

GALATIANS STUDY NOTES

Galatians 1	2
Galatians 2.....	10
Galatians 3.....	20
Galatians 4	30
Galatians 5.....	41
Galatians 6.....	49
Appendix 1.....	55

Galatians 1

1:1-2 "Paul an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the Churches of Galatia."

Galatians would be a difficult letter. It is directed to a group of churches in Galatia, a province in Asia minor (modern day Turkey). These churches were known to each other and all under the same influence. From a doctrinal standpoint the influence was not good. It would be a letter in which Paul would need to express a righteous anger and frustration and yet it would need to be more than an emotional appeal. It would have to be well thought through and have intellectual clout. Beginning with his own qualifications Paul gives the letter an apologetic tone. Paul represented himself not just as a messenger sent by men with a message from other men. Rather he was divinely commissioned, prepared though the work of Jesus Christ, commissioned in a dramatic way by him, with all the authority of God the Father himself behind him. Paul's teaching and message, therefore, was not to be placed on the same level as that of normal "official spokesmen" or designated and approved teachers. He was not speculating in his doctrine. He was delivering from God the official position, the official version, if you will, of the Gospel.

This was not to say that Paul was not accountable to anyone. The letter would show that Paul's teaching had been intensely scrutinized and approved by the apostles appointed by Christ as heads of the Church. It could be shown to be in absolute harmony with the previous revelation of the Old Testament. It would also be shown to be in logical harmony with what they knew to be true of the life and work of Jesus. The letter is not just Paul's work. He wants them to know it comes from Christ, from His apostles, and from a group of concerned individuals who are with Paul.

1:3 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ,"

This is a standard greeting from Paul, especially weighty in the situation where the letter would concern a "grace issue," and where there could easily be faction and strife. This became his greeting because he believed that where Christ is at work there comes to be grace, a sense of God's great favor and mercy at work. There also comes to be peace, because God delineates a clear way in which to think and live. Revelation brings the sense of grace and peace. False teaching has a way of bringing shame, guilt, and turmoil. It carries with it a sense of unbending sternness and uneasiness. It produces a lack of transparency and a false sense of pride. It results in grumbling and disputes, rather than a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving. The law produces in some hopelessness, and rightly so. In others false hope. Grace produces a sense of grace and graciousness, and rightly so. In others it produces licentiousness where there are bad hearts or flighty motives at work.

1:4 "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age,"

When Jesus gathered his men and they ate together the Passover for the last time he did so with very special and deep emotion. He gave that Passover new meaning and a special role in the Church when he commanded them to "do this in remembrance of me."

Now how could they forget Jesus? It is part of our human condition that we forget that it is His work that saved us from our sins. We lose sight of our sinfulness, the necessity of the mercy, and our absolute dependence on His substitutionary death very easily just in the

normal course of living. We are vulnerable to all the various schemes of self-help. We forget that he "gave himself for our sins."

The Galatians had "forgotten" this great truth. They had not forgotten it as a fact, unable to recall it mentally. They were not practicing its implications. They had slipped backwards into a way of thinking that made them believe they improved their standing with God through various ceremonial acts and deeds. They had "forgotten" that Jesus had lived a painful life and died a painful death because there was no other way to bring salvation to humankind. Because all were incapable of saving themselves. He became their substitute. There was no other way. This little phrase is more than a pious greeting at the start of a letter. It is the grain of truth that would make everything Paul would say to them right. He wants to draw them to that great truth from the start, because everything else would simply be an implication of that great event.

It is the death of Christ that makes it possible for us to be set apart by Christ's ongoing sanctifying work. His plan is deliverance from its penalty, power and presence. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit evil's power and influence is broken in our lives. How can Christ be present in such a way within us? Because we make ourselves clean and pure? No, because Christ as our substitute has paid the penalty for our sin and the demands of His justice has been met. This sacrifice allows God to justly carry out His desire to purify us and ultimately to re-create our bodies and stand us in his presence absolutely Holy at the resurrection. The word used here for rescue is *ἐξεληται*, from *ἐξαίρεω*, which is used of snatching away or taking out of danger (Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2 Corinthians 12:2,4; Revelation 12:5). This deliverance "out of this present evil age" is both present and future. We experience it in definite practical ways now. We will experience it fully when we live with him away from the presence of evil.

"According to the will of our God and Father." All of it happens because this is the desire of God himself. This is the plan, there is no other. It is the will of the Sovereign of the universe that we be delivered, and it is His will that it not be done through self-help but through divine help. Because this is the will of the very One to whom we owe our existence, there is no other possible way in which our deliverance can be obtained.

1:5 "To whom be the glory for evermore. Amen."

With that Paul concludes what must be to him a section of thinking that stands by itself. This is a concise statement of God's work and its designed outcome. It is His glory forevermore. Paul's heart in living for the purity of this truth was, "So be it! Amen! May this be the way things are in our lives!" It is the truth that would drive all else he would say and do.

1:6 "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel."

Paul's transition from his greeting to the matters of concern to him is very abrupt. Missing is his more normal style of expressing his gratitude for their progress in the faith. Here he expresses amazement at their journey away from the faith he had so carefully delivered to them. He is amazed that it has happened, and amazed that it has happened so quickly. Paul views their action as deserting God. That is what it is when we leave the truth and embrace false doctrine, regardless of our intent. Paul notes that they had been called "by the grace of Christ." It was only that grace that allowed God to look favorably on them and only by that grace that they could have access to the holy One. After starting out in such a manner, they had now made the switch and were operating in a different way.

Their departure was in essence a setting aside of the true gospel and on embracing of a different (ετερος; another of a different kind) one. The embracing of a way of salvation that minimizes in any way the work of Christ is a different gospel from that taught by the apostles. To distort it is to abandon it.

1:7 "which is really not another account, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ."

False. To marginalize the act of God in our behalf as He has proclaimed it is not simply a matter of semantics. It is not that those who do so are still within the boundaries of orthodoxy in their new position. The gospel they are practicing is not simply a localized strain of the thing Paul entrusted to them. It is a breed apart. The rest of the letter will explain just how far apart it was. In short, to mix Judaism and Christianity, where the Christian faith becomes the practice of a tradition based on the Old Covenant is to empty it of its essential nature as good news. There had to come to be a distinct separation between the human system of practicing faith in Yahweh as Judaism had contorted it and the course correction Yahweh had revealed through Jesus Christ. Paul would show that Jesus' teaching was not so much a break with the Old Testament as it was a return to the spiritual lives of the Patriarchs, with the addition of all that Christ's death and resurrection had brought.

teachers always distort. That is, they trouble people. They stir things up. Usually they trouble us within and it is normally through guilt. As the good news of Christ is distorted, it almost always means that the magnitude of grace is compromised, which has the effect of creating a sense of moral deficit. The result is that we feel inwardly troubled, and even worse, this troubled feeling has a way of feeling right, and godly. This is the way of many false teachers. It all can feel so right and pious to the hearers, this distorted doctrine. For that reason it is particularly dangerous, and it is crippling. More than that, it is false and wrong. This warrants the comments that Paul would make next.

1:8-9 "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."

So important is this statement that Paul repeats himself immediately as if to say, "Yeah! You heard me right." He wanted no misunderstanding about the seriousness of the issue and he did not want his comments dismissed as hyperbole. So confident was Paul in the content of what had been delivered then that he places himself and his company under the same rule. The Galatian's attachment to the objective content of the gospel was to preclude their subjective attachment to the messenger. They were to allow no cracks in the perimeter, no exceptions to the rule. They were to be so loyal to this gospel that if Paul himself contradicted it, they were to regard him as having abandoned the faith and accord him the status of an unregenerate. That is powerful confidence of such nature that no subsequent revelation Paul might have could be regarded as from God if it would contradict the truth as he had delivered it.

1:10 "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."

Paul poses the question because some had apparently accused him of teaching about God's grace in order simply to please men. He was, according to them, changing the truth to give it greater appeal. Even today Paul is commonly thought of as the brilliant scholar who

packaged Christianity in such a way as to give it a broader appeal beyond just Jews. While there is no doubt Paul was culturally sensitive, statements like these show that an appeal generated was simply a result of the broad appeal of the invitation of the gospel.

The presence of the word "still" (ἔτι), indicates that Paul was at one time a men-pleaser. This may have been his motive for persecuting the Church. Jesus said that such people suppose that they are doing God a favor (John 16:2; Acts 13:27; 1 Timothy 1:13). Here he points up the illogical nature of the accusation that he was a men-pleaser simply by reasoning that if this were his motive he would not have embraced Christ. It is flawless logic. Had he wished to be favorably viewed by men, he would have stuck with his position in Judaism. There was a compelling reason why pleasing men was not an option with Paul. While he said in the following verses delineates this reason.

1:11 "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel that was preached by me is not according to men."

This is the primary point Paul wants to make in this section. There was no human agency involved. He did not dream up the message that he preached or craft it through normal logical process. He did not derive it from studies of books. He was not given it by a teacher or by any group of teachers. It did not come from some sanctioning body.

1:12 "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it. But I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

Paul's knowledge and understanding of the gospel came as a result of a revelation, and this not from an angel, but from the central figure of the Gospel, Jesus Christ. Jesus revealed himself to Paul and disclosed to him the truth that he had passed on to the Galatians. He embraced it because Christ compelled him to. He had to proclaim it if he was to be on the side of truth.

1:13 "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I was persecuting the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it."

Paul was not coming from a position where he had been sympathetic at all to Christianity. The reality was that it was only the knowledge imparted to him in a personal encounter with Christ that now enabled him to call the Church the Church of God. He had not felt that way in the beginning. This encounter with Christ was not as ours is. It was exceptional. A first installment of it is recorded in Acts 9. Our encounter with the truth is marked by the inner work of the Holy Spirit. Paul's encounter was this, but also involved Christ physically intervening to prevent Paul from persecuting his church any longer. Paul physically saw the glory of Christ and heard him speak directly to him.

All of this shows the readers that pleasing men was not ever in any way a motive in Paul's presentation of the gospel. The gospel ran against everything Paul had once held dear and embraced as true.

1:14 "and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."

Before this very direct intervention of Christ, Paul had been living a way of life that was very pleasing to men. He had been well thought of. He had a following. He had already distinguished himself among his peers. Paul's motives in embracing the gospel and in passing it along were of Jesus Christ himself. His embracing of the gospel was not a matter of being ignorant of the more "proper way" of Judaism. He had been well versed in it, more so than the false teachers who were "troubling" the Galatians. If theirs was the way of truth, Paul would have not given it up himself, for he was comfortable in it. He would have taken the Galatians there because he was well-versed in it. This was the very thing Paul had once embraced and then left behind because it was opposed to the truth. Paul's teaching, therefore, was not due to a lack of zeal for the Jewish way, nor a lack of commitment to the truth system they had established. It was because God had intervened and corrected his thinking. Paul had not been looking for an easier way, for he had achieved and grasped the support difficult way of the Jews. But he was thinking apart from the will of God. Now, the Galatians were in danger of the same thing.

1:15 "But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace,"

In this verse we see the source of Paul's way of life and his message beginning to be laid out. His life and the message of his life was shaped before his birth. Paul affirms the great truth of the sovereignty of God, an idea critical to Jewish thought. This was the cornerstone of Paul's explanation of who he himself was. It explained the urgency of his message. His was a life and message shaped and ordained by God. For this Paul had been set apart, marked out before birth by God. His life and message were not an accident. Paul's message of grace had operated first in him. What he asked others to set aside he had been compelled to set aside as well. What he asked others to believe, mainly that they were helpless, totally dependent on God's grace, totally incapable of gaining His favor through their own effort, he himself, a Jew of Jews, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a teacher among learners, had been forced to come to grips with. He stood before them as one totally dependent on God's grace, totally incapable of saving himself.

1:16 "was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,"

Paul's calling was not simply to have something revealed to him. It was a calling to something to be revealed in him. The Holy Spirit would model a life in Paul. Then he would explain it by means of Paul to others. Paul's life and ministry merge into one, as it should be for all. It was the result of God's sovereignty and made possible through his Spirit. It is a high and serious calling that the gospel makes. For it is not simply a call to believe Christ, but a call to reveal him. It is grace alone that does that. Legalism subverts this. It deceives some into thinking that they are spiritually strong and morally very healthy. But it really reveals to all who look close enough, imperfections, moral flaws, and the absence of true spiritual strength. A life that, with thanksgiving, embraces God's goodness, reveals that goodness and demonstrates the power of Christ. It does not reveal how good I am, but how good he is. That grates against the flesh, but it is the nature of grace.

Paul's calling was not to spread Judaism to the Gentiles, but to preach Christ, the one to whom Judaism pointed, Judaism's gift to the world, the means by which Abraham would be a blessing to all nations, the central figure of Judaism. The life and death and exaltation of Christ was the script called for by the entire Old Testament. Embracing Paul's ministry was

not a threat to Judaism but a tribute to it, the natural transition of God's great sovereign plan to bring solution to an ignorant, lost world through the Jews.

Verses 15 and 16, though alluding to some great and powerful thought, and though compelling in their own right, are simply introductory. They are the beginning of the direct statement of the order in which Paul's message and doctrine developed in 1:17 "nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me;"

Having already stated that his message came through direct intervention of Jesus Christ who instructed him in the truth, Paul now begins to move on to show that it was not altered at all by human input. The fact that it agreed with the message preached by others was not proof that it came from them, but that both came from the same source, Jesus Christ. Here Paul states simply that upon being called to the great work, he did not immediately get input from any human source. He did not turn to human thought to learn what he was to preach and proclaim. He made no pilgrimage to Jerusalem to be tutored and schooled in what to say from the leaders of the movement. Paul's detractors were perhaps suggesting that Paul's mission and message were simply a result of the error of others who had fallen into the same trap in Jerusalem, of setting aside the law. They were perhaps, proclaiming themselves as the true defenders of the faith, which was to be a mixture of belief in Christ and obedience to the laws of the Old Testament, Paul wrote to show that his revelation, and the resulting message he preached did not come from the Jerusalem band, though it agreed with them. In doing this he authenticated both himself and the first apostles.

1:17 "But I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus."

After Paul's conversion the book of Acts reports him in Damascus, "immediately" proclaiming Jews in the synagogues. A time period of "many days" (Acts 9:23) elapsed before Paul was forced to leave Damascus. It might have been during this time he took a time of private retreat to Arabia. Or this time of retreat might have occurred during the time he was in Tarsus (Acts 9:30, 11:24-26), though that seems less likely due to the fact that Acts 9:26-30 report him in Jerusalem before going to Tarsus. Whenever it occurred it was the time when he sorted through all his thinking on the Old Testament and the new information he had been given by revelation to order his thinking and message. The retreat to Arabia apparently came somewhere in the events reported in Acts 9:21-22. This passage in Galatians likely reveals that the "many days" of Acts 9:23 was about three years.

1:18 "Then three years later, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days."

Again, we cannot pinpoint for sure when this visit with Peter occurred. It could have been the same visit to Jerusalem that is reported in Acts 9:26. It could be a later one not reported at all in Acts. If it was that event that is reported in Acts 9, then Paul had been a Christian and had been proclaiming Christ for three years before he met and had meaningful instruction with Peter. Here he reports a fifteen day stay with Peter. The fifteen days would seem not to be enough time to receive the message from Peter in detail, but to do as Paul says he did, to present for Peter's approval the detail of his own understanding of the Old Testament.

1:19 "But I did not see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

Paul's visit to Jerusalem did not involve an official meeting of any sort with the other apostles. Not only did he not get the content of his gospel from them, but he did also not even see them while he was in Jerusalem. James is here named as an apostle, showing that others beside the twelve were considered apostles. The Lord was calling into places of influence others beside the original eleven plus Mattias, to establish and lead in his church. One of these was James, Jesus' own brother who would have had a rich and accurate perspective on Jesus' earthly life. James himself was an unlikely person to be in such a position having been a skeptic himself at one time (John 7:1-4).

1:20 "Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying."

Paul gives to the Galatians the solemn assurance "before God." This is no small issue since the Lord had instructed that our yes should be yes, our no a no and anything beyond this is sin. Paul writes to assure them in the strangest possibly way that his gospel had not come from any human source.

1:21 "Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia."

