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GALATIANS

by

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The book of Galatians was written by the apostle Paul and probably was the first book he wrote. This book does essentially three things: (1) It establishes Paul's apostleship; (2) It is an eloquent defense of the "gospel"—the fundamental Christian doctrine that people are saved only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ—and this makes the entire Christian family (Jew and Gentile alike) one; (3) It then discusses the implications of this radical salvation for the new community: people are to live a new life by the faith that flows from the working of the Holy Spirit in them. This book, perhaps more than any other, describes the uniqueness of Christianity: every other religion in the world essentially is a list of laws and rules to follow which enslave people. Christianity is different: in Christ we have been freed from slavery to the law and to the flesh; that does not mean that Christians are lawless. Instead, Christians have the "law of Christ" inside of them, and through the internal guiding of the indwelling Holy Spirit they are being transformed to live like Christ.

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I. Introduction

A. *Author, date, and recipients*

The book of Galatians was written by *"Paul, an apostle"* (**Gal 1:1**). There is some scholarly debate about when this letter was written. The majority (and probably the best) view is that Galatians was probably written around the year AD 48 shortly before the important Jerusalem Council (**Acts 15**); the other view believes the letter was written after the Jerusalem Council, probably during Paul's third missionary journey in the mid-50s AD (see Carson and Moo 2005: 461-64; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 56-59; McClelland 1989: 998-1001). If the early date is correct, Galatians likely was Paul's first epistle and perhaps the first NT epistle written (James being the other likely candidate).

Galatia was one of the provinces of the Roman Empire. It was located between the provinces of Asia and Cappadocia in the central part of modern Turkey. On Paul's first missionary journey (**Acts 13-14**) he visited the towns of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in southern Galatia. He returned to Galatia during his second (**Acts 16:1-6**) and third (**Acts 18:23**) missionary journeys. "It is natural to assume that the congregations in these towns in the south of the province of Galatia were the addressees of the letter" (Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 54).

B. *Background and purposes*

Acts 13-14 tells us that Paul and Barnabas had evangelized the southern part of the province of Galatia. After they left, some Jewish Christians came into the area. These people are often called "Judaizers." The Judaizers "were undermining Paul's gospel by claiming that Paul's authority was inferior to that of the other apostles such as Peter and James, who were more closely associated with the Jerusalem Church and Judaism ([Gal] 1:1; 6:17). But the specific error they were spreading throughout the churches was that Gentile converts must live as Jews and undergo circumcision and submit to certain aspects of the ceremonial law, in order to be saved from the wrath to come in addition to embracing Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. . . . Hence, one must add to faith in Christ as Messiah, the so-called 'badges' or ethnic 'emblems' of national Israel, namely submission to circumcision, the keeping of certain dietary laws, the celebration of Jewish feasts, and understanding continuing obedience to the law of Moses as essential in order to maintain one's place in the covenant community." (Riddlebarger 2017: n.p.)

The danger of this false teaching lies in its subtlety. David Platt and Tony Merida point out that "much of the teaching of the Judaizers was right down the line, biblically speaking. They acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, and they even acknowledged His death on the cross. They claimed to believe all the truths the other Christians believed, and they certainly weren't telling people that they denied the gospel. Instead, they were improving it, adding requirements and standards from the old covenant to the new covenant. But the reality is that as soon as you add anything to grace, you lose grace altogether. There's no middle ground." (Platt and Merida 2014: 10) Paul recognized that this false teaching went to the heart of the gospel and the equality in Christ of every tribe, tongue, and nation. The epistle to the Galatians is his response.

Galatians is more "focused" than many of Paul's other epistles. It is also more polemical (i.e., an argument for or against some opinion or doctrine). This book does essentially three things: (1) It establishes Paul's apostleship; (2) It is an eloquent defense of the "gospel"—the fundamental Christian doctrine that people are saved only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ—and this makes the entire Christian family (Jew and Gentile alike) one; and (3) It discusses the implications of salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ: people are to live a new life by the faith that flows from the working of the Holy Spirit in them.

This book, perhaps more than any other, describes the uniqueness of Christianity: every other religion in the world essentially is a list of laws and rules which enslave people. Christianity is different: in Christ we have been freed from slavery to the law and to the flesh; that does not mean that Christians are lawless. Instead, Christians have the "law of Christ" inside of them, and through the internal guiding of the indwelling Holy Spirit they are being transformed to live like Christ.

The focus of this book is seen in the key words and ideas that Paul repeatedly uses and contrasts:

Law—31 times	Faith/faithfulness—22 times
Flesh—16 times	Spirit/spiritual—19 times
Circumcision/circumcised—13 times	Gospel—11 times
	Promise(s)—11 times
	Free/freedom—10 times

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C. ***Outline***

Given the three things Galatians does—(1) establishes Paul's apostleship; (2) defends the "gospel"; and (3) discusses how people are sanctified by their obedience that comes from their faith and flows from the working of the Holy Spirit in them—the book may be outlined as follows:

1:1-5—Salutation

1:6-9—Occasion of writing: If anyone preaches a "gospel" contrary to what I have preached, let him be eternally cursed.

1:10-2:21—Paul's ministry and message: Jews and Gentiles alike are justified by faith in Christ alone, not the law.

- **1:10-12—**Paul's receipt of the Gospel.
- **1:13-14—**Paul's pre-conversion life.
- **1:15-16a—**Paul's conversion.
- **1:16b-24—**Paul's immediate post-conversion life and first meeting with the Jerusalem leadership.
- **2:1-10—**Paul's second meeting with the Jerusalem leadership.
- **2:11-21—**The truth of the Gospel overrides the importance of individuals and one's own heritage:
    - **2:11-14—**Paul publicly exposed Peter's hypocrisy regarding his treatment of Gentile believers.
    - **2:15-21—**Even Jews are justified by faith, not the law.

3:1-4:31—The faith/law distinction: This is fundamental and goes all the way back to Abraham.

- **3:1-5—**The fundamental question: Are you perfected by the flesh (law), or by the Spirit (faith)?
- **3:6-9—**Only those who are of faith (whether Jew or Gentile) are the true sons of Abraham.
- **3:10-14—**No one is justified by the law but is under a curse.
- **3:15-24—**The purposes of the law:
    - **3:15-18—**The law cannot annul the covenant with Abraham.
    - **3:19-22—**The law reveals our sinfulness.
    - **3:23-24—**The law was a custodian to lead us to Christ.
- **3:25-4:7—**In Christ we are no longer slaves or children under a custodian, but are redeemed, adopted, sons and heirs of the Father.
- **4:8-20—**Appeals to the Galatians:
    - **4:8-11—**An appeal to their status in Christ.
    - **4:12-20—**An appeal to their personal relationship.
- **4:21-31—**Summary: The whole law/promise distinction is epitomized typologically in Hagar (Ishmael) and Sarah (Isaac); ironically, Israel is Ishmael and Christians are Isaac!

