Dt. 27-28 (cf. Deut. 30: 19). It may be argued that since the Law was formally given only to the Jews, the curse of the covenant does not apply to the Gentiles—the rest of humanity. But notice the text of 3: 13, "Christ redeemed *us* from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for *us*..." Paul is writing to the Galatian church which primarily consisted of *Gentiles*, not Jews (cf. Acts 13-14). The "us" is all-inclusive of Jews and Gentiles who are all likewise under the curse of the law. Excluding Gentiles from the curse also has a difficult time accounting for God's judgment of Belshazzar's kingdom in Dan. 5, "'TEKEL'—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient", or Jonah's warning to Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown", or Paul's warning to the Colossians in Colossians 3: 5-6 where he lists a catalog of sins for which judgment will come upon "the sons of disobedience", Jew and Gentile.

It is evident that God judges all mankind for violation of his law even if never received in codified form as it was by the Jews. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..." (Rom. 1: 18). The remainder of Romans 1 describes God's judgment upon the sin of Gentiles who "knew" or recognized God in creation, but did not "honor Him as God". They also "knew" the "ordinance of God" (v. 32), that is, his moral law, but ignored it.

Notice also in v. 14 that the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles by virtue of Christ becoming a curse for "us" (everyone) in v. 13. This is expressed by the words, "in order that" (*hina*). In the Greek, the word order emphasizes the Gentiles receiving the blessing and reads, "in order that to the nations the blessing of Abraham might be in Jesus Christ..." Putting this together, Christ became a curse for the express purpose of extending the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles.

It should be understood that the giving of the Law to Israel at Sinai was representative of the formal giving of the law to *all mankind*. Men have always been required to obey the moral law of God (Gen. 6: 5-6; 17: 1), but by giving it to Israel in written form, man's sin became more culpable (blamable). The Jews were chosen by God as the representatives of the whole human race to demonstrate man's complete failure under a legal covenant. The history of the Jewish race proves that even those who received the expressly written Law of God disobeyed that Law. Given the opportunity to earn life through obedience, all men, whether Jew or Gentile, will fail. As the Gentiles refused to submit to the knowledge of God revealed in creation (Rom. 1: 18-32) and conscience (Rom. 2: 14-15), the Jews refused to submit to the knowledge of God revealed in His Law (Rom. 2: 1-29). And just as the Jews are under the curse of the Law (the written Law), the Gentiles are under the same curse through the federal headship of Adam (cf. Rom. 5: 13-14; 3: 19). "For as in Adam all die..." (1 Cor. 15: 22). If the Gentiles are not under the same curse, then Gentiles would not die, for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6: 23) and death comes to all

men, Jew and Gentile. Furthermore, sin is not imputed when there is no law; it does not exist when there is no law. Thus, the law has existed throughout the entire history of the human race, even before it was formally promulgated (codified) at Sinai (See John Murray, *Romans*, pp. 187-191).

But now, what about the *blessings* of the Mosaic Covenant? Christ received the curse of the covenant by becoming a curse for us; our curse was transferred to Him. But Christ also earned the blessings of the covenant mentioned in Dt. 28: 1-14 by living a perfect life. Life was promised to the one who kept the Law. As we have stated earlier, this was a legitimate, genuine promise to the one who kept all the commandments of God. Christ did that and for His obedience God the Father was obligated to grant Him life. Instead of receiving life, Christ died, and through His death and resurrection, the blessings of the covenant which Christ *earned* were transferred to those who believe in Him. Christ earned the life offered in Lev. 18: 5 and Dt. 30 through His perfect obedience; thus, we should recognize that *we are saved as much by the obedience of Christ as we are by the death of Christ* . Without His perfect obedience, His death would not have atoned for sin. Therefore, Christ not only had to die for us to redeem us from the curse of the Law, but He also had to live for us to earn the life promised in the Law. His death removed the curse; His life earned the promised reward of life (cf. Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned* , pp. 31, 74.)

But, it may be argued, the promise of life in the Mosaic Covenant was based on perfect obedience, but the blessing to Abraham was based on pure promise. In v. 14, the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles through Christ who endured the curse of the covenant (v. 13), but with the Abrahamic Covenant there was no curse, only promise. Or was there? The answer to this question depends upon the perspective from which the Abrahamic Covenant is examined. From Abraham's perspective, there was no curse, only promise; but from God's perspective, there was a distinctive pledge to death if the conditions of the covenant were not met (Gen. 15). The difference between the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant is not that one has a curse and the other does not. The difference pertains to the covenantal participants toward whom the curse is directed. In the Mosaic Covenant, the covenant curse is directed to the Israelites (and all mankind whom they represent), but in the Abrahamic Covenant, the curse is directed toward God himself who walks between the pieces in the covenant ceremony of Gen. 15. (For a thorough treatment of this subject, see Kline, pp. 16-25.)

When God promised Abraham that he would have an heir from his own body and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens (15: 4-5), Abraham believed God, and his belief was reckoned or accounted to him as righteousness (v. 6). Nevertheless, Abraham wished to have some tangible assurance from God that this promise would be fulfilled (v. 8). In answer to this request, God used a treaty form—a suzerainty treaty—which was culturally familiar to Abraham. Such treaties between two parties were common when one king had subjugated (conquered) another king and made him and his country a vassal or servant. As a servant subject to the conquering king (the suzerain), the defeated king (the vassal) had to keep all the terms of the treaty which generally included paying tribute money and providing soldiers for the suzerain whenever asked. If the vassal refused to keep the terms of the covenant, the suzerain would marshal his forces, depose the rebellious king, putting him to death and replacing him with one who would keep the terms of the covenant (2 Kings 24: 1-5). The particular form of the treaty is given to us in the text of Gen. 15. Animals are slain and split into halves, and the two halves are laid opposite each other leaving a path, drenched in blood, down the middle of the

halves (v. 10). The conquered king, the vassal, is then required to walk down the middle of these mutilated carcasses (bodies) declaring, “May I be as these slain animals if I do not obey the terms of this covenant.” This was a solemn pledge to death—a self-maledictory oath pledging oneself to death for any failure in keeping the covenant.

The surprising thing about the covenant ceremony in Gen. 15 is that the activities of the vassal and the suzerain are switched. We would expect Abraham to be the vassal in this arrangement and God to be the conquering king, the suzerain, and so it is. But this would imply that the conditions of the covenant be dictated to Abraham, not the other way around, and we would expect Abraham to be the one walking between the pieces and declaring the self-maledictory oath (the curse upon himself). But notice what Abraham is doing while this treaty form is being enacted. After he had slain the animals and cut them in two, we went to sleep, a “deep sleep” induced by God (vv. 10-12). While asleep he had a dream of a “smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between the pieces” of the animals. What were this smoking oven and flaming torch? They represented none other than the suzerain—God, a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13: 21)—who Himself was walking between the pieces and declaring a curse upon Himself, not Abraham, if the promise to Abraham was unfulfilled. Thus we learn in Hebrews that by two “unchangeable things”—the promise to Abraham (Gen. 15: 4-5) and the covenant made with Abraham (Gen. 15: 9)—God would surely keep His promise (Heb. 6: 13-18).

We see that the element of curse is present not only in the Mosaic Covenant but also in the Abrahamic Covenant. The difference is in the direction toward which the curse is pronounced. In the Abrahamic Covenant, the curse is pronounced upon God—by God Himself—if He fails to keep His promises to Abraham; but in the Mosaic Covenant, the curse is pronounced upon the Israelites who declare the maledictory oath upon themselves: “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient” (Ex. 24: 7). Further, in the covenant enactment of Ex. 24, the blood of the covenant is sprinkled on the people signifying the curse of the covenant upon the Israelites if they should prove unfaithful to the terms of the covenant (Ex. 24: 8). In this particular event, God is not the one pledging Himself to death or promising to be faithful to the covenant, Israel is. Moreover, the subsequent history of Israel witnesses to their failure to do what they said they would do. The result of their failure is the curse of the covenant. Just as God removes the Canaanites from the land, God removes Israel in the same way. His promise to keep them in the land is conditional, not on God’s obedience to the covenant, but theirs. They fail to keep the covenant and are punished accordingly, and rather than serving as vassals to the Lord—servitude they should have considered a blessing—they serve as vassals to foreign kings whose yoke is heavy.

What then, of God’s promises to Abraham? The Israelites are the descendants of Abraham promised to him in Genesis 15. If Israel as a nation is wiped off the map, then have the promises of God to Abraham fallen to the ground (cf. Rom. 9: 6 ff)? Has God failed to keep His promise to Abraham that He swore by two unchangeable things? Further, if the covenant with Israel was based on pure law, how could any of the Israelites be saved? These are questions which are answered in Gal. 3: 15-29.

The blessing of Abraham can now come upon Gentiles as well as Jews through the sacrificial atonement of Christ. The blessing is not like the Law. The Law was conditional upon the performance of people. The blessing is a gift bestowed on those who believe, not conditional

upon their performance, but upon the performance of Christ. It is unconditional only because the condition has been met in Christ; it is a free gift only because an inestimable price has been paid by Christ to purchase it. The original promise of blessing to Abraham was not for the Jews only, but for the Gentiles as well. “And in you *all the families* of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12: 3). Paul gives us a hint of the substance of this promise by saying, “so that we might receive *the promise of the Spirit* through faith.” The Holy Spirit is given to all believers as the pledge of their inheritance in Christ (Eph. 1: 13-14).

3. The purpose of the Law (Galatians 3: 15-29)

Beginning in v. 15, Paul labors to explain that the Law was never given to replace the original promise to Abraham. Thus, the promise to Abraham, conditional only upon his faith in the promise, was still in effect during the Mosaic administration. The argument is from the lesser to the greater. Even human covenants between fallible, sinful human beings are not set aside or modified with additional elements once they are ratified by the two agreeable parties to the covenant (v. 15). If this happens, it is called a breach of covenant subject to a lawsuit. How much more will God, who is infinitely honest and just, honor the terms of the covenant made with Abraham 430 years before the Law was ever given at Mt. Sinai? He is not going to change the terms by saying, “Yes, I know what I promised Abraham, but I changed my mind. My blessing is now based on your works.” If this happened, God would be guilty of breach of covenant or fraud—an unthinkable suggestion. If the inheritance promised to Abraham was based on law-keeping, then it cannot be based on promise, but the inheritance was “granted” to Abraham by means of the promise (v. 18). The word “granted” is *kekaristai* which is perfect indicative. The perfect tense in Greek signifies an activity which has occurred in the past but which has continuing results. This means that the inheritance given to Abraham in the past is given to him permanently (cf. Stott, *Galatians*, p. 89). The verb *kekaristai* comes from *charizomai* (to give as gift—*charis*). A gift is in contrast with a wage which must be earned (Rom. 4: 4 in which the word *charis* is used). The Law, coming long after the Abrahamic Covenant, does not “annul” (*NKJ*) or “invalidate” (*NASB*) that arrangement so as to make it of “no effect” (*NKJ*) (v. 17). What God gives as a gift, He gives for all time.

Paul also says that the promise was made not only to Abraham but to his “seed”. The verse appears almost parenthetical and its explanation will come in more detail later. The seed is singular and not plural—“seed”, not “seeds”. This seems confusing given the fact that Abraham had many descendants which were as numerous as the stars of the heavens. But Paul obviously limits the application of the Biblical promise to a singular seed, namely, Christ Himself. The promise of the Spirit (v. 14) is not given to the millions of Jewish people descending from Abraham, but specifically to Christ and to all those who “belong to Christ” by faith (Gal. 3: 29). Therefore, the true descendants of Abraham—those to whom the inheritance is given—are not Jews according to the flesh, but Jews according to the Spirit (Rom. 2: 28-29). This fact should have been obvious to the Jews because not all of Abraham’s physical descendants were heirs of the promise. Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, but only Isaac was chosen. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, but only Jacob was chosen (Rom. 9: 6-13). Abraham also had other physical descendants who were not part of the chosen line. He had children by Keturah, but he gave the inheritance to Isaac alone (Gen. 25: 1-5).

Now this brings up the crucial question found in v. 19: “Why the Law then?” That is, why was it given in the first place if the inheritance was always based on promise?

But before we examine Paul's answer to this question, we must examine another issue which comes up from vv. 15-18. Reformed theologians generally include the Mosaic Covenant as one administration of the Covenant of Grace beginning with Adam and running all the way through the Scriptures until its consummation (completion) in Christ (e.g. John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*). But in the words of Kline,

Paul found the difference between two of the Old Testament covenants to be so radical that he felt obliged to defend the thesis that the one did not annul the other (Gal. 3: 15ff.)....The chronological details show that Paul was contrasting the promise covenant not to some general law principle but to the particular historical administration of law mediated through Moses at Sinai after Israel's 430 years in Egypt....

The Sinaitic administration, called "covenant" in the Old Testament, Paul interpreted as *in itself* a dispensation of the kingdom inheritance quite opposite in principle to inheritance by guaranteed promise....the concept of inheritance by law as over against promise did not find expression merely as a theoretical principle existing problematically within a formal covenant arrangement that was itself promissory, but rather as the governing principle of a particular covenant.

...the unquestionable fact emerges in Galatians 3 that Paul saw in the Old Testament alongside the covenant of promise another covenant which was so far from being an administration of promise as to raise the urgent question whether it did not abrogate the promise (pp. 22-24, emphasis his).

In other words, the Mosaic Covenant was a law covenant. To be sure, there were elements of grace which accompanied this covenant designed to point the true believer in the direction of God's saving grace in Christ—the sacrifices of the tabernacle and later the temple which the book of Hebrews tells us were types of Christ's atoning work on the cross. By bringing his sacrifices in faith, the true believer could be provisionally forgiven of his sins until these sacrifices were fully consummated in the once for all sacrifice of Christ. These sacrifices—including the most important one on the Day of Atonement once a year—accompanied the Law, but were not technically part of the covenantal transaction made with Israel in the giving of the Law. As Kline explains,

Elements of redemptive grace were present in and around the transaction....among the law's sanctions was the promise of mercy, a promise enhanced by the location assigned to the covenant tablets under the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, a place redolent [sweet-smelling] of atoning grace. Yet Paul identified it as a covenant of law in opposition to promise because there was in his thought, as in that of the Old Testament, a virtual synonymity of covenant and oath, and because the Sinaitic Covenant had been ratified by human oath alone (pp. 23-24).

Calvin also speaks similarly.

But as evagelic promises are only found scattered in the writings of Moses, and these also somewhat obscure, and as the precepts and rewards, allotted to observers of the law, frequently occur, it rightly appertained to Moses as his own and peculiar office, to teach what is the righteousness of works, and then to show what remuneration awaits the observance of it, and what punishment awaits those who come short of it. For this reason Moses is by John compared with Christ, when it is said, "That the law was given by Moses, but that grace and truth came by Christ" (John 1: 17). And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ: and then we must consider what the law contains as separate from the gospel (*Romans*, pp. 386-387).

We now return to the question naturally raised vv. 15-18 and anticipated by Paul in v. 19: “Why the Law then?” Paul says, “It was added because of transgressions....” We will deal first with the middle part of the verse along with v. 20. The Law was “ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator....Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas; God is only one.” A plausible explanation of this portion of the text is that Paul is using the two different modes of covenantal revelation as an illustration of the superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant. With the Mosaic Covenant, a mediator was used, Moses, along with the agency of angels.

Although Exodus 20 does not mention angels, other passages of Scripture mention the presence of angels in the giving of the law (Deut. 33: 2; Ps. 68: 17; Acts 7: 53; and Heb. 2: 2). The last reference appears to have the same purpose as the mention of angels in *Galatians*—that a covenant mediated through created beings like Moses and angels is inferior to a covenant mediated directly from God to man. Unlike the revelation of the covenant to Abraham, which was direct from God to Abraham, the giving of the Law required a double mediation—Moses and angels—and was therefore *inferior to the promise* in terms of the mode (means) of revelation. Further, as Lightfoot notes, the idea of a mediator implies two persons who are parties in the contract. In the case of the Law, Moses was a mediator between God and Israel in a contractual arrangement which required both parties to fulfill the terms of the covenant. Failure on the part of either party invalidated (made null) the covenant. But with the Abrahamic Covenant, God needed no mediating agency because the covenant conditions were met absolutely in the promise of God. The verse, “Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one” simply means that no mediating agency was necessary because there was only *one party actively engaged* in the inauguration of the Abrahamic Covenant—God alone. Abraham, on his part, was asleep when the covenant ceremony was enacted and had a dream of God walking between the pieces (Gen. 15). The Abrahamic Covenant is, therefore, “absolute and unconditional” (J.B. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, pp. 146-147).

For the most important part of verse 19, “It was added because of transgressions”, I will provide the traditional interpretation first and then that of John Brown. In the traditional interpretation, Rom. 5: 20 provides an important clue to the meaning of this phrase, “And the Law came in that the transgression might *increase*; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” We might expect the opposite, that transgression might *decrease* with the imposition of the Law, but this is not what Paul says in *Romans*. The Law increases transgressions in at least two ways: in severity and in number. It increases sin in severity with reference to God, and in number with reference to man’s awareness.

First, it more clearly defines sin as a legal offense against God. Rom. 1—2 reveals that all men have some understanding of the moral law of God in that “the work of the law is written on their hearts”. Yet, this work of the law is not clearly apprehended and interpreted; and because men distort it, its content is not as substantial as that clearly revealed in the Law. With the written Law, there is no mistaking the fact that this is what *God* requires of men, and that it is simple enough to understand (cf. Deut. 30: 11 and explanation above). The intensity or severity of the offense is heightened because God has published it in the Ten Commandments. Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he said, “that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Rom. 7: 13b).

Second, because the Law clearly defines what sin is and because it deals with inward thoughts as well as actions, the sheer quantity of sins which we commit will become more apparent to us.

Things which we did not formerly consider as sin will be exposed as sin—sinful attitudes like lust, envy, and hate. Until Paul understood the law against coveting, he was “alive” as far as the law was concerned, but when the commandment against coveting “came” home to his awareness, he realized that he was a much bigger sinner than he thought. At the moment he understood the commandment, Paul’s transgression against God “increased” in his own awareness and he “died”, that is, he was aware that he was under the law’s curse (Rom. 7: 7-9).

If I may illustrate, suppose I see myself as a good driver because I never get tickets for driving violations. But after carefully reading the traffic laws, I realize that almost every day I drive to work, I am violating the traffic laws in some way or another. The written traffic code exposes me for the poor driver I really am. The reason I thought I was a good driver is that I didn’t know the law, but now that I know the law, I realize I am a bad driver. (Now, I am only using this as an illustration, for I am really an excellent driver—I think.)

Such is the traditional view and there are points of truth in this view about the pedagogical (as a teacher) usefulness of the law, but there is one significant exegetical problem with this view found in the following phrase, “until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made”. The little preposition, “until”, puts limits upon the function of the law mentioned above, limits which appear to be unjustified given the importance of this function for all sinners, Jew and Gentile. Brown’s view is that Paul is speaking particularly about the transgressions of the Jews, not about the transgressions of men in general.

In consequence of the descendants of Jacob coming down into Egypt, they gradually contracted a fondness for Egyptian superstitions, and were fast relapsing into a state of idolatry, which must soon have terminated in their being lost among the nations, and the revelation with which they were entrusted being first corrupted and then forgotten, when God raised up Moses as their deliverer, brought them out of Egypt, and placed them under that very peculiar order of things, which we commonly term the Mosaic law—an order of things admirably adapted to preserve them a distinct and peculiar people....We are not so much, if at all, to consider the Mosaic law as a punishment for the transgressions of the descendants of Abraham. We are rather to consider it as the means which their transgressions rendered necessary in order to secure the object of their being chosen to be God’s peculiar people. To be preserved from being involved in the ignorance, and idolatry, and vice in which the surrounding nations were sunk, was a blessing at whatever expense it might be gained. At the same time, had it not been for the **transgressions** of the Israelites, the more spiritual and less burdensome order of things under which Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob might have been continued, and the law as a distinct order of things never have existed because never needed (Brown, *Galatians*, pp.61-62, emphasis mine).

In other words, the Mosaic Law was given to accomplish a peculiar purpose in the history of Israel made necessary by Israel’s emersion in Egyptian idolatry. The law was necessary to preserve Israel as God’s chosen people. Otherwise, Israel would have remained under the administration of the Abrahamic Covenant. This view appears to fit the context better. It also accounts for the time limitation of the Law “until the seed should come” and with the time limitation set by verse 25, “But now that faith has come, we are **no longer** under a tutor.” The Mosaic administration began roughly 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant, and it ended *as an administration* with the coming of Christ and the New Covenant. Yet we do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. We don’t want to say that the moral laws of the OT are no longer binding on the Christian. Adultery and murder are still sins. Who would wish to prove that worshipping other gods is no longer forbidden? Every moral law in the OT is

reaffirmed in the NT with the exception of Sabbath observance which makes us question whether Sabbath observance is a moral requirement or is a ceremonial law which has given way to the NT requirement of gathering together for worship (Heb. 10: 24-25). However, there are still problems with Brown's interpretation which will I will develop below.

Galatians 3: 21

Based upon the way Paul has dealt with the inferiority of the Law compared to the promise, one may be led to the conclusion that the Law is contrary to the promises of God, that somehow God instituted a contradictory covenant which was inconsistent with the promise to Abraham. Paul's response to this rhetorical question is emphatic, "May it never be!" If indeed God had given a law, the Mosaic Law or any other law, which could give life, then surely he would have contradicted himself. On the one hand he would have promised life to Abraham on the basis of faith, and on the other hand to the Israelites living under Moses' administration on the basis of law. And since life based on law-keeping would then be instituted 430 years after the promise to Abraham, the Law would have been properly interpreted as the latest and most accurate means of salvation, efficiently canceling the promise to Abraham. But the fact is, no such law was ever given which could impart life, and as Paul has already said, God cannot be accused of going back on his promises.

Galatians 3: 22

On the contrary, the real purpose of the Law was to "shut up all men under sin." The Law (or law) imprisons men in the bondage of their own sin. When a person is put in the prison of the law (either the Law of Moses or the law of his own conscience, Rom. 2: 14-15), he feels the weight of sin's bondage and the condemning power of the Law. By way of analogy, when a man is convicted of a crime and incarcerated in prison, he feels the weight of his crime against humanity, and he feels the condemning power of the civil law which imprisoned him. This is what the Law of Moses did to Israel, but it is also what God's universal moral law does to all of us. In v. 21 Paul does not restrict his argument to the Law of Moses for he says, "For if a law [*i. e. any law*] had been given..." No law has been given which imparts life, including the Law of Moses and including any other law which man is under (social laws or the law of his own conscience), any law which man attempts to keep for the purpose of justifying himself before God.

This interpretation is supported by similar statements in Romans 2 and 3 in which Paul affirms that all men are under sin, both Jews and Gentiles, "What then? Are we [*i.e. we Jews*] better than they [*the Gentiles*]? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all *under sin...*" (3: 9). Note the phrase, "under sin" which corresponds to the "under sin" of Gal. 3: 22. **All** men are "shut up" in prison and **all** men are "under sin". In Romans 2: 12, Paul affirms, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law." The phrase "without the Law" refers to the Gentiles who did not have the Law of Moses or *especially revealed law*. This in no way implies that they have no law at all, for this would contradict what Paul says immediately following in 2: 14-15, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, **are a law to themselves**, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them." The Gentiles have the law of God in *unwritten* form which is

designated as the “work of the Law written in their hearts” constituted as “their conscience”. This passage means that men are sinners with or without specially revealed law and as such are deserving of God’s judgment. Those without revealed law “will perish without this law” and those who have this law “will be judged” by it (cf. Rom. 1: 18-32).

Further, in Rom. 3: 19, Paul applies quotation after quotation from the Psalms and Prophets to both the Jews (who have the Law) and to the Gentiles (who do not have the specifically revealed Law of Moses but have the unwritten law of God in their conscience). “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God.” The Law in Romans 3: 19 is not specifically the Law of Moses but quotations from the Psalms and Prophets which are synonymous with the OT when used in conjunction with the five books of Moses (Lk. 24: 44; Matt. 5: 17; 22: 40). Thus, Paul says, the whole testimony of the OT which describes man’s sinful condition speaks to both Jew and Gentile, both of whom are “under the law”. Technically the passage reads “in the law” or “in the sphere of the Law”. The Gentiles are in the sphere of the law quoted in Paul’s examples from the Psalms and Prophets (the OT), and therefore, within the sphere of God’s judgment (John Murray, *Romans*, pp. 106-107). The point is that “every mouth” is closed before God and the “whole world” is accountable to God for sin—the Scriptures of the OT tell us so.