Paul's ability to relate the gospel to Hellenist Jews is noted in Acts 9:29. When these begin to react and plot his death, the church sends him to Caesarea and from there to Tarsus. The next mention of Paul is in Acts 11:25. There we are told that Barnabas leaves Antioch for Tarsus to look for Paul. After finding him he brings him to Antioch where he spent a year teaching in the Church. Some have suggested that Paul stayed in Tarsus for about six years, from AD 37-43. Here he makes no comment about those years except to say he went into the region of Syria (Antioch) and Cilicia (Tarsus). Again, these were not places where other Apostles were located, where Paul's gospel could have been shaped by some "established" influence. His preaching and understanding were based purely on what had been revealed to him. Barnabas seeks him out at this point, a strong endorsement. It shows that though Paul's gospel had not been the result of interaction with the established authorities of the young Church, it was accepted as orthodox by them and recognized as authentic.

1:22 "And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ."

To further strengthen his point that the gospel he preached was not simply from men, Paul points out that even though by the time he had been converted for at least 10 years, possibly 14 (2:1) he was not recognized by sight in the Judean churches. He had not frequented them and gained no message from contact with them. His work and message were the same as those churches but independently developed through the Holy Spirit.

1:23 "But only, they kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.'"

Paul's preaching was not scripted or orchestrated by anyone within the church. In fact it came as dramatic news to them that he was a believer. His life and ministry were a testimony to the grace of God and the power of God. No one could take less credit than the church for Paul's conversion and for his message. Any thought that Paul's gospel was simply a repeating of the "error" of the Judean church was preposterous. He was unknown to them, viewed with distrust, and finally accepted in shock. As the next phrase indicates, they had only one explanation for he and his preaching.

1:24 "And they were glorifying God because of me."

The only explanation the Judean church had for Paul was his conversion. The message of his ministry was that God had done a very special work in him and through him. They were amazed, overjoyed and wonderfully perplexed by the news. Far from taking credit or explaining it all they simply glorified God who had so obviously laid his hands directly on Paul and brought about what they saw and heard of his ministry.

Galatians 2

2:1 "Then after an interval of fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also."

The "fourteen years" probably covers the time that elapsed between Paul's conversion and the trip to Jerusalem. Perhaps it refers to a fourteen year interval that had elapsed since his first visit to Jerusalem, mentioned in 1:18, which had occurred three years after his conversion. Paul's point is that he had limited contact with the heads of the Church. Any agreement between his message and theirs could only be explained by the fact that both were from God. It could not be explained by human corroboration. The distinguishing mark of Paul's ministry was his impact among the gentles and Hellenized Jews. This was personified in the presence of Titus with himself and Barnabas. We know little about Titus since he is not mentioned by name in Acts, and what we do know of him is only through Paul's letters. He was probably converted through the ministry at the Church in Antioch, and was to become a key gentile leader. That Titus had been present on this mission to Jerusalem would help the Galatians as they thought through the teaching of the Jews who were troubling them.

2:2 "It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private, to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run in vain."

There is disagreement about what revelation Paul is referring to here. Was it the revelation of coming famine referred to in Acts 11:27ff? Was it the revelation he originally received from Christ? Was it the revelation of truth to him by the Holy Spirit that was normal and ongoing? We know from Acts 11 that the revelation of Agabus about the coming famine in Judea did bring about a trip by Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem. In that case, the material here in Galatians 2 does not refer to the first Church counsel in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. This latter interpretation seems very likely, since it is doubtful that Peter would have "waffled" as verse 11ff indicate, after that historic ruling of the counsel reported in Acts 15. It seems more likely from Peter's response to the situation in Acts 15 that the events of Galatians 2 happened previously. These then enabled him to see the issues confronting the counsel with the crystal clear vision he shows before the council. The only problem that would remain is that of understanding the timing of Peter's uncertainty as recorded in Galatians 2:11ff. Paul would have come to Jerusalem after Peter had the vision of the sheet coming down from heaven, after the experience with Cornelius, after he had made a stirring defense of Gentile evangelization early in chapter 11 of Acts, all of which appears to be before the emergence of Paul as a significant figure. But the details of Acts are most likely reported with some overlap of time so that exact chronology is uncertain. Though Peter's difficulty, confronted by Paul, is not flattering to Peter, it is understandable that his acceptance of Gentile evangelization would come quickly through a vision, while his understanding of how the sanctification process would look among Gentile converts would linger and develop more slowly. As to the idea that the revelation referred to here by Paul was one of truth made to him, can on the one hand be supported by the context. He has spoken of it in the previous verses. There is no mention in Galatians 2 of anything that related to offerings or famines or Agabus. On the other hand, the explanation that he went up to Jerusalem *kata» aÓpokałuyin*, according to a vision, very much allows for it. It could be interpreted as conveying that the vision was of a famine and gave rise to the offerings from the Gentile churches given for the Christians in Judea, and so necessitated Paul's trip to Jerusalem. But *kata» aÓpokałuyin* could also be interpreted as conveying that because of the vision Paul had received that involved the instruction of Jesus to him, he later made a trip to Jerusalem to confirm that he and the apostles were in harmony regarding his message and mission. Whatever the vision was that

gave rise to the visit to Jerusalem, it appears that its impact in the long term was that it affirmed the gospel that Paul was preaching. If we say that was the single purpose of Paul's trip to Jerusalem we must also say that there is no record of such a visit by Paul to Jerusalem in Acts. That is not compelling evidence since much is missing in terms of Paul's early ministry. We must allow that the phrase *κατα αποκαλυψιν* in itself is inconclusive as far as clarifying the time of the meeting Paul writes of here. And so we are unable to equate with certainty this meeting with the counsel at Jerusalem reported in Acts 15.

In today's terms, Paul's vision for this meeting was a self-imposed, closed door ordination exam. He brought in those who were "of reputation," that is, individuals who were accepted as authorities in doctrinal matters.

This verse shows that the gospel Paul submitted to the Apostles at the time of that meeting, whenever it was, was the same as he was currently preaching. So it did not come from them. Paul had come to understand it and articulate it apart from the influence of the apostles and the Jerusalem church, so much so that he felt the need to acquaint them with what it was in detail. This scrutiny he sought out did not necessitate any changes in his message. Though the message had not come from them, they agreed with it in detail. They saw no need to alter it, so that it remained the same to the time of the writing.

Though Paul had experienced a vision, or series of visions, though he had experienced an audience with Christ himself, though he had been caught up into heaven and heard things that were "unutterable" (2 Corinthians 12:1-10), Paul was not brashly confident. He was more than willing to entertain thoughts that he had heard wrong. Such is the possibility wherever one is dealing with the subjective. It can be very real in terms of experience, but a wise person double-checks with others experienced in these things. Though Paul had received such privileged treatment from God, he assumed nothing, submitting his message to others for review. Presumably, had there been a conflict, he would have assumed that he "was running in vain," and would have adjusted his position. It is an amazing and instructive attitude considering his testimony in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, where he reports the exalted experience he had. Paul sees that there was no reason for exclusiveness when it came to doctrinal matters. In terms of Paul's overall argument, placed in writing to the Galatians, this strengthens his position by demonstrating that he was not an arrogant maverick. His concern in the doctrinal issues in Galatia was not to protect personal turf. It was to protect orthodoxy and maintain the purity of Christian teachings. It was absolutely critical to Paul that all the Churches, though different culturally, be on the same page doctrinally. His gospel came from no human, yet it agreed with the authorities in the Church. This was and is strong and ultimate testimony of its divine origin. Paul's attitude was that everywhere God speaks; he says the same thing.

2:3 "But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised."

The results of Paul's presentation were clear cut and conclusive. In the matter of circumcision, a big issue among the Judaizers that had crept into the churches, the apostolic leaders had been clear, that it was not essential for a gentile to be circumcised in order to be a part of the Church and even a leader in the Church. Not even Titus, who would become a spokesman for the Church, and have apostolic authority in it, was compelled to be circumcised. This was a watershed ruling, one that had big implications in terms of the things that had become issues in the Galatian Church.

2:4 "But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ, in order to bring us into bondage."

Paul explains that circumcision was only an issue because of "false brethren." These were Judaizers masquerading as concerned Christians. Their desire was a surface-level preservation of Jewish customs. Worse, there's was a desire for the preservation of their own supposed rank and privileged status with Yahweh and the subjugation of the Gentiles to them. This is the only reason the discussion became necessary, the only reason there was pressure on Paul to have Titus circumcised. Titus was a test case on which the early church's position on circumcision would pivot.

The result of the pressure would have been to place the early church in bondage. All would have been placed in bondage to the law and the gentiles in bondage to the Jews. This is always the result of any system that replaces grace with law. The moment works begin to be introduced into the equation bondage is the result. We can be enslaved all over again.

2:5 "But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you."

There can be no movement on this issue. Compromise in the name of love on such matters is deadly. Paul, the one who "when with the Jews became as a Jew," was unbending. He and the apostolic company sensed that this was an issue in which critical ground was at stake. They never wavered, never held out any hope of compromise.

The reason for their unbending stance was not a lack of love for anyone. On the contrary it was their love for people like the Galatians and their love for the truth that made them unbend. They saw themselves as custodians of the truth, stewards of the mysteries of God. To compromise the truth and in this instance the work of Christ, would have slammed the door on countless who were to follow.

The truth of the gospel is at stake in our presentation of it. We dare not take the easy road and in order to avoid conflict, place ourselves in bondage and rob others of the wonder of grace.

2:6 "But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) - Well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me."

This verse clearly shows that the hierarch in the early church was very loosely defined. In the local church it was not, but in terms of the overall movement it seems from this verse it was still a matter of voluntary subjection based on respect, but not on an official appointment. Paul clearly seeks the blessing of the apostles in Jerusalem. He clearly respects them because they were respectable. At the same time he views all people as under the impartial authority of God and so the apostles as his peers. Paul's point to the Galatians is that the leaders of the movement did not add anything to his message to make it "official." And this is meant to show that there had been no "official" body through which an "official" party line had been conveyed. Again, Paul walks the line very precisely to show that his gospel is not from anyone but Christ, yet it agrees with the mainstream leaders.

2:7 "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised,"

The united recognition of God's ordination of Paul as His choice to initially establish the gospel message among the gentiles, was the contribution this body of leaders made to Paul. They did not have to add to his gospel, it was clearly the same as theirs. They recognized both his message and his ministry as God-sanctioned. To them Paul was the God-ordained means of bringing the truth to the gentiles. They reasoned that Paul was Peter's counterpart. This provides clear insight into the role of Peter in the early Church. He was highly influential, certainly not the exclusive leader but part of a plurality of leaders, seemingly willingly subject to Paul where "gentile issues" were concerned. The apostolic band seems to have been composed of a plurality of leaders, focused on following the leading of the Holy Spirit, functioning in a spirit of mutual submission as the means of doing so.

2:8 "For He who effectively worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectively worked for me also to the Gentiles."

The apostolic company observed an equal calling and equal enablement on the part of both Paul and Peter. They saw in Yahweh equal value and unity in the two groups of people and the two ministries and the two men.

2:9 "and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised."

It is possible this was James, John's brother, if Acts 11 & 12 are in chronological order, though separated by a gap of time, and if this meeting occurred as a result of Agabus' revelation and the subsequent visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. It is also possible it was the Lord's brother. Whomever this James was, he, along with Peter and John, recognized Paul's ministry as like theirs. Clearly it was the result of God's grace. When they looked at Paul and Barnabas they saw God's hand clearly evident both in their call and in their enablement. As an aside, their actions show a great advance in their maturity since the days when they closely guarded turf (Luke 9:49), and had an air of exclusiveness regarding their own ministry. They recognized the message of Paul and Barnabas as the same gospel, with a different kind of ministry in a different culture. It was the result of a specific call of God based on His sovereign purposes and plan. The expression "the right hand of fellowship" indicates this. We might say, the same gospel, a different culture with different ministry parameters, the same team. Paul would later write, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (1 Corinthians 12:4). Different ways of fleshing out the faith would exist for a period. A Jew, simply by his background, would feel compelled in certain areas of conduct. A Gentile, with no such background in the Law, would feel compelled in different areas. Over time many of those cultural issues would disappear, especially between Jew and Gentile. That would take longer than the lifespan of both the apostles and the readers of the letter. Seeing one gospel and one faith, in the cultural diversity was the key challenge of the day in this new movement of the Holy Spirit.

2:10 "They only asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do."

The common lifestyle thread the apostles deemed eager to maintain was that both Jew and Gentile remember and minister to the needs of the poor. With this Paul was in total agreement, as demonstrated by the very reason for his presence in Jerusalem at that point in time. This concern marked the early leaders of the Church and should be a deliberate and intentional mark of any organized local church. This verse marks the end of Paul's record of

his visit to Jerusalem. That visit ends with an agreement in principle. Everyone concerned agrees that Jew and Gentile stand on equal footing in Christ, regardless of whether or not they have been circumcised or become recipients of any other Old Testament rite. It was a monumental achievement to arrive at this point of harmony, to achieve such vast common ground. They were ready for the hard work of making it a reality.

2:11 "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned."

It is one thing to agree in principle on harmony. It is another to live in harmony. It is a relatively short and easy process to arrive at an intellectual position. It is another thing to work through the emotional and cultural ramifications. Peter, when it came right down to it, did not apply the Word of God to a real life situation he found himself in at Antioch. As a result he "stood condemned," guilty and sentenced by his own actions. Paul confronted him and did so aggressively and with deep feeling. That is good among leaders. It is a wonderful thing to serve with those who are willing to hold you on course. It is also the responsibility we have as leaders to not do what is easy. Even one with such spiritual roots and experience as Peter can be guilty of wrongdoing. When we see this, no matter the person, we must fix it.

2:12 "For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloft, fearing the party of the circumcision."

Peter started well, doing the unthinkable, actually eating with Gentiles. He learned to do this through revelation, his experience on the roof of Simon the tanner, and first fleshed it out with Cornelius. From our perspective that seems so inconsequential, eating with a member of another ethnic group. We would be properly outraged at anything else. To a devout Jew, living right at this crossroad of history, it represented great faith and courage to do so. It meant the setting aside of all Peter had heard about Jews and Gentiles from early in life. For not even Jesus, as far as we know, had given much instruction about this. We only know that he certainly reached out and ministered to many Gentiles, that he often had sighted the faith of various Gentiles, and certainly ate with "undesirables."

The cultural situation for Peter was difficult. It was one thing to rejoice over the conversion of the Gentiles in the friendly confines of Jerusalem. It was another matter to live by the implications in Antioch. At this he stumbled and fell, but the critical thing is that the church didn't. The Church rose to the occasion.

It is a miserable thing to have your failures recorded in Scripture for all to see, contemplate, discuss, and pontificate on. No one in the New Testament record bears that cross like Peter does. It says something that there is also no one as revered by generations that have followed as is Peter. Each phrase says something specific about the sin of Peter. It began when the men from James came. It could be said that in this situation, Peter was not a man of principle, but one who responded to the values of his peers. It is said that he changed in his action toward these fellow believers and began to hold himself aloof. That's an ugly picture of maturity in this matter. He had the ability to set aside the truth, suppress the work of the Holy Spirit, allow men to dictate his actions rather than God, and take a course of action that was exactly opposite to the direction God wanted the Church to go. This trap Peter fell into because he "feared," or respected and revered the Jews. Herod had feared the Jews and after killing Jesus had thrown Peter in prison, probably just prior to Peter's arrival in Antioch. All that he had learned and seen modeled in Christ, Peter set aside in order to behave in a very normal, instinctive way. He abdicated his position of leadership and allowed the group to find its own level. In leadership we must know when it is time to hang back with those we lead and

when it is time to get out ahead and call them up to a higher level. To do so means conflict and discomfort. Not to do so means worse, as Peter would find out.

2:13 "And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with a result that even Barnabas was carried away their hypocrisy."

Peter led, by virtue of his personality, his standing and his gifting. But rather than leading the church upward in this moment, he led them back down to the same familiar hypocrisy that had marked the Jewish religious system. Peter was one of the most influential Christian men in history. Yet he was no different from any other Christian leader in having this liability. It is why a plurality of leaders is essential.