5:1-6:10—Freedom in Christ: You were called to freedom, so walk by the Spirit.

- **5:1-26—**You were called to freedom, so do not submit again to slavery to the law or the flesh but walk by the Spirit.
    - **5:1-6—**Do not submit to the law of circumcision, which shows that you have abandoned the grace of the Spirit for slavery to the law.
    - **5:7-12**—Do not follow those whose teaching is not from the Lord.
    - **5:13-15—**Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh; instead, love one another (which fulfills the law).
    - **5:16-26—**The deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are contrasted.
- **6:1-10—**Specific applications of *"faith working through love"* and *"walking in the Spirit."*
    - **6:1-5—**Bear one another's burdens.
    - **6:6-10—**What you sow you will reap, so let us do good to all people while we can.

Gal 6:11-18—Summary and conclusion: Those who want to circumcise you are hypocrites and are not acting from proper motives anyway; may God's mercy and grace be on those who only glory in the cross of Christ.

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II. Commentary on Galatians

A. Gal 1:1-5—Salutation

- **1:1-2:** ***[1]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), [2] and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia.***

When Paul was writing, the conventional way of beginning a letter was for the writer first to identify himself (**v. 1**), second to identify his recipients (**v. 2**), and third to extend a greeting to the recipients (**vv. 3-5**). Paul does this in all of his other epistles as well. However, given the background and context of the epistle to the Galatians, **vv. 1-2** are actually quite loaded with meaning. Paul's apostleship had been challenged by the Judaizers. Consequently, he does not begin this letter by calling himself a "bond-servant" of Christ as he does in **Rom 1:1, Phil 1:1,** and **Titus 1:1,** or a "prisoner" of Christ as he does in **Phlm 1:1**. Instead, he calls himself an "apostle," but then does more: he emphasizes that his apostleship was *"not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead."* He is clearly accrediting his own authority by emphasizing that his position as an apostle did not come through any human agency but came directly from Jesus Christ and God the Father.[1] He will continue to assert and describe his apostleship throughout much of the rest of **chapters 1** and **2**. Further, in **v. 2** Paul emphasizes that he is not alone but refers to *"all the brethren who are with me."* By emphasizing this he is telling the false teachers and the believers in Galatia that his (true) teaching is supported by lots of others. Thus, even in the first verses of this epistle Paul is making an argument.

The word "apostle" itself refers to someone who has been commissioned and sent out with authority for a specific purpose. It is the noun form of the Greek word *apostellö* ("to send"). The essential meaning of "apostle" is conveyed by such terms as "ambassador," "delegate," or "messenger."

1. The NT recognizes two basic types of apostles: (A) *foundational* apostles; and (B) *church-commissioned* apostles. "Foundational" apostles were those apostles who were companions of Jesus, witnesses to the resurrection, and were specifically called to be apostles and witnesses by Jesus (see **Matt 10:1-5; Mark 6:7, 30; Luke 6:13; John 15:27; Acts 1:21-22**). They dedicated themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (**Acts 1:14; 6:4**); chose replacement apostles (**Acts 1:21-26**); taught and preached (**Acts 2:42; 4:31, 33; 5:19-21; 6:4; 8:25; 10:42**); performed signs, wonders, and healed (**Matt 10:1-8; Mark 6:7; Acts 2:43; 3:7; 5:15-16; 2 Cor 12:12**); called and held a congregational meeting (**Acts 6:2**); commissioned deacons (**Acts 6:6**); sent apostles and church planters to the mission field (**Acts 8:14; 11:22**); prayed for and laid hands on converts, who received the Holy Spirit (**Acts 8:15-17**); related visions to the church from a position of authority (**Acts 11:1-18**); wrote letters to the churches (**Matthew, John, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Revelation**); and were the final authority for all theological disputes (**Acts 15:1-29; 16:4**). Foundational apostles were the leaders of the early church and the "foundation" of the church itself (**Eph 2:19-20**). As such, those with the authority of foundational apostles have not existed since the original apostles died (only one foundation can be laid for a building). Paul was a foundational apostle. Although he had not been a companion of Jesus (but, in fact, had persecuted the church), Christ had specifically appeared to him (**Acts 9:3-6, 17, 27; 1 Cor 9:1**), he had specifically been called by God for his ministry (**Acts 13:2; Gal 2:2**), Christ had given him the gospel by special, divine revelation (**Gal 1:12**), and his authority had been recognized by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (**Gal 2:9**).

"Church-commissioned" apostles are those men and women who have been delegated by a church to go out and preach the gospel, plant new churches, and build up the church (see **Acts 13:1-3; 14:14; Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 9:5-6; 12:28; 1 Thess 1:1; 2:6**). The *purpose* for which Christ gave some people certain gifts and position as leaders (e.g., apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers) is *"for equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ"* (**Eph 4:12**). In other words, those who are apostles (as well as prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers) are to be involved with the members of the church, and are to train up and equip the church members so that they also can be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. This means that, while the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts *"to each one individually just as He wills"* (**1 Cor 12:11**), and not all are apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. (**1 Cor 12:29**), the gifts and abilities of apostles,

[1] Note also that Paul specifically mentions the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the central fact of history, since it demonstrates that Jesus is more than just a man but is the Son of God (i.e., God who became a man); it also demonstrates that God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross. The significance and evidence for the resurrection are discussed in detail in Menn 2015-2020: 30-40.

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prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers can be taught and learned and should be desired (see **1 Cor 12:31; 14:1**).

Both types of apostle are united in a man like Paul (see **Acts 9:1-16; 13:1-3; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:6-10; Gal 1:11-17; 1 Tim 2:7**). Church-commissioned apostles can have no greater authority than being commissioned by the church. The church is the body of Christ on the earth (**1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col 1:18**). The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 3:16-17**). Christ has ordained the church and given it His authority (**Matt 16:18-19**). Consequently, Christ can be expected to act through His church, not independently of it. By commissioning apostles, the church also provides them with credibility and accountability, both with respect to the church itself and in the eyes of the world.[2]

2. Jesus' founding the church on the basis of 12 disciples/12 apostles symbolized that he was founding a new, spiritual Israel. Jesus' selection of 12 disciples/12 apostles (**Matt 10:1-2; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-26**) is symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. In fact, on the twelve gates of New Jerusalem are written *"the names of the twelve tribes of Israel"* (**Rev 21:12**), and on twelve foundation stones of New Jerusalem are *"the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb"* (**Rev 21:14**).[3] The apostles themselves recognized the significance of the "Twelve." In **Acts 1:12-26** they concluded that it was necessary to fill Judas Iscariot's position as apostle. Although Paul was an apostle (**Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 9:1**), the NT (and Paul himself) recognizes a distinction between the apostleship of Paul and "the Twelve" (see **Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5, 8**). This may have to do with the fact that Paul's ministry primarily was to the Gentiles (**Acts 9:15; 13:46; 18:6; Rom 11:13; Gal 1:16; 2:7**) and that Paul had not been a companion of Jesus (but, in fact, had persecuted the church), whereas Peter, the evident leader and spokesman of the Twelve, primarily was an apostle to Jews (see **Gal 2:7-8**). Paul recognized that his conversion and his apostleship were acts of divine grace. Because Christ had appeared to him and called him even though he had been persecuting the church, Paul called himself an apostle *"untimely born"* (**1 Cor 15:8**) and *"the least of the apostles"* (**1 Cor 15:9**).