Thus, “the Scripture” shutting up all men under sin in Gal. 3: 22 closely parallels Paul’s reference to the OT in Rom. 3: 9-19. The Psalms and Prophets (representing the whole OT) declare the sinfulness of Jew and Gentile alike. This is equivalent to (equal to) “the Scripture has shut up all men under sin” (See also Brown, p. 68). Furthermore, Chamblin has noted that to be “under sin” is the same as being “under law” (J. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, pp. 53, 69). This can be logically proven from the fact that “sin is not imputed [*put on account or recorded*] when there is no law” and “where there is no law, neither is there violation” (Rom. 5: 13; 4: 15). Without the universal law of God, sin simply does not exist (Murray, p. 188). But Paul’s description of the Gentiles in Romans 3 is a description of sinners who must be “under” some kind of law in order to be called sinners (Rom. 3: 23). Thus, to be “under sin” is to be “under law”.

There is a benevolent purpose to being shut up under sin in the latter half of v. 22—“in order that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” A keen sense of our bondage under sin prepares us for the good news of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Returning to the prison illustration, a pardon from the civil authorities would mean nothing to someone who had never committed a crime and never gone to prison. Such a person would have no sense of his need for pardon. But for someone who had been behind bars for 20 years, pardon would be welcome relief, indeed. This relief from sin’s bondage is universal—for Jew and Gentile or the same “all men” mentioned previously. Paul would not have “all men” shut up under sin only to offer the promise of Jesus Christ only to the Jews who believe.

Galatians 3: 23

“Before faith came” corresponds to the phrase, “until the seed should come” in v. 19, but as we shall see below, they are not synonymous. “Before faith came” can have a subjective meaning while “until the seed should come” is limited to the objective coming of Christ in history. According to the verse, it is “the faith which was later to be revealed”. Some commentators

limit the “we” to “we Jews.” In other words, when Paul moves from v. 22 to v. 23, he is no longer speaking in universal terms of “all men” but the Jews only who were “kept in custody under the Law” (See Brown, p. 71; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 6, p. 662). This interpretation would make the giving of the Mosaic Law and the coming of the seed in v. 19 parallel to the coming of faith and the custody of the Law in v. 23. The thought may be diagrammed something like this:

- (A) The Law was ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator.
- (B) Until the seed [Christ] should come.
- (B') Before faith came
- (A') We were kept in custody under the Law.

In this scheme, A and A' are parallel, and B and B' are parallel.

The meaning is that Israel as a nation, including Paul, was kept in “custody” (more prison terminology) under the Law until faith in Christ “came” or was “revealed” in the gospel. Being “shut up” has both a positive and a negative connotation (suggested meaning). We have already noted the negative meaning—the Law shuts us up to its bondage and condemning power. Here we have the positive purpose. Israel was placed in protective custody in prison where they were “guarded” (*NKJ*) from the prevailing idolatrous influences of the surrounding nations, influences which would have successfully eradicated (removed) Israel from the face of the earth. To repeat Brown’s analysis above,

We are rather to consider it [the Law] as the means which their transgressions rendered necessary in order to secure the object of their being chosen to be God’s peculiar people. To be preserved from being involved in the ignorance, and idolatry, and vice in which the surrounding nations were sunk, was a blessing at whatever expense it might be gained (p. 62).

Living under the Law was difficult (Acts 15: 10), but it was not as harsh as pagan life, and if the Israelites had had no legal boundaries (food laws, marriage laws, mandatory religious ceremonies and festivals) to mark them off from pagan nations, they would have completely intermarried with them and adopted their practices and religions. The end result would have been the extermination of the nation of Israel through the process of amalgamation (mixture). If this had happened, the faith of Abraham would have been lost in the process. Further, there would have been no mass conversion to Christianity on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 because there would have been no foreign Jews visiting Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. They and their families would have been already assimilated into other religions for many centuries. Thus, the Law put a fence around Israel, putting them in protective custody until faith was fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, their Messiah.

A few years ago I participated in a prison ministry. I would go to Parchman Prison in Mississippi to share the gospel with men who had been convicted of murder, armed robbery, rape, and many other crimes. During that ministry I found out that often prisoners were placed in more restricted, solitary cells. Sometimes this was done not to punish them but to protect them from death threats from other prisoners. The isolation was a kind of protective custody to keep them alive. So it is here with Israel and the Law.

The Mosaic Law had this protective function for Israel, but must we restrict Paul’s meaning to the Jews? We have already noted that all men universally are shut up under sin so that the Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com

promise may be given to those who believe (v. 22). The universal law of God puts men in the prison of sin's bondage and the law's condemning power. But what of the positive purpose of the law, to place men in protective custody for the faith which will be revealed to them later?

I am not a Jew, but the Law has had this effect upon my own life. I grew up in a church-going family, but never understood the gospel until I was 20 years old. I always thought that a Christian was someone who was a little better than the person sitting next to him. Many of my classmates were getting drunk on the weekends and engaging in fornication, but I never did. I knew that the law of God did not permit that kind of lifestyle. But I was not a Christian until a few years later when I realized that being a Christian did not consist of just keeping a list of rules. It was a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ who loved me and died for me. All this time I thought I was a Christian because I didn't do certain things—I didn't commit fornication; I didn't get drunk, I didn't do drugs, etc. I was attempting to save myself by keeping the law, but I was not saved.

Nevertheless, it was a blessing to be confined under the law. It was good because all those things my classmates were doing were self-destructive, and they would have been harmful to me. I never caused my father or mother any grief through reckless behavior, and I could start my marriage with my wife with a clean conscience knowing that I had never had sex with anyone but her after we were married. The law had acted as a hedge around me protecting me from a life of self-destructive sinfulness and debauchery. It did this for me until I came to an understanding of the gospel. But if I had not had any contact with the Law of God through the church, my life would have been different and my sinful lifestyle may have kept me from any contact with Christian people and the gospel. The law did not save me, but an awareness of the law served to protect me until Christ was revealed to me.

I have no objection to making the Jews the focal point of v. 23. Surely the nation of Israel provides the supreme example of the protective function of the Law preserving Israel as a distinct nation until Christ was fully revealed in the gospel. On the other hand, I believe the experience of Israel under the Law was an *instructional paradigm* (model) for the church which also consists of Gentiles. In 1 Cor. 10: 6-11 Paul uses the experiences of Israel as a warning for the church saying, "Now these things happened as examples for *us*, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.... Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for *our* instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

Paul is using the history of Israel in the same way in *Galatians*, for instructional purposes. The difference is that the example is positive rather than negative. Just as God used the Law in the life of Israel, he has and will use the Law (or universal law) in the life of every elect unbeliever who is later joined to his church. God uses the law for his elect people not for their harm but for their good, just as he used it for the elect remnant of Israel (Rom. 9: 27). It was never God's primary purpose to use his Law to curse the nation of Israel. This certainly happened, but it was secondary to his main purpose, the salvation of his elect. His desire was for Israel to understand the law, repent, and come to faith in Christ when He appeared (Ezek. 33: 11). Some of them did repent and believe, but the rest were hardened in their unbelief (Rom. 11: 7).

In the same way, God uses the Law (or law) in a benevolent way for his elect Gentiles. What happened as a paradigm (model) in the life of elect Israel will also happen in the life of elect Gentiles. The law of God operating in the person's conscience will aggravate his sin (Rom. 7:

8), condemn him (Rom. 7: 9-10) and when properly understood (Rom. 7: 9) will drive him to the mercy of the gospel (Rom. 7: 24-25). Once this happens he is “no longer” (Gal. 3: 25) held in custody under the law because the faith of Christ is revealed to him. Let me diagram the concept below.

Elect Israel kept in custody under the Mosaic Law until the *objective* revelation of Christ

Elect Gentiles kept in custody under the universal law of God until the *subjective* revelation of Christ by faith

Christ must be revealed in two different ways. He must be revealed *objectively* and historically in time and space, and He must be revealed *subjectively* to the individual heart. Israel was kept in custody under the Mosaic Law objectively in time and space. The individual unbeliever is kept in custody by either the Mosaic Law or the universal law of God until Christ is revealed to him through faith. Paul as an unbeliever was kept in custody under the Law long after the objective revelation of Christ in history. Christ objectively ended the covenantal administration of the law for all believers in AD 30 when He died on the cross. The veil of the temple was torn in two. But the subjective administration of the law continues in unbelievers. When Christ was revealed to Paul personally, he was no longer held by that law.

Attempting to discern the antecedent nouns of “we”, “our” and “you” in Galatians 3 seems tedious and unnecessary, for that which happened to Israel is a paradigm for everyone else. The Law (or law) continues to function in this way for elect unbelievers. Otherwise, they would never see their need of Christ. In the objective, historical realm, the jurisdiction of the Law has ended for elect Israel, replaced by the New Covenant inaugurated in Christ. But that covenant must be appropriated by faith in the subjective realm, the conscience; otherwise, the individual elect Israelite is still kept in custody waiting for the spiritual, subjective revelation of Christ. In another sense the non-elect Jew and Gentile are still imprisoned by the Mosaic Law or the universal moral law which afflicts the conscience (Rom. 2: 15; 3: 19; Gal. 3: 22), and will remain in this state of imprisonment since they will never come to Christ for relief.

Galatians 3: 24

Most of the translations miss the correct understanding of the word *pedagogos*. The word does not describe a teacher but a strict *disciplinarian* who accompanied young children to and from school and was generally responsible to govern their conduct at all times (Stott, p. 97; Robertson, *Word Pictures*). If the child didn't behave properly, the pedagogue would use his stick, beating him severely to keep the child under control. By the time the child was whipped a time or two, attending school would be a tender mercy in comparison. The pedagogue was often harsh, but at least the child would attend his lessons and survive childhood until he reached the age of maturity at which time he would enter into the full privileges of his inheritance. (Paul goes into more details of this arrangement in chapter 4). The inferior position of the Law is set forth in the figure given, for the *pedagogos* was not a member of the family but a high-ranking slave. Analogously, Christ is superior to the Law because he is not a slave in the house, but the owner of the house.

Likewise, the Law serves as a disciplinarian to lead us to Christ. The “us” here refers to elect Jews and Gentiles, for Paul’s audience consists of both. It must have direct reference to the elect since only the elect will be driven by the law to Christ. The law whips us, governs us, seems harsh and unyielding without offering us any help in keeping it. It puts a fence around us and tells us that we can go so far but no farther. It places us under protective guard to keep us from destroying ourselves. Nevertheless putting us under law served the purpose of driving us to Christ. By the time we are beaten with its whip and are bruised and bleeding with the guilt and consequences of our sin, we are ready to listen to the gracious offer of Christ Jesus who says, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11: 28-29). When we are tired and broken from our efforts to save ourselves, we can now come to Christ to be justified by faith (Gal. 3: 24). Although the Law is “not of faith” (3: 12), it nevertheless “nudges” the person toward faith. Once the law is clearly understood, a person knows he can’t keep the law. Therefore, God used the Law, and still uses it, for the gracious purpose of leading His people, both Jew and Gentile, to the gospel.

Sadly, it did not have this effect on everyone in Israel, for the majority of Israel did not understand the Law or its righteous demands. Like Paul before his conversion, they believed that the law could be kept. For them, the commandment did not “come” to their understanding for if it had, the Law would have had the same effect upon them as it did upon Paul: “when the commandment *came*, sin became alive and I died” (Rom. 7: 9). The Law shut all of them up to condemnation, but for most it did not shut them up to the faith later to be revealed.

For Israel as a whole, the Law was *not* a disciplinarian *leading them to Christ*; it was simply a “*hard yoke*” (Acts 15: 10) since most of the nation perished in unbelief. This sad situation was no fault of the Law, for it was given to preserve the nation from idolatry and the self-destructiveness of sin—“and this commandment, which was to result in *life*, proved to result in *death* for me” (Rom. 7: 10).

Thus, Paul is speaking only hypothetically (theoretically) when he says the Law served the benevolent function of keeping Israel in protective custody until the revelation of Christ. It served this function for the *elect remnant*, but not for all Israel. What it did accomplish for the nation is the first, negative function—putting them under the bondage and condemning power of the Law, a function which still persists today because unbelieving Jews (and unbelieving Gentiles) are still “under the Law” (Compare Rom. 6: 14 with 7: 1-6). There are only two conditions for the human race: “under grace” or “under law”. Further, the only way to be “released” from the Law is to “die” to the Law and be “joined to another” who is Christ.) Likewise, the universal law of God serves this negative function for non-elect Gentiles, and it serves the benevolent function of protective custody and discipline for elect Gentiles. For any Gentile who comes to an adequate understanding of the law and the impossibility of fulfilling its demands, the law will “beat him up” and lead him bruised and broken to Christ. Otherwise, every man will cling to his own self-righteousness, assured that he is good enough—like Paul who was satisfied with his performance of the Law (Phil. 3: 4-6; Gal. 1: 14).

Galatians 3: 25

What, then, are we to do with the temporal limitations placed upon this function in verse 25? The verse says, “But now that faith has come, we are *no longer* under a tutor.” This corresponds

to the temporal nature of the law found in v. 19 (“until the seed should come”) and v. 23 (“before faith came”). The Law’s pedagogical function has a beginning and an end; it is temporary. **But the question is: temporary for whom?** As I have indicated above, the “we” and “our” of vv. 23-24 are best interpreted not as national Israel, but as elect Israel with implications for elect Gentiles or for all believers (See v. 22). For *believers*, the Law no longer functions as a disciplinarian leading us to Christ. “We” are already in Christ. Thus the Law Covenant was a temporary order of things intended only for a distinct period of time. It ended for *believing* Jews when Christ came objectively in time **and** subjectively to their conscience; both the objective and subjective conditions are necessary. But for *unbelieving* Jews and Gentiles, the Law continues in effect subjectively in their conscience. The New Covenant has replaced the Old Covenant for *believers*, but not for unbelievers.

This interpretation is supported by the structure of the sentence in v. 25. The condition for not being under the Law as a disciplinarian is found in the subordinate clause, “But now that faith has come”. The coming of faith is the condition for no longer being under a disciplinarian. I will substitute the word “if” to illustrate the condition: “**If** faith has come, we are no longer under a disciplinarian.” **The presence of faith terminates the condition of being under the Law as a disciplinarian.** We no longer need it as such. It may function in other ways (and I believe it does), but it no longer serves in the capacity of keeping us in custody until Christ is revealed to us *spiritually* and *subjectively*. But for elect Jews and Gentiles **who are not yet Christians**, it still functions in this benevolent capacity; they are still under the law’s discipline for the purpose of leading them to Christ.

If the disciplinary function of the Law was terminated for each individual Jew with the objective (factual) coming of Christ in history, we could not account for the effect of the Law on Paul’s conscience in Romans 7. Paul was converted several years after the death of Christ and the inauguration of the New Covenant, but surely in Romans 7 the Law was functioning as a disciplinarian leading him to Christ (“Until the commandment *came*” i.e. came to his understanding—Rom. 7: 9). Thus, the phrase, “We are no longer under a tutor” cannot mean that the whole Jewish race ceased to be **under the law** when the New Covenant was inaugurated in the death of Christ. **Objectively** the New Covenant blessings were available through the atoning work of Christ; **subjectively** they were out of reach for those who refused to believe. We have already seen in Romans 7: 1-6 that a person has to “die to the Law through the body of Christ” experientially (in his experience) to be “released” from the law’s “jurisdiction” (v. 1).

Yet the basis for Paul’s **subjective** release from the Law was the **objective** inauguration of the New Covenant and the disbanding of the Old Covenant. The Mosaic (Old) Covenant must lose its **status** as a covenant objectively for the Jewish or Gentile sinner to be released from its obligations. Thus, Paul must introduce the objective (factual) coming of Christ in v. 19, “until the seed should come”. In other words, unless the Old Covenant is terminated objectively and historically in the atonement of Christ, there is no foundation for the subjective (personal) experiential termination of the Law over a man’s conscience, and he is still bound under the Law and under its curse. The believing Israelites during the Old Covenant were justified by faith, but they were still objectively under the Law as a covenant administration. (Christ himself was born “under the Law”—4: 4.) This is why believing Jews had to suffer the judgments of God in exile along with unbelieving Jews. It is also why their consciences were not completely free from the guilt of sin even though justified like Abraham (Heb. 9: 8-9; see also Calvin’s comments below). That situation persisted “until Christ” (v. 19). Unbelieving Jews like Paul were still kept in

custody by the Law “before faith came” subjectively and experientially. The Law was terminated as a Covenant *for believers*, but *unbelievers* were still under its power and obliged to keep its requirements for salvation. There are only two options for salvation: faith in Christ or keeping the Law, both for Jew or Gentile.

Thus, the temporal limitations of the law in v. 25 do not have reference merely to the *objective* appearance of Christ in time, as in v. 19, but also to the *subjective* experience of faith by the believer. When faith “comes” to the believer subjectively, he is no longer under the law, but until he has faith, he is under the Law (or law), for there is no other alternative.

Galatians 3: 26-27

Notice that in v. 26, Paul uses the second person plural pronoun “you”. He does so because he is finished with the Jewish paradigm (model) of vv. 23-25. As a model for the whole world, God placed the nation of Israel under the Law covenant as an object lesson to prove the inability of being saved by law-keeping. Even though he uses “we”, he does not eliminate the applicability of vv. 23-25 to the Gentiles. They, too, are under the universal law of God and under its curse. But now that Christ has come, the necessity of Israel as a paradigm for the nations has terminated. The Gentiles no longer have to become Jews under the Law of Moses to be counted as God’s people. A New Covenant is in place which has made the Old Covenant null and void for believers. Unbelievers remain under the Law, or law, and under its curse.

The condition for being “sons of God” is not membership in the Jewish race but believing: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” The word for “sons” is *wios* and is contrasted with “children” (*nepios*) of 4: 1 and 3. “Son” has the connotation (suggested meaning) of a full-grown son who is mature and ready to enter into the full benefits of his inheritance. We will discuss this more in detail in chap. 4. The emphasis of this verse is on the word “all”. All of us, Jew and Gentile, are sons; that is, both Jew and Gentile now have the same mature status before God through faith in Christ. This obviously serves the purpose of Paul’s argument that Gentiles did not have to “live like Jews” to be in good favor with God. Being a Jew and keeping the Laws of Moses had nothing whatever to do with one’s status; faith in Christ had everything to do with it. This goes along with Paul’s insistence that “we” believers are no longer under the Law as a tutor to lead us to Christ. As “sons” we are “in” Christ already, no longer being *led* to him by the law.

The faith of v. 26 qualifies the “baptism” of v. 27. We are not sons of God through our water baptism; we are sons of God through faith, and that faith is synonymous with being baptized “into” Christ. The phrase occurs only here and in Rom. 6: 3, and in both places something is said of the person baptized that cannot be said of a *faithless* person who has merely been baptized with water (Brown, p. 74). In Rom. 6: 3, the one baptized is baptized into Christ’s death and is also raised up with Christ to “walk in newness of life” (v. 4). The connection between baptism into death and baptism into resurrection of new life is not *potential* or *hopeful* (maybe it will happen) but *actual* and *guaranteed* (it will happen). In other words, if one is baptized “into Christ Jesus”, he most certainly will walk in newness of life. If not, he is merely washed with water but not baptized “into” (*eis*) Christ. Baptism into Christ is union with Christ in the likeness of his death and resurrection (v.5). Thus water baptism implies the existence of faith—either the faith of the person or the faith of parents of baptized infants—but does not guarantee that faith actually exists in the baptized adult or infant. But regardless of whether the

baptized person has faith, the meaning of baptism in v. 27 is not altered. Baptism means union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and Paul is using physical baptism as an encouragement to Christians to realize who they are from their baptism. When they submitted themselves to baptism, they were identifying with Christ.

In the same way, Gal. 3: 27 presents baptism into Christ as synonymous with being “clothed” with Christ. The same verb is used in Rom. 13: 14, “But put on [be clothed with] the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.” To be clothed with Christ is the same as being united to Christ and points to the purity of character demanded of Christians in light of their union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Murray, *Romans*, p. 170).

The metaphor of being clothed with Christ is also used by Paul in Colossians 3.

But now you also, **put them all aside**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you **laid aside the old self** with its *evil* practices,¹⁰ and have **put on the new self** who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— (Colossians 3:8-10 NASB)

The verb, “put on” is the word *enduo*, to put on clothing, and it is the same word used in Galatians 3: 27. Christians have clothed themselves with Christ. Every vestige (remnant) of the old man is being laid aside and the new man in Christ has been put on.

Galatians 3: 28

As those who are clothed with Christ, there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave or free man, male or female. We are all “one in Christ Jesus” and the future of one believer is bound up with the future of every other believer. Again, the idea that one could not fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles (Gal. 2: 11-14) is foreign to the concept of “all” being sons of God and clothed with Christ. We are no longer wearing the garb (clothing) of a Jew or Gentile—a Hutu or Tutsi, a Dinka or a Nuer—a slave or free man, or a male or female, but the clothing of Christ. When God sees us, he sees Christ. When we see other believers, we must see them as Christ sees them and not as people who are inferior or superior to us on the basis of race, tribe, socio-economic status, or sex. So close is our relationship to one another in Christ that Paul speaks of all Christians as a singular man in Christ: “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature **man** [*singular noun*], to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4: 11-13).

The gospel is the only basis for true unity and fellowship in the church. The Law cannot do this because the Law builds a wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles in which the Jews were always the superior race and culture. This was necessary for a limited time—also a long time, 1500 years—to preserve the Jewish nation from assimilation into pagan idolatry and ultimate extinction until Christ inaugurated another covenant. But now that Christ has come, the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles and between all races, tribes, and language groups is torn down. “Therefore...” Paul says to the Ephesian Gentiles,

...remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands—*remember* that you were at

that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one*, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus establishing peace*, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity” (Eph. 2: 11-16).

Only by abolishing this temporary order of things (the Law) could God unite Jews and Gentiles, all races, social castes, and sexes on the same level. Religions are normally divisive because they are usually culture-bound. (Even the Jewish religion was culture-bound; necessarily so, until Christ came.) That is, the dominant culture of the region establishes the religion of that region. If one does not submit to that religion, he faces isolation or even danger within that cultural context. Wherever the Muslim religion is the dominant religion, there can never be freedom, for the Muslim religion requires those who are not Muslims to be treated as second-class citizens. Muslim-dominated countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq cannot have true democracies, but only unstable democracies, for this reason. Only time will tell if the US and Britain can establish a stable democracy in Iraq, but if accomplished, it will only be at the expense of fundamental Muslim doctrine which rules out religious and political freedom (For a thorough treatment of this subject, see *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam*).

[Note to the reader. I wrote the paragraph above in 2006, three years after the Iraq war began. Recent history has shown that the deep-seated hatred between Sunnis and Shiites will never yield to stable democracies. The heavy hand of Saddam Hussein kept these two people groups contained, but no new democratic leadership has emerged who is able to do this. As a general rule, stable democracies are the product of the Christian world-view which promotes separation of church and state. The church is no longer a political entity as it was in the theocratic economy of Mosaic Law. The church consists of the people of God in all nations who act as salt and light in any nation or cultural entity. The Christian faith requires toleration (love for enemies) which is absent in other religions. It attempts to influence society by means of persuasion, but not force and terror.]

On the other hand, where the Christian faith is well-established, one always finds democratic forms of government, religious freedom, and toleration of religions other than Christianity. This is not a cultural accident. The Christian faith, *properly understood and practiced*, produces freedom and liberty, but it can only do this because it has progressed beyond the Mosaic Law as the covenantal obligation before God. There is certainly continuity with the Old Covenant because God gave it, but there is also discontinuity, as well, clearly set forth in Galatians 3 and 4 and elsewhere in the NT, a discontinuity ordained by God and recognized by the NT writers (Heb. 8: 6-13; 2 Cor. 3). The Old Covenant was good as far as it went, but it did not go far enough. If it had, God would never have replaced it with the New Covenant. “New Covenant” and “Old Covenant”—these are the terms the *Bible* uses to describe the two major covenantal arrangements with God’s people. The Bible never uses the terms, “covenant of grace with multiple administrations” found in much theological literature.

Galatians 3: 29

Contrary to the Judaizers who were stressing the necessity of Jewishness, the real issue is whether one belongs to Christ by faith (v. 29). The real descendants of Abraham and the only true heirs to the promise are believers, not physical Jews or Gentiles who subject themselves to

the Law (Rom. 9: 6-8). Consequently, Paul's opponents are putting the cart before the horse. (In other words, they are getting it backwards.) A real Jew is not one with Jewish DNA, and real circumcision is not the cutting off of physical flesh. A real Jew is a believer who shares Abraham's faith, and true circumcision is regeneration by the Spirit leading to repentance and faith (Rom. 2: 28-29).