The result of Peter's sin was that the attitude of a few men that had come to Antioch from James now became the official position of the Jews in Antioch. It was validated by both Peter and Barnabas, though they obviously were doing so with considerable reservation in their spirits. Leaders always lead. The question is only that of the direction they will lead in. Peter and Barnabas allowed themselves to be led by unnamed individuals "from James." The result is a church divided, following a course of hypocrisy. It is reversed only because of a plurality of leadership and a spirit of mutual submission that marked the dealings of the early Church. It is a key mark of Holy Spirit-led movements that they right themselves in such situations.

2:14 "But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'"

Paul was able to discuss that far from defending the truth, as legalism tends to delude us into thinking, they were compromising it. God's view, expressed through Paul, was that they had compromised the very gospel that they were being persecuted for. Appeasing a legalist, confirming to their outward demands in order to lessen or avoid conflict, amounts to a lack of integrity in our message. We are no longer "straightforward about the truth," that is, we accept its truth but not its implications. There is a time to stand firm and hard, unbending, and you can be sure it has arrived when legalism began to flourish.

Paul did not do this privately, but for all to see, hear, and process. All were caught up in the thinking and all had to be led out. Where a leader such as Peter gets caught up in error, he is no longer a leader but must be led. Paul forces Peter's hand in the presence of all, probably both the Jews and gentiles that were a part of the Church.

The first part of Paul's statement jerks off Peter's mask he has used to appease the legalists. It brings out into the open how Peter has personally applied the gospel. It had given him freedom from the old rituals and ceremonialism of the Jewish system. He had learned this well, removing the mask of legalism from himself. In doing this he had rightly interpreted and applied the truth of the gospel. Paul forces Peter's hand and forces him to lead in the matter by shining the light on Peter's personal life.

Paul's question to Peter could be rendered like this; "If you do not feel compelled to embrace any longer the tenants of Judaism, how is it that you compel others to do so, especially non-Jews? It is a question that had to sting. It had to make Jesus' condemnation of the double-standard of the Pharisees ring in Peter's ears. Nevertheless it cuts to the heart of the matter. The very truth of the gospel was at stake. It is impossible to say for sure if Paul knew the strategic nature of this conflict. It happened where the gospel was lived in Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians, under the watchful eye of the apostolic company. It would be presented to the gentile church in all directions of the compass from Antioch. The

issue at stake was this; would Gentiles be forced in the gospel age, to embrace the tenants of Judaism? Would this movement be simply an offshoot of Judaism or a whole new thing as Jesus had forecasted it, then enabled it by His death? Would it be the new wine of the Spirit, or the bad booze of the flesh?

2:15 "We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles,"

In this statement Paul captures the sentiment of the Jews. Their material view of themselves and their view of Gentiles was summed up in the statement. It was probably well-recognized by all to whom Paul was speaking. It was the popular notion of the day among the rank and file. Having stripped Peter of his mask, Paul turns to the entire Jewish population to question what they were really embracing as truth. Were they embracing the gospel and its straightforward declaration of the guilt of all men? Or were they embracing prejudicial, self-righteous motives of Judaism and distorting the gospel with these? Were all men truly on equal footing, dependent on Christ? Or were the Jews a cut above the rest, as they were beginning to behave in Antioch?

2:16 "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law; since by the works of the law still no flesh be justified."

This is capturing the foundational tenants of the gospel, and therefore Christianity. The law is not a means of justification though it is certain that if humankind could absolutely keep it, the gospel's solution would not be necessary. But as humanity is, the law can do nothing for them before God. Since our works always fall short of the law, they are unable to bring about his salvation. They are simply good works, which might perhaps make us visibly less imperfect, but still far short of righteous. This is huge in terms of its implications in Christian thought. It was especially true in the matter of the statement Paul had just made relating to the moral/immoral nature of Jew and Gentile. The fact is that both have the same problem with the law's standard. Both fall short. The divine solution to the immorality of humankind is not obedience to the law but belief in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. Paul is emphatic in bringing those present back to reality. Their reality was that even they themselves, who were Jews, knowledgeable of the law, in possession of the oracles of God, uniquely loved by God, had turned to Christ for salvation. They had accepted already that their works fell hopelessly short, that they were essentially immoral. In Paul's eyes the watershed decision had already been made.

"Not by works, but by faith" has been recognized as an important pillar of the Christian faith. Paul calls all Christians back to this with these words. It is the solution to practical dilemmas in the Church, like Jews and Gentiles not eating together. They had to remember that they are in equal footing in terms of their need for solution and the provision and source of their salvation.

The verse winds its way back to where it started and in doing so repeats the most critical thought. No person is a member of the Church universal, the family of God, by means of the law. It is only through faith in the work of Christ. The implication in these words so far is plain. The law's purpose was not the justification of Jews; therefore, we must not make it the means of justification for anyone. After 2000 years under the law, Christ still had to die for humanity's salvation. Now, we must not make the mistake of refiguring the law into our standing with God. Paul will later develop the law's official role in the plan of God. Here he wants it unequivocally known that it was not given as the means of justification.

2:17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!"

The question Paul is asking is this; Is Christ advancing the cause of sin, since under His law we as Jewish believers are shown to be sinners like everyone else? Have we as Jews believing in Christ gotten worse under him than others so that we have actually gone backwards in the moral sense? Apparently some were suggesting this, that under Christ Jews were actually slipping into the moral ways of the Gentiles. To them, Christ and Christianity actually produced sin in people. From a legalistic viewpoint this was certainly true with its narrow and inaccurate concept of sin. But from the standpoint of morality as defined by God, it was not true. Paul does not deny that, given the freedom of Christ, it was possible for Jews to sink to a low moral level in terms of practical behavior under Christ. But this was not by God's design or by Christ's ministry in their life. The next verse would explain the source of such a contradiction. Here Paul expresses his dismay at such a situation. May it never come about! May such a situation never become reality! He does not deny the possibility, he simply will show that if such a situation occurs, it is not the result of Christ's work in a person.

The Judaizer's logic sounded holy. They said something like this: "Think about the message you are sending about Christ by setting aside obedience to the law. Your message is dramatic and very far-reaching. When you suggest justification by faith alone, without obeying the law, you are in effect saying 'we Jews have found that our obedience to the Law gained nothing for us in terms of our standing with God. The law did no good.' We know that the law is holy and God-given and therefore of great value. When you, Paul, set it aside in Christ's name you are suggesting that Christ is working contrary to God and thus you make him a minister of sin."

Paul's reply to these might have been: "By admitting that we Jews, though adhering to the Law, are just as needy as the Gentiles, that we are depraved sinners in spite of the law, do we by that really somehow logically make Christ one who promotes sin? Are we by that really advocating rebellion against God and the Law? May it never be—this is the furthest thing from our minds!"

Paul's logic was this: actually, it is when we rebuild the notion that we can gain merit with Yahweh through the Law that we provide ultimate evidence of our sinfulness. We plainly exhibit ourselves as transgressors. There are several reasons why placing hope in our obedience is an affront to Yahweh. First, when we advocate adherence to the law as a means of justification we go against all the Law was meant and sent to do. It was meant to kill the hope we humans naturally have of obeying our way into heaven. The Law sentences us to death (Deuteronomy 28). It teaches us that Yahweh's salvation and grace are our only hope.

Second, when we advocate adherence to the law as a means of justification we go against all Christ was meant and sent to do. He would serve our sentence for us, satisfying the law's demands. He would bring an end to our old way of life and began a new one in us. We would live with Christ's Spirit in us changing our thoughts and our actions in real life. So it is in rejecting grace that we create a major problem between ourselves and God. We believe and act as if the death of Christ, and Yahweh's entire plan of salvation are valueless and meaningless. We cling fast to a way of thinking God has revealed is foolish.

2:18 " For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor."

If I move backwards morally, and slip into a way of thinking that I had previously separated myself from then I simply prove myself the sinner. It is true of a sin like adultery or lying. It is also true of my unbelief in what Christ's death purchased for me. My sin of unbelief is not Christ's fault. It is not even the devil's fault. It is my fault. It is the sin of unbelief that leads to all other sins. By my unbelief I have revealed my morality.

2:19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God."

From the standpoint of a Jewish legalist, who viewed the Law as a means of gaining access to heaven, the present failure of Jewish Christians to conform to the Law was catastrophic. To God, to Christ, to Paul and from the viewpoint of Christian thought, the Law's highest purposed was being served. Through the Law and their history under it, Jewish Christians had learned of their own moral incapability and had turned to Christ. He was the fulfillment of the Law. He was Yahweh's provision for righteousness. Through the law, specifically, trying to live by its standards, the Christians that followed Paul had died to it. They do to this day. To die to the law is to be released from its obligation, the need to obey it. Christ frees us from the need to obey the law. Through Jesus we die to the Law. Our obligation then is to God, who has paid our debt to the law for us. Through faith and because of Christ, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and through his power are morally capable of living for God.

2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.""

Two great facts of the Christian life are revealed in Paul's words here. First, that we, like Paul, have been crucified with Christ. The great truth of how God sees us is that our identity has totally changed. Who we use to be before we trusted the truth about Jesus, the Christ, no longer exists. That old being that mindlessly served the demands of legalism and the idea of currying God's favor is gone, dead. The second great fact is that Christ is present in us not just as a memory but as a living person. Our being has undergone a very distinct constitutional change, so much so that Paul can say it is no longer I who lives. Where there use to be in us only instincts directed at survival and self-advancement, there is now One who counters that. Our old inner beings, which only could follow one course, have been united with Christ so that His laws are written on our hearts. Through the Holy Spirit Christ's words have forever been made our companion, His conscience our inner witness, His voice our guiding light. We are of a different makeup. The potential is enormous.

Paul lives physically, in a body of flesh and bones. But life is not the same. He lives bodily, but by faith. Christ's desires have become his desires and the Holy Spirit his power. It is impossible to live the Christian life any other way. If the Galatians were to live as Christians they could only do it by trusting in Christ rather than in the power of their own flesh. The basis for this trust-life is to understand that our central task is not to earn God's love and companionship. We must trust that Christ loves us and "delivered himself up." This term, "delivered up" is the same word used of Judas' act of betray. Here the greater picture is provided of that entire event. In reality no one delivered Christ up. He delivered himself up and did so for us. He was our substitute. Our central task now is to live out that relationship with Jesus. Our great privilege is to partner each moment with Christ and rely on His strength and power. We do this by believing and trusting in all he has said.

2:21 "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly."

Paul shows the dramatic nature of the error in the Galatians' thinking and in the thinking of all who would add works of the Law to the "how-to-please-God" formula. To add works is to do two things. First it is to nullify the grace of God. To nullify is the rendering of the Greek word *αθετω*. The word is formed by prefixing the "a" privative to the word meaning to place or put. So it conveys the idea of displacing something. In usage it conveys intentionality. It is used of disallowing something or of canceling out the result of something. In this case it is the disallowing of that which is an attribute of God, namely his entire salvation plan! It is nothing less than human reasoning making the audacious claim that God is not who he reveals himself to be. It makes God a liar. It is human beings deciding simply to ignore what revelation has plainly taught.

Secondly, such thinking makes the cross and Christ's death needless. That to which the Old Testament looks toward and builds toward, that to which all the covenants point to and depend on, suddenly become non-central and more important impotent in terms of God's purpose toward humanity. Christ's death rather than being the means of salvation becomes just an event in the story and hardly even a compelling one at that. It means that far from being the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to save humanity, Christ's death had no merit with regard to our need. If humans could earn forgiveness from sin, then Christ's death was needless. If the rules are such that forgiveness is still only guaranteed by our performance of the law's demands, then Christ's death was in vain.

Galatians 3

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

Here is a fairly harsh rebuke that Paul has chosen to use. In this matter the Galatians have been fools. They have been unthinking. They may have been bullied and intimidated by a strong leader. Or they may have been come under the spell of a charismatic, manipulative leader. However it had come about, there was no logical explanation for them shifting their thinking. Paul made this very clear by his choice of words. Their thoughts on Yahweh's salvation went against everything they had been taught and all they had experienced. There was only this explanation in the matter; they had believed naively and had been taken in by the smooth talk of false teachers whom they had obediently followed as they piped their tune of Jewish legalism.

There is that within tender-hearted Christians that makes us vulnerable to legalism. Our conscience, programmed thoroughly by the humanistic idea of performance based acceptance and conditional love, combined with our new-found concern for the things of God, is vulnerable. It is ready to witness from within us of our moral shortfalls. Such an inward influence can only be squelched one way, by deliberate reflection on the whole truth that says, "Yes it is true, I have fallen short. But that is my nature, for which God has abundantly provided through the cross and Christ."

If we do not habitually rehearse this truth of the gospel, we foolishly follow the normal human way of dealing with guilt. We seek to pay back in some way or make up for it. If we are ignorant of truth, this is normal. We are under the spell of the world's thinking. Now, if we know the truth and fall for such thinking, we are fools. We subject ourselves again to the spell of spiritual pride. It is a complex and nasty spell, the very essence of our fallen nature. Once we know the truth, as the Galatians had come to know it, to fall back into this is something we do willfully. So it was not ignorance of Christ's work that led the Galatians to be deceived. It seldom is. As Paul has already stated it was a case of being foolish, unthinking. In doing so Paul removes any excuse they might use and draws them back to the basic fact on which Christianity is based, Christ's death. This fact had not been subtly taught. They had not had to "read between the lines" to come to understand it. Christ had not been presented as a King "who, by the way, was also crucified." He had openly and boldly been presented as crucified, as the substitute, the sacrifice for their sin, and this had been done as a matter of first importance. Were it not for this truth there would be no Christianity and Paul would not have brought the truth to them because without it there is no Gospel. There is nothing to proclaim, there is no revelation. Humanity is under the same old curse. They are dependent on their own efforts to save themselves. That is not new news and certainly not good news. It is the same old pious junk.

3:2 "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"

Paul is coming to a question that, when answered, should settle this whole matter in their minds. This "one thing" is something with very significant implications. If they answer this right and embrace it in the matter at hand, it will break the "spell" they have fallen under.

Most of Paul's arguments have been and will be objective, asking them to think through some facts. Here he brings in their experience. He wants them to look back on the beginning of their experience of the Holy Spirit. Had it come about because they had obeyed the Law? Or did it come about by them simply believing Paul's message?

We are not sure, from the written record what their initial experience with the Holy Spirit involved. Combining this question with the statement regarding miracles in verse 5, it must have been such that the Holy Spirit's presence was readily identifiable to all of them AND it must have been such that it was clearly linked to hearing and believing a message of truth. Paul could take them back to this experience and be assured that there could and would be only one answer to this question. They had received the Holy Spirit the moment they heard and believed the truth of the gospel, the news of Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection. From that moment the Spirit's work was clearly evident to them and in them. Paul will deal with this issue in a historic and Biblical way not just by discussing their experience. But for now he asks them to recall their own experience.

3:3 "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

These are the third and fourth of six questions Paul asked the readers in the opening statements of chapter three. All six questions are rhetorical, all designed to demonstrate the absurdity of the position the Galatians have adopted. Paul asks, "Are you so foolish?" Are you really so mentally challenged that you would allow yourselves to think such things as you're thinking?

Paul's logic is flawless. What logical sense does it make to think that a work that had to be started by the Spirit could be completed by us under our own power? If you could not even begin in your own power, what makes you think you can finish? If God, by His grace, had to intervene in the beginning, are you really so foolish as to think you can take it from there? It is, when the slightest thought is given to it, an absolutely preposterous idea, illogical and foolish!

3:4 "Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?"

It is uncertain what things the Galatians had suffered and at whose hands. It is likely that the source of their troubles began with Jews, since this seemed to be the normal pattern in Asia minor. If so Paul's statement here is potent. He was in effect telling them that if they were going to subject themselves to the law once again, thereby minimizing Christ as Savior, then why had they bothered going through the pain of separating from Judaism? If they were going to settle into this subjection to the law then their initial sufferings had been needless. They should simply have stayed in the life Paul found them in.

3:5 "Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"

Paul asks his sixth and final question of the readers then and now. It is always a good question for us to answer often, each day. The presence of the term "then" indicates that Paul is asking them, "since you have embraced these principles with one hand, can I conclude that you have embraced in the other hand this idea, namely that all you've personally experienced of the hand of God stirring among you, is the result of your good performance of the Law's demands?"