- **1:3-5:** ***[3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5] to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.***

"Grace and peace" are a typical Pauline greeting (see **Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 1:3).** Although these verses are part of Paul's introduction, they do a number of things. Given the context of the false teaching of the Judaizers, these verses are a strong statement concerning the sufficiency of what God has done. In other words, our salvation and new life are based entirely on God's will (not our own), God's grace (not our works), and what he (in the person of Jesus Christ) accomplished on the cross. While grace (i.e., the undeserved, unearned favor given as a gift by God) is the basis of our salvation, peace is the result of our salvation. Because our salvation and new life come entirely from God, *"to [him] be the glory forevermore"* (**v. 5**).

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[2] The church needs to test people who call themselves "apostles" to determine whether they are true or false apostles (**1 John 4:1-6;** see also **2 Cor 11:3-4, 13; Rev 2:2**). Many people today like to appoint themselves as "apostles." That is contrary to the NT pattern (NT apostles were not self-appointed). Many of these self-appointed "apostles" claim to work miracles. However, even the working of miracles is *not* necessarily a sign that a person is called by God (**Matt 7:15-23; 2 Tim 3:1-9** [see **Exod 7:10-12, 20-22; 8:6-7, 16-19**]). In Africa, "the emergence of African prophets and apostles allowed for the proclamation of the equality of blacks and whites in faith and ministry (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). It also established the principle of separation of the Christian faith from all colonial political connections." (Ouedraogo 2006: 1434) Unfortunately, however, "many African prophets and apostles do not take the Bible as the basis for their faith and conduct. . . . They regard [what they claim to be direct revelations from God] as additions to the Bible. However, the Bible warns against making the slightest addition to the word (Rev 22:18-19). . . . Many African prophets and apostles also indulge in a personality cult. . . . Some even claim to be Christ's successors or even another Christ. Such claims make them objects of worship. Sadly, many of them gain almost total control of the minds of their followers. The NT warns us against such people (Matt 24:11; Jude 4-16)." (Ibid.) Modern "apostles" need to be judged by their teaching (see **Acts 17:11; 1 Tim 6:3-5**) and their lifestyle (see **Matt 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:12-17; Acts 18:3; 1 Cor 9:11-18; 2 Cor 11:7; 12:13**). Principles for judging prophets and apostles and how to deal with false prophets and apostles are discussed in Menn 2017: 40-42.

[3] "Noteworthy is the observation in [Rev] 21:14 that the apostles are part of the foundation, whereas the tribes are part of the gates in the wall built on the foundation. One might have expected the opposite portrayal since Israel preceded the church in redemptive history. But the reversal figuratively highlights the fact that fulfillment of Israel's promises has finally come in Christ, who, together with the apostolic witness to his fulfilling work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the new Israel." (Beale 1999a: 1070)

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These verses actually give us a brief summary of the gospel.[4] The word "gospel" means "good news." Specifically, "The Greek term 'gospel' . . . was news of a great historical event, such as a victory in war or the ascension of a new king, that changed the listeners' condition and required a response from the listener. So the gospel is news of what God has done to reach us. It is not advice about what we must do to reach God." (Keller n.d.: 1) The gospel is the good news that God has done for us what we never could do for ourselves. God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived the life we should have lived *as a man*; he perfectly obeyed God the Father in everything; he was *"tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin"* (**Heb 4:15**). That qualified him to be our representative, to take upon himself our sin and pay the penalty for our sin that otherwise we would have to pay but never could (**Rom 8:1-4; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Col 2:13-14; 1 Tim 2:5-6; 1 Pet 2:24**). At the same time, Jesus Christ was God. "God did not, then, inflict pain on someone else, but rather on the Cross absorbed the pain, violence, and evil of the world into himself. . . . Why did Jesus *have* to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid—God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be borne—God himself bore it. . . . On the cross neither justice nor mercy loses out—both are fulfilled at once. Jesus's death was necessary if God was going to take justice seriously and still love us." (Keller 2008: 192-93, 197)[5] The gospel is "good news" because it is what God in the person of Jesus Christ did for us, not what we have to do; therefore, we never have to worry about whether we are "good enough."

The statement in **v. 4** that Christ gave himself in order to *"rescue us from this present evil age"* hints at the cosmic effects of the gospel. The Bible has a comprehensive eschatological structure. That structure is the "two ages" (Greek = *aiōn* ["age"]): *"this age,"* and the *"age to come."* There is a *qualitative difference* between this age and the age to come. "The New Testament sets The Age to Come in direct opposition to This Age. . . . When we ask what Scripture teaches about the character of these two ages, we find a sharp contrast. This Age is dominated by evil, wickedness, and rebellion against the will of God, while the Age to Come is the age of the Kingdom of God. . . . In This Age there is death; in the Kingdom of God, eternal life. In This Age, the righteous and the wicked are mixed together; in the Kingdom of God, all wickedness and sin will be destroyed. For the present, Satan is viewed as the 'god of this age;' but in The Age to Come, God's Kingdom, God's rule will have destroyed Satan, and righteousness will displace all evil." (Ladd 1959: 31, 28, 34) There is also a *quantitative difference* between this age and the age to come. This age is temporal, finite, and will come to an end (**Matt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Heb 9:26**); the age to come will last infinitely, without end (**Luke 1:33; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 11:15**). Finally, the two ages comprehend all of time, and the age to come immediately succeeds this age. **Eph 1:21** says that Christ is *"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."* In **Matt 12:32** (see also **Mark 3:29**) Jesus states that whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven *"either in this age, or in the age to come."* Those passages indicate that there is no intervening or temporary time period between *"this age"* and the *"age to come."*[6]

Christ's first coming brought with it a "breaking in" of the powers of the age to come into this age (**Heb 6:4-5**). Thus, while the age to come is the age of the new creation (**Rom 8:18-22; Rev 21:1-4**), in a sense the new creation already has begun in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit (**2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15**). When **v. 4** talks about Christ's *"rescu[ing] us from this present evil age,"* it is suggesting two things: First, even though believers are living in this world, we are not to be "of this world" (see **John 17:14-16**). Instead, we are to be *"conformed to the image of [Jesus Christ]"* (**Rom 8:29**). Paul devotes **Galatians 5-6** to discussing what a life being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ should look like. Second, **v. 4** is indicating that we will finally and completely be "rescued from this present evil" age when Christ comes again, at which time the entire earth will be renewed, we will receive glorious new bodies like his own, and all sin, sorrow, and death will be forever eliminated. All of these things are corollaries of the gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the two types of "apostles" in the Bible and what are their functions?