It should be clear from Paul's analysis of the Abrahamic Covenant, that it is the OT *type* of the New Covenant in Christ. Paul goes to great lengths to contrast the Old Covenant (Mosaic Covenant) with the New Covenant (3: 17), but he virtually equates the Abrahamic Covenant with the New Covenant (3: 16, 18, 29). And while the Mosaic Covenant has been terminated in Christ, nothing is said about the termination of the Abrahamic Covenant which is extended into the New Covenant. Christians find their blessing with Abraham the believer (3: 9). Many Baptists insist that infant children of believers should not be baptized because they do not belong to Christ by faith, but the organic connection between the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant here in Galatians 3 strongly implies the continuation of applying the covenant sign to the children of believers. The covenant with Abraham was based on faith and the New Covenant is based on faith. In the Abrahamic Covenant, infant Jewish males received the external sign of the covenant, strongly implying the necessity of baptizing all infants of believers. Continuity with Abraham, the believer, would seem to suggest the baptism of infant children of believers. Moreover, as circumcision in the OT never presumed regeneration of the Jew (Rom. 2: 28-29; Jer. 4: 4), baptism in the NT never presumes the regeneration of either the infant or the adult (Acts 8: 13-23; 2 Tim. 4: 10).

D. Defense of the Gospel: The Superiority of Mature Sonship to Childhood and Slavery (Gal. 4: 1-11)

We can see from this chapter that Paul is building upon the contrast between the Law and the gospel he has been constructing since the beginning of chapter 3. We must remember Paul's comprehensive argument to the Galatian Christians lest we get lost in all the particulars. The Galatians are being persuaded by false teachers to embrace the requirements of circumcision as a necessary requirement for justification. In doing so, they are unintentionally embracing the entire OT economy (the Mosaic Law) as a requirement since this economy is a single covenantal unit which cannot be separated into parts. If the Galatians embrace the necessity of circumcision, they must also embrace the whole Law as a requirement for justification. Paul makes this very clear in 5: 3, "And I testify again to every man who receives *circumcision*, that he is under obligation to keep the *whole Law*."

For this reason, Paul is systematically exposing the inferior conditions in which the Jews lived under the Mosaic economy for the purpose of convincing the Galatians that the Old economy of Moses is not something they should prefer. Let's review the evidence for this below.

1. They did not receive the Holy Spirit through the Law, but through faith in Christ (3: 1-5).
2. Even the OT teaches justification by faith and not by Law. Abraham believed God and his faith was counted as righteousness (3: 6-9).
3. Those who are under the legal economy of the Law for salvation are under its curse, because you must keep the Law perfectly to earn life by the Law (3: 10-12). But Christ redeemed us from the Law's curse that salvation can come to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike (3: 13-14).

4. The Law was an economy which was introduced later in redemptive history 430 years after the promise of salvation to Abraham, and it did not in any sense annul or replace the promise to Abraham (3: 15-18).
5. The purpose of its introduction was not to present an alternative way of salvation, but in order to expose sin for the horrible offense against God that it really is and to raise man's awareness of the pervasiveness of sin—how it spreads into every aspect of his life and being, his thoughts and actions. It was introduced to aggravate man's sin as an offense against the written, publicly revealed will of God (v. 19).
6. It was an economy which was ordained through the mediation of created beings (Moses and angels), not like the Abrahamic promise which was mediated to him directly by God (v. 19-20).
7. The old economy of Law was not able to impart life (v. 21).
8. It was an economy in which the Jews (as representatives for the whole world) were “shut up” to the Law through its bondage and condemning power (v. 22). They were placed in protective confinement under the Law for their preservation until something much better had been fully revealed—namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 23).
9. The Law was a disciplinarian who set up strict rules for their behavior for the purpose of directing their attention to Christ. But the *pedagogos* was a slave in the house and could not be superior to Christ who is the owner of the house (v. 24). Now that they had believed in Christ, it was foolish to subject themselves to the inferior discipline of the Law.
10. You don't have to become a Jew and keep the Law to be a true child of Abraham. Any advantages of race, sex, or social standing are removed with the gospel (vv. 27-20).

We will now begin to analyze chapter 4.

1. Being under the Law is the state of childhood and slavery (Gal. 4: 1-3).

Beginning in Chapter 4, Paul picks up an argument which he only introduces in 3: 26. The difference between a believer in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is the difference between an ***underage child*** and a ***full-grown son***. When the heir is an underage child (*nepios*), his life is not “at all” different from that of a slave (*dulos*). The word “child” also has the connotation of a “minor”, someone with no legal, independent status and very limited liberty.

The word for guardian is ***not*** the same as the word for “tutor” in v. 24. Under Roman law, the guardian (*epitropos*) potentially acted as the legal guardian of the child even if the father was alive, but was legal guardian in actual fact if the child's father was deceased. The household manager (*oikonomos*) took care of the child's financial concerns until he reached the age of 25 (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 852). The full-grown son was destined to take possession of the father's property, but before he became of age (“until the date set by the father”—v. 2), his life was managed by high-ranking slaves within his father's household. He could not come and go as he pleased, and his life was severely restricted by the close supervision of his *epitropos* (guardian). The money and property he was to inherit at 25 years of age was not at his disposal but managed by the household steward (*oikonomos*) (Brown, p. 77). His overall situation was one which, according to Paul and apparently well-known by the Galatians, was not superior to that of a slave although his status was that of sole owner (v. 1).

The contrast is between the liberty of the full-grown son (*wios*) and the restriction of a child or minor (*nepios*). The state of Israel under the Law was that of a child whose life was closely supervised and restricted by very tangible, “worldly elements” (v. 3) which were very symbolic

and external. He could not eat certain kinds of animals or wear mixed clothing as a reminder of the necessary separation from sin and sinful idolaters (Lev. 11: 4-7; Lev. 19: 19). The liberty of the gospel consists of a less regulated, less external regulation and worship which is the consequence of the Law (that is, the whole testimony of the Word of God in the OT and NT) written upon the heart by the Holy Spirit and being led by the Spirit for understanding and practice.

In v. 3 Paul expands the description of bondage which he began in vv. 23-24. While they were under the Law, the Jewish nation (the OT church) was held in bondage to “elemental things of the world”. The best interpretation of these elemental things is provided later in the text in vv. 9-10 where the word *stoicheia* (“elemental things”) is used again in reference to the ritual observance of days, months, seasons, and years. Thus, the “elemental things” are the ritual and ceremonial observances of the Mosaic Law. They cannot be a reference to the moral principles of that economy which are clearly set forth as continuing requirements in the New Covenant; otherwise, they could not be called “weak and worthless” (v. 9).

We could never refer to the laws against idolatry, taking God’s name in vain, murder, adultery, etc, as “weak and worthless”. While it is true that the Old Covenant is terminated with the coming of Christ, it does not follow that every principle of that covenant is also terminated. The moral principles of God government of man’s righteousness were in existence long before the Law of Moses, dating back to Adam and Eve. Cain killed his brother Abel and was fearful of being executed by other men as a consequence (Gen. 4: 15). He knew that murder was wrong, and he didn’t need a written code to understand this. The death penalty for murder was formally promulgated (published) in the Noahic Covenant in Gen. 9: 6.

However, the ritual observances which prefigure Christ (the Aaronic priesthood, food restrictions, yearly festivals, etc.) are **now** weak and worthless because they are nothing but **shadows** of the real person whom they prefigured—Christ himself (Col. 2: 16-17). But they were good and necessary for the period of the church’s minority or **childhood** depicted by the nation of Israel before Christ. Brown gives us a helpful commentary on why they were necessary and what they included.

Now, by the elements here referred to, I understand the whole system of external observances under the law, which, if I may use the expression, may be considered as elements, rudiments, suited to the comparatively childish state of the church at the period referred to. And they are termed “worldly elements” to mark their sensible and external character. In training children, we are obliged constantly to appeal to their senses; we cannot fix their attention in any other way. It is by sensible representations we convey abstract truth into their minds. In like manner, in the childish state of the church, arising out of the imperfect revelation of the economy of grace, and that, again, proceeding from the nature of the case, the church was taught and disciplined by symbolical representations and external services. This worship...had a great deal of corporeality [bodily form]. It was very much a thing of time, and place, and circumstance. The constant round of such observances was intended, in some measure, to serve as a substitute for that enlightened spiritual, habitual, service of God, which nothing but a clear revelation, accompanied with a full effusion of divine influence, could have produced.

Under these worldly external elementary institutions, the church, in its childish state, was “kept” as in a state of bondage; that is, its members were kept in a restricted, confined state—they were kept “shut up under the law.” Chandler remarks, “The Jews were in bondage under these elements. Their very religion made them a kind of slaves; the expense necessary to support their temple worship was very
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great, and a constant burden on their estates. Their frequent washings and purifications must have been attended with many great inconveniences: their annual journeys to Jerusalem, which all the male Jews were thrice every year obliged to perform, were both costly and troublesome: so that they might well cry out, ‘What a weariness is it?’ upon which account the apostle Peter calls the Mosaic law, even in Jerusalem itself ‘a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear’ (Acts 15: 10). The being under such a law was really a state of slavery and bondage; and therefore the Jews who were heirs of the promises differed nothing whilst they were under it from servants” (Brown, p. 79).

Here, as in Chap. 3, the Jews were appropriate representatives for the rest of mankind. In that chapter, while the Jews were under the moral requirements of the Mosaic legislation in written form, pagans were attempting to save themselves by any other unwritten law of their conscience (v. 21-22). In chapter 4, while the Jews were fulfilling the ceremonial requirements God had instituted, pagan cultures were immersed in superstitious activities very similar in practice—animal, and sometimes human, sacrifices for the appeasement (satisfaction of wrath) of the gods, ritual festivals, special restrictions upon foods, and other requirements which made tangible impressions on the worshippers (Deut. 18: 10; 2 Kings 16: 2-3). Chuck Bennett writes that the Lacandon people of Mexico still make “god-pots” out of clay for burning pine-pitch incense for the appeasement of spirits. The Lacandon men travel on pilgrimages to Mayan ruins deep into the jungles of Mexico to worship their ancestral gods (*God in the Corners*, p.56). Many professing Christians in Africa are still in bondage to the belief that ancestral spirits are present in their homes and villages, spirits that can bring good or harm to them depending on their willingness to appease them with sacrifices. However, the Bible teaches that after death, the human spirit is either in heaven or hell, incapable of “crossing over” from death to the living. Moreover the spirits of unbelievers are in “torment” and “agony”, they are not tormenting others (Luke 16: 19-31).

We should not expect the heathen to act any other way since all men are made in the image of God and have a “God-vacuum” in their hearts which seeks satisfaction. Thus, Paul feels justified in moving back and forth from his reference to Jews under the ritual requirements of the Law and the Gentiles under the ritualistic practices of heathen religions. Verses 1-4 appear more applicable to the Jewish Christians in Galatia while vv. 8-9 is an appeal to Gentile Christians who had been converted out of paganism: “However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves **to those which by nature are no gods**. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?” (cf. Brown, p. 88)

Even the ritualistic requirements of the Mosaic Law were “elemental” and external compared to the more spiritual service and worship of the New Covenant. Israel was blessed far more than the pagan nations for having detailed instructions in the worship of God compared to the Gentiles who were groping in darkness (Acts 17: 27), but even their more knowledgeable situation was not something the Galatian Jews should favor more than Christian liberty.

2. Being in Christ is the state of liberty and adoption as sons (vv. 4-11)

While the pagans were groping in darkness with improvised (made-up) religion and the Jews were fulfilling their religious duties with the Mosaic regulations, at the right time God sent His Son. The phrase, “But when the fullness of the time came” is rich in meaning. The fullness of the time refers to the completion of time between the promise of the Messiah by the OT prophets (including Moses in Genesis 3: 15) and His first coming. His first coming includes his birth, his life, his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. All of these events in the life of Christ (a

period of 33 years or so) are considered as one period of time by the prophets, a single unit of time—the fulfillment of all the prophets had spoken. Sometimes his second coming is included with the events of his first coming (Isa. 9: 1-7).

Repeatedly in the NT we come upon this word “fulfilled” or “fulfill” and it usually has reference to some prediction of God’s promises in the OT. For example when the risen Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, He came into their midst and said, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms are synonymous for the complete OT Scriptures. Often in the Gospels and Acts we find the following phrase or something similar, “Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled” or “For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled”. Christ was the fulfillment of all prophecy; He was the fulfillment of all the promises of God in the OT. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 we read, “For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him [Christ] they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

The question often comes up: Why did God take so long? Why did he not send Christ sooner? We can’t answer this question. We can point out the superior conditions produced by the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) when most of the world was under the authority of the Roman Empire. This produced a situation of world peace which eliminated much of the fighting between tribes and nations throughout the world. With Roman domination, those with Roman citizenship could travel more freely and expect a certain degree of protection under Roman law (Acts 21: 39; 22: 28). We could also point to the superiority of Roman roads which allowed Paul easier access to remote parts of the world. But all this begs the question: Why didn’t God bring the Pax Romana sooner? We simply do not know why Christ did not come sooner, but we trust the apostle Paul who said, “For while we were still helpless, at the *right* time Christ died for the ungodly.” This is the same as saying, “But when the fullness of the time came [*that is, when everything was ready from God’s perspective*], God sent forth His Son....”

“Born of a woman, born under the Law” describes the very human condition of our Savior. He was real flesh and blood so that he could assume the frailties of the human predicament: hunger, thirst, sickness, sorrow, fatigue, discouragement, the temptation of sin without the experience of sin, the consequences of sin—death. Only a human Christ could have completely entered into the human situation, and only a human Christ could heal the human situation. An ancient theologian once said, “That which is not assumed is not healed.” If Christ had not assumed human flesh, then human beings would not have been healed of sin and death. God without human flesh cannot look upon sin, cannot be tempted, and cannot in any way be touched by sin. He can only judge sin.

Jesus was also born “under the Law” that is, under its requirements and under its curse for non-compliance. This is an astounding truth, for the very Christ who with the Father and the Spirit gave the Law at Sinai is now found to be subject to the conditions of the Law.

Galatians 4: 5-7

The purpose of Christ being born of a woman and born under the law is stated in v. 5 and is two-fold. First, it was “in order that” (*hina*) he might redeem those who were under the Law. The

word redeem (*exagorazo*) is the same word used in 3: 13 and carries with it the idea of buying back or ransoming (See the explanation above). Why did Christ have to buy us back or ransom us? The answer lies in Ezek. 18: 4, “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.” All souls belong to God who gave them life. We forfeit our lives through sin because the wages of sin is death. The only proper substitute for human life is the life of another human, and Christ is the ransom price which God accepts in exchange for our lives. But how can the life of only one human be sufficient for the ransom price of all believers? Only because Christ is no ordinary human, but a fully human being who is also God. Through his death we have been ransomed (bought back) from death.

The second reason for Christ being born of a woman and born under the Law is “that (in order that) we might receive the adoption as sons.” In our status and experience as believers, adoption elevates us from the position of slaves to the position of sons, and because we are sons, our way of relating to the master of the house is different from that of a slave. If a slave is adopted as a son, the master is no longer *just* his master, but his father. A slave ordinarily obeys out of fear in merely external fashion to satisfy the bare minimum of the master’s requirements to avoid punishment, but a son learns to obey out of love. To a large degree, the OT saints lived in the Father’s house with the servile disposition of slaves. Their sins had not yet received the full atonement for sin provided in the sacrifice of Christ, and the Spirit had not yet been given in full measure as He was at Pentecost. This, as well as many other factors worked against the development of the filial spirit of sons (See below under “The Fatherhood of God in the OT”). In Christ we have been brought near to God to experience the love of God for his children. Our sin no longer keeps us at arm’s length, so to speak, and we may relate to him with a greater degree of confidence knowing that his love is unchanging toward us.

Furthermore, we are heirs of God destined to receive the full measure of the Father’s inheritance. This includes eternal life, perfect fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with fellow believers. It also includes the new heaven and earth: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” We shall also inherit new glorified bodies with which to enjoy this new earth (1 Cor. 15: 35-44).

Adoption is one of the most important aspects of the believer’s salvation which primarily concerns his status as a son of the living God with the accompanying privileges of sonship. Having such fundamental importance, it deserves considerable attention here. (I will be relying heavily upon J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*).

The Biblical Doctrine of Adoption

1. Adoption is the Pattern of God’s Relationship to His New Covenant People

In adoption, the believer is accepted into the family of God and is made an heir to the inheritance which the Father bestows upon him. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave he right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1: 12). “Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4: 7). Both verses imply a legal authority which is given to us by the Father to be called His children. The implication (that which is implied) is staggering to the imagination, and we can scarcely understand how great is the inheritance which the Father has given to us. The magnitude of our calling as children prompted Paul to pray that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that

you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1: 18). The doctrine of adoption prompted John to exclaim, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are” (1 Jn. 3: 1). J. I. Packer, an Anglican scholar, maintains that adoption is the “highest privilege that the gospel offers,” (*Knowing God*, p.186), and he would not be alone in this assessment.

In the Old Covenant, God was known by the name of Yahweh, the name for God which signified His covenant faithfulness to Israel. Even today, Jewish rabbis will not use or write the name *Yahweh* for fear of profaning the name inadvertently (accidentally). But the new name for God is *Father*. This is the name Jesus told His disciples to use when they asked Him how to pray (Luke 11: 1-4). The name of God is still to be revered and respected (“Hallowed be thy name”). As the Father of the New Covenant people, He is no less a consuming fire than he was in the Old Covenant (Hebrews 12: 29; God *is* a consuming fire, not *was* a consuming fire). Nevertheless, there are differences between the administration of the OC (Old Covenant) and the NC (New Covenant). If this were not so, it would not be called “new”. Particularly, the NC affords the Christian a different way of relating to God within the context of the completed atonement of Christ and the satisfaction of the wrath of God against sin.

Recall the events in Ex. 19: 10-25 when the OC law (the covenant document) was given to the nation of Israel shortly after the exodus from Egypt. There was thunder and lightning; Mt. Sinai was covered in smoke and shaking violently. The people also shook for fear of this holy God who could not be approached. They were even warned not to come near the mountain for fear of accidentally touching it and incurring the wrath of God (v. 21). If even a dumb animal touched it, God would kill it. Probably on that day young mothers fearfully hung on tight to their small children who might wander off and go too near. Even young children would not be exempt from a sure and sudden death if they came too close to this awesome and holy God (19: 12-13).

The terror of Sinai in Exodus 19-20 is contrasted with the circumstances of the NC (Heb. 12: 18-24). Notice in v. 18 that Christians “have **not** come” to the situation which prevailed at the giving of the Law. Notice also the strong adversative “but” (*alla*) in v. 22. “**But** you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels...” The Christians addressed in Hebrews are also encouraged to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (4: 16; see also 10: 19-22). This confidence and encouragement to draw near is far removed from the warnings in Exodus to stay away from the mountain where God was giving the Law.

As Packer has noted in *Knowing God*, “The whole spirit of Old Testament religion was determined by the thought of God’s holiness....Again and again it was stressed that man must keep his place, and his distance, in the presence of a holy God. This emphasis overshadowed everything else” (p. 183). The holiness of God explains many of the laws requiring ritual cleansing (Lev. 11: 32; 12: 2-8; 13: 1-6); careful observance of food laws (Ex. 22: 31; Lev. 11); even separation of different kinds of seed and cloth (Lev. 19: 9). Such laws were designed to provide tangible instruction to Israel about “holiness”, a word whose base meaning is *separateness*, a separation from all forms of evil. God’s people are still instructed in the holiness of God, but now the instruction is not as mechanical and restricted to precise rules and regulations, but is more general and adapted to the many kinds of situations facing Christians

living in a very different world from that of the OT theocracy. Instead of a theocracy, Christians are now living within the context of the family of God, a theme which shows up again and again in the Sermon on the Mount. This holy family is living in the world but it is not to live like the world (1 Jn. 2: 15; 1 Tim. 3: 15).

Packer insists that adoption, properly understood, governs our lives as Christians in a number of ways (*Knowing God*, pp.190-193).

2. Adoption Governs the Life of the Adopted Believer

a. Adoption governs our conduct.

The kind of conduct emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount is the kind which is encouraged by parents for their children, particularly as they get older. When children are small and immature, they must be given specific rules which govern specific forms of behavior. “Don’t talk back to mommy and daddy.” “Don’t cross the street until we tell you.” “Eat your beans, or you don’t get any pineapple.” They need such rules when they are small because they have not yet learned to apply **general principles of conduct to specific situations**. This ability will come after many years of observing mama and papa and listening to their instruction. As they grow older, they will be given more freedom to make their own decisions and to make their own applications of Biblical principles. This is as it should be, and any parent will be disappointed if his children do not learn to cope with life’s problems and moral decisions independently as mature adults. It is just part of growing up. Three main principles of conduct emerge in the Sermon on the Mount (Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 191-192).

(1) Imitating the Father

Christians are to love their enemies as imitators of their Father in heaven who makes the sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5: 43-45). We are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48), indicating that holiness of life is still necessary, but spelled out in terms resembling the modeling familiar to family life. Children in a family learn more truth from the father’s example than from a list of rules. Our Father has given us adequate example of His character, not only from the history of the OT, but from the example of Christ in the Gospel accounts, who was the fullness of the Father.

(2) Glorifying the Father

Our good works are specifically for the purpose of glorifying our Father and bringing honor to His name (Matt. 5: 16). Godly conduct on the part of children is a credit to fathers and misconduct is a discredit. Children who truly love their father are grieved when their misconduct tarnishes his reputation in the community.

(3) Pleasing the Father

Children in God’s family must be focused on pleasing the Father rather than pleasing men (Matt. 6: 1-18). Here, Jesus goes beyond the outward performance of deeds characteristic of the Law and highlights the importance of motives. Why are we doing good deeds—to build our own reputation with men? If so, our earthly reputation will be the full extent of our reward. If what

we do is to please the Father, our reward awaits us in heaven, for nothing we do to please our Father will go unnoticed (Matt. 19: 29; Heb. 6: 10).

Progress in sanctification is impossible under the slavish fear of God which is the opposite of the “Spirit of adoption” given to the Christian (Rom. 8: 15). The Spirit is given to us to assure us that we are the children of God, not on the basis or ground of our performance, but on the basis of our status as sons. Good or bad, sons are still sons, and even a good human father will not disinherit his sons for their flaws. But this assurance and liberty is not a license for sin: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (Rom. 8: 14; also Gal. 5: 13). Rather, the assurance of our status will encourage us to seek the Father’s face and be restored to favor whenever we sin (as in the parable of the prodigal son—Lk. 15). Lack of assurance of status will leave the Christian always in doubt of the Father’s love whenever he falls and will leave him in doubt of whether repentance is truly enough.

Obedience to the law for a son is different from a slave’s obedience to the law. A slave in the household may obey his master out of fear of punishment, but a son, secure in the love of his father, obeys primarily out of love. This doesn’t imply that a son has no reverential fear of his father; he certainly does and should. But his position as a son produces in him reverence for the law as the rule of his father’s family. As such, these rules are not in place for the purpose of punishment, but blessing and guidance.

b. Adoption governs our prayer life.

We are taught to pray, “Our Father.” The word for “father” which Jesus used is the familiar term for father which was characteristically used by small children and can be translated by our English word, “Daddy.” There is nothing formal (proper according to custom) about the word since Jesus was teaching His disciples to approach the Father in prayer not by formal appointment only, according to a predetermined time, but at all times as small children who generally don’t behave according to formality, but spontaneously (impulsively). With the heavenly Father, we need no appointments to enter his presence. It should be our impulse to spontaneously seek his help for all of our needs (Matt. 7: 7-12).

Our spontaneity (impulse) can best be illustrated with a story of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most remembered presidents of the United States. As president of the United States, Lincoln entertained important leaders and dignitaries from all over the world. During these meetings no one was allowed to disturb the president or interrupt the meeting unless it was an urgent necessity—no one, that is, except his small son. On one occasion (maybe more) he walked boldly into a meeting of world leaders, crawled up into Lincoln’s lap and said, “Daddy, would you please tie my shoes?” President Lincoln calmly but unapologetically excused himself for a couple of minutes and tied his son’s shoes. This familiarity with his father is the kind of familiarity we should have with God or should be cultivating with God. He who holds the stars in the heavens and rules over the affairs of men is never too busy to “tie our shoes”, to hear every request and plea, however great or small. After all, He is our Daddy.