This question is one with huge implications. It is so easy to slip into the idea that God's answers to our prayers, and His miraculous interventions come because of our somehow deserving or earning them. We are comfortable with that. It's how all of life works in our fallen world. It even makes us feel good about who we are in moments when good things happen. But it poses some very severe theological and practical dilemmas if we are honest about our

hearts and motives. Paul's question shows that this view is an impossible one to defend. The truth is God's only demand of us is the presence of faith, which may or may not have proven itself in our actions.

3:6 "Even so Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

This statement was made to bolster the answer "by faith," implied in the rhetorical question in verse 5. Paul cites no less a man than the father of the Jews, the alleged patriarch of the false teachers, Abraham. Abraham had faith in God, which act was credited to his account as righteousness. It is not that faith is second best and is accepted in lieu of righteousness as a sort of fall back, second best position. Faith is what God seeks. It is in a sense God's currency.

We can understand faith and obedience in this way. Faith is the earthquake. Obedience is the aftershock. Legalism seeks to create the aftershock without the quake. Christianity focuses completely on the quake and leaves the aftershocks almost as an after-thought. Abraham was the first and established the rule. Through God's record of Abraham's story, God testified to all that being "a good person" in His eyes is a matter of faith.

3:7 "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham."

This is directed both at the false teachers and at the Galatians. In Paul's mind the false teachers had no right, even though they were physically descended from Abraham, to claim Abraham as their patriarch. It is those who follow his faith, regardless of ethnicity, that walk in Abraham's steps and so are his spiritual descendants. Paul is not denying the ethnic, physical descendancy of the Jews. He is speaking of the fact that these particular Jews have no spiritual root/link to Christ and His Church. Only by embracing the same faith will they inherit the promises associated with the New Covenant. The words do not demand that we say all unbelieving Jews have been rejected by God. They only demand that we say that they will not inherit the blessings apart from conversion and belief. Individual salvation has always been a matter of faith. National salvation never existed in the sense of the eternal. It did and does exist in the terms of the nation as a whole experiencing God's favor. During their history whenever they are led by people of faith, and when the national trend was faith they experienced gracious blessings. David's rule is the consummate example of an era of blessing they experienced corporately. Manasseh's rule is an example of the curse they experienced corporately. They were to some degree saved from wasting disease, plagues, and enemies in eras when there was general respect for Yahweh and His law. In Israel's history we observe such salvation coming to the nation without belief and trust being exercised by every individual who was part of that nation. Living during such an era did not guarantee personal salvation from the penalty of sin. That was and is an individual matter settled only through faith in Yahweh's salvation plan.

It seems we must conclude that there was and is with ethnic Jews a national standing of sorts that is related to this present life and world. It is a byproduct of the individual and eternal selection of key people within the nation, and conveys no privilege on unbelieving Jews in terms of eternity.

It is very clear, however, that individual salvation from sin's penalty has been a "select" experience entered into by those who believed Yahweh as Abraham did.

3:8 "And the Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith presented the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.'"

The good news was proclaimed to Abraham centuries ago that all nations would be blessed through him. The Gentiles receiving the gospel, responding in faith and so being declared righteous as Abraham had been, brought about the fulfillment of that promise. It is interesting that the gentiles receiving the faith was not a fulfillment of the promise, "I will make of you a great nation." Though the church is grafted into Israel, in particular into those of the faith, there remains a work which God wants to do with unbelieving Israel in the future, bringing them to faith in Christ in a dramatic moment when he stands on earth, the One they pierced. This will be the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation."

3:9 "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

Those who believe God's testimony about Christ inherit the blessing of Abraham. The verse is a very concise statement of what Paul had taught in the letter of the Romans in Chapters 9-11. Believers, regardless of ethnicity, are grafted into believing Israel. All that belonged to Israel as a privileged nation is theirs due to their like-Abraham-faith.

3:10 "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written 'cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the Law, to perform them.'"

Paul speaks here of those who are "of the works of the law." He means those who view the works of the law as the means of justification. These, without exception, are under the curse of the law. That is the difficulty that the Galatians were not considering. The law's own words are quoted here by Paul, and they are quite precise. It is not that if a person is 80% obedient they will be only 20% cursed. In fact, they will NOT be considered "good people" even if they were 99.9 percent obedient. The old covenant was such that if you offend in one point you are 100% guilty and so under the curse. So, knowing the condition of mankind and their moral incapability and knowing the history of Israel, it is absolutely true that those who set about to obey the law and try for its blessings, all such people have one thing in common; they are under the Law's curse. There are no degrees of obedience credited, no degrees of blessing gained. Obedience to the law is not viewed in some "overall" sense. It is viewed in an absolute sense; you keep it 100% perfectly or you're a lawbreaker. There is no exception to that rule in the words used in connection with the Old covenant (Deuteronomy 6:3,25; 8:1; 11:22, 32; 12:28, 32). It is as Paul says, "as many as are under the works of the law are under a curse." The Law did not call for obedience as a general trend. Only by God's mercy was any blessing ever experienced by those who were in this sense "under the Law." This reality Paul intends to use to further show the Galatians the extent of their folly in embracing the law after they have escaped its curse through Christ.

3:11 "Now that no one is justified by the law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 which says, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith." The Jewish Talmud states that Habakkuk in the verse reduces 613 commands of the law into the statement. That's wrong thinking. The error of the Galatians may have grown out of Jewish thinking regards faith and probably evolved from thinking that said, "faith brings solution, faith that slates itself out in practical form by obedience to the law."

Actually, Habakkuk was stating the lesson learned by the error of centuries worth of seeking to be justified by the law. It was faith that saved various Israelites over the course of their history. The humble, who learned from the law their own inadequacy and leaned on God's mercy, were justified. The others simply fell victim to blind pride, imagining that they were being obedient to the law's demands. Far from summing up the law, Habakkuk was stating the lesson of the law, something entirely different from a legalistic, "trust in the law" type of message. It was a different way of salvation than that advocated by the rabbis. This is not to say it was new, it had been around since Abel according to Hebrew 11. It was that to which the Law purposed to bring men. But for many, pride short-circuited the law's work and left men imagining that they could merit justification because of their obedience to the law. The truth was that anyone who had been justified was in fact justified in consequence of their faith. There was no other way.

3:12 "However the law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them."

Justification through the law is not a matter of faith at all. It is a matter of performance. "If you do it, this will happen" is the law of the Law. There is nothing to its demand that requires faith. It is simply performance that it demands. Law is not an instrument that requires faith, and believing one can be justified by law requires no faith in God, only faith in oneself.

3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"

No one is under the blessing of the law, because no one can obey it. All are therefore, under its curse. Christ, who was under the law's blessing, took our place and bore our curse when He hung on the cross. The righteous demand of the law was met in every way by him and so he released us from the law's demand. He redeemed us, bought us out of our slavery to the law's curse.

3:14 "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

The effect of Christ's life and death is that all people who believe experience the blessing of Abraham. Through Christ all who believe become the covenant people of God who were once far off. We who were not called the people of God are now called the people of God. This happened not because we became obedient to the Law, or adjusted to any Jewish custom. It came, as the previous verse teaches, because of Christ redeeming us from the curse of the law. Far from enabling us, the Law separated us from God. Christ bought us out of that predicament.

The result of Christ's work is that we receive the Holy Spirit, promised through the prophets to Israel and the world. We receive it not through the works of the law, but simply through faith. With this statement Paul has developed a theological answer, and an answer from Bible history to his question in verse 1, "This is the only thing I want to find out from you; did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith?" If they could not think through the answer to that question, he helps them. The result is that we are left with God's mind on the matter, recorded forever for us to scrutinize. We receive the Holy Spirit through faith as a result of Christ's works, not our own.

3:15 "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations. even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it."

Paul seeks to illustrate from the realm of human relationships, specifically human covenants and contracts, the absurdity of thinking that forgiveness and possession of the Holy Spirit is dependent on obedience to Jewish Law. Even in the realm of human covenants, and the implications is how much more so in divine covenants, there is no changing the obligations once they are established. There is no addition or subtraction to its terms and conditions. A deal is a deal and all parties understand that.

3:16 "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as reckoned to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ."

This is a quote of Gen 28:14 when God says to Jacob of His promise to Abraham, "And in your seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed." This verse shows the high view of Scripture Paul had. He is willing to base his argument on the fact that a word is singular in the Scripture. By doing this Paul indicates that inspiration extends to the grammar not simply the thoughts and ideas of Scripture. Paul's point here is that the blessing that would come from Abraham to all the peoples of the world would not be a result of the actions his offspring would take—some tradition they would take up. The blessing would come as a result of one individual who would descend from Abraham, that is Christ, the Messiah. The blessing of all that is involved in Yahweh's covenant promises to Abraham is freely offered to every tribe and nation on the earth through one of Abraham's offspring, Christ. In him, or through him and because of him, the promises (plural) to Abraham would be fulfilled. Paul's primary point is that these are entered into in Christ, apart from the Law.

None of this is to say that the fulfillment of the promises is purely spiritual in nature. That is an argument for another time in a different passage of Scripture. Whatever we conclude the nature of those promises is, Paul emphatically says that they are inherited only by those who embrace Jesus Christ through faith.

3:17 "What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."

Since terms cannot be added to a covenant after it is ratified, the Law is not the condition for fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. To view it as such is to accept the idea that terms can be added to a covenant way after it has been ratified, 430 years to be exact. The law did not lay out conditions for receiving the blessing made to Abraham as the false teachers were proclaiming to the Galatians. No, the purpose of the law lies in something other than being the condition upon which the blessing of Abraham is entered into.

3:18 "For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise. But God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise."

Abraham's inheritance that he was to receive from God was based on one thing, God's promise. We don't know why God promised it. He simply looked with favor on Abraham and made him a promise. It was not based on Abraham's performance of the law. In fact, the law was unknown to Abraham, it came 430 years later. It cannot be based on both. They are mutually exclusive. A promise is based on the character and word of the promiser. A law based covenant would have been based on the character of Abraham. And because of the character of Abraham and every other human being, a promise based on performance of the law would have been meaningless.

3:19 "Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made."

If God made an unconditional promise to Abraham that he intended to fulfill to and through Christ, and if it was based purely on His word and character and not on the performance of Abraham, then what was the purpose of the Law?

The law is given because of the sin problem in humanity. It exists due to the presence of thoughts and so deeds that are outside of the will of God. There are thoughts and deeds in every human that incur God's wrath, that lead away from His blessing, that offend him and destroy all relationship to him. Sin brings with it spiritual blindness to sinners. Then they lose the ability to make any kind of moral judgment. The result is that they not only think and do sinful things but they become enslaved to sin. The law is given to be a standard, to make people even with this blindness mindful of sin. It was "added alongside," to address a completely different issue, to "school" Abraham's descendants on the consequences of sin and the great and only hope, God's love and mercy.

The law came to make us aware of some very bad news. Yet it came with a certain pomp and splendor, a glory of its own. This glory was the work of angels to confirm it as being divine in origin. The mediator who brought it was Moses who represented humanity to God, and stood between God and Israel. So the law came through the ministry of Moses and was confirmed and established by the works of angels, which works attested to its divine origin, and who administered its blessing and curses. The Law was a system of consequences, good and bad, made certain and sure by God's ministers, Angels.

The law was established (ordained) with a time limit. That time limit was until that individual came on the scene through whom the promise made to Abraham could be and would be fulfilled. At the arrival of that person, the law's commission expired, its purpose was fully served. That single individual was Jesus, the Christ.

3:20 "now a mediator is not for one party only, whereas God is only one."

A promise is a one party proposition. It is not an agreement, and there is no need for a mediator (Moses) to negotiate and stand between separate parties. A promise only necessitates a single person who acts. That is what Yahweh's salvation is. It is a one-sided promise with no performance clauses for humanity except Yahweh's appeal for faith and trust in him. The law then, did not relate to the promise, but to that "added alongside," specifically to the tutorial process.

3:21 "Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law has been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on the Law."

Paul raises a logical and legitimate question. If the promises of God to Abraham were promises without condition and obligation with respect to the Law, Then was God contradicting himself by asking Abraham's offspring to obey the Law? Is the law saying something different than what God said in the promises? The answer is an emphatic no with an explanation to follow.

The law is not an alternative to God's promises because there is not a single law among all that make up the Law, that can impart spiritual life. That can only be done by the Spirit. The

Law can measure spiritual life but it cannot impart it any more than a tape measure can impart physical stature. So in all the Law there is nothing that has the power to infuse life.

3:22 "But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Christ Jesus might be given to those who believe."

The Scriptures, of this time frame of Galatians, was the Old Testament writings. These expounded the Law, applied it, and recorded Israel's continuous short fallings. There is no witness in those writings of anyone who was guiltless when it came to the Law. The result of the scriptural record was that all people were confirmed to be guilty. There was none righteous. Yet, many believed that eternal life was found in the Scriptures. This was the work of pride and spiritual blindness. The result was that Christ said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them is eternal life. But eternal life is found in me" (John 5:39). Eternal life has always been in Christ. The Scriptures, in speaking of him, are able to point us toward eternal life. But they have no power in themselves to impart that life. On the contrary, they testify to us of our sin. They shut us up, that is, they confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt, our inability to obey God. So the law is not contrary to the promise of God. Rather it is given alongside the promise to heighten its beauty, its power and sufficiency, its glory, and its absolute necessity. The Law addresses totally different issues than the promise. But it compliments it and helps mankind search for it, accept it, and be grateful for it. The Law narrows our choices with respect to salvation to One. It shuts us up. and the only way out is to believe. It does a grim work with a glorious outcome.

3:23 "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed."

It is not that there was not faith under the old covenant. There was faith, but not THE faith, the understanding of Christ, his works, forgiveness of sin, indwelling of the Holy Spirit. During that time historically the law provided fences for Israel. It could not cure the problem of the flesh and sin. It could only hope to inform. It provided a divine statement on sin and sins, so that there was an awareness among the Israelites of their unrighteousness. It kept Israel in "custody," that is, in check to the extent that it declared the true nature of their deeds. Their imaginations were not able to run unchecked and allow them to think that bad was good and good was bad. What was true historically of Israel is often true of individuals. Their first step towards faith is a relationship to the Law, or at least moral law of some sort. It keeps them in custody. It bids them establish their own righteousness by conforming to its standard. It has the effect of making them aware of their own moral inability. It herds them toward the only honest conclusion that can be drawn, that they are unable to establish their own righteousness.

When Israel was thus in custody, they had no knowledge of what was coming. What would be revealed in Christ was hinted at. It was "plainly" there in type and illustration from our vantage point. But few paid that close attention to it. So Christ can be seen looking backward into the Old Testament worship system. But the information was not available as it is today. None of this gradually become known. It was revealed. The revelation of Christ was dramatic and it was sudden. The shepherds were scared to death. In one sense Israelites were prepared for it. In another sense they were not. In terms of events, the stage was clearly set and the time perfect. But there was so much to turn loose of and so much to think through, and pride's work had so twisted and entrenched the old, that the revelation of the new was not generally received by the Israelites.

Revelation when it finally came was swift, dramatic, and very demanding on them. It was itself very revealing as to their true character and their moral and spiritual condition.

3:24 "Therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."

The law is such that it prepares people for Christ. So high its standard, so unbending its command, so broad its scope that no person can say of it, "I have accomplished all it asked me to do." The lesson it teaches is of our own moral inability, our complete dependence on God's mercy and grace. The era of the law, recorded by the Old Testament for all I read, describes details of a nation's efforts to live by the law. Salvation was not at state, God's blessing was. They were unable to sanctify themselves. That historical record is the lesson of the law. It seems that to this day the Law is always greeted with, "All you have commanded we will do." But its end is always, "this people draws near to me with their lips but their heart is far from me."

The Law reveals what is in the heart of humans and demonstrates that even when we are willing we are incapable of conformity to God's righteous standard. The lesson when learned and faced up to has great reward. It leads to acceptance of God's provisions for righteousness which comes freely to all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. These are "declared righteous," judicially pardoned for their moral shortfall and credited with righteousness from their great high priest. The law is a school master and a cold, unbending, demanding one at that. The class is rigid, the assignments impossible, the rewards unattainable, the consequences of failure common and certain.