2. Many people today call themselves "apostles." In what ways do some of these modern "apostles" differ from the biblical idea of apostleship?

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[4] The Bible frequently has short summaries of the gospel. Other short summaries of the gospel include **John 3:16; Acts 10:36-43; 13:32-33; 16:30-31; Rom 3:21-26; 5:8; 10:8-13; 1 Cor 15:1-8; Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7**.

[5] The nature of the gospel and what Christ accomplished on the cross are discussed in detail in Menn 2015-2020: 83-87 and Menn 2017: 20-23.

[6] The two ages are discussed in detail in Menn 2010-2017: 20-25.

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3. What is "grace"?

4. What is the "gospel"?

B. <u>Gal 1:6-9—Occasion of writing:</u> If anyone preaches a "gospel" contrary to what I have preached, let him be eternally cursed.

[6] I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; [7] which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! [9] As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

In all of Paul's epistles except this one, after his greeting he immediately offers thanks or praise to God, or a prayer, or a command. Only here does he not do that but instead immediately deals, in terms of extreme urgency, with the issue of the false gospel that had been taught in Galatia. In **v. 6** Paul talks about the Galatians "deserting" God for a different gospel. The word (Greek = *metatithēmi*) is used of soldiers revolting or deserting or people changing sides politically. In its other uses in the Bible, the word is used of major changes in location (**Acts 7:16; Heb 11:5**), the change in the nature of the priesthood brought about by Christ (**Heb 7:12**), and people perverting the grace of God (**Jude 4**). Paul's point is that not understanding—and falsely teaching—what the gospel is, is not merely a theological error but amounts to abandoning or deserting God himself.

Paul emphasizes this in **v. 7** when he mentions those who *"want to <u>distort</u> [pervert; corrupt] the gospel of Christ."* That word (Greek = *metastrephō*) is used only two other times in the NT. It signifies a significant change from something into its opposite. Thus, **Acts 2:20** says, *"The sun <u>will be turned</u> into darkness."* **Jas 4:9** says, *"Let your laughter <u>be turned</u> into mourning."* Here, Paul is saying that the teaching the Galatians had received (which, in essence, said "you may be saved by faith but you are kept by the law") amounts to a reversal of the gospel. It turns the gospel (which, in essence, says that "you are saved by grace through faith and are kept by grace through faith") into no gospel at all. The reason, as mentioned earlier, is that the gospel is about what Christ has done for us, not what we have done to earn God's favor. If even 1% of our salvation were dependent on what we do, no one could be saved, because God's standard is perfection (**Matt 5:48**), he cannot abide in the presence of sin (**Hab 1:13; Rom 1:18**), but our hearts are deceitful (**Jer 17:9**) and cannot be fixed by us. On our own we are all corrupt, sinful, cannot please God (**Rom 3:9-18; 7:5, 8-11, 14-24; Gal 5:17; Heb 3:12-13**). Therefore, we cannot meet God's standard and cannot save ourselves, either in whole or in part.

The absolute seriousness of this is stated in **vv. 8-9** where Paul twice says that if anyone—even an angel from heaven—should preach a gospel contrary to what Paul had taught, *"he is to be accursed."* The word for "accursed" (Greek = *anathema*) signifies being damned or devoted to divine condemnation. In other words, Paul is saying, "If anyone teaches a false gospel, *let him go to hell!*"[7]

<u>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</u>

1. Why is correctly understanding and teaching the true gospel so important?

2. How big of a problem are false teachers in the church today? How should we deal with this?

[7] Paul wished in two other places that individuals be accursed. In **1 Cor 16:22** he said that *"if anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed."* That indicates that the false teachers who are perverting the gospel in Galatia are equivalent to those who do not love the Lord. In **Rom 9:3** he wished that he, himself would be accursed if thereby he could win his fellow Jews to Christ. That indicates his heart and how strongly he felt for his lost brethren.

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C. <u>Gal 1:10-2:21—Paul's ministry and message:</u> Jews and Gentiles alike are justified by faith in Christ alone, not the law.

The entire section concerning Paul's life as set forth in **Gal 1:10-2:10** reveals that his entire life was an apologetic for Christ and the gospel:

- **1:10**: no self-interest = an appeal to reason
- **1:11-12**: the gospel was divinely revealed = an appeal to God and special revelation
- **1:13-19, 21-22**: a radically different lifestyle = an appeal to the effects of Christ and the gospel in his own life
- **1:20**: an oath before God = an appeal to personal integrity
- **1:23-24**: Godly fruit = an appeal to the effects of Christ and the gospel in others
- **2:1-10**: authentication by recognized leaders = an appeal to authority

The itinerary of Paul's life as a Christian, prior to and immediately following the writing of Galatians, as set forth in Galatians and Acts can be compared and summarized as follows:

<u>Event</u>	**<u>Galatians</u>**	**<u>Acts</u>**
Paul's conversion	1:15-16a	9:1-19a
Stay in Damascus	1:17	9:19b-22
Visit to Arabia	1:17	-----
Return to Damascus	1:17	-----
First visit to Jerusalem	1:18-24	9:26-29
Goes to Syria and returns home to Tarsus (in Cilicia)	1:21	9:30
Second visit (famine relief & leaders' meeting)[8]	2:1-10	11:27-30; 12:25
First missionary journey	-----	13:1-14:28
Writing of Galatians	-----	-----
Third visit (Church Council)	-----	15:1-35

- **<u>1:10-12—</u>**<u>Paul's receipt of the Gospel.</u>

[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. [11] For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. [12] For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

In these verses, Paul states the source of the gospel: it is *"not according to man,"* but Paul received it directly through *"a revelation of Jesus Christ."* By repeating that *"the gospel which was preached by me is <u>not according to man</u>"* and *"I neither <u>received</u> it from man now was I <u>taught</u> it,"* Paul is emphasizing his divine commission which came directly from Jesus Christ. He returns to this point in **vv. 15-16a**. This divine *source* of the gospel is consistent with the divine *nature* of the gospel. Every other religion in the world essentially says, "If you want God or the gods to accept you and take you to heaven, it's up to *you*—to make enough sacrifices,

[8] A number of scholars contend that this meeting in Jerusalem was the Jerusalem Council meeting of **Acts 15**, not a private meeting between Paul and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. If that is the case, then Paul wrote Galatians after the Jerusalem Council, not before. That seems unlikely, however, because the Jerusalem Council was a truly momentous meeting in the history of the church. It vindicated Paul's position. Paul undoubtedly would have mentioned it in Galatians if he had written Galatians after the Council. His failure to mention the Council, therefore, is strong evidence that he wrote Galatians before the Council took place. Other evidence from both **Galatians 2** and **Acts 15** indicates that Paul's second visit to Jerusalem preceded the visit described in **Acts 15**. For example, **Gal 2:1** says that Paul was accompanied to Jerusalem by Barnabas and Titus, whereas **Acts 15:2** says that Paul was accompanied by Barnabas and "some others." In **Gal 2:2** Paul says that his meeting with the leaders in Jerusalem was by "revelation" and was "private," whereas in **Acts 15:2** Paul was sent by the church to Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem Council was public (**Acts 15:12**). **Gal 2:9** says that the leadership Paul met in Jerusalem included John, whereas in **Acts 15** John is not mentioned. Finally, Paul rebuked Peter in **Gal 2:11-14**, whereas in **Acts 15:7-12** Peter and Paul were in agreement. Additionally, David Trobisch persuasively shows that **Gal 2:1-10** and **Acts 11:27-30** are parallel (Trobisch 1999: 336-37). Paul's "revelation" (**Gal 2:2**) probably was referring to the prophet Agabus who prophesied a coming famine "by the Spirit" (**Acts 11:28**).