He is also a Father who already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt. 6: 32), so we don’t have to bend His ear or manipulate Him to do what He would not otherwise do. At the same time, He likes to be asked for what we need, even repeatedly, in order to show us that we need *Him* more than anything else we are asking for (Matt. 7: 7-12). And He will always

respond, not necessarily to our every whim (want) but to every need. He is a good Father who knows that many of the things we ask for are “stones” and “snakes” instead of “bread” and “fish” (7: 9-10). He gives us what we *should* have asked for rather than what we *actually* asked for. The Apostle Paul asked for his thorn in the flesh to be removed. His ultimate desire was to be a productive servant of Jesus Christ, and this is precisely the prayer request that God answered (Packer, p.192). The Lord Jesus said to His Father, “I knew that You hear Me always” (Jn. 11: 42). This being true of Christ, it is also true of His adopted children. There is no such thing as unanswered prayer for the child of God; there is only the problem of interpreting the answers. No matter what, God always gives us what we need and often, more than we need.

c. Adoption governs the life of faith.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us not to be anxious about our lives (Matt. 6: 25-34). We should trust Him for every material need, which means that material needs should not dominate our thoughts. Rather, our thought life is to be dominated (controlled) by the earnest desire to see His kingdom and righteousness manifested in our personal lives and the personal lives of everyone else. This is what we should be seeking for, and if this is our priority, everything else will fall into place. This does not mean that we will no longer have to work, but it means that God will make Himself personally responsible for the things we truly need. A good father takes upon himself the responsibility of taking care of his children. It is not their worry to put food on the table, but to do the father’s will by obeying his commands. One of our Father’s commands is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them also to obey His commandments as we do (Matt. 28: 19-20). If we whole-heartedly obey this command, we will lack nothing we need until that day when our work on earth is done.

It is difficult to estimate how far behind we are in making disciples of all nations simply because of this anxious care for food, clothing, and shelter. For wealthy nations, it is not just a desire for basic necessities, but for total economic security. Often, American Christians do not wish to leave anything to faith, preferring to walk by sight, a reversal of the Pauline principle of 2 Cor. 5: 7. Today in the US, the prayer of many Christians has ceased to be “Give us this day our daily bread” but has become, “Give us this day our retirement income by which we can live the last twenty years of our lives in unproductive idleness.” It is ironic that people will work forty years in the expectation of living half that amount of time doing nothing in particular. In order to purchase this last twenty years of retirement, even Christians will refrain from a God-oriented, sacrificial life-style. They will store up for themselves treasures on earth (Matt. 6: 19) and forfeit the treasures in heaven stored up for those who give sacrificially to the needy and to the cause of missions world-wide. They are acting like the rich fool in Luke 12: 16-21 who prepares assiduously (with diligent attention) for retirement (v. 19), but is not rich toward God (v. 21).

If God takes care of birds (Matt. 6: 19), He will also take care of us. He is not the Father of birds, but of His people who are called His children. These words of assurance in Matthew (See also Luke 12: 22-34) are meant for people who either are or surely will be tempted in times of insecurity to wonder whether God is still paying attention to their needs. No one is immune to such pressing concerns, even those whose sacrifice essentially makes the “good life” of security and prosperity impossible (See Packer, p. 193). Peter once asked, “Behold, we have left everything and followed you; what then will there be for us?” (Matt. 19: 27). Jesus gently assured Peter that his future reward was well-worth his sacrifice (19: 28-30). There is no need for the Christian to imitate the behavior of the unbeliever who grabs for whatever he can get out

of this life, believing this life is all there is. The Father has gladly given us the kingdom (Lk. 12: 32), and this gives us the spiritual and psychological freedom to keep a loose grasp on this world and the material things of this world (“Love not the world”—1 Jn 2: 15). There is simply nothing here to compare with the glory which will one day be revealed to us (Rom. 8: 18).

d. Adoption assures us of our salvation and the love of the Father

In addition to the three areas above (*Knowing God*), adoption is the assurance to us that we are truly God’s children. In this sense, adoption is not merely an intellectual or cognitive truth, but a felt truth which warms our hearts and elicits (calls forth) an emotional response. This truth is more clearly set forth by Paul in Rom. 8: 15 than in Gal. 4 in which the “spirit of slavery” is set in contrast to the “spirit of adoption”. Scholars have been divided in the interpretation of “spirit” in this verse. Some, like Luther, have been inclined to interpret “spirit” in both places in the verse as “disposition” or “frame of mind”. Thus, the idea presented is that the spirit of adoption is the “disposition which flows from adoption or sonship” whereby the “spirit of slavery” is the disposition of fear which flows from the state of slavery. The problem with this interpretation becomes obvious when Rom. 8: 15 is compared with Gal. 4: 6 in which the “spirit” sent forth into our hearts is “the Spirit of His Son” who is clearly the Holy Spirit (Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 266).

Eagerness to interpret “spirit of slavery” as a “disposition to slavery” arises from the hesitancy of theologians to refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of fear and slavery. It is simple enough to associate his work with adoption and freedom, but how can we connect the inward work of the Spirit to fear? At the same time, how can we be consistent in our exegesis if we interpret “spirit” in two different ways in the same verse? John Murray addresses this problem.

“It would seem arbitrary to take “Spirit” in the one case as a proper name and not in the other. The Holy Spirit, however, cannot be called “the Spirit of bondage” for as noted above, where he is, *there* is liberty [2 Cor. 3: 17]. The solution resides in the consideration that the proposition respecting the “Spirit of bondage” is negative and there is no reason why we should not interpret the thought to be, “Ye did not receive the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of bondage but as the Spirit of adoption” (*Romans*, pp. 296-297).

Martin Lloyd-Jones also interprets “spirit” in both places as the Holy Spirit. (For a thorough explanation of his position, see D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, Vol. 8, pp. 196-205). The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of adoption for believers, but is also the Spirit of bondage and fear for unbelievers. He presents the following reasons for this interpretation which I have summarized.

- (1) First, the interpretation is better suited to the context of Rom. 8. From the very beginning of the chapter Paul has been talking about the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned 12 times in the 14 verses leading up to v. 15 and immediately after in v. 16.
- (2) Second, Paul would not change the meaning of the word without some indication that he was doing so.
- (3) Third, the operations of the Holy Spirit upon the unconverted are totally consonant with (in harmony with) the disposition of fear and slavery mentioned in v. 15. The Holy Spirit is one who convicts the sinner of sin and guilt, and it is quite impossible that the sinner will feel the imprisonment of the law and its condemning power apart from the operations of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that his convicting and condemning work will necessarily result in repentance and faith, but simply that apart from his work the law would have no effect.

Therefore, we may apply Lloyd-Jones' interpretation to our understanding of Gal. 3: 22-24 in which the Law of Moses (or the universal law of God) shuts up all men, Jew and Gentile, under sin and places them in custody to await the revelation of faith. The Law is a disciplinarian to lead us to Christ, but how does the Law do this but by the powerful operations of the Spirit, for the Word of God without the Spirit of God is a dead letter? (1 Cor. 2: 14). In Rom. 7: 9, Paul admits that he was once alive apart from a correct understanding of the Law, but when that understanding came, he died. He was thoroughly conversant with the Law intellectually, but spiritually he did not understand it until the Holy Spirit fully explained it. He had no reason to fear and was thoroughly satisfied with his performance of the Law (Phil. 3: 6) until the Spirit put that fear within him (See Rom. 3: 18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes.")

(4) Fourth, the parallel structure of the verse suggests that the Holy Spirit is the spirit who is "received" both times. The Spirit is not received "again" as the Spirit of fear which implies that he *was* received once in this manner. He is received first as the Spirit who produces bondage and fear through the instrumentality of the Law. The second time he is received as the Spirit of adoption, no longer to be received as the Spirit of slavery to fear. (I realize the structure only suggests this interpretation but does not conclusively prove it).

The main objection to this interpretation is found in 2 Cor. 3: 17 in which the Holy Spirit is described as the spirit of liberty. How can the Spirit be both the Spirit of bondage *and* the Spirit of liberty? But the objection is removed by asking the question: Is the Holy Spirit the spirit of bondage and the spirit of liberty at the *same* time and with respect to the *same* person? And the answer is: no. With respect to *two different individuals*, he may at the *same* time be the spirit of bondage to *one* and the spirit of liberty to the *other*. To the unbeliever he is the Spirit of bondage; to the believer he is the Spirit of liberty. At *two different times* He may be to the same person the Spirit of bondage *before* conversion and the Spirit of liberty *after* conversion. One and the same Spirit can bring the terrors of the Law and later the bold assurance of salvation to the same person. This bold assurance is the subject of Rom. 8: 16.

Notice that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit—that is, our human spirit. The content of this witness is that we are the children of God. In Romans 8: 15 Christians bear witness to God's Spirit by crying out "Abba, Father!", but in v. 16 the Spirit himself is the one who bears witness to us. There is no indication here that any audible expression takes place to the effect that we hear God's voice in a literal sense. Nevertheless, the assurance of our status as children is just as certain as if we had heard the Spirit speak to us audibly. As Lloyd-Jones has indicated, this is not the propositional assurance of salvation we receive as those who are being "led by the Spirit" or living exemplary lives of obedience (8: 14). Nor is it the assurance of the Spirit that comes to those who have felt the bondage of the law and are now experiencing the liberty of the Spirit. It is an assurance that may come as we are reminded of a passage of Scripture or it may come without a specific passage of Scripture, but it is not the same as a logical deduction from Scripture. For example, we could be doubting our salvation, and we begin to preach the gospel to ourselves saying, "The Bible says to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. I have done that; therefore, I am saved." Such reasoning is proper in itself, but such deduction from Scripture is not what Paul is talking about in this verse. It may start at a more subconscious level and move up into our consciousness, but it does not start as a deduction from Scripture (See Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, Vol. 8, pp. 291-308).

Possibly the closest parallel in the Bible to the witness of the Spirit to us is found in Rom. 5: 5, "...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The "love of God" mentioned in this verse is not **our love for God** but **his love for us**, and this love, Paul says, is poured out (*ekxeo*). According to its usage elsewhere, the verb gives evidence of a profusion (pouring forth with great lavishness and abundance) of the love of God within our hearts. In Matt. 26: 28, the blood of the new covenant is "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". In Acts 10: 45, the Spirit is "poured out" upon the Gentiles, and is "poured out richly" upon all Christians (Titus 3: 6). The word is also used to express the "pouring out" of God's wrath upon all unbelievers (Rev. 16: 2-4). A form of the verb is also used in Matt. 26: 7 when a woman took expensive perfume and poured it upon Jesus' head. The lavishness of the expense caused the disciples to ask, "Why this waste?" All of these uses of the verb indicate the extravagant abundance with which the love of God for us is poured out in our hearts by the Spirit, so much so, that we are overwhelmed with the love of God for us and cry out, "Abba, Father!"

The experiential awareness of this love of God may very well be the witness of the Spirit to us in Romans 8: 16. Again, it is not a logical deduction from a verse of Scripture such as "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." God loved the world, and, therefore, he loves me. It is not logical deduction, but the personal experience of the love of God and the Spirit of God that Paul is talking about. It is difficult to explain, but every child of God has experienced the Spirit's witness and the love of God in different ways and in differing degrees. We might expect this confirmation to come more often in moments of quiet meditation and prayer, and this should not be uncommon in our prayer life. Communing with God in prayer should be a normal means of experiencing the assurance of the Spirit that we belong to Him. But the experience of adoption may also come to us in moments of disobedience. Indeed, a deep awareness of sin is the fruit of the Spirit's work in our lives, and we may at times come to the most intense confirmation of our adoption as sons when the Spirit speaks to us in that inaudible but unmistakable voice, "You should not be acting this way; you are an adopted son of God." A son who has just grievously disobeyed his earthly father is at that point in time the most potentially receptive to this assurance. Without approving of his sin, the father takes him aside and assures him of his love for him, not because he is flawless, but just because he is his son. Awareness of our identity with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection is one of the strongest hindrances to sin (Rom. 6); awareness of our identity as sons of God is yet another of these benevolent hindrances.

3. God is the Father of Believers Only

Liberal theology has promoted the idea of the fatherhood of God for all men irrespective of faith in Jesus Christ. It must be admitted that Acts 17: 28-29 lends itself to this idea, but upon further examination, the passage cannot bear the weight of this interpretation. It is true that all of mankind is the offspring of God in the creative sense of the word. Believer and unbeliever alike are created in the image of God and bear the stamp of His likeness. However, being in the image of God is not the same as being in the right relationship to God as a son. Adoption has reference to this relationship in which we are no longer aliens, but children who have rightful claim to His love and protection. This can hardly be said of those who are alienated from God and are children of wrath, not of God (Eph. 2: 3).

In Matt. 5: 45-48, although God is shown to be good to all men, He is called the Father only of the disciples. Notice the words “your Father” in v. 45. In Ephesians 3: 15, the family has reference not to all men, but to the family of God. The same can be said of Eph. 4: 6 which is spoken within the context of the body of Christ. Malachi 2: 10, as Acts 17: 28-29, makes a reference to the fatherhood of God on the basis of creation, but further examination of this text shows the covenantal context of this statement, “Why do we deal treacherously each against his *brother* so as to profane the *covenant* of our fathers?”

In His controversy with the Pharisees, Jesus once and for all denied the existence of the fatherhood of God for all men without exception (Jn. 8: 39-44). The Pharisees were imitating the deeds of their father, the devil, by opposing Jesus on every occasion and seeking to kill Him. If God had been their father, they would love Jesus because He is the only begotten Son of the Father. By their deeds they proved their true filiation (the state of being a son or daughter) with the father of lies, the devil. It goes without saying that one cannot have satan as his father and God as his father at one and the same time.

4. The Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament

There are clear statements in Scripture which establish the fact of Israel’s adoption (Ex. 4: 22-23; Dt. 14: 1-2; 32: 5-6; Is. 1: 2; 43: 6; 63: 16; Hosea 11: 1; Mal. 1: 6; 2: 10; and most specifically, Rom. 9: 4. Quoted in Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 225).

It may be pointed out that God was the Father of Israel and yet not all of the Israelites were saved. How can we take comfort in our adoption if most of the Israelites were judged for their unbelief (1 Cor. 10: 1-5; Heb. 3: 12-4: 1-3)? If God will cast off His adopted people in the OT, it would seem logical that He could do the same in the NT.

This is not a simple issue, and to resolve it, we must establish a fundamental difference in the adoption of Israel as a nation and the adoption of individuals subsequent to (after) their justification. Remember Rom. 5: 1 which says, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This peace with God is the fruit of adoption by which we have received the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) of adoption by which we cry out, “Abba, Father.” It comes after justification which is a once and for all act whereby God declares us not guilty and righteous in His sight. Justification is not reversible which means God can never declare someone righteous at some point but then declare him to be unrighteous later on the basis of personal failure. If this were true, then justification is not by faith in Christ, but by works, something Paul in *Galatians* has labored to expose as a false gospel. Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. Adoption is also a once and for all act of God and irreversible. God does not declare us to be his sons and then declare us *not* to be his sons on the basis of bad behavior. If this were true, He would be less generous than a human father who adopts a child only later to cast him out of the house. God is not less gracious than a human father, but far more gracious.

But the fact remains that Israel was rejected by God for their unbelief and cut from the olive tree of God’s salvation (Rom. 11: 15, 20). This same passage, Rom. 11, warns the Gentiles in the Church of Rome that the same thing will happen to them if they do not continue in belief. They should not boast in the fact that they as Gentiles were grafted as unnatural branches into the olive tree while the natural branches (Israel) were cut off (vv. 20-22). They too will be cut off for

unbelief, the same warning we find in 1 Cor. 10 which warns the Corinthians not to imitate the unbelief of Israel.

It would appear from the above passages that our adoption in the NC is equally as tentative (provisional or uncertain) as the adoption of Israel in the OC, but this is not the case as we shall see. Murray makes a distinction between the “theocratic fatherhood” (God as father of the nation of Israel) in the OC and the “adoptive fatherhood” of God in the NC (whereby God adopts each believer into intimate relationship with Himself). His own remarks are helpful in marking out this distinction.

This must be distinguished from [theocratic fatherhood], not because it is principally different but because it is the full-fledged sonship in distinction from the nonage [immature] sonship in the Old Testament period. The distinction is clearly drawn by Paul in Galatians 3: 23-4: 6. The difference is in line with the difference in general between the Old Testament and the New; the Old is preparatory [preparing for something else], the New is consummatory [at the point of completion]. The Old is prepadeutic [preparatory teaching], the New is gradulatory [that which pertains to a graduation ceremony]. The children of God in the Old Testament were as children under age. The grace of the New Testament appears in this that by redemption accomplished and by faith in him all without exception are introduced into the full blessing of sonship without the necessity of undergoing a period of tutelary preparation [preparation by a tutor] corresponding to the tutelary discipline of the Old Testament period. That is to say, New Testament believers from among the Gentiles do not have to undergo in the realm of their individual development a preliminary period which corresponds to the Old Testament period in the broad sphere of progressive revelation and realization. There is not recapitulation [doing something over again] in the individual sphere of what obtained in the realm of dispensational progression (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p.225-226).

Believers in the NC do not go back under the preparatory period of the OC. By virtue of the finished work of Christ, in which the promises of the OC are completed, NC believers are ushered into a new sphere or age of revelation in Christ. We are no longer under the administration of the Law, an administration limited to the Israelites before the coming of Christ and to all unbelievers. We are under a new administration or tutelage which Paul describes in Galatians 5 as the tutelage (teaching) of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5: 16-26). It is precisely this tutelage of the Spirit which confirms our adoption and the permanent benefits of adoption since the Spirit is given to us as a pledge of our future inheritance (Eph. 1: 13-14). When Paul says in Gal. 3: 26 that we “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”, he is distinguishing the sonship of NC believers with the sonship of OC Israelites who may or may not have been true believers. OC sonship was only a type of NC sonship, even as Israel was a type of the Church. As always, the antitype (NC sonship) exceeds the type (the sonship of Israel) in splendor and glory. Whereas the sonship of Israel is likened to slavery, the sonship of the New Covenant is likened to an heir coming of age and taking ownership of his father’s property (Gal. 4: 1-7). As John Calvin indicates, even the best of OT saints did not enjoy the freedom and joy of saints living “under” the economy of grace.

To sum up: the Old Testament [meaning the old covenant] struck consciences with fear and trembling, but by the benefit of the New they are released into joy. The Old held consciences bound by the yoke of bondage; the New by its spirit of liberality emancipates them into freedom.

But suppose that our opponents object that, among the Israelites, the holy patriarchs were an exception: since they were obviously endowed with the same Spirit of faith as we, it follows that they shared the same freedom and joy. To this we reply: *neither of these arose from the law*. But when

through the law the patriarchs felt themselves both oppressed by their enslaved condition, and wearied by anxiety of conscience, they fled for refuge to the gospel. It was therefore a particular fruit of the New Testament [New Covenant] that, apart from the common law of the Old Testament they were exempted from those evils. Further, we shall deny that they were so endowed with the spirit of freedom and assurance as not in some degree to experience the fear and bondage arising from the law. For, however much they enjoyed the privilege that they had received through the grace of the gospel, they were still subject to the same bonds and burdens of ceremonial observances as the common people. They were compelled to observe those ceremonies punctiliously [very careful about every detail], symbols of a tutelage [education] resembling bondage (cf. Gal.4:2-3); and the written bonds (cf. Col.2:14), whereby they confessed themselves guilty of sin, did not free them from obligation. *Hence, they are rightly said, in contrast to us, to have been under the testament of bondage and fear, when we consider that common dispensation by which the Lord at that time dealt with the Israelites* (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter XI, Section 9, emphasis added).

We must also recognize the difference between **national** adoption and **individual** adoption. Israel was adopted as a nation, but not every Israelite was individually adopted (Rom. 2: 28-29; 9: 6-8). Notice in Rom. 9: 8 that the fleshly descendants of Israel were not the children of God, but only the children of promise were true children, that is, those who believed in the promise, as Paul clearly shows in Gal. 3: 29, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

What then, are we to make of the passages in Romans 11 and 1 Corinthians 10 warning us of the consequences of unbelief? We must not interpret these passages as meaning that our adoption can be rescinded (abolished). They are merely warnings to us to make sure that we truly are the adopted children of God and to not falsely presume we are adopted (Jn 8: 39-44). If we are truly adopted children, we will believe in Christ, and we will desire to do the deeds of our Father, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not believe the truth or live by that truth, we prove that the Holy Spirit has not come into our hearts producing the filial disposition of a child of God. Rather, our unbelief and persistent disobedience proves that we are sons of our father, the devil.

Galatians 4: 8-11

Paul appears in v. 8 to be referring to the pagan past of some of the Galatians who worshipped things “which by nature were no gods”. Such worship was a form of slavery to external ordinances and rituals (see explanation of v. 3). But now they had come to know God and were known by God and should have realized a better way of relating to him through the internal operations of the Spirit of adoption. The astounding thing to Paul was that some of the Galatians had experienced the Spirit of adoption and yet were ready to return to the slavery of external requirements. Can this happen in a church? Apparently it did, and it can continue to happen when Christians substitute formal religion for spiritual worship. It is easy to get side-tracked on minor issues of formality and miss the weightier issues of the spirit. For example, should the pastor wear robes or can he dress in his normal daily attire? This can become a major problem in the church if we let it, while at the same time the church is neglecting the care of its members spiritually and physically. But is God more concerned about what a pastor wears in the pulpit or whether His children are being nurtured?

One of the manifestations of their concern for externals was the observance of “days, months, seasons, and years” (v. 10)—a pressing concern for pagans and for the Israelites living under the Old Covenant. As the Galatians were returning to these laws, Paul feared that his instruction in

the freedom of the sons of God had been in vain. Was the worship of God invalid if it happened on days which were not established as holy days? This brings up the question of whether Paul included the Sabbath commandment with the “elemental things” of vv. 3 and 9. Space will not permit a thorough investigation of the perpetuity (permanence) of Sabbath keeping for Christians, a subject that would take us far from the primary purpose of our study. However, the question does have important significance for the theme of *Galatians*. Most reformed theologians consider the fourth commandment, “Keep the Sabbath holy”, as a moral law since it is included with the other moral commandments written in tablets of stone. “Stone” implies a degree of permanence which is appropriate for those commandments which would have permanent significance for the people of God in the NC. Such permanence cannot apply to those commandments which relate to food laws, priestly garments, sacrifices, etc. which had only a passing significance until the coming of Christ.

Other conservative scholars maintain that its inclusion within the moral requirements of the Ten Commandments does not prove that it was intended as an ongoing requirement for believers. Other ceremonial requirements were also mixed with moral requirements. An examination of Lev. 19: 18-20 will reveal that the laws against breeding two different kinds of cattle together, sowing a field with two different kinds of seed, and wearing a garment with two different kinds of material are preceded by the law to love your neighbor as yourself and followed by the law against pre-marital sex with a slave girl. This mixture of moral and ceremonial did not perplex the Jewish mind since the Law was a seamless garment woven together with the same fabric of God’s holiness. The mixture is only perplexing to us in the NC as we attempt to discern what laws are applicable to us.

Without going into much detail, consider the fact that Sabbath keeping is given little attention in the NT scriptures, even in the gospel accounts. Breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death (Ex. 31: 15) and was part of the reason for their exile (2 Chron. 36: 20-21). Yet, it is not even mentioned in the catalog of sins mentioned in his epistles (Gal. 5: 19-21; Col. 3: 5; 1 Cor. 6: 9-10). When he does mention special days or a Sabbath, we have very good reason to believe that it was a ceremonial requirement ending with the coming of Christ who is the perfect antitype of the Sabbath (cf. Rom. 14: 5; Col. 2: 16-17; Gal. 4: 9-10; Heb. 4: 1-11). Commenting on Gal. 4: 10, Calvin says,

He [Paul] adduces as an instance one description of “elements,” the observance of days....Of what nature, then, was the observation of which Paul reproves? It was that which would bind the conscience, by religious considerations, as if it were necessary to the worship of God, and which, as he expresses it in the Epistle to the Romans, would make a distinction between one day and another. (Rom. 14: 5.)

When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned a part of divine worship, then days are improperly observed. The Jewish Sabbath, new moons, and other festivals, were earnestly pressed by the false apostles, because they had been appointed by the law. When we, in the present age, make a distinction of days, we do not represent them as necessary, and thus lay a snare for the conscience; **we do not reckon one day to be more holy than another**; we do not make days to be the same thing with religion and the worship of God; but merely tend to the preservation of order and harmony. The observance of days among us is a free service, and void of all superstition (*Galatians* p. 124, emphasis mine).