3:25 "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

When the purpose of instruction has been achieved, there is no longer a need for that teacher. It is time to move on to new teachers and new lessons. And so once Christ is found there is a graduation from the Law as our teacher to the Spirit of God. The lessons to be learned are not of one's inability, but of one's ability in all things through dependence on the Holy Spirit. The result is that the Christian has an obligation to the Law and need not labor under its demands. It may be properly discarded as for another time. Such an attitude is not rebellion, it is responsive. It is not disrespectful; it is regarding Christ's work as sacred above all. It is not blasphemous with regard to the law; it is submissive to its purpose and design. It is showing Godly respect for it.

3:26 " For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Paul is beginning to build an illustration that he will develop fully in 4:1-3, of the fact that sonship marks the end of an era in terms of guardians and managers. For now his point is that we are sons of God. We have achieved that status through faith. There is nothing more the law could possibly do for us. We do not need a tutor to lead us to the point of justification, a job the law formerly did. We are justified and so have a position before God. The position is marked by all the affection and the privilege that we can imagine from our own dads, were they without sin and perfected in love.

3:27 "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ."

This baptism could refer to the salvation experience which is synonymous with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or it could refer simply to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Either way, it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who places us in Christ and through whom we are clothed with Christ. Paul is talking about an identity which we take on the moment we are regenerated. He has used family relationships to describe our position in Christ. Now he illustrates our experience with Christ through different imagery, that of clothes. Our experience is like

clothing in the sense that it has a visible, observable impact on us. It is something by which we are readily identifiable. As someone might be given a new robe to celebrate their baptism so we receive this new inner being and outward look that identifies us as a part of Christ, organically linked to him through the Holy Spirit and so behaving as he would and representing him to others. It is a critically important statement because it shows that justification is an act of God, something he does to us, and not something we gradually work into or something we strive for and seek to attain. It is a state of being, not simply a declaration. It is conferred on us by God through the Holy Spirit. It is instantaneous and complete. Were justification by the law it would come only at the moment God made a final declaration regarding our lives at the judgment seat. There would be no sense in which we could make statements like this one Paul makes. To believe in Christ is to voluntarily "put him on," to readily identify with him and be from that time forth His in the deepest sense. It is to be equipped to be His representative. We can now join Christ in being the blessing to the world promised to Abraham.

3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In terms of status within the family of God there are none of the ranks and classes which are delineated by culture. There is no higher privilege for Jews, for free men or for males. There is no longer privilege for Greeks, for slaves, or for females. All have inherited the great privilege and wealth that are bestowed in Christ. Our equality is clearly stated in the fact that we are all one in Christ, meaning we are equal in value, privilege, status and rank. In the body of Christ there is no inherent privilege due to any of those things. All of his children have equal right and footing, all have equal opportunity to prove their faithfulness in serving him. This truth does not mean that all difference in role or function is to be eliminated. We would certainly agree it means that role or function is not determined by ethnicity, social class or any such things we are used to seeing. But diversity in role exists in Christ's body as it does within the person of God, the Trinity. It does not increase or diminish essential value. There are diverse functions in the Trinity, among Angels and in the body of Christ that simply are, as the sovereignty of God has determined and as all of Scripture supports. This verse is clearly dealing with equality of standing, and with the equal value of each individual who is in Christ. This worth and privilege is solidly affirmed for each individual in this Scripture regardless of role, as it is throughout Scripture. 3:29 "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

If you belong to Christ you are an heir of the promise made to Abraham. The specific promise being discussed in this context has been "all the nations shall be blessed in you." There is no reason to confine it to this. But this is the promise that Paul has been careful to show the readers is specifically linked to Christ (16).

The phrase "according to promise" describes the basis of our standing as heirs. It is according to promise as opposed to obedience to the law. The idea is not "according to promise as opposed to physical descent." The context is all about being an heir by means of faith as opposed to by obedience to law as the Galatians were wrongly thinking, or as opposed to being a physical descendant as the Jews were wrongly thinking. Through belonging to Christ, which is by faith, we enter into all that is his as the seed of Abraham, and as Christ's offspring we are also Abraham's offspring. Paul's primary desire is to affirm that our standing is a result of faith, not works. Our standing is just like Abraham's, and in fact we are his children by virtue of being Christ's children.

Galatians 4

4:1 "Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything."

Being an heir has its privilege, but that privilege comes about according to a specific timetable. Until the time has arrived, the heir enjoys the prospect of the inheritance, but does not experience it. In reality, he is just like one of the house servants in many ways.

4:2 "but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the Father."

The heir is like the slave in the sense that he is under the authority and instruction of certain others until a specific time. The purpose of this is to allow certain things to be learned by the heir so that the inheritance will not be squandered managed well. Another purpose often comes into play as well; to allow time for the Father to complete the business matters he has planned so as to pass the estate on at its fullest possible value. During this time the heir does not have the full experience of his inheritance. He awaits the appointed time and is being directed and taught by those appointed by his father as he awaits the day.

4:3 "So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world."

Paul uses the term "children" to describe the state of God's people and the world before the death of Christ. He has already described that era as "before faith came." The time had not come for any to fully experience what would be theirs once the sacrifice was made by Christ for their sins. Custody was exercised over these and a written history of that custody was made, in order to assure that all would manage the inheritance properly once it was offered. Paul described this as being "in bondage." The law provided a degree of structure that could only be described in this way. It was not that the structure was bad. Rather the subjects were so rebellious that the experience was miserable. Paul describes the law as "the elemental things of the world." The law is holy and of God but it is concerned with the elemental things of life on this earth, what we eat and what we touch. That is the nature of life as an heir before the time. It is concerned with the fundamentals so that the inheritance is rightly handled once gained. The entire verse describes the period of time before Christ, but it has application to those today who would be under the law. What they will gain from the Law is not closeness to God but bondage. If they approach the Law truthfully, they will feel the bondage of guilt. If they approach the Law in a prideful way and suppose that their outward conformity makes them righteous, their pride will hold them in pharisaical bondage so that they are kept from the full truth of Christ.

4:4 But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law."

When from God's viewpoint and according to His plan, the full number of days for this custody had past, "the faith" was revealed, or more fully "the object of the faith." From a human standpoint there came to be a universal trade language, Roman roads, Roman peace. Much more, that we imagine is of far greater significance, determined "the fullness of time" in God's mind. The phrase "fullness of time" is particularly fitting because Christ is the centerpiece of God's plan for all that exists. He was and is the apex of revelation, where the unveiling of God and his plan reached its fullest degree. It happened when the purpose of the Law had been achieved. It happened when the giver of the law had decided that it had run its

course and accomplished its purpose. The fullness of time, the "rightness" of time, meant that the world was at the perfect point for the Son of God to enter the scene. It marked the moment in which the sons were deemed ready to enter into their inheritance. The Son was "born of a woman." God's Son took on the form of men and was a man. His father was divine, His mother human. He was fully human and fully divine. Undiminished deity and perfect humanity were forever united in one person, Jesus Christ. Jesus was born under the Law. He was placed under the custody of the Law, meaning he was subject to its demands. It was essential to his mission that he live the law perfectly. This became the difference between himself and the rest of humanity. He kept it perfectly and so did not fall under the curse. Instead he became the only human to fall under its blessing because he could live by its demands. He became uniquely qualified to be our sin-bearer. And that was his purpose and mission.

4:5 "in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law. in order that we might receive the adoption of sons."

Jesus, being under the Law's jurisdiction but not under its curse, came to buy back out of slavery those who were under the Law's curse. His mission is clearly stated here by Paul. He lived under the Law. He was able not to transgress it. The result was that he fell under its blessing (Deuteronomy 28). This is, one of the great ironies of God's dealings with men. Jesus became "the lamb without blemish" whose death would mean the redemption of those in bondage to the Law, who were under the Law's curse. This verse concisely and precisely states the purpose of the incarnation, the redemption of the humanity. It is important to remind ourselves at this point of the purpose of all this argument on Paul's part. It is to show the Galatians that they are no longer under the Law. What has been redeemed has no further obligation. The law is a former master, not the present one.

The Galatians had slipped backwards. They had forgotten that through Christ all their sins had been forgiven and that through Christ's death they enjoyed a perfect standing with God. They were trying to improve that standing by being obedient to the Law. It was foolishness. All of Christ's work in our behalf was aimed at us being fully accepted and adopted as sons of God. If Jesus did not accomplish this then indeed he had died in vain. The fact was he had accomplished it. The time had come for us to be adopted because of this work in our behalf. The work had been done, and it had been approved and accepted. The adoption was final. The law was now only a reminder of a past era. "What the law could not do," bestow sonship, "weak as it was through the flesh," that is because of our innate moral inability to obey it, "God did." The work had been completed, our standing with God is a completed transaction to all who believe.

4:6 "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

In normal adoption there is no physical linkage between a child and the adoptive parents. The bond becomes an emotional one. In the case of our relationship to Christ, though the relationship is generally thought of as "spiritual" there is a deeper linkage. He places his Spirit within us so that we are organically linked to the Father and the Son as well as to one another. The result on our part is a close emotional bond with and an inner likeness to the Father. It is characterized by all the love and affection imaginable in the healthy relationship of a perfect Father to his Son. The Spirit is referred to here as "the Spirit of His Son," a passing statement that offers evidence of the trinity. The term "Abba" is the familiar and affectionate term by which a small child addressed their "daddy."

The verse shows that God has held nothing back in declaring us His sons. He has imparted his very self to us in the miracle of regeneration.

4:7 "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son then an heir through God."

Whereas before the time had come for us to enter into all our rights as sons we were under the guardianship of the law, now we are full-fledged sons and have entered into the experience of the inheritance. We no longer have an obligation to the former guardian, the Law.

It should be a constant part of our mindset that we are heirs of God. This is essential to undo the unhealthy elements of our identity that life in this fallen world embeds in us. It is also essential in our quest not to be entangled with the normal concerns and pursuits of this life. That we are heirs of all that is God's changes everything!

4:8 "However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods."

This may be a reference to the gentile's path and life during the time the Jews were "under guardians and managers." At that time they were living in ignorance of God and worshipping idols rather than their creator. They were enslaved by those idols to all sorts of wrong thinking, and as Paul says to the Corinthians, "doctrines of demons." Their gods were not gods by nature. On the contrary, by nature, they were composed of worthless, lifeless elemental things. So whereas Jews were kept under custody by the Law, the gentiles were ignorant and subjected to false gods. Both ended up in slavery. The Jews through their response to the Law were slaves to the elemental things of the world (4:30). The gentiles were slaves to the same things (9) through false gods." The way traveled is very different in terms of moral appearance. But either way the result is the same, spiritual slavery and death.

4:9 "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."

The verse begins with the word, "but" and returns to the absurdity of the direction the Galatians thoughts have taken them. The term "know" connotes not only the end of their ignorance but also the end of their estrangement. Before they had not known about God. They had no information or understanding. Now they not only had that knowledge of him but he had entered into intimate relationship with them. Them knowing him was a matter of information. him knowing them was much more than information. It is certain he had all the information on them from eternity past. him knowing them was a matter of his work accomplished through Christ and the fact that his Spirit was now joined to theirs. That Paul says to them that God "knew" them, would certainly startle them. It was meant to remind them that the relationship was as full as it could be. God had held nothing back from them. There was no greater level of acceptance they had to earn from him. They were already there though their faith and His work. The Law served no further purpose.

The Galatians were turning back to things from which they once had turned away and had turned to Christ. Paul notes that these things shared three characteristics. They are weak, unable to bring about change and unable to produce the life of power they had known in the Spirit. They are worthless, of no value in terms of salvation or sanctification since they are weak. They are elemental, that is they are characteristic of a very low level of spiritual interest. They are classic elements of man-made religion. They show up everywhere man tries

a new scheme with regard to God. By turning back the Galatians were becoming worse than they had originally been. Before they were enslaved ignorantly, against their will. Now they are choosing to be enslaved, desiring it. Their actions really were plain and simple foolishness.

4:10 "You observe days and months and seasons and years."

Such things are indeed very elemental. They have to do with things that are of relative unimportance. From the heights of supernatural life in the Holy Spirit the Galatians had chosen a style of religion that dealt not with the inner being but with the outer one. That is the nature of legalism. It changes things like the calendar, but the heart is unaffected. It can change what we do, but it can't change why we do it and so it caters to the flesh. The result is that instead of indulging the flesh by various vices we indulge it through religion. Either way it is the flesh. Either way we indulge our lust for power, for control, for pleasure, for significance, importance and status. That is never good.

4:11 "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."

So serious is the error in their thinking that Paul equates it with a return to square one and his own efforts to help them as possibly wasted. Slipping back under the law is not just a backwards step. It is a complete rejection of the gospel, a return to having to learn certain things all over again. With this Paul engages in an intensely personal and emotional appeal. Then he will shift to another line of argument in verse 21. will shift to another line of argument in verse 21.

4:12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am. For I have become as you are. You have done me no wrong;"

We can possibly understand Paul as saying, "I am as you are," or "I have been as you are." Most likely Paul is asking in this, that they adopt his thinking in the matter he has laid before them. Become like me in the way you think, in your theology. The primary question is what Paul means by the next phrase, "I also have become as you are." He certainly was not thinking like them! In what sense had he become like them? There is likely a touch of three things in these words of Paul. First, he is referring to the fact that he used to think as they were now thinking. At one time as a devout Pharisee, he himself had mastered the mode of thinking they were slipping into. He was very acquainted with it. Now he wanted them to think as he himself had learned to think. He had learned to live as Gentiles needed to live. He had learned to live apart from the letter of the Law. He was like them in that sense. He had learned to serve the Law's intent. At the same time Paul is probably also expressing the idea that he had placed himself in their shoes and addressed their problem. Now they needed to place themselves in Paul's shoes, think like him, understand their error and forsake it.

Paul is also using the language of relationship. He is communicating this to them; "I have borne great concern for your welfare as I would my own. I have poured myself into you and your problems. I have thrown myself into this situation and shown my love by my hard words. Behind them there is the deepest of emotion and persistently deep, nagging concern." The whole verse and the verses that follow are relational in tone and reflect the depth of Paul's affectionate and loving frustration with their thinking. He wants them, he begs them to adopt his perspective and to do it with clear understanding and deep emotion so as never to slip back.

Paul begins a statement that he will continue in verse 13. It may have been aimed at assuring them that there was no relational barrier between themselves and Paul that should work to cement their error. They had not wronged Paul. They should not persist in their error because they feel they have burned the relational bridge between themselves and Paul. That would be a complete misunderstanding on their part. Here Paul assures them that the relationship on his part is as it has always been. In fact, he calls on them in the ensuing verses to renew their deep feeling in that relationship. Another possibility regarding this statement is that Paul is simply saying to them, "You did me no wrong when I was vulnerable. There was ample opportunity then. Why do it now?"

4:13 "but you know that it was because of bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time."

Apparently an infirmity of some sort impacted Paul's circumstances in such a way that it resulted in his being with the Galatians and sharing the gospel with them. We are unsure of the nature of the infirmity. It seems from what is said in verse 15 that it could have had to do with eyesight, but that expressions could simply be a colloquialism of some sort, an expression of their great devotion to him. It is best to see the present statement for what it is, a simple comment that Paul had a physical illness that required special care. It partially limited his activities, which resulted in a stay in Galatia, which resulted in him presenting the gospel there.

4:14 "and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself."

Paul's bodily condition could have impacted the Galatians. It was such that it could have caused them to reject Paul and his message. It apparently was some health problem that had symptoms that were in some way unattractive and could have caused the hearers to shun the message bearer due to his appearance or due to him being a burden to provide special care for. At any rate, though this could have happened, it did not.

Paul has a warm memory of their reception of him. Far from rejecting him due to some physical difficulty, they attached great value to himself and his words. They regarded him as nothing less than a divine messenger, the very presence of Christ.

4:15 "Where then is this sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that if possible you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me "

The great question Paul raises here amounts to saying, "What changed?" There is much implied in the question. Did you misjudge my authority and authenticity? Have you been fickle? How is it that you give authority so quickly and easily, first to me and now to others? Have you thought this through well or have you been duped?