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do enough good deeds, and deny yourself enough things." Further, every other religion was founded by someone who essentially said, "I am not God, but I will tell you what you need to do so that God may accept you." Christianity is the opposite of all that. In Christianity, Jesus said, "I *am* God who has come to find you." Christianity alone says that we can do *nothing* to earn our salvation: we never can make enough sacrifices, do enough good deeds, or deny ourselves enough things. Instead, in Christianity our salvation is based 100% on what Christ has done for us. We can only receive salvation as a gift of his grace.

- **1:13-14—**Paul's pre-conversion life.

[13] For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; [14] and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Paul's life in Judaism had been one of learning, authority, and power. In **Phil 3:4-6** he said, *"If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: [5] circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."* In **Acts 22:3-5** he added, *"[3] I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated under Gamaliel [the leading rabbi of that time], strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. [4] I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, [5] as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished."* Paul was even present at the stoning to death of the church's first martyr, Stephen (**Acts 7:58-8:1;** see **Acts 22:20**). He described his pre-conversion self as *"a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor"* (**1 Tim 1:13**). His mindset was like that of a modern Islamic jihadist.

- **1:15-16a—**Paul's conversion.

[15] But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased [16] to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.

Paul's conversion is described in **Acts 9:1-30** (see also **Acts 22:1-16; 26:1-20**). In these two verses Paul stresses that his conversion (salvation)—and, by extension, anyone's conversion—is all from God: God *sets apart* a person for himself; God *calls* a person through God's *grace*; and God *reveals* himself to a person for God's *pleasure* and *purpose*. These verses reveal several important things about the nature of true conversion:

1. True conversion involves God's intervention. Paul had been describing his unsaved life as a Jew in **vv. 13-14**, but **v. 15** begins with the important word "But." We have pointed out how Christianity, unlike every other religion, is based on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, not what we do for God. In Paul's case, God dramatically stepped in and radically changed the entire direction of Paul's life. This is reflected in the contrast of language between **vv. 13-14** and **v. 15**. When Paul is discussing his former, unsaved life as a Jew, he keeps using the words "I' and "my." However, when he talks about his conversion, the emphasis is on the words "God" and "His Son."

2. True conversion involves God's eternal planning. These verses also state another reason why we know that salvation is ultimately in God's hands, not ours: that is, the doctrine of God's *election* and *predestination*. In **v. 15** Paul states that God *"set me apart even from my mother's womb."* This is consistent with other examples where it is stated that someone had been called or set apart even before birth (see **Isa 49:1** [Messiah]; **Jer 1:5** [Jeremiah]; **Luke 1:15** [John the Baptist]; **Rom 9:10-13** [Jacob]). This is also consistent with more general statements that those who are saved have had their names written in the book of life *"from the foundation of the world"*: **Matt 25:34** (*"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*); **Eph 1:4** (*"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him"*); **2 Tim 1:9** (God *"has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity"*); **Rev 13:8** (*"All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain"*); **Rev 17:8** (*"those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast"*).

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While our believing and receiving Christ's salvation must occur in time, the entire drama of salvation—including Christ's own death on the cross—is according to *"the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God"* (**Acts 2:23**; see also **Acts 4:27-28**).

3. True conversion involves God's calling. The word "call" (Greek = *kaleō*) can be used in a general sense of "invite" (see, e.g., **Matt 22:3; John 2:2**). It can also be used in an absolute, authoritative, effectual sense. This is the sense in which "called" is being used in **v. 15**: God's call was sufficient to produce the salvific response of faith in Paul (see also **Rom 1:6; 8:28-30; 9:24; 1 Cor 1:9, 24, 26; 7:18, 21; Eph 4:1, 4; 2 Thess 2:14**). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) summarizes matters this way:

> "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace." (*Westminster* 1647: ch. X.1)

This is consistent with passages such as **Eph 2:8-9** which states that we are saved by God's grace through faith, but even our faith is not of ourselves but is a gift of God.

4. True conversion involves God's grace. Paul adds that God called him *"through His grace."* As we have previously pointed out, the issue of God's grace (as opposed to one's own works) is what distinguishes Christianity and the gospel from every other religion in the world. Only Christianity says that we can do *nothing* to earn our salvation. Instead, our salvation is based 100% on what Christ has done for us. We can only receive salvation as a gift of his grace.

5. True conversion involves seeing the glory of Christ. In calling Paul, God *"was pleased to reveal his Son in me."* Some translations translate this as *"to me."* Either way, "the wonderful reality of Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, and reigning—was made known to Paul" (Platt and Merida 2014: 34). Salvation and the gospel primarily concern and revolve around the Son, Jesus Christ (see **Rom 1:1-4**). As Paul said in **2 Cor 4:6**, God *"has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."* Further, believers are no longer alone (**Heb 13:5**) and are no longer their own (see **Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9**). Rather, as Paul puts it in **Gal 2:20**, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."*

6. True conversion involves being called for a purpose. God revealed His Son in Paul for a reason (i.e., that Paul might preach Him among the Gentiles). Paul's life was dramatically changed by his conversion. He went from being a persecutor of Christians to being persecuted (and ultimately being beheaded) because he was a Christian (see **2 Cor 11: 23-33**). This is consistent with passages such as **Eph 2:8-10** which states that we are saved by God's grace through faith for a reason, namely, *"for good works which God prepared beforehand [i.e., before the foundation of the world] so that we would walk in them"* (see also **John 15:16; Eph 1:11-12; Jas 1:18**). This should cause us to realize that we, like Paul, have been called for a purpose, to *"proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (**1 Pet 2:9**) and manifest Christ's excellencies by *"not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing"* (**1 Pet 3:9**).

- **1:16b-24—**Paul's immediate post-conversion life and first meeting with the Jerusalem leadership.

[16b] I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. [18] Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. [19] But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. [20] (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) [21] Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. [22] I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; [23] but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." [24] And they were glorifying God because of me.