The “preservation of order and harmony” may be a reference to the necessity of establishing some day, any day, for public worship. Necessity would dictate that we set aside the same day of the week, or at least a well-published day, to prevent confusion. We are commanded to do so in Hebrews 10: 24-25 which is the closest thing to a Sabbath commandment we will find in the NT. “...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” As I said above, sometimes we allow the formality to take priority over the substance—the most important part. The substance of the command for public worship in vv. 24-25 is the importance of stimulating our fellow believers to love and good deeds and encouraging one another, no matter what day it is. Formal obedience requires only that we “show up” on the prescribed day regardless of whether we encourage anyone or engage in any fellowship. We therefore observe the form of the Sabbath but not the substance.

In Romans 14: 1-12 Paul treats the observance of religious days along with the observance of food laws in the OT. Those who were “weak” would not eat certain meats which were not permitted in the old economy of the law or meats which would have been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8). So fearful of eating the wrong meat, such people would refrain from meat altogether and eat only vegetables (v. 2). They believed that such laws were still binding on the conscience. Those who were more knowledgeable in the faith could eat all kinds of food without hurting their own consciences. They knew that an idol was nothing (1Cor. 8) and that the food laws of the OT were no longer binding on their conscience. Paul advises those who had the liberty of conscience to eat whatever they wished not to “regard with contempt” those who refrained from eating certain foods. As another example of the use of Christian liberty, Paul uses the observance of certain religious days, and he warned those who “regarded every day alike” not to regard with contempt the one who “regards one day above another” (v. 5). Keeping certain days and eating certain foods are no longer required, but if a believer wishes to keep certain laws “for the Lord” (v. 6), he is permitted to do so.

What makes the situation in Romans and Corinthians different from that in Galatia? No one in the church in Rome or Corinth was claiming that eating certain foods or keeping certain days was essential for salvation. It was a matter of conscience and Christian liberty. But in Galatia, keeping these laws—including certain days—was being presented as a necessity. Thus Paul “fears” (v. 11) for the Galatians who are looking at these observances as essential to salvation, while he permits such observances in Corinth and Rome and even instructs the “non-observers” not to judge the “observers” with contempt and not to cause them to stumble. This is the same logic Paul uses in the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16: 3) “because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek”. Yet, Paul adamantly refused to have Titus (also a Gentile) circumcised since the issue under debate was not one of Christian liberty but the question of how one can be saved (Gal. 2: 3).

Excursus: Paul’s Personal Plea (4: 12-20)

In literature, an excursus is an interruption or digression from the main subject or thought being discussed. At this point in the epistle, Paul interrupts his defense of the gospel to interject a personal note designed to win the hearts of the Galatians. It is here that Paul changes course from the theologian to the pastor, for he was their pastor in every sense of the word.

Verse 12 is a complex statement with a simple meaning. Even as Paul continues to have a fond affection toward the Galatians, he pleads with them to share the same feelings about him. “Be as I am” that is, “have the same affection toward me as I do of you” (Brown, p. 90).

Previously, they had entertained such kind regard toward Paul even when he came to them with a bodily affliction which was somewhat disgusting to the sight and one which apparently affected his eyes (vv. 14-15). They had received him as an angel of God or Christ himself which was entirely proper since Paul was giving them what he had received from Christ directly, the gospel of Christ. But all that had changed because of the influence of false teachers who had turned them against Paul. Because of his teaching, they now apparently considered Paul an enemy.

It is sad but true that Christians who may at first receive their pastor with open arms and hearts may one day turn their backs on him. And they do this not for some flaw in his character, which may be exemplary, but because of personal exhortations in private to some members who are caught in sin or because of public exhortations to the whole church from the pulpit. As we have seen, Paul is not one to mince words or “beat around the bush” when the spiritual welfare of others is at stake. Popularity was not his first concern, but the glory of Christ, and his bond-service was not to men, but to Christ alone (1: 10). Had he shunned his responsibility to correct the Galatians out of his desire for peace and popularity, he would have forfeited his privileges as Christ’s slave and become the slave of men. He would not withhold necessary instruction to maintain the good favor of men however much he wished to enjoy that favor. It is clear from his appeal in this section that Paul had no desire to be the “bad guy” who was always rubbing people the wrong way, and he understood human nature well enough to know that if people disliked him that his ministry would prove to be less effective. But out of conscience and his primary desire to please Christ, he was willing to set aside his desire for the favor of his beloved children (4: 19).

Here is a lesson for all of us who are or who desire to be pastors. As much as possible, we should be zealous to be blameless before men, winning not only their minds, but their hearts to God and also to us personally, for these two things do not have to be contradictory (Acts 24: 16). However, when it becomes clear that pleasing Christ excludes the possibility of being in good favor with men, the choice we must always make is to please God first and let His all-wise providence take care of everything else. The extreme difficulty of this exercise in conscience becomes apparent when we recognize our frailty as pastors and our proneness to error not only doctrinally but in practice. The difficulties we face in the church are not always as black and white as they are in *Galatians*, but are shades of gray. To make matters worse, none of us have the doctrinal precision or character of the Apostle Paul. We so easily make mistakes in our judgment of the primary issues, and this recognition of our fallibility often hinders us from being forthright and pointed in our admonitions. On the other hand are those pastors whose constitution and temperament are less timid and who are too hasty and too harsh in their treatment of erring members. Balance is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The most we can hope for is a burning desire to serve Christ and dependence upon the Spirit to discern what path we must take.

The Judaizers were attempting to steal the Galatians away from Paul so that they would become dependent upon them (v. 17). Paul’s hope was that this would change and that the Galatians would seek him even when absent, though not for the purpose of creating dependency but to seek

the truth (v. 18). In other words, Paul had no desire to see the Galatians removed from one kind of bondage to another—from the Law to dependence upon people.

After planting the churches and establishing them in the faith, Paul was now going through labor pains once again for the purpose of establishing Christ in their hearts (v. 19). He wished he could be present with them rather than writing them with such stern language, then perhaps through personal contact he could speak with them in a more gentle voice. But the reason he writes this way is because he is perplexed (confused) about their reversal (v. 20).

E. Defense of the Gospel from the Allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Gal. 4: 21-5: 1)

This is one of the most interesting passages in *Galatians* for the reason that Paul uses an OT passage in an unusual way to illustrate the distinction between the Law and the gospel. The passage has critical implications for the subject of hermeneutics (principles of Biblical interpretation) because it helps us explore the possibility of creative approaches to the meaning of many OT passages. We will not explore those possibilities here, but the reader is referred to my discussion of the allegory in *Hermeneutics (III. Special Literary Methods, C. Allegories)* and to John Frame's *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 198-199. It is sufficient to introduce this portion of *Galatians* by saying that Paul recognizes the historical fact of the story of Sarah and Hagar and uses this story to prove the superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant (the type) and its antitype, the New Covenant.

1. The Old Testament Scripture (the "law") tells the story of freedom and bondage (vv. 21-23).

The Galatians who wish to be under the Law should study their Bibles better; they should listen to what the law says. He is referring here not to the Mosaic legislation but the entire OT, for the story does not come from *Exodus* or *Deuteronomy* but from *Genesis* during the time of Abraham. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was born to Hagar who was Sarah's slave, and Isaac was born to Sarah, Abraham's wife. The social rank of the two was entirely different—Ishmael was born a slave and Isaac was born a free man. This is the first distinction which is important in understanding the argument Paul is making—Ishmael is a slave and Isaac is free.

The second important distinction between Ishmael and Isaac is the nature of their births. Ishmael was born "according to the flesh", and Isaac "through the promise". The words "born according to the flesh" can mean simply that Ishmael was born according to the normal process of human birth (Rom. 1:3; 4:1; 9:3, 5), an interpretation with no negative connotation (suggested meaning). Another possible interpretation is that Ishmael's birth was "according to sinful fleshly behavior" (Rom. 8: 4-5, 12-13; 2 Cor. 11: 18). In other words, Ishmael's birth was the outcome of the fleshly, sinful behavior of Abraham—and Sarah, who suggested the arrangement in the first place (Gen. 16: 2). The point of debate is not whether polygamy was permissible or impermissible in the OT, but that Abraham failed to act upon the promise that Sarah would have a son, and, therefore, did what God never told him to do—take Hagar as a wife. It is never said specifically that Abraham did not believe God's promise of a son to Sarah, but perhaps to pacify Sarah, he did not act upon his belief by yielding to Sarah's plea. In this sense, Ishmael was born according to fleshly behavior.

Considering the context, it is likely that both meanings are intended by Paul to make his point. Unlike Ishmael's birth, Isaac's birth was the fulfillment of God's promise of a son to Sarah when she was well beyond child-bearing age. This required the supernatural intervention of God in the fulfillment of the promise—He had to restore Sarah's womb to make her capable of child-birth. But there was no such supernatural intervention in the case of Ishmael who was born to Hagar, a much younger woman. Thus, Ishmael was born according to the normal course of natural birth, but Isaac according to the supernatural promise of God.

Secondly, God never promised Abraham a son by Hagar; this was something according to his own fleshly arrangement which had nothing to do with God's covenant with him. Isaac, on the other hand, was the one God had chosen to carry on the covenant promise and the covenant seed of Abraham. Thus, Isaac was a child born according to faith in the promise of God while Ishmael's birth had nothing to do with faith, but was purely a fleshly attempt to substitute human effort for faith in God's supernatural promise.

Both ideas are germane (relevant) to Paul's argument in this section. On the one hand, salvation through keeping the Law is not "of faith" (3: 12), but is purely grounded in human effort; on the other hand, salvation by believing God's promise is purely by faith and has nothing to do with human effort. Furthermore, salvation is not by human birth or physical descent, but by supernatural birth wrought by the Holy Spirit. Just as Ishmael was a slave by natural birth, so is everyone on earth (including Jews) a slave by nature (Stott, p. 124). To be set free, we must be born *supernaturally*. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were *born* not of *blood*, nor of the *will of the flesh*, nor of the *will of man*, but of *God*" (Jn. 1: 12-13).

It should be clear that physical birth to Abraham was not the defining factor in the lives of Ishmael and Isaac nor could it be the defining factor in the life of any Jew. The important question was not: Who is your daddy? But: "Who is your mother?"—Hagar (the Law) or Sarah (the promise)? (Stott, p. 126)

2. Sarah and Hagar represent two covenants—the Law and the Gospel—the first producing slaves, the second producing free men (Gal. 4: 24-31).

Galatians 4: 24

Beginning in v. 24, the allegorical interpretation begins to take shape. Sarah and Hagar represent two covenants. Hagar represents the covenant with Moses and the children of Israel promulgated (officially published) at Mount Sinai. And just as Hagar gave birth to a slave, the covenant at Sinai gave birth to slaves. This was not the Law's positive design, for God had the gracious purpose of using the Law to teach Israel the necessity of grace, and for the faithful remnant of Israel it accomplished this purpose. But its practical effect for most of Israel was slavery—a slavish fear of God, and consequently, a slavish, external obedience to his Law ending in disobedience rather than obedience. The Law was a "methodological failure" (Henry Krabbendam, personal conversation) leading men to the grace of the gospel. In other words, God purposely "failed" (humanly speaking since God cannot truly fail at anything he does) to solve the problem of sin by giving man a law which promised life to the doer of the law. But God knew the Law to be an imperfect solution to the problem of man's sin because he knew man could never keep it. He also knew when He gave it that He would replace it later by something

“better”—“But now He [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a **better** covenant, which has been enacted on **better** promises” (Heb. 8: 6).

Logically speaking, if something is perfect, it cannot be replaced by something “better”, only by something worse. You cannot get “better” than perfection; any change in perfection only makes perfection to be imperfection. What am I suggesting? I’m saying that God purposely gave an imperfect covenant at Sinai as the background for highlighting the perfection of the gospel. He highlights the brightness of the gospel by painting the darker background of the Law—the same way he highlights the brightness of stars by the blackness of the night sky. We cannot see stars without darkness, and we cannot see the *hope* of the gospel without the *hopelessness* of keeping the Law—the pedagogical use of the law.

Why does the Law produce slaves? For the simple reason that the Law *demands* obedience but cannot *produce* obedience. Think of the Law of God like any other law. There are certain aerodynamic laws of the universe which dictate (demand) a certain amount of force to lift a man off the ground and make him airborne. Let’s assume I am able to calculate just how much force I would need to lift my 200+ pound “fuselage” of flesh off the ground. I then strap wings (also carefully designed) to my arms which will catch the air. But on the runway, I find out that my knowledge of aerodynamics and wing design will not help me flap my arms fast enough to take off. In a day’s time, all I will accomplish is exhausting myself and making a fool out of myself.

This is what the Law does for unbelievers—it makes a fool out of them. Like aerodynamic laws, there is nothing wrong with the Law; it reflects the way things truly are. If we could keep it, we would earn eternal life—just as we would fly if we flap our arms fast enough! But we are just as incapable of keeping the Law perfectly as we are of flying with bird wings. The difference is that in the history of science, we have discovered that the unaided human body cannot comply with the aerodynamic laws necessary for flight, but man has not figured out that he is incapable of keeping the law of God. Instead, we become its slaves, always trying but failing under its relentless whip. Jesus alone kept the Law to give us rest.

Galatians 4: 25-31

The first part of v. 25 is purely incidental to Paul’s argument. It is as if Paul says, “By the way, did you know that the name Hagar means ‘rock’ in Arabia and that Mt. Sinai is a mountain in Arabia? That’s a funny coincidence, isn’t it?” (Brown, pp. 100-101; Stott, p. 125)

The second part of the verse was no joke, but must have been shocking to the Jewish mind. That Paul would connect Mt. Sinai and the present Jerusalem to Hagar and slavery was unthinkable. After all, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not sons of Hagar, but Sarah and Abraham. Jerusalem as the capital of the nation symbolized the heart and attitude of the nation as a whole (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 839). Often Jesus would have wished to gather the inhabitants of the city under His arms like a mother hen gathering her chicks, but the scribes and the Pharisees had hindered him from doing so (Matt. 23: 37). Chamblin has noted the importance of the context in this Matthean passage coming at the end of the seven woes to the scribes and Pharisees (vv. 13-32) and the devastating spiritual effects of their teaching upon the Jewish people (Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, p. 213). Indeed, Jerusalem was not a free son, but a slave, because only the truth could set them free.

We remember one occasion in Jerusalem when Jesus said to the Jews, “If you abide in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you **free**.” They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You shall become free?’” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the **slave** of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. If therefore the **Son** shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (Jn. 8: 31-36). To the Jewish mind, freedom consisted in being the sons of Abraham, but Jesus told them that freedom was not defined by external birth. “Everyone who commits sin [*as a way of life*] is the slave of sin.” If they were truly the sons of Abraham, they would “do the deeds of Abraham” (v. 40), and if God were their father as they claimed, they would love him (Christ). As it was, their deeds proved that the devil was their father (vv. 41-44).

The “present Jerusalem”—the Jerusalem of Paul’s day and Jesus’ day—was in slavery with her physical and spiritual children. They were slaves because they were slaves of sin, not because Abraham was not their physical ancestor. They were committed to the Law as a means of salvation, but the Law had not delivered them. It had only made their slavery to sin worse by aggravating their guilt, but had given them no power against sin. This much was evident in the fact that the Jews Jesus was talking to were the slaves of uncontrollable hate; they were seeking to kill him (Jn. 8: 37, 40).

But the “Jerusalem above”, the spiritual Jerusalem, “is free”, and she is the mother of all who believe like Isaac (v. 26, 28). The OT text quoted in v. 27 is Isaiah 54: 1 and refers to the restoration of spiritual Israel as a type of the church. Isaiah is prophesying beyond his own day to the time when Judah will fall to Babylon and be taken into exile (E.J. Young, *Isaiah*, p. 328; see Isaiah 48-53 for context). Israel, the northern kingdom, is already in exile as Isaiah writes. However, the suffering servant of chapter 53 (Christ) will take the iniquity of Israel upon himself and will bring about its restoration. Though he is “crushed” for Israel’s sins, “He will see His offspring, he will prolong His days...As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (53: 10b, 11). Christ will die, but God will resurrect him and “allot Him a portion with the great” (v. 12).

The teaching of *Isaiah* is that in exile Israel has lost her husband, Yahweh, because of unfaithfulness (See also Jer. 3: 8 in which Israel is given a certificate of divorce). Nevertheless, in captivity she may rejoice in the promise of a future restoration at the hand of her Messiah, the Servant (chap. 53) through whose death and sacrifice she will be more prosperous and her womb more fruitful than when God was her husband in the Land of Promise. She will be so fruitful, in fact, that she will have to “enlarge the place of [*her*] tent” and “stretch out the curtains of [*her*] dwellings” (v. 2) to make room for all her offspring who will spread to the “right and left” (worldwide) encompassing the “nations” (v. 3). While having some reference to the physical restoration of Israel from exile, Isaiah’s primary reference is to the church—its growth and amazing missionary outreach throughout the world since the resurrection and ascension of Christ (E.J. Young, *Isaiah*, pp. 361-363). The nation of Israel was always a small nation with relatively few inhabitants compared to the vast kingdoms of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. But the church in the 21st century consists of millions upon millions of Christians. The number of professing Christians are two billion (Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, p. 2), and if even one-tenth of these are true believers, Christians number over 200 million

strong, not counting the millions who have lived before this century. This is quite a large tent compared with the tent of tiny Israel living in the Land of Promise.

In v. 28, Paul encourages the Galatians back to spiritual sanity by reminding them who they are: they are not slaves like Ishmael but children of the promise, like Isaac. But just like Isaac, they will be persecuted by those who are slaves. There is only one reference to Ishmael's persecution of Isaac (Gen. 21: 9) in which Sarah discovers him mocking Isaac. Most likely his mockery and persecution was a common occurrence given his superior age and strength (Brown, p. 104). Moreover, Ishmael knew that Isaac was the favored son, and there was nothing he could do about it. But further, he knew that Isaac's privileged position in the family had nothing to do with Isaac's behavior or his performance but existed solely on the basis of birthright. Such thoughts were bound to fill Ishmael with envy and hatred.

Even so, those who are saved by faith are persecuted by slaves to sin and the Law. Liberty is envied by those who are under a yoke of bondage, either the bondage of being accepted by God on the basis of performance, or the bondage to men for their acceptance. But let the child of God walk in liberty knowing that he is accepted by God solely on the basis of what Christ has done and is totally independent to the spiritual requirements of men, that person will be the object of hatred. This is why Paul was hated by the Judaizers, because he was not subject in any way to their control and because he sought to snatch the Galatians from the bondage of the fear of men (4: 17; 6: 13).

And who are the present persecutors of the true church? Are they unchurched unbelievers who despise Christians? Sometimes, but Paul has reference primarily to those religious unbelievers (nominal believers) who do all they can to discourage and sabotage the work of true believers. In the words of Stott,

The persecution of the true church, of Christian believers who trace their spiritual descent from Abraham, is not always by the world, who are strangers unrelated to us, but by our half-brothers, religious people, the nominal church. It has always been so. The Lord Jesus was bitterly opposed, rejected, mocked and condemned by His own nation. The fiercest opponents of the apostle Paul, who dogged his footsteps and stirred up strife against him, were the official church, the Jews. The monolithic structure of the medieval papacy persecuted all Protestant minorities with ruthless, unremitting ferocity. And the greatest enemies of the evangelical faith today are not unbelievers, who when they hear the gospel often embrace it, but the church, the establishment, the hierarchy. Isaac is always mocked and persecuted by Ishmael (p. 127).

Nevertheless, slaves will not share in the inheritance with true sons (v. 30). As Hagar and Ishmael were cast out of Abraham's house (Gen. 21: 10-12), even so spiritual slaves (unbelievers) have no permanent dwelling in God's house—even those descended by physical birth from Abraham. Again, we are reminded of Jesus' words to the Jews in Jn. 8: 35, "And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever." Jesus was using a cultural norm to teach a spiritual reality. In the land of Palestine, slaves could be bought and sold at any time; they had no security or permanence in any household. Security belonged only to a true "son" (*wios*—a mature son, the same word Paul uses in Gal. 4: 5-7). Likewise, as spiritual slaves, the unconverted Jews had no enduring place in God's house even though they claimed to have such rights (v. 35). Only a true son in the house can "remain forever" and Jesus is the epitome (the supreme example) of the true son in God's house. Thus, if the Jews would

believe in this Son, they would be truly free and not enslaved to sin (v. 36), but if not, they would continue to be slaves to sin (Leon Morris, *John*, pp. 458-459).

In v. 31, Paul again reminds the Galatians of their true identity. “We are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free woman” (v. 31). It is remarkable how often the apostle appeals to the believer’s conscious identity as a deterrent to sin and apostasy (Rom. 6: 2-12; 8: 9-12, 15-17; 1 Cor. 6: 15; etc.). Here also, as in v. 28, a good reminder of who they are in Christ will help them to return to the sanity of Biblical orthodoxy.

Galatians 5: 1

It is probably more accurate to connect 5: 1 to 4: 31 rather than include it as part of chapter 5 (Fee, p. 417). The “yoke of slavery” in v. 5 clearly has reference to the “children of the bondwoman” of 4: 31 and the “freedom” we enjoy in Christ is the result of our “parentage”—we are sons of “the free woman.” What is this yoke of slavery? Verse 2 gives us the meaning. It is circumcision and all that circumcision represents in the context of the Galatian controversy—namely, obedience to the law as a means of securing one’s salvation. For Paul goes on to say in v. 3 that if they receive circumcision as a necessary requirement, they will not be able to stop there but must go on to “keep the whole law”. And if they place their hope in keeping the law for salvation, they are truly under a “yoke of bondage”. We are reminded of Peter’s words at the council in Jerusalem some time later who argued that Gentiles should not be subjected to a “yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15: 10) F.F. Bruce informs us that when a Jewish proselyte (a convert to Judaism) took it upon himself to fulfill the Law this activity was described as taking “up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven” (*Acts*, p. 307). The “yoke” mentioned in Acts 15: 10 is not simply the ceremonial regulations of circumcision and endless sacrifices, but the entire Mosaic legislation. In this line of interpretation, Calvin remarks,

But we may easily gather out of the thing itself that he [Peter in Acts 15: 10] doth not speak of the ceremonies only. The servitude of the old training up under the law was hard and laborious; but yet it were too absurd to call it a yoke that cannot be borne; and we know that not only holy men, but also even most hypocrites, did well and exactly accomplish the outward observation of the rites [i.e. the ceremonies] (Calvin, *Acts*, p. 52).

Peter was not talking primarily about the requirement of ceremonies. Calvin claims this interpretation to be “absurd” since even hypocrites can perform the outward rites of religion (see Isa. 1: 10-15). Furthermore, Calvin also denies that external obedience even to the moral law is a “yoke” too great to bear.

Moreover, it were not any hard matter to satisfy the moral law, if it were content with corporeal [outward] obedience only, and did not require spiritual [inward] righteousness...(Acts p. 52).

In other words, it is not “unbearable” to avoid adultery, theft, murder, and telling lies. Many disciplined unbelievers can avoid such outward sins, but Calvin interprets Peter’s words as regarding the inward, spiritual righteousness required by the law as the condition of salvation, the prohibitions against the sins of the mind and heart.

Therefore, those be too foolish who restrain [limit] unto ceremonies Peter’s words, whereby the weakness of men to perform the *righteousness of the heart is expressed*; which doth not only far pass their strength, but is altogether contrary to nature....The false apostles did avouch [affirm], that no man could attain unto salvation unless he did keep the ceremonies. If man’s salvation be tied to

works, it shall be no longer grounded in the grace of Christ, and so, by this means, free reconciliation shall fall flat to the ground. Now, seeing that man's strength is unable to keep the law, all men are subject to the curse which the Lord there denounceth against the transgressors; and so by this means, ***all men shall come in danger of despair***, seeing that they see themselves guilty of eternal death by the law. Peradventure the false apostles understood these things craftily. But Peter pierceth the very fountain, that he may bring to light the deadly poison of that doctrine; and thus must we do, so often as Satan doth craftily thrust in wicked errors... (p. 53; emphasis added).

...the law is counted a yoke in two ways. For, inasmuch as it bridleth the lusts of the flesh, and delivereth a rule of godly and holy life, it is meet that the children of God take this yoke upon them; but, ***inasmuch as it doth exactly prescribe what we owe to God, and doth not promise life without adding the condition of perfect obedience, and doth again denounce a cure if we shall in any point offend, it is a yoke which no man is able to bear*** (Calvin, *Acts*, p. 57; emphasis added).

It is from this yoke of perfect outward and inward, spiritual obedience as a condition of being accepted by God that we are set free. Verse 1 reads literally, "For freedom Christ freed us..." indicating that we are set free for the purpose of living in freedom as sons of the free woman. The whole theme of the epistle has been that we are justified by faith in Christ and are not subject to the bondage of the Law requiring perfect obedience. And since justification by faith is the only sure path to obedience, freedom in Christ must therefore have a positive effect upon one's behavior, a subject to which Paul returns in v. 13.