This is a verse that may provide the clue as to what Paul's "bodily illness" was that caused him to spend time in Galatia and bring them the gospel. There is also a chance that it is simply an expression of the Galatians willingness to give sacrificially for Paul's welfare. The point is that at that time there was a deep commitment on their part to Paul and a stirring love for him. They would have borne any trial in his behalf in order to give him increased ability to carry on his work.

4:16 "Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

Paul had opposed their wrong thinking. He had either done this by previous letter or by word of mouth, or he is simply anticipating their response to what he has said in this letter. He senses that those who once hung on his words, are now resisting his message and doubting his motives. The question is an important one for those falling into error to face. It is easy, when caught in error, to resort to a prideful defense of oneself against all logic. It is easy to begin to see friends as enemies, falsehood as truth, danger as safety and security. By this question Paul is trying to jar them into reality.

4:17 "They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them."

Those who have led the Galatians astray had bad motives. The false teachers were "seeking" the Galatians, that is, they were seeking to make the Galatians their loyal followers. They wanted to be able to count the Galatians as "in their camp." Their actions were those of leaders, but their motives in seeking such followers were impure.

This is a very revealing statement by Paul that addresses a problem that has always been characteristic of leaders of things in the spiritual realm. There have always been many who wish to place themselves between people and God, so as to be themselves the official dispensers of spiritual wealth and of grace. These want control. They love to be first. They present the truth in such a way that the rank and file are "shut out." They either make it more difficult than it is, or they change the meaning of words so that only they understand the "code." The result is that they are needed. They are "sought after" because they have created a situation where they unlock the spiritual mysteries and they solve great spiritual dilemmas. This is typical of legalists who construct a system that favors them and minimizes their liabilities. They become people's gurus and are viewed as experts by those within the boundaries they have manufactured by their own selfish designs.

4:18 "But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner and not only when I am present with you."

There is nothing out of line with good teachers, those who for the right reasons stand between men and God. There is nothing wrong in being eagerly sought as one who has resources in spiritual matters. In fact, it is good to find yourself always in such a position, as long as your motives are commendable. Commendable motives for being eagerly sought after would be a desire that God be properly portrayed and represented so as to receive due allegiance and glory. A desire to see people freed from the slavery of wrong thinking. A desire to see people come to know the truth of God's grace in Christ. This is opposed to a desire to see men dependent upon or obligated to you.

But the Galatians were being eagerly sought by the false teachers. They were being sought in order to be used by them, sought for how they could be enslaved by them to serve their agenda. Now there is nothing wrong with being sought after to become a loyal and helpful follower, as long as the course is the mission of Christ, and the glory of God. It is when the desire is for the glory of the false teachers that there is a problem.

Paul was not demanding "guru" status from the Galatians. He was saying that they should always be open to those who seek their help in legitimate spiritual business. They need not only follow Paul. Paul is also telling them by this phrase that they need to follow only those with commendable motives whether he is with them to guide them or not. What they do when he is there with his help, they need to do when he is not there.

4:19 "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you."

This is the commendable manner in which Paul seeks the Galatians, to bring about the church of Christ among them. He is expressing his motives in seeking their loyalty, and describing the relationship as he views it. He is also describing the personal distress he feels for them and the personal stake he has in their spiritual health. His is no mere concern for additional followers, for more numbers. His is an emotional bond, a concern for their development for their spiritual futures.

4:20 "But I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."

Paul feels the limits of written communication. He wants to boldly communicate his concern. He is appalled, but not in a condescending way. He is hurt, but not for selfish reasons. He wishes to be with them so as by overall tone to communicate his depth of genuine concern for them. His was a commendable motive, which often can only be communicated subjectively, through the subtlety of tone and body language.

4:21 "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?"

Paul is calling to the witness stand the very Scriptures that were allegedly revered by those who are teaching this false doctrine. He is willing to argue on their terms. They had special reverence for the writing of Moses, what we call the Pentateuch, the first five books of our Bible. It is easy not to listen to the more subtle teaching of these books. If one listens carefully to their message, Moses projects himself as a failure. He did not enter the promised land. His story is pure and simply that he died in the wilderness just like the worst of the rebels. That's what the Law does. Moses presents faith as the stuff of heroes, the thing that God searches for in people. Abraham is the primary hero, with Caleb and Joshua also being prime examples. Like many Christians, the Galatians needed to listen to the Law.

4:22-23 "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bond woman, and one by the free woman and the son by the free woman through the promise."

Paul summons the simple testimony of the Old Testament speaking of the two sons fathered by Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac's birth came through a woman who had proven barren. After she had been barren through her prime childbearing years and through the "maybe" and the "borderline" years and even into old age where she could only laugh at the whole prospect of bearing children, she conceives a son. It was clearly extra-ordinary, the work of God as a result of His promise.

Ishmael was a child conceived as a result of the family trying to produce Yahweh's promised result by their own efforts and schemes. His life would be a story of independence from both the rule of God and human authority and of willful separation from normal human bonding.

4:24 "This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar."

An allegory is a symbolic representation of truths or generalizations about human conduct or experience. In an allegory the characters and incidences are normally fictional. They are crafted by starting from a truth one wishes to demonstrate and constructing characters, events and actions that will demonstrate that truth. It is important to say that Paul was not allegorizing. To "allegorize" is to explain a written account such as this by focusing the

hearers or readers on its lessons. Allegorization stresses an event's symbolic significance as interpreted by the speaker. It sees the event itself as insignificant and focuses on what the event points to. It can stop at the symbols and miss the event's significance. In fact, to many such interpreters it is not even important if the events are actually true, since that is not the intent of the author in recording them. Paul is not allegorizing by using the word "allegory" here. The narrative of Abraham's two sons had profound meaning and significance for their lives. It continues to have such significance in the lives of their offspring, physical and spiritual. What Paul is saying is that this narrative, in particular what it reports about how the two sons were conceived, also serves as an eternal demonstration of two ways of approaching Yahweh. One way of approaching him is by the efforts of the flesh, human effort. This is illustrated by the scheming involved in the conception of Ishmael. The other way of approaching Yahweh is by faith in God's promise, in response to the Holy Spirit, illustrated by the conception of Isaac. Both ways have been clearly pursued and the result plainly recorded for us. The Galatians faced the same two choices. The results have always been the same as those Abraham and Sarah brought about through the choices they made. The story of Isaac and Ishmael has its great historical significance that impacts world events to the present day. It also serves as a great illustration to all who would ponder two paths of experiencing God's promises. Paul's point is that the Galatians would certainly experience all that comes with approaching Yahweh in a fleshly way if they continued on the course they had strayed into.

4:25 "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."

Paul defines the sense in which the incident recorded by Moses in the Law is speaking allegorically. Paul is saying, under the direction of the Sovereign over the events themselves, that the two women in the events symbolically represent two covenants. Hagar represents the Old Covenant, which was initiated on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. The covenant related to how to experience God's blessing. It was conditional. It said, "do these things. If you do I'll bless you. and you'll be a privileged nation. If you don't, the curse of sin will devour you and you will be everyone's servant."

The Old Covenant was brilliant, though destined to fail as a purveyor of Yahweh's blessing. It exposed humankind as morally incapable, something, they never dreamed of themselves. It recorded their intentions and failures in writing for all to examine for centuries. That record had the potential, when attentively examined, to lay to rest forever the belief that we can please him and earn His favor by our good performance. Because of this moral weakness in humankind the Old Covenant had the effect of enslaving Israel both figuratively and literally. That is the only outcome there could possibly be. The Old Covenant could never give freedom due to every human's sinful condition. It could not possibly bring blessing to anyone. Hagar's conception and the birth of Ishmael was the result of Abraham and Sarah trying to produce the blessing of God by their own efforts. It was a great representation of the old covenant before it existed. The old covenant would yield condemnation to all who would try in their own efforts and by mere human means to procure God's blessing. Sadly, this is the path all human religion points us to.

Again, Hagar represents the covenant emanating from Mount Sinai, the old covenant. As Hagar gave birth to Ishmael so, corresponding to that, the old covenant produced the Jerusalem of Paul's times. Not only was Jerusalem under the thumb of the Romans, but they were also under the condemnation of the Law and had not accepted Christ as their Messiah. The Jerusalem of Paul's day was in slavery in most every sense. Only faith in the Gospel of Christ could set them on the path of freedom. Ever since that time, being a child of Jerusalem, a Jew, has meant scornful treatment to some degree. It is important not to speak of the slavery of the Jews as being spiritual or literal, but as being both, for that is what the curse of

the law is about. It warned that because they would disobey "...you shall never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually." (Deuteronomy 28:33). So, as Hagar was a literal slave, so those of the covenant she foreshadowed are literal and spiritual slaves.

4:26 "But that Jerusalem above is free, she is our mother."

Sarah is an allegory of the new Jerusalem, that community of people whose bond is trust in the promise of God and in His salvation that he provides in Christ. These are citizens of the city above. The city is said to be "above" because it is in the place of Yahweh and being fashioned by him (John 14:1-3; Rev. 21:9-27). Abraham is said to have been searching for such a city, "which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). The Jerusalem above is the place where the faith community will reside with God (Revelation 21:1-22:5). It is the "good ending" worked for us by Yahweh through the new covenant. The new covenant works righteousness and glory to those who embrace Yahweh through faith. The place of rest for God's covenant people is free in every sense. There, all are free from the curse of the law, including physical slavery, because their sins have been borne away by Christ. The Law therefore has no claim against them they are free from its demands. They are free from the presence of all the sin that was in them that kept them from obedience to Yahweh.

4:27 "For it is written, 'Rejoice barren woman who does not bear, break forth and shout, you who are not in labor. For more numerous are the children of the desolate than the one who has a husband.'"

This quotation from Isaiah 54:1-2 was addressed to Israel in promise of days of restoration in the future. Isaiah 54 is one of the great Old Testament passages on the promises of Yahweh to Israel that he was yet to fulfill. It makes some specific statements on the new Jerusalem. Israel had its years of great glory under David. But those years were few, and a distant memory by the time of Isaiah. Barren wombs were one of the curses associated with the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 28:18). Infertility apparently became very common in Israel due to their disobedience to the Law. He sees Israel itself as being barren. None of the promises of Yahweh seemed remotely possible to Israel by Isaiah's time. The nation was a spiritual wasteland, barren in every respect. Into this doom Isaiah speaks of a coming hope. There would be an offspring produced by Israel! With the progress of revelation Paul confirms Isaiah's words that were beginning to be fulfilled before his eyes. Isaiah foresaw Israelites who would come to faith under the New Covenant joined by a large multitude of Gentiles who by faith in Jesus the Christ would be grafted into Israel and the blessings of the New Covenant. In the end, barren Sarah, will have all these who are of her faith counted in her lineage. Thus she will have many more offspring than did the one who "had a husband," that is, the nation living under the Old Covenant.

4:28 "And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise."

Just as Israel was promised to Abraham and Sarah, so Gentiles were also promised to them. We, from every kindred, tribe and nation are the fulfillment of promises made to the patriarchs and their offspring.

4:29 "But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also."

Paul is using the term "flesh" in its ethical sense. It refers to living according to instinctive human drives and motivations. Things like advancing one's own interests, protecting one's

interests and seeking one's own welfare and comfort, all without thinking of others or of what God might want, are classic signs of what the Bible calls "fleshly" living. It is self-centeredness and self-obsession. The Spirit seeks to lead us to a higher life than this. And so the flesh resists. We feel this war within us. We observe it outside of us.

Genesis records that Hagar looked down on Sarah once she had born a son to Abraham. (Genesis 16:1-6, 21:8-14) It also reveals that Ishmael looked down on Isaac. This was the flesh, self-centeredness at work inspiring prejudice and ridicule. The one born out of a fleshly union, as opposed to a Godly one, and the one born by human fleshly and conniving, was opposed to the child that was of the Spirit. In what sense was Isaac's birth of the Spirit? Probably in several senses. It was revealed to Abraham and Sarah most likely by the Spirit. The miracle in their physical bodies was most likely done by the Spirit. The faith that enabled them to embrace it before it happened, outside of momentary lapses, was of the Spirit. The phrase "so it is now" is profound. It is routine that fleshly people are alienated by those living by the Holy Spirit. The self-orientation in the fleshly ones seeks to suppress the Spirit's work. And so Hagar and Ishmael instinctively followed this course. This is a very sobering thought and we should be well warned of it and ponder it deeply. We can behave like Hagar and Ishmael. All we have to do is start obeying the flesh rather than the Spirit. When we do there is no limit to the selfish acts we can engage.

4:30 "But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman."

(Genesis 21:8-14; 16:1-6). These words were uttered by Sarah with regard to Ishmael in Genesis 21:10, but confirmed by the Lord in 21:12. Though it had been God's will for Hagar and Ishmael to remain with Abraham and Sarah for a time (Genesis 16), it was now His will that they be gone. The incident that prompted these words by Sarah was the sight of Ishmael's "mocking," at the feast Abraham prepared in honor of the weaning of Isaac. Ishmael was 14 when Isaac was born (Genesis 16:16 cf 21:5). It is not reported what the "mocking" consisted of, but it is apparent that Ishmael was at an age where he was responsible for his actions. Sarah demanded that he be held responsible.

Abraham had affection and dreams for Ishmael. This is apparent from Abraham's great distress of sending him away (Genesis 21:11). God had a plan and it is even said that he was "with" Ishmael (Genesis 21:20). But there came a time in His plan where His will was that they separate and be two distinct people. His care would be extended to Ishmael, but he would not be an heir of the promises extended to Abraham. There are a number of things Ishmael's life illustrated and it is uncertain how many of these we would be free to expound on without being guilty of over-allegorizing the story. One such thing is clear. The truth Paul is conveying from the story is that the children of the flesh and the children of promise are two distinct peoples with separate and distinct destinations in the plan of God. It is also clear that there comes a time when the children of promise must "cast out" the children of the flesh. There must be separation in practice because they are two different ways of life. The two covenants and the two sets of motives do not mix. The presence of the new specified the obsolescence of the old. The old must be cast out. Paul's main point in this whole line of reasoning is that there comes a time to separate, to leave the old behind in favor of what God has now provided.

4:31 So then brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman."

There is nothing in our heritage that points to slavery, spiritual bondage and obligation. We are chosen by Yahweh to be free, to have no outstanding debt to God. This is because of His sovereign will who then brought about our spiritual birth. Our heritage is not a result of our performance with regard to the Law and human ordinance. Our faith allows Christ's sacrifice for our sin to be applied to our account. The resultant transformation of our spirit by God's own Spirit amounts to us being born again. We are by all this set free from all that we were.

Galatians 5

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

The work of redemption is entered into with one result in mind, to bring about the freedom of the one redeemed. It is unthinkable that Christ would have had any other result in mind. Christ set us free so that we would BE free. We have been set free by him, none other than the One who is creation's sovereign. His work ended our slavery to the law. It has no further claim on us. Our relationship to it has been forever changed.

Paul is concerned that the readers can, due to past conditioning of the conscience, willingly give up their freedom from the law and make themselves again slaves to it. In fact, they had done this very thing. It is interesting to contemplate the idea that to do such a thing is not to "stand firm." Legalism can feel like standing firm. It can feel so right to put ourselves under its laws and regulations and routines. From a legalistic perspective grace seems so wishy-washy, such a precarious and pathetic spot to stand on. To stand on a specified code of conduct and doggedly insist on it seems so strong and disciplined, so stable and sure, so noble and self-sacrificing. The truth is that to embrace grace and to continue to stand on it by faith, to continue to embrace the idea that "in my flesh dwells no good thing," is to take the more difficult and truthful road. It is to "stand firm." It is not to relinquish the truth.

5:2 "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."