According to **Acts 9:19-20**, immediately after his conversion, Paul remained in Damascus (where he had been intending to go to persecute Christians when Christ appeared to him) *"to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying 'He is the Son of God.'"* Additionally, he argued with the Jews and confounded them *"by proving that Jesus is the Christ"* (**Acts 9:22**). This indicates that Paul understood the gospel well enough from

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Jesus' revelation to him to be able to proclaim and argue for Christ. His mention in **vv. 18-19** about going to Jerusalem to meet Cephas (Peter) and James probably refers to **Acts 9:26-29**. In **v. 21**, his going to the regions of Syria and Cilicia is reflected in **Acts 9:30** which says that some Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem had been attempting to kill Paul, so believers *"brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus."* Tarsus is located in the province of Cilicia.

Paul's life shows how the true gospel affects not only you but also those whom you influence. In Paul's case, since he had persecuted the church, at first many believers were skeptical or even afraid of him (**Acts 9:13-14, 26**). However, it did not take long for the fruit of the Spirit to be obvious in Paul's life, with the result that the people who heard Paul and heard about his change of life *"were glorifying God because of me"* (**Gal 1:24**). Our own lives should resemble this. We should be people of integrity who do not advance the gospel for reasons of personal gain. We should demonstrate changes in lifestyle and should bear fruit consistent with the gospel. We need to ask ourselves: "Are people glorifying God because of *me*?"

- **2:1-10—**Paul's second meeting with the Jerusalem leadership.

    - **vv. 1-5:** ***[1] Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. [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. [3] But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. [4] But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. [5] But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.***

It is somewhat unclear whether the fourteen years mentioned in **v. 1a** is after his conversion or after his first visit to Jerusalem. The issue in **vv. 1-5** of whether Titus (a Greek, not a Jew) should be circumcised was a particular instance of the claims of the "false brethren" (the Judaizers) which is central to Galatians and was central to the reason why the Jerusalem Council was convened in **Acts 15** (see **Acts 15:1**, *"Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'"*). Paul refused to have Titus circumcised (**v. 3**). He recognized that to do so would *"bring us into bondage"* (**v. 4**). This would be the "bondage of the Law" which Paul spends the bulk of this epistle refuting (see **Gal 2:4; 3:10, 23; 4:21-26; 5:3, 18;** see also **Rom 7:6**). Rich Lusk explains, "Circumcision, of course, was not the only issue, but it stood as the most prominent and most distinctive mark of Judaism. . . . Circumcision was most prominent because it was the sign of initiation into Mosaic discipleship. . . . Paul does not want the Galatian Christians to submit to circumcision because to do so would fundamentally negate the work of Christ. Through his death and resurrection, Christ has abolished the law, with its barriers to God's presence (think of the veils in the temple) and its barriers between God's people (think of the graded levels of access in the temple system). To go on circumcising as a sign of covenant membership would imply a defect or incompleteness to Christ's work. Thus, circumcision was not to be practiced. Jesus had opened the door to full covenant membership to Gentiles as such, in accord with the ancient promises (Gen. 12:1ff, etc.). . . . For Judaizers, to be under Torah = under grace. But for Paul, the circle of Torah is not co-extensive with the range of God's grace. In Christ, grace is also available to those who are *not* under Torah." (Lusk 2003: n.p.)

On the other hand, during Paul's second missionary journey, he was accompanied by Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father (**Acts 16:1**). In that case, *"Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek"* (**Acts 16:3**). Paul could be charged with inconsistency in not allowing Titus to be circumcised but in circumcising Timothy. "But from Paul's perspective, both actions were deeply principled. He refused to permit Titus to be circumcised in a Christian context where circumcision would have signaled that Titus (and Paul, too) agreed that one needed to be a proper Jew to accept the Jewish Messiah—and that would have jeopardized the exclusive sufficiency of Christ. In the context of a Jewish synagogue, however, where Paul was resolutely trying to win people to Christ and no one was reading in any Christological implications, the circumcision of Timothy was merely part and parcel of his willingness to 'become all things to all people so that by all possible means [he] might save some' (1 Cor 9:22)." (Carson and Moo 2005: 468n.31)

This issue is so important that in **v. 4** Paul calls the Judaizers "false brethren," which suggests that their doctrine put them outside of the faith. That is corroborated in **v. 4** where he adds that they "sneaked in" (or "infiltrated") which is a word "used of traitors who pretend to be part of a group so that they can spy on it and

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weaken it" (Ngewa 2006: 1417). The issue was *"the truth of the gospel"* (**v. 5**). Paul is saying that freedom or liberty comes from and is based on the truth. Although circumcision or Jewish law may not be the issue we face today, we as individuals and churches all tend to create our own rules which require us to do or avoid doing certain things. When we follow these man-made rules we think we are earning God's favor. That is legalism. Legalism entails the two anti-gospel errors that the circumcision being advocated by the Judaizers entailed: (1) it adds requirements to salvation and who is a true member of the covenant community of Christ beyond what Christ did for us; and (2) it divides the body of Christ. Paul's words should stand as a strong warning to professing Christians to avoid this kind of legalism. Since freedom or liberty come from and are based on the truth, legalistic bondage to man-made rules signifies that the church has departed from the truth and has departed from the gospel.

The issue of the gospel versus legalism also has implications regarding our behavior. Paul speaks of *"our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus"* (**v. 4**) versus "bondage" which occurs when we are "under law" (see **Gal 2:4; 3:10, 23; 4:21-26; 5:3, 18;** see also **Rom 7:6**). Many people think that the gospel of liberty in Christ amounts to a license to do anything we please. That is not correct. Our liberty as Christians is not a self-centered "do whatever you want" kind of liberty but is liberty *"in Christ Jesus."* It is something like a loving marriage: when a person gets married, he or she can no longer do whatever they want whenever they want with whomever they want. Yet we willingly surrender this personal freedom for the far greater freedom, peace, security, and love that marriage brings. Christ is our bridegroom (**Matt 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35; John 2:9; 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-27; Rev 19:7; 21:2; 22:17**) and we are his bride and wife (**2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-27; Rev 19:7-8; 21:2, 9-10**). Consequently, as Christians we are subject to the *"the law of Christ"* (**1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2**).[9] One example of this is not to waste our money on ourselves and our own pleasures but instead to *"remember the poor"* (**Gal 2:10**). In **Galatians 5-6** he discusses in some detail the ethical norms we should follow as the bride of Christ.

Being in Christ Jesus means that we now have *his heart* (**Ezek 36:26**), *his mind* (**1 Cor 2:16**), *his Spirit* (**Ezek 36:27; John 14:16-20; 2 Cor 3:3**), and *his law* written in our hearts (**Jer 31:33; Rom 8:2; 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2**). As we obey and follow the Lord our attitudes and priorities become transformed. In a sense, therefore, in Christ Jesus we *can* do whatever we want—for as the Lord works in us to conform us into the image of Christ (**Rom 8:29**), we naturally will start thinking, speaking, and acting more like Christ himself and no longer fulfill the desires of the flesh (see **Rom 8:1-14; Gal 5:17**), because when we are in Christ Jesus, *"it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure"* (**Phil 2:13**). In other words, we now begin thinking, speaking, and acting in accordance with our true nature—the way God created us to be. On the other hand, when Christians act improperly it is a *not* a sign of their liberty in Christ Jesus but is a sign that they are being *disobedient* to Christ.