Fundamentally, freedom involves a filial spirit toward God as Father, something we have already explored briefly in our discussion of adoption. A filial spirit is the spirit of a child toward a loving Father as opposed to the servile spirit of a slave toward a demanding master. A slave expects punishment from his master unless he is able to fulfill all the master's wishes, and he does not experience uninhibited freedom of conversation with him in which he expresses freely what he thinks and feels. Christ set us free so that we can experience this liberty of expression toward the Father and also the liberty of knowing that nothing, even our failure and sin, can change the Father's relationship toward his adopted son. We may surely displease the Father with much of our behavior, but nothing will provoke him to banish us from his house. The true son "remains in the house forever" and nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8: 39). This everlasting, predictable acceptance with God gives us liberty of conscience knowing that our relationship to God is secure and unchangeable. We do not have to fear his wrath even if we may, and should, fear his displeasure as a consequence of our sin. This confidence in the love of God encourages and strengthens our obedience. Commenting on Rom. 6: 14 ("For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace"), Hodge writes,

By law here, is not to be understood the Mosaic law....It is the rule of duty, that which binds the conscience as an expression of the will of God....we are not merely delivered from *Judaism*, but from the obligation of fulfilling the law of God as the condition of salvation....Whosoever is under the law in this sense, is under the curse; for the law says, "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p.205, emphasis added).

Notice that Hodge quotes Gal. 3:10, a quote from Dt. 27:26 . But is it not the Mosaic Law which requires perfect obedience? What Hodge means is that Paul is not referring to the *ceremonial* aspects of the Mosaic Law (notice the emphasized word, "Judaism"). That is, Paul is not attempting to give us the assurance that sin will not be master over us since we no longer have to slaughter bulls and goats and keep ceremonial rituals (cf. Hodge, *Romans*, p. 217), but that our Christ's Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com

conscience is free from the burden of perfect obedience to the moral law as a means of receiving the love of God. Hodge goes on to say,

We are not under a legal dispensation, requiring personal conformity to the law, and entire freedom from sin, past and present, as the condition of our acceptance; but we are under a gracious dispensation, according to which God dispenses pardon freely, and accepts the sinner as a sinner, for Christ's sake, without works or merit of his own. Whoever is under the law in the sense just explained, is not only under condemnation, but he is of necessity under a legal or slavish spirit. What he does, he does as a slave, to escape punishment. But he who is under grace, who is gratuitously [without merit] accepted of God, and restored to his favour, is under a filial [relationship of a son] spirit. ***The principle of obedience in him is love, and not fear. Here, as everywhere else in the Bible, it is assumed that the favour of God is our life. We must be reconciled to him before we can be holy; we must feel that he loves us before we can love him....The only hope therefore of sinners, is in freedom from the law, freedom from its condemnation, freedom from the obligation to fulfill it as the condition of acceptance, and freedom from its spirit*** (Romans, p.206; emphasis added).

But the liberty of conscience before God brings another kind of liberty with it—freedom from bondage to men. Both kinds of bondage go together, for if we are not confident in the love of God, we will search for our acceptance elsewhere—in other people, success, popularity, etc. The Galatians, having left the liberty of the gospel, were now seeking their approval from the false teachers who were prescribing their religious behavior. This happens often in the church. Rather than being confident in the liberty of Christ, men often subject themselves to the expectations of other men who are quite fond of giving them a list of rules (their rules) to live by. Generally these rules are established by the official or unofficial religious hierarchy of the church. For example, the leaders of the church decide that a person cannot be a good Christian if his marriage is not legitimized in a church sanctuary. His wedding may have taken place elsewhere, but not in the church; therefore, he is not legitimately married in the eyes of the church. (I am not talking about a person who simply starts fornicating with someone without the covenant arrangement of marriage.) The Bible requires the covenant of marriage, but it does not require that marriage take place inside a church building. This is a man-made rule. For another example, the leaders of the church decide that you cannot be a good Christian if you drink alcohol in any quantity. You are then bound to comply with their demands if you receive their acceptance and avoid their censure. You are therefore in bondage to their man-made rules since there is no prohibition in Scripture against alcohol, but only against drunkenness. You may have no personal twinge of conscience about drinking a little alcohol, but now you are in bondage to the fear of men rather than God.

Christians fall prey to all kinds of man-made rules which are cultural rather than Christian. For example, Africans must give money to their relatives whenever they request it, and refusal will cause them to look bad in the eyes of their relatives and the village community. The Bible requires us to be generous to those in need, especially our relatives (1 Tim. 5: 8), and Africans set a good example to the whole world for taking care of extended family. But we are never required to feed able-bodied people who refuse to work, relative or stranger (2 Thes. 3: 10). Also, great sums of money are spent on funerals because it is social custom to have large numbers of friends and neighbors present at the funeral—all of whom must be fed at great costs to the bereaved. Having many friends and relatives present to share your personal loss is a commendable, but going into debt to pay for their food is not (Rom. 13: 8). Would it not be more God-honoring to have a simple burial with only the immediate family than to burden yourself, your wife, and your children with the debt of a large funeral? Are you afraid of what

other people in your culture will “think” of you? If so, you should consider walking in the liberty Christ has given to you in the gospel.

Freedom, as will be explained later, is not the ability to do what we want or what someone else wants, but the ability to do what we should. What we should do is given to us in the Scriptures. Sometimes it is difficult to determine how we should apply Biblical principles to specific situations, but at least our main task is Biblical exegesis—what does the Bible say about this or that, not what does my culture say about it—African, American, Chinese, or otherwise. If culture does not contradict the Scriptures, we are “free” to pursue the cultural norm; but if not, we must submit the cultural norm to Scripture.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free.” He wants us to live and act as free men, not enslaved to the rules and expectations of others, but subject to what God requires of us. To be a slave of Christ is to be his freeman (1 Cor. 7: 22). Only as a free man was Paul able to pursue his ministry among the Gentiles. He was not in the least hindered from not having the approval of the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 2: 1-10), and he was not in the least hindered by the disapproval of the false teachers among the Galatians.

...the judgment of Christ matters far more than that of other people: even if every last person in Galatia and Jerusalem denies the genuineness of his apostleship, Paul remains an *apostolos* because Christ has declared him to be so (Gal. 1: 1-17) (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 137, emphasis his).

Paul admonishes the Galatians to keep standing firm in this freedom without being subject again to the yoke of slavery—slavery to the Law and slavery to men. “Again” indicates that this was the position of the Galatians previously, either bondage to the Mosaic Law (if they had been Jewish) or to the universal law of God (if Gentile) (Rom. 2: 14). Either way, their acceptance before God was based on the performance of his commands, an impossible goal to achieve ending only in frustration, rejection, and a slavish disposition. The indicative (statement of fact) of vv. 31 and 5: 1(a) precedes the imperative (exhortation to duty) of 5: 1b. We *are* free sons of the free woman; Christ freed us for the purpose of living freely; therefore, **keep standing firm** in your freedom in Christ. The indicative as the foundation for the imperative often occurs in Paul’s letters. Paul never gives us empty commands incapable of execution. It is because of the accomplished fact of what Christ has done for us that we may obey the command. (For more examples, see Romans 6 and John Murray, *Romans*; also see my “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper” in which I provide a brief exposition of Romans 6 and the meaning of baptism).

F. Defense of the Gospel: The Superiority of Faith to Human Merit (Galatians 5: 2-6)

1. Those who are seeking to be saved by circumcision have been cut off from Christ (vv. 2-4).

If indeed righteousness is based on keeping the law, symbolized by receiving circumcision, then Christ is no benefit to them. The beauty of the Christian religion is that Christ is the all-sufficient Savior. If we must add our circumcision, baptism, obedience to social or cultural norms, obedience to God’s law, or anything else to the work of Christ, then His work is unnecessary since the critical, **deciding factor** in our salvation is not His work but **our work**. Hence, His atonement is no benefit to us (2: 21). More forcefully, if anyone wishes to rely on circumcision, or baptism, or church attendance or to rely on any personal merit of his own, he

must then comply with the whole law (v. 3). We are not at liberty to pick and choose which commandments of God we wish to keep and which we wish to ignore.

It is implied from the verse that perhaps the Galatians did not understand what they were getting themselves into. Perhaps they thought the requirements of the Judaizers ended with circumcision, and that they needed only to add circumcision to faith in Christ to be saved. Was circumcision too much to ask if it added a little “additional extra” to their faith?

But Paul sets the record straight. Once this method of salvation is adopted, there is no stopping point; the whole Law must be kept. The Judaizers may have been keeping quiet about this, but total obedience to Moses for acceptance with God was clearly their agenda—something which surfaced later in the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15: 5). By the time this council convened, Peter had learned an important lesson from his confrontation with Paul in Antioch and his failure to represent the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2: 11-14), for he vigorously opposed “placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we [*Jews*] have been able to bear” (Acts 15: 10).

In v. 4, Paul is not implying that a person can lose his salvation; he is simply saying that you cannot have salvation both ways. Either we are looking to Christ for grace, or we are trusting in our personal performance. To be “severed” from Christ means that Christ “has become of no effect” to the Galatians (Calvin, *Galatians*, p.151), or “you will derive no advantage from” Christ (Brown, *Galatians*, p. 111) since his death on the cross would be rendered useless to one who seeks to be saved by his own merit. The word “severed” is *katargeo*, the same word Paul uses in Romans 7: 2 of a woman being “released” from the “law” (marriage contract) of her deceased husband or the Christian being “released” from the Law as a means of producing the fruit of holiness (7: 4-6; see also Brown, p. 113). The whole context of Romans 7 is about the inability of the Law “in the hands of sin” (Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 133) to produce practical righteousness. The Christian who has died to the Law and has been joined to Christ is now released from the Law’s jurisdiction over his conscience even as a widow is released from any obligations to her former marriage. The result of this death to the Law and union with Christ (a new marriage) is that he can now “serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7: 6). Applied to Galatians 3: 4, to place yourself under the jurisdiction of the Law for justification is to “sever” your relationship to Christ—the exact reverse situation found in Romans 7: 1-6 in which we have “severed” our relationship to the Law in order to be joined to Christ.

To “fall from grace” also sounds much like losing your salvation, but once again, this is not Paul’s meaning. The verb *ekipto* may be literally translated “to fall out of” meaning that grace is represented here as a sphere or realm of existence (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures; Bible Works*). To seek salvation through the Law implies that one is placing himself in the sphere of existence or realm in which the Law reigns and demands perfect obedience. Analogously, if I am living in Uganda, I am living in the realm in which Uganda’s law rules. If I break one of those laws, I cannot make the plea that I am a U.S. citizen, and that in the U.S. we don’t have that law. That argument will not be accepted because I live in Uganda and within the realm or rule of the laws of Uganda. Justification by law-keeping is a realm in which perfect obedience to the Law is *the* rule. Grace is a different realm altogether in which justification by believing is *the* rule, so to speak. *Believing* is the only law you must keep to be saved. (Of course, we will find out in Chap. 5 that by believing we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit “against [*which*] there is no law”.

2. Righteousness is by faith through the Spirit (vv. 5-6).

Verse 5 is a close parallel to 3: 3 in which Paul says, “...having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” Justification is the beginning of the process of sanctification and ultimately glorification—“perfection”. This process began by the work of the Holy Spirit; the “flesh” or the works of the flesh made no contribution to this process whatsoever. Notice that Paul says we are “waiting for the hope of *righteousness*.” We might expect him to say that we are waiting for the hope of *salvation*, but salvation is salvation *from sin to righteousness*. It is not “through the Law” by works but “through the Spirit” by faith that we wait for this hope of righteousness, the end goal of our justification. Having repudiated the idea that the Christian can be “perfected” through the flesh (circumcision as a symbol of law-keeping), Paul now buttresses (adds additional support) this idea by saying that it is “through the Spirit by faith” that we have our hope of completed righteousness. Furthermore, this hope of righteousness is not something we “work” for but something we “wait” for (Stott, p. 134). This does not imply the passive waiting of “letting go and letting God” do something in your life while you are passive, but rather, active dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit (5: 16) and being “led” by the Spirit as we actively mortify the flesh (Rom. 8: 13-14).

This active waiting is further supported by the next two verses. Now that Christ has come and removed the Christian from the jurisdiction of the Law, there was no benefit in either circumcision or uncircumcision; being “in Christ” is all that really mattered. There was no superiority in being either a Jew or a Gentile. External distinctions have faded into nothingness (3: 28) because nothing external can provide the legal and practical righteousness we need—only faith. And the faith that we have in Christ for legal righteousness is the faith which produces practical works of righteousness. It is not an idle faith; it is the faith that “runs well” and “obeys the truth” (v. 7). Love is the instrument of faith because faith “works” or demonstrates itself through acts of love (James 2: 14-22). We cannot demonstrate faith unless we engage in acts of kindness to others. Faith without works is a dead faith—a disingenuous (insincere) faith. And if we do not love our brother whom we have seen how can we love God whom we haven’t seen? (1 Jn. 4: 20)

On the other hand faith is the power which wields (uses) the instrument of love. Without faith we are afraid to love others and powerless to love others because we are consumed with our own security and convenience. Faith must precede true love for “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14: 23b).

Excursus: Questions and Imprecations (Gal. 5: 7-12)

Here again, as in 4: 12-20, we have another interruption in Paul’s thought. This time, rather than making a personal appeal to the Galatians, he simply asks two questions followed by an imprecation. The Galatians were “running well” (an athletic term, *treko*, from the Greek games; see 1 Cor. 9: 24). Now they were being hindered from running well and obeying the truth. Who was it that hindered them? Paul probably already knew even the name of the person or persons causing the trouble. Nevertheless, the main emphasis of the verse is the effect this false teacher had on the Galatians. They were actively engaged in running the Christian race and someone had “cut in” (*egkopto*) on them or tripped them as they were running. Paul uses the same word to describe Satan’s hindering him from coming to the Thessalonians (1Thes. 2: 18).

The persuasion to abandon the truth of the gospel did not come from Christ, but from the leaven of the Judaizers (v. 9). It does not take much yeast to leaven a whole lump of bread, and it does not take many false teachers to trouble a whole church—sometimes one is enough. Nevertheless, Paul is confident in the work of the Spirit among the majority of the Galatians that in the end they will embrace no other teaching than his (v. 10a). On the whole, we generally forget that positive encouragement can often deter fellow brothers and sisters from persistent error. Understandably Paul was frustrated by the way his children in the faith had so easily been distracted from the true gospel; nevertheless, he was not at all ready to give up on them. Says Brown,

In dealing with those who have apostatized, or are in danger of apostatizing, there is a peculiar need of the union of tenderness with fidelity [truth]. In warning men of the crime and misery of apostasy the minister cannot be too honest. There is scarcely a possibility of exaggerating here. But he must not take too readily for granted either that apostasy is begun, or that it has become obstinate [resistant to all reason]. To address a man who is but doubting as if he were a confirmed infidel [unbeliever] is a very likely method of making him one. The Christian teacher ought always to act under the influence of the charity which “hopeth all things;” and when he stands in doubt of any of those whose souls are committed to his care, he must not conceal his hopes while he makes known his fears (*Galatians*, p. 119).

As for the false teacher (or teachers) he shall bear his judgment (v. 10b; also Gal. 1: 8-9). If indeed Paul had been preaching circumcision, there is no reason for some to keep persecuting him because the stumbling block of the cross has been “abolished” or made of no effect (*katargeo* is used once again). Paul’s use of this word here and in 5: 4 indicates the continual contrast being made between law and gospel. Either the law as a legal covenant is “made of no effect” by the gospel, or the gospel is “made of no effect” by the law (See also Eph. 2: 15). The two covenants cannot stand together; the one cancels out the other as Paul also insists in Rom. 11: 6, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” Also, sons of the bondwoman cannot be heirs with the sons of the free woman; they will be cast out of the house.

The cross was a stumbling block along a footpath (*scandalon*) to the Jewish mind (1 Cor. 1: 23) because they could not believe their promised Messiah could die such a dishonorable death. Crucifixion was reserved for the most notorious criminals; hence, Jesus could not be their awaited Messiah—so they thought. It was also a stumbling block because keeping the Law for acceptance with God was ingrained within the Jewish mind. And again, the Jewish mindset is representative for the rest of mankind, for men normally believe that you cannot get something for nothing; you have to earn it. The gospel of free grace sticks a knife into our proud hearts as we attempt to take credit for our acceptance with God and His benefits to us. No one sets out in life to be a beggar dependent upon the kindness of others; he wants to stand on his own two feet and make his own way in life. The gospel cuts our legs out from under us making us lame in both feet and dependent on food from the king’s table (2 Sam. 9).

Paul’s statement of v. 12 is jolting. The meaning of the statement is this: I wish the false teachers wouldn’t stop at circumcision but would go all the way and mutilate (castrate) themselves (Stott, p. 136; J.B. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 207). The word *apokopto* is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) of emasculation or castration (Deut. 23: 1), and anyone thus emasculated could not enter the assembly of the Lord. It does not serve our purpose

here to explore the reason for this OT exclusion, but the Judaizers opposing Paul would have been aware of this law and would have understood his point. Just as emasculated men could not be admitted into the congregation of Israel, Paul wished the Judaizers would mutilate themselves and be likewise “cut off” from the church, thus relieving the church of their presence.

Paul’s imprecation (for that is what it is) may be foreign to us, but it is not foreign to the Bible. An examination of the Psalms reveals many such imprecations which have nothing to do with personal vengeance, but are directed against the activities of those who threaten the corporate people of God and attack the glory of God (Ps. 58: 6; 109: 8-10, 12. For a more thorough treatment of imprecatory Psalms, see my *Hermeneutics*, “Psalms”. Just as zeal for his father’s house consumed Christ when he drove out the money-changers with a whip (Jn. 2: 13-17; Ps. 69: 9), zeal for the truth of the gospel consumed Paul. The real fault lies not with Paul for making such a shocking statement, but with us who often exhibit so little anger at apostasy and spiritual laxity in the church. Our nonchalance (casual indifference) to sin and error is hardly to be commended as love but is really arrogance (1 Cor. 5: 1-2). In contrast to Paul (and Jesus) we are much too easy-going with error to be of much use to God. Peace can easily become the ultimate goal in the church when, in fact, there can be no peace when the glory of God and the gospel are threatened. Calvin is to the point.

It is a cruel kind of mercy which prefers a single man to the whole church. “On one side, I see the flock of God in danger; on the other, I see a wolf “seeking,” like Satan, “whom he may devour.” (1 Pet. 5: 8) Ought not my care of the church to swallow up all my thoughts, and lead me to desire that its salvation should be purchased by the destruction of the wolf? And yet I would not wish that a single individual should perish in this way; but my love of the church and my anxiety about her interests carry me away into a sort of ecstasy, so that I can think of nothing else.” With such a zeal as this, every true pastor of the church will burn (*Galatians*, p. 157).

G. Defense of the Gospel: The Superiority of the Spirit’s Sanctifying Work in Believers (Galatians 5: 13—6: 10)

Traditional interpretation presents this part of *Galatians* as the “practical application” section of the book while the material preceding it is the “doctrinal” part of *Galatians*. This is partially acceptable since there are certainly many exhortations to holy living in this final portion. However, this designation may cause us to miss Paul’s continuing defense of the gospel—the superiority of the Spirit’s sanctifying work in believers. Paul was not only convinced that the Law could not justify, but he was equally convinced that it could not sanctify (See Rom. 7: 1-6 and my commentary on pp. 33-34 above). The work of the Spirit in changing our behavior in chapters 5 and 6 is set in contrast to the inability of the Law to do the same—implied in the passage and throughout the context of *Galatians* (Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, pp. 420-421).

Hints of this argument have been given previously in 2: 20 and 3: 3. In the first passage, Paul answers the objection of the Judaizers who claim that a gospel of justification by faith alone cannot be a hindrance to sin (2: 17). Paul’s answer is that he had to die to the Law in order that he might live to God. Being crucified with Christ, the life he now lives in the flesh is a life lived by faith in the one who “lives in” him, who loved him and gave himself for Paul (2: 19-20). The Holy Spirit is not expressly mentioned but is clearly implied by the phrase, “but Christ lives in me”. In the second passage, the Spirit is credited with the beginning of the Christian life (“Having begun by the Spirit”), and the necessity of His continuing work is implied in the

following question: “are you now being perfected by the flesh?” The question is rhetorical and demands a negative answer: “No, we can’t be perfected by the fleshly rite of circumcision or by the works of the flesh.”

The word for “perfected” is *epiteleo* which may also be translated “completed” (2 Cor. 8: 6, 11; Rom. 15: 28). If salvation is begun by the work of the Spirit in *justification* (righteousness in terms of legal standing with God), it will also be completed by the Spirit in *sanctification* (righteousness in terms of one’s experience). Paul uses *epiteleo* two other times in his epistles (2 Cor. 7: 1, Phil. 1: 6) in connection with sanctification, the most important one for our purposes being Phil. 1: 6 in which he assures us, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect [*epiteleo*] it until the day of Christ Jesus.” The same word for “began” (*enarxomai*) is also used, thus creating essentially the same formula we have in Gal. 3: 3—the *beginning* and the *completion* of the work of salvation. Later in Phil. 2: 13 he gives us confidence in our ability to “work out” (not “work for”) our salvation “for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” This work of God in us is none other than the work of the Holy Spirit.

In writing *Galatians*, Paul is as much concerned with the matter of holiness of life (*living* right before God) as he is the matter of justification (*being* right before God). Being right is simply the necessary prerequisite of living right. Fee takes the position that the latter is Paul’s primary concern. Commenting on 3: 3 he says,

Indeed, here is the heart of the matter—which drives the argument of the entire letter...This is the question to which the entire argument of the letter is devoted as a response. Which in turn means that the question is not, “How does one gain right standing with God? How are people saved?” but, “Once given right standing with God, how is such a relationship maintained?” (p. 384)

I would argue that both justification and sanctification rank equally in Paul’s purpose in writing the letter, for you cannot have the latter without the former. However, Fee’s emphasis is well-taken since commentators traditionally neglect Paul’s latter concern. Commenting on 5: 13—6 : 10 Fee remarks,

One can make far more sense of the letter as a whole, however, by viewing this section as the final (necessary) stage of the argument...it is absolutely essential to the argument that began in 3: 1. It functions, in fact, as Paul’s response to his own question in 3: 3: “Having begun by the Spirit, do you now *come to completion* by the flesh?”

Two matters appear to drive the whole: On the one hand stands Paul’s deep conviction of the failure of Torah [the Law] to effect righteousness, both as right standing with God and as behavior that conforms to the character of God. The argument from 2: 15 to 4: 31 has basically dealt with the work of Christ as effecting righteousness in the first sense, *evidence* for which, of course, is the experienced reality of the Spirit. This passage now picks up the second conviction, the failure of Torah to effect righteousness in terms of behavior.

On the other hand, in terms of the argument of Galatians proper, there is the objection that was—or would be—raised by his opposition: If you eliminate Torah observance altogether—as Paul indeed does—what happens to obedience? Since the whole point of Torah is to lead God’s people to obedience, if you take that away, what is to keep them from doing “whatever they wish” (5: 17)?

Paul answers both issues in this passage. Having begun by the Spirit, one comes to completion by the Spirit. The key to ethical life, including everyday behavior in its every form, resides in the fundamental Pauline imperative: “Walk by/in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desire of the flesh.” The Spirit is the empowering life that is both over against the flesh (so that one may not do whatever one wishes, v. 17) and in conformity to the character of God (here as the “fruit of the Spirit”) (*God’s Empowering Presence*, pp. 421-422; emphasis his).

1. The Meaning of Freedom—Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself (Galatians 5: 13-15)

Our calling in Christ is a call to freedom. What does this mean? As I mentioned earlier, freedom is not the ability to do what we please, but what we should. Paul cautions the Galatians here to beware of the antinomian tendency to interpret freedom as freedom from responsibility to others—which is the tyranny of the self. The freedom for which Christ set us free is the same freedom he exercised in *his* life and death. In life he was constantly looking to the needs of others and serving others. When he stooped down and washed the disciples’ feet, He gave them a symbolic demonstration of the kind of ministry He was calling them to—a life of humble service. In death He was laying down his life so that others may live; we are likewise called upon to lay down our lives for the sake of others (1 Jn. 3: 16). In the sacrifice of Christ we have a “new commandment” (Jn. 13: 34). It is not new in the sense that the OT did not teach us to love one another, for it certainly did (Lev. 19: 18 quoted in v. 14); but it is new in the sense that God incarnate had never exhibited love in this manner before. God in the flesh laying down his life for sinful men—this is new.