Paul, the Hebrew of Hebrews, is willing to make this statement. It is not a statement made by an "ignorant gentile." It is made by a former Pharisee, schooled in the Scripture, steeped in the law, one who had been himself obedient to it. He makes a dramatic statement about the rite of circumcision, an issue which could not be compromised. The one who had Timothy circumcised so as not to bring offense to the Jews, now drew a line in the sand as an authority in the church. "If you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no value to you." Paul is saying, if you accept circumcision as the additional thing you have to add to the work of Christ, if it is to you a means of spiritual merit, so as to attain salvation, you have compromised the faith. It is a journey away from spiritual thinking to fleshly thinking. The flesh loves to think it has something to give, something of merit it can and must add to Christ. To slip into such thinking is to journey back to the mindset of the unregenerate. At that point you will receive none of the practical benefits of grace. Paul is not suggesting they will lose their salvation. They will lose touch with the Holy Spirit because they are thinking according to the flesh and obeying its voice. From the standpoint of daily living they will be right back where they started before they embraced Jesus the Christ. They would be depending on their own works for good standing with God and living life in the power of the flesh rather than in the Spirit. They would be living like Ishmael, living the life that Christ redeemed them from, enslaved all over again. They had surrendered their benefits.

5:3 "And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole law."

All who accept the premise that the law is the means of gaining righteousness, must then accept it as their personal contract for righteous standing with God. They are then obligated to all of its terms, not just some of them. A portion of the law cannot be taken as a means of righteousness. It is a contract that must be fulfilled in its entirety. To those who would think of

working their way to heaven, the whole law is their contract in the matter. To start thinking fleshly in the matter of one's own eternal salvation is to assume this obligation.

The Law does not lead in the same direction as the path Paul had made known to the Galatians and to us through the gospel. The Law and its era are classic demonstrations of the ineffectiveness of all humanistic approaches to right standing with our Creator.

5:4 "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

It is not essential to believe that Paul is by these words saying the Galatians have lost their salvation, nor that they have been severed by God from Christ. The word Paul uses of them is *κατηργη θητε*. That word has been used already in this letter by him to express the prospect of something having been nullified, or rendered ineffective (Galatians 3:17). The Galatians have cut off their own lifeline to the Holy Spirit in listening to and following the mind of the flesh. In believing they could add to Christ's work, they have actually, from the point of view of practical everyday living, neutralized Christ's work. They have stopped the sanctification process. The work of Yahweh's Spirit has been neutralized in them because the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God. They have blocked the potential of grace and the intent of grace. They have fallen from the heights of life in the Spirit down to the normal plain of human religion. It does not matter that theirs might have been a "better side" of the flesh, moral and pious. It is still the flesh, in which "nothing good dwells."

So to let go of faith in Christ's work as the means by which we have right standing with God, is to let go of living in the Spirit, and to let go of living in the Spirit is to lose touch with the mind of Christ and go back to living by the flesh.

5:5 "For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."

This thought serves as an explanation for what has gone before, specifically "you have been severed from Christ," and "you have fallen from grace." Paul speaks here of the mindset of those who are in close relationship with Christ, operating in grace, himself included. They are "waiting for righteous."

Christians who are thinking right do not imagine that they can manufacture righteousness. They know that righteousness is not just a matter of doing certain things. It is bestowed a thought and deed at a time as one trusts God enough to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit. It will be ultimately bestowed by God in the complete sense, in response to our faith, complete with new bodies free from sin's ravishes. In the meantime, we rest in faith by the Holy Spirit on the fact that in God's plan the issue of our righteousness has been taken care of. We need not achieve it through works.

5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working though love."

The works of the flesh leave one standing hopelessly short of God's righteous standard revealed in Jesus Christ. That deficit is addressed by God who imputes to our account Christ's righteousness in response to our faith. Once in Christ, work that we might have done to become righteous is without significance. What matters is our trust demonstrating itself through thoughts and then acts of love.

5:7 "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?"

This is again, very clear language meant to show the Galatians the seriousness of their position. Things were not okay with them from Paul's point of view and from God's point of view. They are no longer running well. They have now been hindered in their running. Paul slips out of the figure dramatically to state the problem in plain literal terms. They had been hindered from "obeying the truth." There was no simple little abnormality. It was an issue of lack of obedience to the truth. Paul asks them who the source of this was. The question under grace is always this; Who is leading in this matter? Is it God? Is it me? Is it the devil? That is the question those living by faith must get good of answering at a moment's notice. Who done it! In this case it is a person, but there is, of course, the evil one's influence and the influence of their flesh that lend power to that person's influence.

5:8 "This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you."

Paul eliminates God from the list of possible answers immediately. That is important for students in sorting something like this out. It is very helpful to have the teacher and leader say authoritatively, "This is not from God."

Oftentimes for the young and weak the voice of legalism is hard to distinguish from the voice of God due to the weakness of conscience. The voice of legalism can stir such guilt and conviction that it can be mistaken as the voice of God. Paul, with apostolic authority flatly states that this path they have chosen to walk is not the one God's voice has called them to.

5:9 "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough."

Legalism cannot be looked at as a little issue or a little problem. It has a dramatic effect. We somehow believe that if a person is thinking legalistically it's not as big a deal as if they behave immorally. In fact, we often would rather they behave legalistically than immorally. There is no divine wisdom in such a standard that regards legalism as less of an issue than immorality. There is no safety in such an outlook. We should see the seriousness of the one just like we do the other. We should as rigorously oppose and correct one as we do the other. Here Paul uses the same figure with regard to legalism that he does in 1 Corinthians 5:6 of a sexually immoral relationship. Both are equally damaging in their effect on the body of Christ. Legalism seems to us to be safer. It is not.

5:10 "I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view, "but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is."

Paul had confidence that the Galatians had been rooted and grounded in the Lord. They were ultimately under the Spirit's influence so that when properly led in this matter, and when properly taught, they would take appropriate steps. Though they had been temporarily blind-sided in the matter, they would now at Paul's insistence, move on to reject these false teachings.

Those who lead people astray with false doctrine will bear judgment, particularly those who do it so that others might "seek them" as this individual had done. That is always the issue in leadership. Leaders will be judged for their stewardship of their ability to influence. They will have to answer for the direction in which they steered people. Their judgment is certain and they will bear it.

5:11 "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished."

Paul wants to emphasize one last time that what the Galatians are toying with, specifically that circumcision is a requirement for salvation, was not what he himself was teaching. If he would have been teaching that, he would not have endured persecution at the hands of the Jews. It would not be said of him that he was setting aside the law. Paul would have been embracing the very widespread human idea that we have the ability to save ourselves.

If salvation comes through obedience to the law and conformity to things such as circumcision, then the message of the cross would not be offensive and difficult for the Jews. They would not have to face their depravity, their national sin in rejecting their Messiah, the blow to their national pride caused by a suffering servant, Messiah, their spiritual equality with the gentiles, and the complete futility of all their supposed goodness. Paul would not be the target of their reaction to the truth if the truth was different. The thing that makes the cross so offensive is not what it says about God, but what it says about us.

5:12 "Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."

Circumcision done for the wrong reasons amounts to mutilation, cutting oneself. If it is done to display one's own goodness, no one should bother. In such a case it simply displays further their need, the fact that they have not yet come to grips with the truth. They are as far removed from the truth as the Baal-worshippers of Elijah's time were who cut and mutilated themselves to get their god's attention (1 Kings 18:28). Paul here equates circumcision, when done to gain salvation, as the equivalent of that barbaric practice. His is a valid observation. He desires that these teachers would carry out such brutality on themselves if it was such a critical thing for the Galatians to do.

5:13 "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Paul has openly wished that the false teachers would mutilate themselves and leave the Galatians alone. The Galatians were summoned to freedom, not to slavery and to feats of asceticism and masochism in order to impress gods. The "opportunity for the flesh" Paul is concerned with here is not antinomian, and not licentiousness. It is legalism. There is nothing that so exalts the flesh as legalism and the belief that one has earned their salvation. Nothing causes greater schisms; nothing causes greater spiritual pride than legalism. Nothing exalts the flesh more. To embrace it is to give the flesh and therefore the devil a gigantic opportunity. Paul points them to higher, more noble things. Rather than being caught up in earning recognition of themselves through legalism, he commands them to live by love. Rather than serving the flesh's desire for exaltation, they were to serve one another. Rather than falling into a system that gratifies the flesh, they were to live by that which imitates and gratifies Christ. Most of all, rather than focusing on those elements of the law that were simply outward issues destined to change with passing time, they were called to focus on the spirit of the law.

5:14 "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This is the spirit of the law, love. It is love for God and love for people. The focus of life lived by the Spirit is love and so it brings about the fulfilling of the law. The one who lives by love will never be accused of license, or of living by the flesh, or of being antinomian. A life lived by the principle of love ends up a life in harmony with the law.

5:15 "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."

When people live by the flesh it always gets ugly. There may be an initial show that looks impressive, but it will deteriorate. Once legalism is embraced it is only a matter of time before envy and jealousy begin to take their toll, and only a matter of time before the very worst in humankind begins to come out. In such a situation you are on your own, that is, you'd better watch your back. The things that can happen to you through fleshly people and your own heart can be cruel and devastating. There is no limit to what the flesh will do to meet its desires. The flesh soon consumes those who begin to live by its influence, and there is nothing that can be done to make it kinder or gentler.

5:16 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh."

The solution to ruling the power of our flesh is not to be found within our minds. We cannot set our minds in some way so as not to do it. We must set our minds on something else entirely. To simply make laws against fleshly thinking will not stop fleshly living because the flesh is very devious and highly creative. Living by the Spirit is the key to subjecting the flesh. The Spirit of God has greater power than our flesh and through him we are able to overcome its power. We will not reclaim the flesh through the Spirit. We do not reform it and make it better so that it isn't a problem anymore. We simply choose not to follow its evil prodding's and instead follow the leading of the Spirit. The result of that is that the deeds of the flesh are put to death, aborted before they are given birth.

5:17 "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another so that you cannot do the things that you please."

There is a battle within us by two opposing voices and influences. The flesh, with its desire to gratify itself, has an agenda in every situation that arises in our lives. The Spirit convicts us in the direction of His heavenly agenda in every situation. The result is that at no time can we simply do what we please. We cannot allow ourselves to do as our instincts prompt us, too. And because of the flesh it is not easy to do what we purpose to do in obeying the Spirit. We are unable, if we wish to live in a way that pleases God, to do whatever we please. That would provide great opportunity for the flesh. Yet we are also unable to live according to our good intentions, because our flesh gets in the way. Our conscience won't let us live in sin, but our flesh won't let us settle into a life of godliness. The result is an inner tension that every child of God must manage well.

5:18 "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."

Those who seek to be justified by their own efforts, by their own moral power are judged by the law and are under it. They report to it in a sense. The result is always the same, condemnation.

Those who come to Christ for justification are justified freely by His grace and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He leads them according to God's will. They are under his direction and they are free from the condemnation of the law. Through the Holy Spirit the law is written on their hearts, and they are forgiven for their sin. Since their sin is forgiven they are under no obligation to carry out the Law's ceremony to pay for their sin.

The law was given to be the standard for human effort, the work of the flesh, the standard by which it is judged. Deeds done according to the flesh are judged by the law.

5:19 "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,"

In this listing of the deeds of the flesh there appear to be "clusters" or sins belonging to a certain area of fleshliness listed together. Here we find a group of sins that relate to how we are to rule our sexuality. The three terms dictate against the many actions produced by immorality. They also address the thinking that leads us to the greater more recognizable sins.

5:20 "Idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying."

Two sins relating to the spiritual dimension of our humanity are found in the words idolatry and sorcery. Fleshliness leads to the placement of idols in our lives and in many cases the sin of sorcery, where one attempts to obtain and exert power over people and circumstances in order to gain some advantage, follows close behind. Whether in primitive times or in modern times these two sins continue to occur. They are more sophisticated today. But their effect is the same. There follow in the remainder of this verse examples of sins of the flesh that result from self-centeredness, and striving for the advancement of one's own interest. They give us a picture of the mess that can develop within a person, within relationships and within a church if we live according to our own feelings and needs. A relationship between two Christians is not automatically sanctified by the fact that both name Christ as their Lord. Being set apart from these things comes as we obey him as our Lord.

5:21 "drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

These are those sins that result from the excesses of indulging our flesh and its constant desire for self-gratification. It is insatiable in its desire to make us first.

Paul's consistent message to the Galatians has been that those who live by the flesh as their chosen way of life will not enter into the promised experiences of the kingdom of God. We have been chosen to be a kingdom of priests in service to God. A pursuit of the desires of the flesh will not lead to the experience of such a lofty calling as God intends. Paul gives a stern warning about those who practice the things he has listed here. There are several terms upon which the meaning of this warning hinges. The terms "practice," "inherit" and "kingdom of God" determine how we take the warning. What is meant by the "kingdom of God?" In Paul's writings he uses the phrase "kingdom of God" in two ways. At times he uses it to speak of a present reality, as in Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 4:20, Colossians 4:11. At other times, as in 1

Corinthians 15:50, he is using the term to describe a future entity. 1 Corinthians 6:9, Ephesians 5:5 are examples of ways that appear to be the same as the present usage. In 2 Thessalonians 1:5 he uses the phrase in a way that could be taken in both senses and which indicates well Paul's understanding of the term. He sees it as a present entity, the well-being of which we struggle, suffer, and work hard for, but also a future entity into which we enter only on the merits of Christ clearly resting from our labors. He correctly views both of these as experiencing "the kingdom of God."

Where Paul is addressing the subject of one's eternal salvation, he clearly teaches that the basis for our salvation from sin and our citizenship in heaven is our faith in Christ's work. His writings also make clear that our present experience of salvation is determined by how well we struggle against the flesh. Here in Galatians 5:21, where a group of Christians are being encouraged to stay the course, the subject is sanctification and present salvation from sinfulness. So Paul's words are warning that only a return to the life given by the Spirit will result in a current experience of salvation and "the kingdom of God." The flesh will lead in a totally different direction. Paul's use of the phrase "kingdom of God" is to be understood in this way, as referring to the experience of life as ruled by the Spirit within the present life. Paul affirms to the readers that a return to the fleshliness that goes with the Law would not result in the inherence of the life meant for those in God's family.

5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,"

It is called fruit because it comes as a natural result of him being allowed to work His thoughts in ours. That does not mean it is natural to allow him to do so. That is a choice we must make of either thinking and acting according to the prodding's of the flesh or according to the leading of the Spirit. If persistently given free course, this is a description of what the Holy Spirit begins to produce. These things stand in very stark contrast to the works of the flesh Paul has described. But the primary point Paul wants to make about these comes next.

5:23 "against such things there is no law."

Paul is not primarily concerned with developing the ideas connected with the fruit of the Spirit. He wants those who are feeling drawn by the Law to realize that if they will walk in the Spirit and let that be their ambition and focus, there is no law given that they will find themselves breaking. The kinds of things the Spirit leads us to do result in thought and activity that is righteous and can stand up under the greatest of scrutiny. Paul was not against being a Law-keeper. He was against doing it at only a surface level, through the flesh and for fleshly reasons. Where one acts according to the Law and their motivation is envy or jealousy, or where they use the Law for some sort of personal gain, their good is really an outworking of evil and is not to be commended.

5:24 "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

There are those who do not believe in Christ and have no desire to be in any way connected with him. There are those who believe in him and are saved and are a part of His family, but are still fleshly. In the sense of being His children they belong to him. Their actions, however, reveal that they make many decisions instinctively rather than by His Spirit. Then there are those who have grown in their understanding of him and yielding to him so that he has control over their beings and they live life in the Spirit. Their hearts belong to him in every sense. It is these Paul is referring to here. He is calling the Galatians up to this way of thinking

or living. He is asking them to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. Put that life forever to death. Do not allow the flesh to control your spiritual pursuit so that you simply are a "good fleshly person" rather than an "evil fleshly person." Either way you are pursuing evil. The pursuit of righteousness demands that it be pursued simply because it is right, not for fleshly gain. Those who have sold out to Christ, have put the flesh to death.

5:25 "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

If it is by the Holy Spirit that we have been given spiritual life, and it certainly is, then it is by him that we will experience that life. Our focus should not be walking in the Law. The law is not our source of life. We need to be intent on walking in the Spirit. Life in the Spirit is a step by step process. It is not an issue of asking for that life from God and one day getting it all at once. It is something we learn to do. Even then, it is a moment by moment matter. Without a doubt though, this should be the focus of the Christian walk. Walking in the Law leads us to Christ. Walking in the Spirit leads us to be like Christ.

5:26 "Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."