- **vv. 6-10:** ***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. 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 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 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, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.***

In **v. 2** Paul said he went to James, Peter, and John and *"submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles . . . for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain."* He was obviously concerned how the recognized leaders of the church would regard the gospel of grace he was preaching, particularly since it overturned the heart of Jewish ritualism and exclusivism. The answer is found in **vv. 6-9**: Paul was accepted; uncircumcised Titus was accepted; and there was no attempt to modify the gospel Paul was preaching. Indeed, James, Peter, and John all recognized that Paul had received the same grace and was preaching the same gospel they had received and were preaching. Even though Paul's target audience was Gentiles and Peter's target audience was Jews, Peter was not preaching that after receiving Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior the Jews had to submit themselves to Jewish law. Further, by giving Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship,"

[9] The specifics of the "law of Christ" will be discussed in greater detail below in the discussion of **Gal 6:1-5** where the phrase "law of Christ" is actually used.

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the leaders in Jerusalem were acknowledging that Paul's apostleship was on the same level of authority as their own. It should be noted that **v. 6** is the corollary to **v. 3**: just as the external, physical mark of circumcision does not define the boundary of God's people or give someone "higher status" before God, so the internal, non-physical reputation that a person may have does not matter to God. God does not show partiality to different types of people (**Deut 10:17; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11**). Instead, *"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"* (**Gal 3:28**; see also **Col 3:11**).

This private meeting had tremendous implications for the church. It established that there is only one gospel, and the truth of the gospel is unchanging. There may be different styles and emphases in presenting the gospel to different types of audiences, and certain concessions might be made to people on policy matters (e.g., Paul's circumcising Timothy in **Acts 16:3** and his concessions to "weaker brothers" in **Rom 14:1-15:1** and **1 Cor 8:1-13**). But there can never be concessions made on matters of principle and on the truths of the gospel itself.

The context of the statement in **v. 10** to "remember the poor" is that Paul was going to the Gentiles whereas Peter, James, and John primarily were ministering to the Jews. The Gentiles had most of the money. Recall the contribution taken up in Antioch for the relief of the poor believers in Judea (see **Acts 11:29-30**). James, Peter, and John in essence were saying, "When you travel throughout the Roman Empire and deal with powerful and rich Gentiles, don't forget the poor Judeans."

Both the OT and the NT repeatedly stress the importance of taking care of the poor (e.g., **Exod 22:22; 23:6, 11; Deut 10:18; 14:28-29; 15:9; Ps 12:5; 74:21; 140:12; Prov 14:21, 31; 22:9; 28:27; 31:9; Isa 3:14-15; 58:6-7; 61:1; Jer 22:3; Ezek 16:49; Amos 2:6-7; Zech 7:10; Matt 19:21; Luke 4:18; 12:33; 14:13; 18:22; Acts 10:4; Rom 12:20; Gal 2:10; 1 Tim 5:3; Jas 1:27; 2:2-6; 1 John 3:17-18**). Caring for the poor and needy is one of the important sociological implications of the gospel. In his *Commentary on Galatians,* Martin Luther discusses the importance of taking care of the poor: "After the preaching of the gospel, the office and charge of a true and faithful pastor, is to be mindful of the poor. . . . For the world and the devil do persecute the Church, and bring many to poverty. . . . Contrariwise, false religion and impiety flourisheth and aboundeth with wealth and prosperity. Wherefore a true and faithful pastor must have a care of the poor: and this care Paul here confesseth that he had." (Luther 1979: 55)

- **2:11-21—**The truth of the Gospel overrides the importance of individuals and one's own heritage:

    - **2:11-14—**Paul publicly exposed Peter's hypocrisy regarding his treatment of Gentile believers.

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.
[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 aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.
[13] The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. [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 Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

These verses show us that the issue facing the church goes beyond adding requirements to faith in Christ (such as circumcision or adhering to Mosaic law). These verses show us that the gospel affects every area of our lives, including even who we eat with. The events of **vv. 11-14** occurred after persecution of the church by the Jewish authorities had broken out in Jerusalem and elsewhere (see **Acts 4:1-21; 5:17-40; 6:8-8:4; 9:1-2; 11:19; 12:1-5; 13:44-45; 14:1-2**). In light of that, it is possible that the motives of James, the men he sent, and Peter were good motives, i.e., withdrawing from eating with the Gentiles may have been done to try to spare Jewish Christians from opposition and persecution by unconverted Jews who thought that Jews and Gentiles had to be forever separate. By doing this, Jewish Christians would be able to say to unbelieving Jews and Jewish authorities, "You see, we still honor our traditional Jewish customs even though we believe in Jesus as our Messiah."

However, Paul saw that, regardless of their motives, the actions and results of what Peter and the others were doing stabbed at the heart of the gospel itself. In **Acts 10** Peter had been shown that God does not show partiality between Jews and Gentiles. He even testified about this in **Acts 11** to Jews who had opposed his eating with uncircumcised Gentiles. When Peter met with Paul in Jerusalem, he agreed with Paul's doctrine (**Gal 2:1-10**). Now, however, Peter is denying the very gospel he had preached by the way he was living. Peter's external,

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objective actions did not correspond to his internal, subjective beliefs. Consequently, Paul rightly called him a "hypocrite." Since this was not just a private matter between Peter and certain individual Gentiles but the entire church was being affected and the nature of the gospel itself was at issue, Paul did not go to Peter privately (as per **Matt 18:15-16**) but rightly confronted him *publicly* (see **Eph 5:11; 1 Tim 5:20**).

Peter was acting in an exclusivistic, ethnocentric way which is contrary to the gospel. That is why Paul did not attack Peter on the grounds that Peter was acting in a tribalistic, or racist, or hateful, or hurtful way, although he was acting in all those ways. Instead, Paul's attack went to the heart of the matter, namely, that Peter was not being *"straightforward about the truth of the gospel"* (**v. 14**). The NIV translates this as being *"in line with the truth of the gospel."* Peter denied the gospel by excluding Gentiles from full participation and equality in the life of the church. He was also denying Gentiles complete acceptance *in his private life* (i.e., in who he ate with) because of the fact that they were Gentiles. In effect, although he knew better, Peter was making the gospel for "Jews only." This is a complete reversal of the entire movement of salvation history and amounts to overturning the New Covenant and reinstituting the Old Covenant. Rich Lusk states, "Because the Old Covenant ceremonial laws were laws of exile and exclusion rather than access and intimacy, laws of promise rather than fulfillment, for Gentile converts to come under these laws would be to take a major step backwards, just as for Jews to remain under them would be to stay in the old age. . . . The essential difference [between Paul and the Judaizers] was Paul's realized eschatology in Christ vs. the Judaizers' commitment to ongoing practice of Torah. Paul could say, and his Jewish opponents could not say, that the promised, final, eschatological age has arrived in history, opening the gates of covenant blessing, not merely to all the genetic sons of Abraham, but ultimately to all the genetic sons of Adam. The basic problem in Galatia was a Jewish nationalism, or exclusivism, rooted in a defective understanding of God's redemptive-historical timetable. Israel turned Torah, which should have been a means to the end of Christ's coming (cf. Rom. 10:4), into an end in itself, and therefore into a form of idolatry (Gal. 4:8-9; cf. Rom. 2:22)." (Lusk 2003: n.p.)