Note as well that “through love” we should “serve one another”. Only in love is there true freedom to serve without the bondage of trying to earn God’s approval or the approval of others. Love and freedom are flip sides of the same coin. If our motive in service is to earn a reputation with others or to win God’s favor, we are not free in our service since everything we do will be calculated for winning the effect we desire. On the other hand, “slavery to Christ, like slavery to Sin, entails slavery to other people. But now the experience is radically different, owing to motivation from the new Master” (Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 135). Chamblin further notes that the verb “serve” is *douleuete*, coming from *douleuw*, to serve as a slave.

Galatians 5: 14

The whole law is fulfilled in love to one’s neighbor (v. 14). The laws against dishonoring parents, murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting are all “completed” in this command. The same appeal is made in Rom. 13: 8-10. In v. 8 of that passage, the word, “has fulfilled”, is the perfect of completed action and “means that the law has received the full measure of that which it requires. The completeness of conformity is thereby expressed (cf. Gal. 5: 14)” (John Murray, *Romans*, p. 160). Murray continues to point out that love is not the dispensing of the law (the elimination of the law) but that love fulfills the law. “It is the law that love fulfills” (Murray, p. 161). This is an important point since many ungodly things can be done in the name of love. It is not sufficient that we tell people to love one another; the Bible must also inform them as to *how* they must love one another. Love will be the fulfilling of the law only if it is informed by the law. In the interest of self-love, a woman may decide to end her pregnancy in abortion, but this is not the love which fulfills the law of God. In the name of love men and women engage in sexual intercourse outside the bond of marriage, but this is not true love since the law of God forbids fornication and adultery.

For this reason, we must not throw away the moral law of God along with the Old Covenant administration. Paul adamantly argues that we are not “under law” as a legal covenant demanding perfect obedience as a condition of being right with God (see Hodge’s comments above). This Law proceeds from Sinai and produces slaves. On the other hand, the same apostle uses the same Law consistently to inform us of the demands of love. He does so in this very epistle in 5: 14, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”, a summary command from Lev. 19: 18. He does so in Ephesians 6: 1-3 to press upon the children of believers their duty in regard to their parents, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (a quotation from Ex. 20: 12, the fifth commandment). In 1 Tim. 5: 18 Paul quotes a case law (not the Ten Commandments) from Deut. 25: 4 to support his command that elders who rule well should be paid appropriately: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.’”

Although the Law as a covenant demanding perfect obedience must be abandoned in order to be saved by grace (Gal. 2: 19), the moral requirements of that same law are consistently preserved by the NT writers as commandments to be obeyed by those who are not “under the law”. Fee’s statement that Paul eliminates Torah (Law) observance “altogether” must therefore be qualified (*God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 422). Law observance is eliminated as a means of being right with God or as a means of self-sanctification since it provides us with no power to keep it. On the other hand, the Law (or Torah) is not eliminated in substance and content. Paul uses it often to regulate our behavior and does not assume that the command to love is self-explanatory. Indeed, the exhortations throughout Paul’s epistles prove that love needs explanation.

Galatians 5: 15

The opposite of serving one another in love is found in v. 15. It should be observed that for Paul Christian obedience was not simply a private matter; it was primarily communal. Fee summarizes the communal focus of Paul’s exhortations in Gal. 5: 13—6: 10.

...the concern from beginning to end is with Christian life in community, not with the interior life of the individual Christian. Apart from 5: 17c...there is not a hint that Paul is here dealing with a “tension” between flesh and Spirit that rages within the human breast—in which the flesh most often appears as the stronger opponent. To the contrary, the issue from the beginning (vv. 13-15) and throughout (vv. 19-21, 26; 6: 1-4, 7-10) has to do with Spirit life within the believing community. The individual is not thereby brushed aside; after all, one both enters and lives within the Christian community at the individual level. But that is where the individual believer fits into the argument. Within the context of the church each one is to live out his or her freedom by becoming love slaves to one another (v. 13). The imperative “walk by the Spirit” does not emphasize “the introspective conscience of the Western mind,” but rather calls for a life in the Spirit that does not “eat and devour” one another (v. 15) and which does not through conceit provoke and envy others (v. 26). The “fruit of the Spirit” engenders “love, joy, and peace” within the community, not primarily within the believer’s own heart (v. 22). Such a Spirit person will be among those who restore an individual who “is overtaken in a fault” (6: 1). And the final expression of “sowing in the Spirit” is “to do good to all people, especially those of the household of the faith” (v. 10) (Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* p. 425)

Again, Fee’s concern with the corporate emphasis of the text may be a bit overstated (“there is not a hint...”). After all, immorality, drunkenness, idolatry, etc. can be intense spiritual battles

fought within the individual soul. Nevertheless, his emphasis should be appreciated, and the corporate nature of the exhortations often neglected should be carefully noted.

2. The Spirit in opposition to the flesh (Galatians 5: 16-26)

a. The Spirit's superiority to the flesh (vv. 16-18)

“Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” is primarily directed toward the life of the people of God lived in community—the church. The “desire of the flesh” describes most of all those desires which result in factionalism and the harmful fracturing of others in the body: “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying” (vv. 20-21a). Of course, private morality is not left out of the list but is found in “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery...drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (vv. 19-20a, 21a). But even in these less corporate, more private sins, the potential harm to the body in “biting and devouring one another” should be evident. No private sin can be isolated completely from the body of Christ; everything we do affects other people within the church even as every physical organ affects our whole body.

“Walk” is a form of *peripateo* (1 Co. 3:3; Eph. 5:2, 8, 15; Col. 2:6; 4: 5; 1 Thess. 4:1) and is the common expression Paul uses in urging believers to live the Christian life (17 usages in all; Fee, p. 429). The verb is present imperative which indicates that we must live (“walk”) consistently, thus the verse could be translated, “go on walking in the Spirit” (Fee, p. 430).

The objection to Paul's gospel anticipated in 2: 17 was that a gospel which ignores the necessity of keeping the law for salvation will leave a man in his sinful condition and make “Christ a minister of sin”. Paul's response to this was “May it never be!” Christ would not give us a gospel which leaves us in our sinful condition. To buttress this assertion, Paul goes into more detail in chapter 5 and proves that faith in Christ will change a person's behavior apart from the yoke of law-keeping. Where the Law has failed (“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did”) the Spirit received by faith will succeed. Knowledge of the Law is important, but by itself will not help us to live in Christian community. Walking by the Spirit is presented in v. 16 as the *means* by which we will not bite and devour one another.

Galatians 5: 17

Having stated the fact of the Spirit's involvement in curbing the desire of the flesh, v. 17 tells us how the Spirit works to accomplish this (Fee, p. 423). The Spirit and the flesh are in conflict with one another in which the desire of the flesh is set against the desire of the Spirit. The end result is that because of this conflict between the Spirit and the flesh, we cannot do the things we please. But the question is: Who wins the match, the flesh or the Spirit? One interpretation takes the phrase, “so that you may not do the things that you please” as an indication of our defeat in the face of the flesh. The things which we please, according to this interpretation, are the things we wish to do in cooperation with the Spirit. But because of the opposition of the flesh, we cannot do those things. We are reminded of the struggle Paul describes in Romans 7 in which he says “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish” (vv. 18-19). The psychology of this struggle in Romans 7 is often imported into the text of Galatians 5: 17 with the result that the flesh appears to come out on top.

But the meaning is that “the things we please” are the cravings of the flesh which the Spirit within us *prevents* us from doing. This interpretation would appear more in keeping with the context of v. 16 in which Paul assures us that if we walk by the Spirit we *will not* carry out the desire of the flesh. This assurance is followed by the explanation, “for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh....” In other words, “You will not be able to bite and devour one another because as you walk by the Spirit, He (the Spirit) is opposing the desire of the flesh within you.” In v. 17 Paul is concerned to show the sufficiency of the Spirit in restraining the desire of the flesh—“you will not carry out the desire of the flesh”.

Galatians 5: 18

This verse does not seem to follow from what Paul has said in vv. 16-17, but it *does* follow from what he has said in vv. 13-14 and in previous chapters. Paul is concerned to show that walking in the Spirit, not slavish obedience to the Law, is the *most effective deterrent* to biting and devouring one another in the church. Our freedom in Christ is not to be used as an opportunity (“base of operations”) for doing whatever we please. Just because we are no longer under the disciplinary tutelage of the Law (3: 25) does not mean that we are *lawless*. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is a statement right out of the OT and is the summary statement of all the duties required of us found in the last five commandments. But rather than remaining “under” this external, elementary disciplinarian which provided no internal power against sin, we are now placed under the new regulation of the Spirit who Himself powerfully stands in opposition to the flesh. Therefore, if we are led by the Spirit, we are no longer “under” the external, elemental regulation of the Law since the Spirit is continually with us and in us convicting us of sin and stimulating us to righteousness. However, what the Spirit directs us to do will not be contrary to the moral law of God but fully in keeping with it. The Spirit will never direct us to do something contrary to His nature as God, “He will guide you into all the truth...” (Jn. 16: 13).

Being “led by the Spirit” (or “walking by the Spirit”) and being “under law” are two opposite conditions just as being “under law” and being “under grace” are two opposite conditions. Paul’s assurance in v. 16 that if we walk by the Spirit we will not fulfill the desire of the flesh is synonymous with his assurances in Romans 6: 14: “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.” Being “under grace” then, is the same as being “led by the Spirit”, a condition in which the Christian is “putting to death the deeds of the body”. And he does so “by [or “by means of”] the Spirit (Rom. 8: 13). The Spirit, therefore, is superior to the observance of the Law which could not accomplish sanctification because it was weak through the flesh (Rom. 8: 3). God sending his Son as an offering for sin accomplished what the Law could not do. Through the offering of Christ we receive the Spirit through whose power we now walk and fulfill the requirements of the Law (Rom. 8: 4). This is the same as saying that we are dead to the Law through the body of Christ to whom we are joined in order that we might bear the fruit of righteousness for God (Rom. 7: 4). From these and other verses of Scripture it is clear that the observance of the law apart from the work of the Spirit does not produce the Christian behavior which is the goal of our redemption. Jesus said the same, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (Jn. 6: 63). There is no substitute for dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

The great practical lesson taught us by this passage [Gal. 5: 16-26] is, that, the true way of mortifying sin and making progress in holiness, is to yield our minds and hearts more and more up to the

transforming influence of divine truth. Divine truth is efficacious [effective] only when attended by the operation of the Divine Spirit. The humble diligent study of the Bible, especially the New Testament scriptures, and fervent believing prayers for the assistance of the Holy Spirit are the principal means of Christian sanctification (Brown, *Galatians*, p. 132).

For more comparisons of the Christian state with the state of unbelief, consider the following:

<i>Believer</i>	<i>Unbeliever</i>
under grace (Rom. 6: 14)	under law (Rom. 6: 14)
enslaved to God (Rom. 6: 22)	slaves of sin (Rom. 6: 20)
freed from sin (Rom. 6: 18; 22)	free in regard to righteousness (Rom. 6: 20)
slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6: 18)	
no longer under a pedagogue	under a pedagogue (Gal. 3: 24-25)
dead to the Law (Rom. 7: 20)	
dead to sin (Rom. 6: 7)	dead in sin (Eph. 2: 1, 5)
released from the Law (Rom. 7: 6)	
Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8: 15)	Spirit of slavery to fear (Rom. 8: 15)
in the Spirit (Rom. 8: 9)	
not in the flesh (Rom. 8: 9)	in the flesh (Rom. 7: 5; 8: 8)
according to the Spirit (Rom. 8: 5)	according to the flesh (Rom. 8: 5)
mind set on the Spirit (Rom. 8: 6)	mind set on the flesh (Rom. 8: 6)

b. The deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5: 19-21)

The deeds of the flesh find their source in the “desire of the flesh” found in v. 16. Immorality, impurity (Eph. 5: 13), and sensuality (Rom. 13: 13) refer primarily to sexual sins. Idolatry refers to illicit worship which may include greed (Col. 3: 5; Matt. 6: 24) and sorcery is “the secret tampering with the power of evil” (Stott, p. 147; quoting J.B. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 211). This “tampering with evil” applies to African Christians who have not allowed their Christian profession to eliminate their loyalties to traditional African religions. Enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envying refer, as we discovered earlier, to the social sins which threatened the community of the body. Drunkenness and carousing (Rom. 13: 13) refer to general absence of the self-control which is the fruit of the Spirit (v. 23).

The list of negative characteristics is not meant to be exhaustive. Paul could have listed many more (“and things like these”). But it is noteworthy that most of them refer to the social sins which threaten the peace and harmony of the body of Christ and hinder mutual worship and cooperation in ministry. Most of all, they destroy the picture of the mutual love and cooperation existing in the Holy Trinity. If members of the body of Christ are at each other’s throats, how can the church testify to the holiness, purity, and love of the Trinity? Contextually these social sins are connected to v. 15, “But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.”

It is very likely that the tedious emphasis on keeping the Law was resulting in theological “hair-splitting” leading to a new breed of Pharisees who became the new spiritual police in the Galatian church. They alone would decide what rules must be kept concerning Sabbath days, months, and years (4: 10)—precisely what Paul counsels against in Rom. 14: 5 and Col. 2: 16. A large measure of enmity, strife, jealousy, disputes, dissensions (et al—“and Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com

others”) is caused by people who emphasize some aspects of the Mosaic Law which are disputed by other believers as being the ceremonial, “elemental things” which are fulfilled and done away with in Christ. No Christian who knows his Bible would deny that one day a week must be set aside for the public worship of God’s people (Heb. 10: 24-25), but what else must be done on this day is a matter hotly debated in the church which has caused dissension, strife, and the division of the body both by those who hold to strict views of the Sabbath and those who don’t. It is truly a matter worth argument, but not at the expense of Christian love and unity.

Those who believe that a strict view of the Sabbath is still an abiding moral law in the New Covenant should be respected for their view as those who wish to be true and obedient to the abiding principal of the Sabbath carried over into the New Covenant. Any charge of legalism is totally unwise and has fueled much of the past and present strife. On the other hand, it is also unnecessary to charge others having a more lenient view of the Sabbath with antinomianism. In the body of Christ, we should be able to sit down peacefully with our brothers and discuss our differences while attributing to each other the best of motives—a fervent desire to be true to the scriptures. However, one of the problems is that a strict view of Sabbath observance obligates its proponents to seriously consider whether church discipline should be administered to those who are careless in their observance of the Sabbath—perhaps those who play tennis, go out to restaurants, or make love to their wives on Sunday afternoon following church services—all of which appear out of keeping with the restrictions given in Isa. 58: 13-14 about “doing your own pleasure on My holy day” and all of which have been actually debated by church sessions. Isaiah 58 is a very positive passage describing the Sabbath day which should not be discarded. However, the question is whether this attitude concerning our Sabbath rest should be on a particular day or every day since faithful trust in Christ Jesus is presented to us as the true fulfillment of the Sabbath (Heb. 3: 12-4: 11). The abiding principle seems to be found in v. 14, to “take delight in the Lord”.

But dissension over Sabbath observance is not suggested here as the only thing the Galatians were arguing about. This is only given as one possible example. Strife can arise over issues which have nothing to do with Christian theology and are much more common in the church than theological arguments. Further, it is quite evident that Paul’s list of sins is not limited to the social sins, but includes immorality, religious idolatry, and an uncontrolled life-style of drunkenness and carousing. The most important point Paul is making is that if a person’s life is dominated by such sins as those listed or sins “like these” (or even one of them), he will not inherit the kingdom of God (v. 21). If a person “practices such things” (not necessarily all of them), he proves that he is not being led by the Spirit and is not walking by the Spirit. If the Spirit sets its desire against the flesh which produces such sins, then the practice of such things indicates the absence of the Spirit’s work in the individual. We cannot claim perfection in any of these areas, but if our lives are dominated by sin there is reason to question whether the Spirit has taken control of us. The Spirit is not given to us to be ultimately defeated by the opposition of the flesh but will consistently win out over the flesh so that “we cannot do the things we please”.

Paul had warned the Galatians before, and he was warning them again now that if their lives were dominated by sin, they were not Christians—they would not inherit eternal life. Far from teaching them to clean up their lives in order to be saved, he is warning them that the reception of the Spirit through faith is the guarantee that a person’s life will not be dominated by sin. “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6: 14) and

“How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6: 2)—a rhetorical question demanding a negative answer: “We can’t live any longer in sin.”

This is the answer to the confusing question of how Uganda can be officially designated as one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International) but also be officially 88% Christian (*Operation World*). The corruption does not simply exist at the top of the government hierarchy, but penetrates to every level and corner of society from the merchant to the bricklayer. Many cannot be trusted to give an honest price in the market or an honest day’s labor. A corrupt population begets, and deserves, a corrupt government. It is also the answer to the confusing question of how the population of Rwanda (80% Christian; *Operation World*) can systematically slaughter 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a three month genocide. How can such an atrocity happen in a “Christian” nation? It is the answer to the question of how the population of the US (85 % Christian; *Operation World*), can callously abort 40 million unborn children since 1973 primarily for the selfish, self-centered convenience of women and their husbands or boy-friends who wished not to be hindered by an unwanted pregnancy. The answer to all these questions is this: Not all who claim to be Christians are true believers in Christ. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness’” (Matt. 7: 22-23).

c. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23)

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Again the list is not exhaustive (“against **such things** there is no law”). Besides, we can think of many good qualities the Spirit produces which are not in this list—thanksgiving, forgiveness, contentment, and humility, to name only a few. (For an excellent treatment of this passage, see Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, pp. 444-453).

It should be noted that the “works” of the flesh and the “fruit” of the Spirit draw attention to the distinction between human endeavor and the Spirit’s empowerment (Fee, p. 444). As I remarked above, the Spirit is superior to the Law which in the hands of sinners (Rom. 7: 10-13) could not accomplish the sanctification or changed behavior God intended for his people. “What the Law could not do, God did” (Rom. 8: 3) through the sacrifice of his son and the giving of the Spirit. “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...” (Jn. 16: 13). The law in hands of sinners fails, but the same law (“Love your neighbor as yourself”—v. 14) in the capable hands of the Spirit produces the obedience required. Law-keeping through human effort ends in failure, but keeping the law through dependence upon the Spirit succeeds.

The difference is that obedience is not the mechanical production of human effort but the organic fruit of a life which has been fundamentally changed by the Spirit. It is the natural out-working of a changed life. “Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit” (Matt. 7: 17). Nevertheless, the fruit of the Spirit is not passive existence but the active “walking” by the Spirit mentioned in v. 16. The Christian is fully engaged in mind and heart to order his life by the commandments of Scripture with the full assurance that his effort is not merely human, but human exertion in coordination with divine enablement (Phil. 2: 12-13—“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much

more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure”).

As in the former negative list, the fruit of the Spirit listed has its primary (but not exclusive) emphasis in social relationships and not in the internal life of the believer. Of course, they are also necessary qualities for the individual believer or else they will not be manifested in community. Love is listed first, as would be expected since we receive the outpouring of the love of God through the Spirit (Rom. 5: 5). Love is not self-centered but directed toward the good and benefit of the whole body (1 Cor. 13), the very opposite of a biting and devouring spirit. Even the fruit of joy cannot be limited to the individual experience of joy but joy within the community of faith as it rejoices together in tribulations and trials because of the eschatological hope of the inheritance (1Thes. 1: 6 and 5: 16). Peace within the human soul in the midst of trials also produces peace with fellow believers. Forbearance or patience is the attitude of longsuffering toward others who may be difficult to get along with. Some personalities are tiresome, and our first inclination is to avoid them or clash with them. In patience we forbear with such people knowing that God continues to be patient with us. Kindness is the flip side of patience which not only “puts up” with difficult people but positively goes out of its way to show them mercy. Goodness is the trait that is constantly and consistently finding things to do for the benefit of others (6: 9-10). Faithfulness could mean loyalty to God or others or both. A faithful man is one whose trustworthiness is predictable and constant. Gentleness is the quality which restrains our tendency to be overbearing in our correction of others. It goes along with the humility of knowing that we, too, are frail and prone to error (6: 1-3). Self-control is implied in all of the fruit of the Spirit but may have more direct application to the sexual sins of immorality and impurity and the inability to control one’s drinking and carousing.

Against such things, there is no law, which is directly connected to v. 18, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” To the extent that a man or woman is consistently availing himself or herself of the Spirit’s power against the desire of the flesh, his life will be characterized by the Spirit’s fruit. There is a law against murder and theft, but there is no law against love and patience. There is a law against sexual immorality, but there is no law against self-control. In the state of Mississippi, there is a law on the books against adultery which imposes fines against the adulterer. The state stopped enforcing the law many years ago, but the law is irrelevant to me. I don’t need a law to force me to be faithful to my wife, and there is no law against faithfulness to one’s spouse. The law is made for transgressors of the law, not for those who manifest the fruit of the Spirit: “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching” (1 Tim. 1: 8-10).

d. The crucifixion of the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5: 24)

Those who belong to Christ—true Christians (3: 29)—have crucified the flesh. The verb is ***aorist active indicative*** which means that the act of crucifixion is considered a definitive, once and-for-all-action which the subjects (those who belong to Christ) carry out. ***We*** have crucified the flesh definitively. But in Rom. 6: 6 Paul says that “our old self was crucified with him [*Christ*]”. The verb there is aorist ***passive*** indicative; the old self was crucified not by us but

through the crucifixion of Christ. So which is it? Do **we** crucify the flesh with its passions and desires or does **God** do it through the work of Christ? The answer is both. By virtue of the fact that the old man has been definitively (decisively) crucified in the death of Christ and by virtue of the fact that the believer lives in union with Christ in his crucifixion (Gal. 2: 20), he actively participates in the results of this crucifixion. When Christ was crucified, the believer was crucified. This is the passive side of our crucifixion—something done **to** us, not **by** us, what John Murray terms “definitive sanctification” (*The Collected Writing of John Murray*, Vol. 2).

The Romans passage emphasizes the fact that by means of union with Christ the old man in the flesh undergoes crucifixion. The Galatians passage, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that through our active (not passive) faith in Christ we voluntarily and actively entered into this union with him—a union in which our old man was crucified. Having been crucified with Christ, we may now actively crucify (put to death—Rom. 8: 13) the sinful patterns of the old self which once enslaved us but which enslave us no longer. Although we have died with Christ in His crucifixion, our **definitive** sanctification at conversion is followed by **progressive** sanctification throughout life. Once we are **set apart to be holy**—the meaning of sanctification—God continues making us holy through the operation of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the believer with the Spirit.

The same dynamic between the passive crucifixion of the believer (in Christ) and his active involvement in the crucifixion (or putting to death—Rom. 8: 13) of sin is found in Col. 3: 8-10. In the former passage, the believer is instructed to “put aside” anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, and lying—evil practices which could easily qualify as the other “such things” of Gal. 5: 21—the “deeds of the flesh”. These practices must be “laid aside” like an old garment (the verb is aorist imperative—“put them aside once and for all”). Further, the **imperative** of v. 8 is based on the **definitive action** of v. 9. The reason that the Colossians should, and could, lay aside these evil practices is that they have “laid aside” the old self (old man). Here the verb is also aorist indicating that they had decisively laid aside the old self definitively or once and for all. Murray explains.

Paul is not exhorting believers to put off the old man and to put on the new. He is urging them to desist from certain sins, sins which are indeed characteristic of the old man, and the reason he adduces for such abstinence is that they have put off the old man and have put on the new man. Since this is the case, Paul is saying in effect, do not practice those sins which are after the pattern of the old man but behave as new men, as indeed you are (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 214).

The laying aside of the old self in Colossians 3 is equivalent to the crucifixion of the flesh in Galatians 5:24, and the putting aside of the particular sinful practices mentioned in Colossians 3: 8 is equivalent to the coordinate crucifixion of the passions and desires of the flesh in Galatians 5: 24. Thus, the active crucifixion of our sinful passions is the result of the definitive crucifixion of the old self which we receive passively as a gift in the crucifixion of Christ. Our union with him in his crucifixion makes possible the active putting away of the flesh. To use Murray’s illustration, to say to a slave who has not been freed, “Don’t act as a slave”, is to mock his slavery. But to say the same thing to an emancipated (freed) slave is to encourage him to act upon his new identity (source unknown).

By describing the Christian life in terms of the daily crucifixion of sin, Paul holds up our sin in the worst possible light. Our sin is so evil that our treatment of it must be every bit as brutal and merciless as the execution called crucifixion. It is doubtful that there was ever a method of

execution more appalling than crucifixion. The bones went out of joint; the victim suffered from lack of oxygen, eventually killed him; but before he died many hours later, he suffered immeasurably in many different ways. Sin must be brutally put to death (cf. Stott, pp. 150-151).