The Law has a way of making us arrogant. It is not the Law's defect that causes this. It is ours. Pride combines with our inability to look at things spiritually and inwardly and we become focused on the externals of the Law. We perform its externals well and become boastful and challenging towards each other. That is always the fruit of the flesh which it bears when given opportunity to do its work. Flesh finds great opportunity in a law-based system of any sort, to view itself higher than it ought to.

Galatians 6

6:1 "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

This is the spiritual way of dealing with the sins of others. It is a work that can only be done by those who are spiritual, that is, who are walking in the Spirit. Restoring others from sin to righteousness is no work for those walking in the flesh. They become boastful in the matter. They challenge rather than exercise a spirit of gentleness. They are envious and seek to destroy and take from others rather than to give back to them. The Christian church is no place for heavy handedness in dealing with the weaknesses of others. There is no place in it for those who would elevate themselves through outward conformity to the Law, and that is the natural work and movement of the flesh. Those who do this work must be people controlled by the Holy Spirit. The significant thing to do as you are correcting the error of someone else is to look to yourself, that is to guard your own ways well even as you are correcting or instructing another. Even for those who are "spiritual" this is a must. There is something about correcting often, even when done properly, that blinds us to ourselves. Beware of your own vulnerability and remember your own vulnerability in all you say to and demand of those whom you are correcting.

6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

This verse is additional instruction regarding the work of restoring one another. We are not to correct in a detached way but in a way that allows us to fulfill the law of Christ which is to love one another. We must restore with personal involvement, sharing in the bearing of the grief of the guilty one and helping them with the burden of the aftermath and the rehab. Whereas legalism would be boastful and challenge the one who has failed, love comes alongside, supports their cause as much as possible, and helps bear the burden of it all. It is a completely different practice than what develops under legalism.

6:3 "For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

This is a statement that gives further explanation of the logic behind the course of action just described. Seek to restore them. You are only fooling yourself if you begin to imagine that you are above such things, or if you believe that your own sins are sometimes less. Don't be prideful when dealing with the sins of others, be gentle and humble. The moment we begin to see ourselves as moral examples, we have lost touch with an important part of ourselves.

6:4 "But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another."

As opposed to being deceived with regard to our own works we are to examine them, and scrutinize them. Paul uses a figure of speech here, a sarcastic comment, in order to make his point. He is saying, "If you examine your own works you'll find great evidence of what a pure and moral individual you are and you'll find great reason why you should boast." He means, "If you'll examine yourself, you'll find so much wrong that you'll see other people's offences much differently." Paul is using irony to make his point. He is ridiculing the whole idea that anyone who is remotely in touch with themselves could begin to see themselves as above someone else.

6:5 "For each one shall bear his own load."

In the matter of our own personal sin, we will be responsible not for what we think we are, but for what we really are. This is a great contrast to what Paul commanded in verse two. There he called us to bear someone's moral weaknesses with them helping them towards restoration. Here he is saying that we ourselves will have to take responsibility for sin in our lives, none will escape because all are guilty. The combined message of verse two and verse five is this, bear one another's burdens in the journey we're all on toward restoration, because we all have our own load that we will be required to answer for. Don't think that you don't have one of your own. Such a thought is of the flesh, and of legalism, not of the Spirit and truth.

6:6 "and let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches."

Within the context of the normal Christian community, where grace is operating in the relationships, where correction is going on, there is to be a respect and thankfulness for those who teach the word so as to bring correction into our lives. The teachers must operate in the Spirit and be known as spiritual people. They must restore in a spirit of gentleness. They must be humble not arrogant, remembering their own moral frailty. But the learners for their part must be grateful and must put the right value on what they receive through these teachers. They must be careful to "share all things good." This is a command. It is important that the Galatians not lose respect for all teachers just because they have been led astray by some bad ones. It is normal, fitting, and right that spiritual teachers be honored by those they teach. Paul did not want them to set aside this practice. It includes financial support but of course is not limited to that.

6:7 "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

This is an interesting point at which to bring this principle up contextually, particularly on the heels of the command to honor those who teach the word. Whenever there is honor at stake, there is great potential for abuse. God will take care of those teachers who are in it for the wrong motives. They will reap exactly in accordance with what they have sown. They may as teachers receive honor, but God will bring them down. Wherever there is teaching there is also great opportunity for a very fleshly response on the part of the student. The flesh screams out against any sort of correction. It seeks to discredit the teacher in some way. The one who resists the gentle and spiritual prodding of the word will reap the consequences of his fleshly reaction. In the church there must be no illusion that anyone can reap anything other than what they have sown.

6:8 "For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap life eternal."

It is the most natural thing to plant and cultivate those things that gratify the flesh. It is the nature of the flesh to invade all that we do. Whenever we follow one of the desires of our flesh we sow a seed. The fruit of what we sow is corruption. So as we gratify our selfish desires, we are gradually corrupted by them. They even get involved in the good things we do so that we are no longer pure in our motives and eventually not pure in our deeds. The corruption that the flesh spreads is like all corruption. It is a creeping death that spreads to more and more things until it has permeated all that we do. Gratifying the flesh always brings spoilage, there are no exceptions. It is the slow undoing of all that good that has been built in our lives, of all the God-given talent and opportunity. One major way of sowing to one's flesh

is through the legalism the Galatians were caught up in. It allows us to say, "I want to show that I am better than most other people. I want to be seen as moral and honorable. I want people to look up to me and be something significant in their eyes. I want to be an achiever, show that I can rise to the challenge and be something." Always look for legalism to corrupt. It will not lift people to a high level. Anything of eternal value is forfeited through fleshly living.

On the other hand we find this, the conjunction "but" making the contrast. To follow the leading of the Spirit, not one's own spirit but the Holy Spirit, results in the growth and reproduction capacity of those things that relate to eternal life. All that endures and has value for eternity is laid hold of by following the direction of the Holy Spirit instead of simply doing what comes naturally. As opposed to worldly corruption, the Spirit brings about that which endures and is eternal. Where the works of the flesh produce spiritual sickness, the works of the Spirit produce spiritual health and promotes those things in our life that gathers strength and endure. The term eternal life does not refer to justification. That would make justification a fruit of our choices. Rather it relates to sanctification, the experience of all that is eternal in the now.

6:9 "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."

The reward for doing good is often not immediately seen. Sowing to the Spirit results in reaping eternal life. Though that includes blessings in this life its full value is not realized until eternity. It is easy to become discouraged when the results are not immediate. It is easy to become weary and take a break from the tasks God has called us to do. The thing that we must turn to in order to keep us going in our faith is our trust that in due time we shall reap. We must be aware of when we are beginning to lose heart. We will do so when our motives are impure, as is the case when legalism creeps in, when we are not living by grace, when we fail to pray as we should and cast the burden for success in our endeavors for the Lord on the Lord. There is a progression from losing heart to growing weary and remembering and believing that in His time we shall reap. This hope is the thing that explains why Christianity has not faded away.

6:10 "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

As opposed to the world of legalism where we became boastful with regard to one another, challenging one another, trying to rise above one another, being harsh with one another, we are to be doing good to others and especially to one another. There are windows of opportunity for this. We often seize the opportunity to do evil, in fact we rarely miss it, but we are sluggish at seizing the opportunities to do good. It is the time to sow good, right now. The imagery is profound. The time to reap will come, where we receive all that has "owed" us and where our own needs are fully met. For now the opportunity is to sow with respect to that harvest. That means to do good as prompted by the Spirit. That is our opportunity. Paul provides us with a means to check on whom we are sowing to, whether to our own flesh or to the Spirit. We simply have to examine how we are treating other people, especially those who are of the community of faith. That will reveal what we are sowing. Must it always be "worth our while?" Must we always receive something in return? Then we are seeing definitive signs that we are sowing to our own flesh.

6:11 "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."

So important was the issue the Galatians were dealing with that Paul undertook the writing of the letter himself. This was apparently unusual. Most speculate this was due to difficulty with his eyes from the Damascus road experience. This accounts for the largeness of the letters Paul describes here as well. This statement accounts for the depth of emotion and even frustration in the letter, but also tells of the urgency of the issue, which is all around us, which we often view as normal Christianity.

6:12 "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ."

The false teachers who had persuaded the Galatians in the legalistic direction did so to achieve something for themselves. Perhaps in attaching works to the gospel their work would become more palatable to "the powers that be" within Judaism and this would benefit them personally. They would be accepted as tolerable in their teaching. They would be in the mainstream enough to avoid the persecution Paul had endured at the hands of the Jews. This was a very flawed strategy. But in terms of pragmatic values it served them well. They wanted to make a good showing in the flesh to their own praise. They wanted the outward appearance of things to be "in order" so they would be well thought of. The rules and policies of legalism would serve well in meeting their personal need for commendation. It would produce for them a following. It would meet all the requirements of a merely fleshly system. In doing so, it would protect the flesh from the rejection, persecution and discomfort it so loathes. But it was all fleshly, classic human religion. It robbed the believers of all that was true life. Such desires and strategies have always been present within the Christian community. They certainly have a momentum. But they have no life.

6:13 "For those who are circumcised do not even keep the law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh."

Paul wants it clear that this teaching does not come out of love and respect for the law. If that were the case it would only be a matter of being misinformed. Yet that was part of the charade. It is a classic prop that legalism hides behind. It looks like a good heart. It looks like a noble mindset. But keeping the law means keeping it all, not sections of it. That meant their real motive lay elsewhere.

If the Galatians accepted circumcision, they would become a trophy for the false teachers, something for them to boast in and be proud of. That was these teachers' motive. Their motive was not a love and respect for the law. The evil of the flesh is such that it will not hesitate to deceive others into thinking it is lofty and noble in its ambitions when the reality is that its agenda is pathetically self-seeking.

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."

Our only boasting should be of Jesus' accomplishment on our behalf. That which drives us should be His great work not our own inept ability and need for affirmation. This provides us with a statement of the value of Christ's act in dying on the cross, making atonement for our sins. No achievement of history matches that made by Christ in His death for us. It stands alone as an achievement of the human spirit, as a triumph of the human will, as the consummate demonstration of bodily discipline, because it was a work of the Holy Spirit joined to the human spirit of Jesus. At stake was no mere bragging right or territorial claim,

but the eternal lives of all humankind. Jesus' act became their hope against the one dread greater than physical death, the second death. The audience was not just a comparative small number of human beings, but the hosts of heaven and hell. Athletic, social, military, business, educational, political and charitable achievements come and go. They are equaled and surpassed. Christ's work stands unparalleled and 2000 years after it is fact, millions can recite its detail.

So significant and powerful was Christ's accomplishment on the cross, that to those who believe it, it completely turns upside down former realities. The world hung Christ on the cross, yet in hanging on the cross he mastered the world. He did it to restore hearts to himself. Now, to all who believe, His Spirit restores their hearts to be one with His own. As Jesus allowed the world to crucify him, he crucified it. It is powerless over him, and because of him, powerless against His children. As he said "no" to all the temptation of the cross, to the desire to exert His will over that of God the Father, he purchased for us that gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to die to those same things. Christ's death was significant not just because it spoke of all that was honorable in him, but because it forever changed how life could be lived, how it would end, and where history would end. Christ's death with its fruits, are indeed the thing to boast about.

6:15 "For neither is circumcision anything, or uncircumcision, but a new creation."

This is another statement of value made by Paul. A work done in the physical body as a religious rite is no longer the thing it once was. It has been surpassed by a new, superior creation. What is critical is that work accomplished in the inner being of all who believe, through the death of Christ. It accomplished our crucifixion and the world's crucifixion. It was the work done by God in joining His Spirit to ours.

God has made something new of us through the Holy Spirit. It is a far greater work than merely a ceremonial rite carried out in the male body. It extends to male and female, law keeper and law breaker. It is a far greater accomplishment for the human leader God uses as well, to change entire lives rather than simply bringing people into conformity with a religious tradition. So significant is the work within of God's spirit, that it renders the former rite insignificant. Now it is nothing to be circumcised due to a more glorious work that God carries out in a person.

6:16 "And those who will walk by the rule, peace and mercy be upon them upon them, and upon the Israel of God."

This rule, that the thing of value in the church is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit not the outward rites of the Old Covenant, that rule is the thing which will make for peace and the blessing of God. Here Paul extends this blessing of God first to "them," that is, to all individuals that are a part of the Galatian church who will live by this rule. He then extends it to "the Israel of God," which can only mean the church at large. In using this term he embraces fully his own teaching in 3:7 that "those who are of faith are sons of Abraham." God's blessing is inherited only by faith. While Jews had great privilege in terms of revelation and promise, faith was still essential for them. They inherited nothing of the promises of God personally except by faith. Therefore there was an Israel and there was an Israel of God. It is still true. The Israel of God has always included those who were Jews by natural birth and who had followed the faith of Abraham, and believed in Jesus Christ. It also included gentiles who had embraced by faith the truth of Christ. "The Israel of God" is not a term which suggests that there is no meaning in being a physical descendent of Abraham. It is a term that affirms that there is a deep blessing in faith that allows one to enjoy all of the privilege afforded to the offspring of Abraham by covenant agreement. It is not a statement of

replacement, that somehow Jews are excluded by God and the community of believers have replaced them and so are now exclusively the Israel of God. It is a statement of inclusion. All who are of faith, regardless of ethnicity, are considered Abraham's offspring in terms of the promises made to him. What of unbelieving Israel? There have been many thousands who have not believed Yahweh, from the earliest days of the extended family that went down to Egypt. Clearly there has never been individual salvation given to such ones. Individual salvation is granted only through faith. So many ethnic Israelites have lived and died separated from Yahweh for all of eternity. They will remain so. This being said, there clearly seems to be a day in Yahweh's program when he himself will invite ethnic Israel into relationship once again with him and those of that day will mourn for him whom Israelites pierced and embrace faith in Christ (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34; Romans 11:25-32). In this sense there is a future for ethnic Israel.

Whether Jew or Gentile, the experience of God's mercy and peace on a day to day basis is a result of living in the sphere of faith, and faith follows this rule that neither circumcision or uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation,"

6:17 "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I have on my body the brand-marks of Jesus."

Paul's wish is that those who discredit him would stop. If they are looking for an outward sign of his belonging to God, the thing he will point them to is not the fact that he is circumcised. He will point to the fact that he is scarred physically from the abuse he has suffered because of his faith. He is scarred physically from the many beatings and imprisonments he has suffered at the hands of the Jews. He views these as the distinguishing mark of ownership on his body, identifying him as belonging to Christ. Over the years persecution has been one constant that has followed those of the faith. It separates the genuine article from the pretenders. If anyone wished to question Paul's citizenship, they had only to consider his scars, most of which had been inflicted because of the hard-core unbelief of the Jews.

6:18 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen"

Paul ends his letter on much the same note as he began when he said, "Grace to you." The letter has been all about grace and here he expresses his wish and desire that they experience God's grace at the depth of their being. Such an experience of grace does not happen when there is legalism. Under legalism one's spirit is never ministered to or refreshed. Only the flesh is catered to. Since the flesh knows no satisfaction there is no contentment to be gained through legalism. The full knowledge and experience of God's grace brings rest to our innermost being. This is Paul's wish for the Galatians whom he refers to here as "brethren." For all their doctrinal wanderings, in spite of all their foolishness, and the fact that by these things they have severed themselves from the life of the Holy Spirit and the life Christ provided, they are still brothers to Paul. It is not their citizenship they have forfeited; it is their own spiritual welfare and experience they have sacrificed due to faulty doctrine. They needed grace to safeguard their own Spirits. This is the great need of all people.

Appendix 1

Burden in Galatians 6:1-5

Βαρος; A burden in the sense of the legitimate and normal responsibilities or demands of fallen people in a fallen world.

Matthew 20:12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials.² Corinthians 4:17 For momentary, alight affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:6-7 even though as apostles being enabled to be a burden to you, but we improved to be gentle among you, bas a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.

Revelation 2:24 'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.

Φορτιον; A burden in the sense of the baggage or freight that is bourn along as a result of one's own choices or those of someone else. Matthew 11:30 "For My yoke is leasy and My burden is light."

Matthew 23:4 "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

Luke 11:46 But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Acts 27:10 and said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."

Galatians 6:5 For each one will bear his own load.