3. The exhortation to walk by the Spirit in opposition to the flesh (Galatians 5: 25—6: 10)

Paul has already declared that he had been crucified with Christ, nevertheless he lived by the empowerment of Christ living in him by the Spirit (2: 20). What is true of Paul is also true of every believer; thus, Paul is not suggesting in v. 25 the uncertainty of living by the Spirit. Every believer does, in fact, live by the Spirit; and this fact presents the obligation to walk by the Spirit. Thus, the indicative (the statement of fact) leads naturally to the exhortative (the command). The word for “walk” is no longer *peripateo* (to walk around or to live) but *stoicheo* which means to “walk in line” with something. In this case it means “to walk in line with the Spirit” according to the rule or standard of the Spirit. The word is also used in Romans 4: 12 in which we are told that Abraham is the father of all who “follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham”, and again in Galatians in 6: 16, “those who walk by this rule”.

Thus, walking by the Spirit is not some vague, mystic sensibility to his inaudible voice as if we should be expecting minute by minute revelation to direct our lives. The direction of the Spirit and the word of God go hand in hand. Walking by the Spirit means keeping in step with His standards of perfection—the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 and other “such things” (v. 23) which we find elsewhere in Scripture, including loving your neighbor as yourself (v. 14). In other words, walking by the Spirit means obeying the law of God found throughout Scripture. However, it does not mean mechanical, legalistic obedience. It means obeying out of love for God and for one’s neighbor and also obeying with the proper goal, the glory of God and the kingdom of God. Three things are necessary for any act or thought to please God: (1) the right standard, the word of God, (2) the right motives, love for God and others, (3) the right goal, the glory of God and the kingdom of God.

Such radical obedience requires total dependence upon the Spirit to help us obey the Scriptures and to make the practical applications of the Scriptures to concrete situations in our lives. We are utterly powerless to make these applications without the Spirit’s help. John Brown says it well.

The great practical lesson taught us by this passage is, that, the true way of mortifying sin [putting sin to death] and making progress in holiness, is to yield our minds and hearts more and more up to the transforming influence of divine truth. Divine truth is efficacious only when attended by the operation of the Divine Spirit. The humble diligent study of the Bible...and fervent believing prayers for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, are the principal means of Christian sanctification (*Galatians*, p. 132).

a. Practical example of not walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5: 26)

Paul concludes the chapter with an exhortation coordinate (of the same order) to the remark made in v.15. In that verse he simply states the fact that if the Galatians were in the habit of biting and devouring one another, they would, in fact, be consumed by one another. He closes the section with an exhortation against pride, competition, and envy. If we look at the structure of the passage from vv. 15-26, it appears that the instructions pertaining to walking by the Spirit Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com

in opposition to the flesh are bracketed [] between v.15 and v. 26. Hermeneutically, vv. 15 and 26 form an *inclusion* highlighting the importance of walking by Spirit rather than walking by the flesh. Thus, what Paul says about the flesh and the Spirit (vv. 16-25) is primarily designed for the purpose of dealing with the interpersonal problems of the Galatians who are presently in the habit of biting, devouring, boasting, challenging, and envying one another.

We find a similar structure in Philippians 2 in which Paul opens the chapter with the exhortation to be of the same mind with one another and to put the interests of others ahead of one's own personal interests (2: 1-4). This exhortation is followed by the exhortation to have the same attitude of Christ who, although he was God, did not cling to his rights and privileges but emptied himself by laying aside his prerogatives in order to become a man and die a substitutionary death on the cross for others (vv. 5-11). This is followed by instructions to obey the will of God because God is at work in them, an obedience which includes “[*doing*] all things without grumbling or disputing” (v. 14) for the purpose of being a good corporate witness before a world of unbelievers (v. 15). Thus, the entire section on the humility of Christ and His self-sacrifice (vv. 5-11) is bracketed [] between the exhortations to be of the same mind, considering the interests of others ahead of your own (vv. 1-5) and doing all things without grumbling or disputing (v.14). Perhaps Paul is especially sensitive to the disputing going on in Philippi because some of his own assistants elsewhere were selfishly pursuing their own interests instead of Christ's interests (2: 20-21). We learn also from Phil. 4: 2-3 that two women, Euodia and Syntyche, were having personal problems in the church. *Paul's theology was intensely pastoral.* One of the greatest descriptions of the deity of Christ and His self-sacrificial incarnation is given to the church primarily for the purpose of promoting harmony in the body of Christ.

Humility is not explicitly named among the fruit of the Spirit in vv. 22-23, but the mention of “boasting” in v. 26 clearly supports the interpretation that the list of fruit is not intended to be exhaustive. The word for boasting is *kenodoxos* (*keno*-empty; plus *doxos*-glory, or empty glory). The idea is that of boasting in something about ourselves which is empty or vain. When we boast in ourselves our boasting must always be “empty” since we have no grounds or basis for self-boasting. Boasting is the very antithesis (opposite) to the nature of the Holy Spirit who willingly and humbly subordinates Himself to the Father and the Son to accomplish the finished task of redemption—regeneration, faith, and sanctification. The Spirit does not draw attention to himself but to Christ, “for He [*the Spirit*] will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me [*Christ*]; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you” (Jn. 16: 13b-14). If we are living by the power of the Spirit, boasting is eliminated because we are reminded by the Spirit that we have nothing of our own which we did not receive freely by God's grace. “For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4: 7)

Challenging one another is also foreign to the nature of the Spirit since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *cooperation, not competition*. (The word, *prokaleo* can have the connotation of challenging one to combat—*Robertson's Word Pictures, Bible Works*). The Spirit does not compete with the Father and the Son in order to exalt his own work, but willingly works together with the Father and the Spirit to accomplish a mutual goal. The church is patterned after this Trinitarian cooperation as a body with feet, hands, ears, eyes, and unseen members (1Cor. 12: 14-27). The different parts of the body are not in competition with one another. If they were, we would soon be dead. And a church in which members are in competition will soon be dead apart

from the intervention of the Spirit who alone can give us the fruit of the Spirit, including the fruit of humility and cooperation.

Pride, competition, and envy all go hand in hand; they feed upon one another. People envy the gifts, talents, possessions of others because they are prideful and wish to be equally recognized for their gifts. They challenge or provoke others in order to gain some advantage over them or to subtract some recognition from them. Why? Simply because they are envious of what this person has. Love (the fruit of the Spirit), on the other hand, “is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered...but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13: 4b-6b). Rejoicing with the truth must mean that love rejoices in the gifts, talents, and possessions of other believers who have the ability and opportunity to use these things in the interest of the kingdom of God.

b. Practical examples of walking by the Spirit (Galatians 6: 1-10)

(1) Bearing one another’s burdens of sin (Galatians 6: 1-5)

The last verse of Chapter 5 naturally transitions into Chapter 6. Rather than challenging one another and trying to gain advantage over one another, we are instructed to help one another live the Christian life in a consistent way. Love “does not rejoice in unrighteousness” (1 Cor. 13: 6b); it does not rejoice when others stumble and fall. Verses 1-5 express a unified thought. If a brother in Christ is caught (overtaken or caught by surprise) he should be restored in the spirit of gentleness (one of the fruit of the Spirit). The verb “caught” implies that this brother is not a habitual, incorrigible sinner but one who slips into sin (Brown, p. 140). Any believer who is humble enough to recognize his own frailty (“you who are spiritual”) knows that this can happen to him as well. For this reason, Paul says, “each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted”. Arrogance, on the other hand, says, “I would never fall into a sin like that! I’m too spiritual.” On the contrary, it is the “spiritual” man of v.1 who is capable of dealing effectively with fallen sinners because he recognizes his own weakness and proneness to sin. Paul is not talking about the spiritual “elite” in the church of Galatia but those whose lives are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Fee, p. 462)

When a member of the human body is injured, the immediate solution is not amputation but repair (Brown, p. 140; the verb “restored” also means to “put in order” and is “used in secular Greek as a medical term for setting a fractured or dislocated bone”—Stott, p. 160). So it must be in the body of Christ. We do not immediately chop them off, but restore them to righteousness. We can see here the difference between the situation of Galatians 6 and that of 1 Corinthians 5 in which Paul orders the church to excommunicate a man who is living in incest with his stepmother. It must be assumed that this man had been reproached for his sin, but to no avail, and that the church had done nothing else about the matter. According to the procedure outlined in Matt. 18: 15-20, the man in Corinth must be expelled from the church. But an occasional lapse into even serious sin, followed by repentance, does not require excommunication, but gentle correction (see also 2 Thess. 3: 10-15 with a special emphasis on v. 15, “admonish him as a brother”).

It should also be noticed from this passage and the one in Matthew 18 that every member of the body of Christ is being recruited for the purpose of restoration. Neither Paul nor Jesus singles

out the elders of the church as the sole agents of restoration. In most situations the elders of the church need not even become involved. If my brother is caught in sin, and I can go to him personally with the result that he repents, well and good. There is no need to make a public display of it. The next time *I* may be the one who needs correction, and I would desire that he treat me with as much gentleness. If he doesn't repent, the steps of Matthew 18: 15-20 must be systematically obeyed. What must not be done is to ignore the matter in hopes that it will go away. It will not go away. Sin behaves in a community like yeast in a lump of dough—it spreads (1 Cor. 5: 6). It is not in the best interest of the individual sinner or the congregation to let the matter follow its own course thus promoting further sin both by him and perhaps other members of the congregation. This is not love, but presumption and negligence.

The bearing of burdens of v. 2 is in connection with v. 1, and the word (*bastazo*) is used of Christ bearing his cross (Jn. 19: 17). Although it obviously may apply to other burdens, the burden of sin is the burden in view in the text. By doing so, we “fulfill the law of Christ” who bore our burden of sin on the cross. By bearing our sin, Christ broke the dominion of sin in our lives, and by bearing one another's burden of sin, we help break patterns of sin in their lives. In this way we also imitate Christ in his sympathy with sinners “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet without sin*” (Heb. 4: 15). Christ never sinned, but he knew all about the power of temptation and sympathizes with the weakness of his creatures.

The willingness to help a fallen brother is the opposite of the boastful, challenging, and envious spirit of 5: 26, the spirit which bites and devours another (v. 15), especially when he is fallen—like kicking someone when they are down. Thus, Paul does not chart a new course in his instructions of chapter 6 but merely elaborates further on what he has already said in chapter 5. Love does not rejoice in the spiritual failings of others. And if we think we are super-spiritual (“something”) when we are, in fact, “nothing”, we deceive ourselves.

Verses 4-5 appear problematic since they seem to reverse Paul's exhortation against boasting and to reverse the exhortation of bearing one another's burdens. It is best understood if we interpret his words as “tongue in cheek” or sarcastic. In the previous verse he warns us not to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are “something when [*we*] are nothing”; therefore, verse 4 cannot properly be interpreted as an encouragement to boast in our spiritual achievements, even if such boasting is private. Boasting is boasting whether done publicly or privately. Paul's meaning is this: If we examine our own work carefully, we will find that there is nothing at all to boast about. Rather than comparing ourselves with others and thinking ourselves superior, upon serious examination we may not look so good after all. We will also find that we have enough burden of sin ourselves for which we will be held accountable (Brown, p. 147).

(2) *Bearing the financial burdens of teachers (Galatians 6: 6-8)*

This section gives us a good example of another kind of burden bearing—bearing the burdens of those who preach and teach the word of God. Though most commentators divide this section into separate subjects, Paul is really dealing with only one subject from different angles. He is talking about the financial care of ministers of the gospel, “elders who rule well...especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5: 17). Those who are taught the word are obligated to share “all good things” (i.e. all things necessary for proper assistance) with those who teach. It is spelled out more forcefully and frankly in 1 Cor. 9: 11, “If we sowed spiritual

things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?” Almost one-half of 1 Corinthians 9 is devoted to the proper remuneration of pastors. The definitive principle is laid down in v. 14, “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel”, a reference to the Lord’s instructions in Matt. 10: 10 and Lk. 10: 7.

There should be nothing embarrassing about this directive for the pastor who works hard in the ministry. The analogy used both in 1 Corinthians 9: 9 and 1 Timothy 5: 18 is that of an ox threshing the grain, the case law in the OT forbidding the farmer from preventing the ox from eating while he is threshing. While ministers may not find it flattering to be compared to oxen, the analogy is actually a compliment. The work they do is hard labor, not physically but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Those who work hard at it find it to be the most demanding work on earth, more difficult than physical labor (coming from the personal experience of one who has done a considerable amount of both physical and mental labor).

Paul’s (and Jesus’) insistence that preachers be supported establishes obligations in two directions. First, it obligates the congregation to appreciate and provide for the needs of their pastors. Congregations who do not provide for their pastors prove beyond any reasonable doubt that they as a corporate body *despise the word of God*. Objections to the effect that the average member of the church is poor are unconvincing when the nice hairdos, expensive dresses, and cell-phones continue to proliferate (multiply) in the church. People of any culture spend money on what is important to them, and if the collection plates of most African churches are any indication, the preaching of the word is lightly esteemed in Africa. But no worthy pastor should be treated like a poor beggar depending on the condescending (treating someone with contempt) handouts of his congregation. The brick layer who builds the church would not consider his pay as charity but as wages justly earned, and so it should be with a hard-working pastor. If a congregation leaves him destitute and poor, they are stealing from God (Mal. 3: 8). While pastors should live simple lives devoid of extravagance, they should not be constantly encumbered by financial distress more disabling than that of the average member of their congregation. Like everyone else, they and their families must eat, and their children must have school fees.

Presently in the Ankole Diocese of Uganda, the lay reader receives 100,000 Uganda shillings per month and the pastor 120,000 *if* enough offerings come in. Sometimes they don’t get paid at all for months at a time. Students training at Uganda Bible Institute have not been successful in collecting a modest 300,000 Uganda shillings per semester for their school fees from those who should consider it a privilege to help them improve their skills in the ministry. And apparently they have also not received much help from the leaders of the Ankole Diocese in the form of fundraising events and public announcements for the purpose of establishing student scholarship funds. This is a disgrace to the church and an occasion for the heathen to blaspheme the name of God. It is small wonder that pastors in the Church of Uganda are so despised by the world if they are so little esteemed by professing Christians in their own denomination.

[Note to the reader: I wrote this in 2005 or 2006. Since then, the situation has not improved at all in the Church of Uganda, but it is no better among African churches of other denominations and possibly even worse.]

On the flip side of the coin, the pastor’s pay obligates him to work, and if he does not work, neither should he be allowed to eat (2 Thess. 3: 10). What is good for the common Christian who

is too lazy to work is also good for the pastor. He is not being paid to take long naps during the middle of the day or to fritter his time away in the village or market place talking idly about nothing while neglecting the most important tasks of study, prayer, preaching and counseling (Acts 6: 2, 4). It is presumptuous for the pastor to expect his congregation to care for his physical needs while neglecting the congregation's spiritual needs—manifested by poor preparation of sermons, lack of interest in the congregation, etc. The pastor's work is the greatest task on earth. To be able to toil hours upon hours over the Scriptures which are given to us by none other than the third person of the Holy Trinity is a privilege which few have. If a man despises this privilege, he despises the God who gave it, and he should find some other work to do. Many African cities are growing and need more bricklayers. May I suggest you look in this direction, but don't continue in a ministry you apparently despise.

But the emphasis in this passage is not the responsibility of the pastor to work but that of the congregation to share their material resources with the pastor who *does* work. Most commentators will interpret Paul's words in vv. 7-8 as the introduction of a new topic as if he has left the subject of the support of pastors and gone to the general subject of sowing to the flesh (e.g. Brown, pp. 149-152). It is true that the statement in vv. 7-8 can be applied to immoral behavior of any kind, but the context in which it is given militates against this general interpretation. Paul is still talking about the support of pastors, and he is arguing that those who fail to do so by spending too much of their material resources on themselves are in essence sowing to the flesh, and that from the flesh they will reap corruption. The metaphor of sowing and reaping is often used by Paul in reference to giving (1 Cor. 9: 11; 2 Cor. 9: 6—The first reference pertains to the contributions of Christians in support of their pastors; the second has reference to benevolent giving to Christians in need. There is no exegetical reason to doubt this specific reference here.)

There are many believers who are not obedient in sharing an appropriate portion of their incomes with those who teach, but they seem to have plenty of income left to purchase the things they want. This has been my observation in the US. There are many struggling pastors in small, independent congregations who live on very humble means. The excuse is always that a small congregation cannot easily support a full-time pastor's salary, but if you do the math you will find that twenty household incomes will be sufficient to support a pastor full time at a livable income. This is probably an accurate figure for a church in Africa as well. Assuming the average household income of a typical Ugandan is 100,000 shillings per month, ten per cent is 10,000 shillings x 20 = 200,000 shillings per month, twice the existing salary of a lay reader. The limiting factor is not money, but commitment.

Christians who despise their pastors by not caring for their needs will reap what they sow (v. 7). Here the apostle states a general principle. A life given over to the satisfaction of the flesh is a life separated from God and one which will reap only corruption. Nothing good grows from the flesh and fleshly desires (Rom. 7: 18a; 1 Jn. 2: 15-16). Such a person is not a believer. By stating the extreme consequences of sowing to the flesh, Paul is not implying that the Galatians who were not supporting their teachers were outright unbelievers, but only that they were *acting* like unbelievers who will one day reap the corruption which they had sown. Such professing Christians should then examine themselves carefully to see if they are in Christ.

(3) Doing good to all men, especially to believers (Galatians 6: 9-10)

On the other hand a person who is generous with his earthly goods is sowing to the Spirit for he is thereby claiming the promise that God will reward him out of his abundant riches and kindness either in this life or the life to come (v. 9). He will “reap eternal life” (v. 8), not for his generosity, but because his good deeds demonstrate the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Thus we should not grow weary in doing good to people knowing that God will never forget the kindness of His people toward others, especially toward other believers “who are of the household of the faith” (v. 10). We are often prone to grow weary in doing good, like children who sow seeds in the ground and wish to see them spring up on the same day (Brown, p. 153). Realistically, season after season may come and go without seeing any encouraging fruit from our labor in good deeds, but God is not obligated to reward us according to our schedule, but in “due season”, a season which may be delayed to the next life.

There is a story about a friend of George Mueller, a great believer of the 19th century, who resisted all Mueller’s efforts at evangelism and prayer. Mueller would pray daily for his friend’s conversion, but he died without ever seeing this happen. But his lost friend was converted through the preaching of the gospel on the very day of Mueller’s funeral. Mueller never “lost heart” in “doing good” to his friend by sharing the gospel, and finally he reaped the harvest in “due season.” They are now together in heaven.

Our kindness to others often seems to yield no fruit, but we must walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5: 7). The Scriptures teach us that no seed planted in the ground for the sake of Christ will fall to the ground for nothing; in due season we will harvest. Therefore, while we have opportunity in this life, let us continue doing good to all men without growing weary, especially to believers and particularly to those believers who labor in the word to help us grow in our faith.

IV. Postscript—Gal. 6: 11-18

A. Paul’s Signature (v. 11)

Notice in v. 11 that Paul identifies himself as the writer of the letter in “large letters” written with his own hand. This verse should be compared to 2 Thes. 3: 17 in which Paul purposely draws attention to his “distinguishing mark in every letter” to prevent the possibility of someone forging his name (Stott, p. 175). Perhaps writing his signature in “large letters” was a further guarantee against forgery since large letters of a person’s name would be more difficult to forge than small ones. Considering the difficulty of the Galatian heresy, Paul was very careful to make sure that there was no possibility of forgery. Normally Paul used an amanuensis, a secretary who took dictation from the one writing the letter (cf. Rom. 16: 22 which identifies the amanuensis by name). That Paul wrote the greeting to the Thessalonians with his own hand alerts the reader to the fact that the rest of the letter was dictated from Paul and *not* written by Paul’s own hand (2 Thess. 3: 17). Dictation was apparently his normal practice (1 Cor. 16: 21; Col. 4: 18; Rom. 16: 22).

B. Boasting in the flesh (Galatians 6: 12-15)

The rest of the letter is a postscript after the signature, an afterthought, as if to say, “Oh, by the way.” But given the seriousness of the situation, this is not just a casual “by the way.” The false apostles attempting to force circumcision upon the Galatians were not doing so out of pure motives, namely love for the Galatians, but for two other reasons. First they wished to avoid the Christ’s Community Study Center—Mbarara, Uganda—mcneilldf@gmail.com

persecution of the Jews who were the primary persecutors of Christians in the early days of Christianity (v. 12). Paul knew this all too well since he was once the fiercest persecutor of the Christian faith. This is why Paul says earlier, “But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished” (5: 11). If circumcision is required, the Judaizers have won their argument that Christ is not sufficient for salvation but is only a supplement (an added requirement) to keeping the Law. Secondly, the Judaizers wanted to “boast in your [*the Galatians*] flesh” (v. 13). That is, they wanted to boast about having a following of disciples in Galatia which had yielded to their insistence that circumcision was essential to salvation (5: 17).

Circumcision easily yielded itself to human boasting because it was an external sign. The number of “converts” who are circumcised can be counted. “Sir, have you been circumcised?” And he replies, “Why, yes, I have.” “Good,” answers the proud teacher, “then you are my Christian disciple.” The same can be true of those who teach that baptism is a necessary requirement of justification or even by those who simply emphasize baptism as a fool-proof sign of true conversion. It is even easier to count baptisms since they are public signs, and preachers everywhere are proud to announce that during their public ministry a certain number of people were baptized. Hundreds of baptisms, they believe, give them reason for boasting. It is a peculiar temptation of missionaries to write home to their supporters that dozens, perhaps hundreds, of people have come to Christ and been baptized under their ministry. This kind of thing impresses donors who might be more willing to send more money to “successful” missionaries since they are really getting results. But all of this is boasting in the flesh, and Paul would have nothing to do with it: “But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (v. 14).

Paul had no desire to boast in his converts or in anything which even hinted at human achievement independent of Christ. This is the “world” that Paul is talking about—*the world of boasting in human achievement*, the only world he knew before he met Christ on the road to Damascus. This was the world of “putting confidence in the flesh”: “...circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil 3: 5-6). But this was the world which was now “crucified” (dead) to Paul and the world to which Paul was also “crucified” (v. 14)), for “...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...(Phil. 3: 7-10). The world of boasting in human achievement is the same world to which we must die to lay hold of the righteousness of Christ by faith. We cannot hold on to that world and Christ at the same time—the two are mutually exclusive and antithetical to one another.

The important thing was not circumcision, nor is it baptism or any external religious practice, but “a new creation”—a changed heart and a changed life (v. 15). This is something you cannot count numerically or boast about. No matter how many people have claimed to be “saved”

through your ministry, there is only one guarantee that their salvation is truly genuine—a changed heart which expresses itself in a changed life. Thus, we are always reduced to silence concerning any claims of “success” in our ministry. If people have been converted, we will have no reason to be sure unless they are showing signs of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. If they are not showing such evidence, what right do we have in boasting in their baptism? And if they are demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, what right do we have in boasting in this fruit since it is the fruit of the *Spirit* and not our own fruit? So there is no room for boasting either way. The Apostle Paul, the greatest missionary who ever lived apart from Christ, had only one thing he wished to boast in, “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”, and it was through this cruel implement of death to the self that he died to the world of human achievement and boasting.

C. Benediction and warning (vv. 16-18)

The word, “walk”, in v. 16 is again *stoicheo* which is to “line up with” and to walk by a certain standard or rule (see 5: 25). To those who walk by the standard of Christ crucified on the cross as the only sufficient means of salvation, he desires the peace and mercy of God to be upon them and upon “the Israel of God”—the whole church throughout the whole world.

He follows this benediction by a word of warning. Paul is tired of being troubled by those who preach a false gospel, particularly those who are not marked as he was by the “brand-marks” of Jesus. These brand-marks (*stigmata*) refer to the sufferings of Christ—the nail prints in his hands and feet, the scars on his head from the crown of thorns, and the hole in his side from the spear. Paul, a faithful apostle of Christ, had borne his own suffering even early in his ministry and much more after this letter is written. On his very first missionary journey, Paul was stoned to the point of death but was supernaturally revived (Acts 14: 19-20). It is unlikely that he would have no visible scars to remind him of that event. Other afflictions would soon follow (2 Cor. 11: 23-26). The false apostles had no such brand-marks as proof of their suffering, thus they should remain silent and quit troubling those who have suffered.

Paul concludes with another benediction emphasizing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 18).

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