This passage, and this issue, is profoundly important for the church today. The issue for us may not be who we eat with. The same type of issue occurs any time a church or individual Christians deny people membership, positions of leadership, fellowship, or full equality because of tribal, ethnic, socio-economic, or other similar reasons. This was a big problem not only in Galatia but also in the early church in Jerusalem (see **Acts 6:1; Jas 2:1-13**); it continues to be a big problem for the church around the world today. This is also reflected in the lack of fellowship that some denominations have with other denominations. Of course, we all think our own theology is correct and those who disagree with us are wrong. Even if we are correct in our theology, however, we may be correct in the same way that Peter was correct: his internal beliefs about the oneness of Jews and Gentiles in Christ were correct, but since he did not translate those internal beliefs into concrete, positive action to insure that Gentiles were treated as equals, Peter was a hypocrite who was *"not straightforward about the truth of the gospel."* He had, in effect, turned his Jewish heritage and traditions into an idol. This is serious. The gospel is *truth*, and truth necessarily affects how we live as well as what we believe. If churches (and individuals) do not resolutely examine themselves and change their practices to bring them in line with the implications of the gospel, God's verdict on the day of judgment may be that we were not faithful believers or churches at all but really were nothing but hypocrites and idolaters.

- **2:15-21—**Even Jews are justified by faith, not the law.

> ***15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 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 may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 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! 18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 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 gave Himself up for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."***

These verses give reasons why Paul was so strong with respect to confronting Peter. These verses are telling us at least three things. First, to return to the Law of Moses after having received Christ as savior and Lord amounts to saying that Christ led us into *sin* because we had *stopped* obeying the Law of Moses when we

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came to Christ. However, that is impossible because Christ is sinless: he neither sinned himself nor led anyone else to sin (see **2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:21-24; Heb 4:15**). Only he perfectly fulfilled the Law (see **Matt 5:17-20**) in order to redeem us from the curse of the Law (**Gal 3:13; 4:4-5**). Thus, anyone returns to the Law after coming to Christ means that he or she does not understand at all what Christ accomplished on the cross and does not understand the gospel.

Second, since Christ bore my sin on the cross, in a sense *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (**Gal 2:20**). Therefore, through Christ *"I died to the Law"* (**Gal 2:19**). As a result, the Law has no claim on believers in Christ (see **Rom 7:1-6**). However, **Gal 2:19** points out that *"if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor."* In other words, the ironic consequence of returning to the Law after receiving Christ is that *I* become the transgressor or sinner.

Third, what Paul is saying here and in Galatians as a whole illustrate the difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world. Typically in the Bible "the Law" and "the works of the law" refer to the law given to Israel through Moses (i.e., the Law of Moses). However, the principles Paul is discussing apply to all religions. The reason is that every other religion in the world requires people to redeem themselves by adhering to various man-made laws, rules, and regulations. In other words, even though the particular laws the people must adhere to are not the Law of Moses, they still must perform "works of the law," i.e., base their salvation on their own efforts (strictly obeying rules and regulations, doing enough good deeds, making enough sacrifices, denying themselves enough things). Thus, all other religions in the word except the Christian gospel are "self-salvation" religions based on law and works, not salvation by grace alone through faith alone in what Christ has done for us. All such "self-salvation" programs are doomed to fail for at least five reasons:

- First, because God himself is morally holy and perfect, that is the standard to which God holds us (**Matt 5:48**). However, "once a person sins, it is impossible to ever be perfect" (Sproul 2002: 94; see also ibid.: 53).
- Second, even our good deeds are tainted with sin and typically arise from mixed motives. Indeed, if we are doing good deeds in order to escape God's punishment and hell, that alone makes our good deeds *not* "good." The reason is that if our motive is to escape hell by doing "good deeds," then those deeds are, by definition, selfish and self-centered, e.g., when we help the poor, we are really primarily helping *ourselves* avoid hell. Thus, no amount of good deeds, since they themselves are tainted with sin, can atone for other sins.
- Third, no one has "done enough" good deeds or made enough sacrifices to satisfy God. Timothy Keller states, "The moral and spiritual standards of all religions are very high, and Pharisees [i.e., all who try to save themselves by doing good deeds and obeying religious rules] know deep down that they are not fully living up to those standards. They are not praying as often as they should. They are not loving and serving their neighbors as much as they should. They are not keeping their inner thoughts as pure as they should." (Keller 2008: 178)
- Fourth, no amount of good deeds changes the sinful nature and sinful propensities of the heart. Laws, rules, and regulations only tell people what they are supposed to do, but they do not change people's hearts or give people the ability or desire to do what they are supposed to do. Doing good deeds does not transform corrupt, sinful people into righteous, sinless people at their core; they remain sinful people. If God let sinful people into heaven and the new earth in which people will live forever (**Revelation 21-22**), heaven and the new earth would be forever corrupted. God could not be there since "sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin" (Stott 1986: 106). Indeed, given humanity's innate corruption and sinful propensities, heaven would be turned into a hell.
- Fifth, ultimately sin is against God because God's law comes from him and is a reflection of his holy nature; therefore, to sin by transgressing his law is to offend him personally. To sin against other people is to sin against God because people are made in the image of God (**Gen 1:26-27; 9:6; Jas 3:9-10**). Sin amounts to dishonoring and defiling God's image and thereby reveals what the sinner really thinks about God himself. The situation is similar to when a person commits a crime against another person; the criminal violates not only the person but primarily violates the law of the state. Hence, it is the government which prosecutes the lawbreaker, not the wronged individual. Sin also is like dropping a rock into a pool of water; the rock creates ripples from its point of entry to the surrounding waters. In the same way sin permanently corrupts and changes the sinner, other people, and the world in ways perhaps unknown to the sinner. Therefore, any "good deeds" or other things we try to do to atone for our sin and earn our salvation, by their very nature, are *temporal and imperfect*. They do not transform the sinner into a holy person and they cannot eliminate the effects of the sin which has *permanently* corrupted the sinner's soul and has affected other people and the world.

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> God is infinite: infinitely holy; infinitely lovely; infinitely good. Therefore, our obligation to him is infinite (**Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27**), and our sin against him amounts to an infinite evil. In short, there is no such thing as a finite offense against an infinite God. Consequently, no temporal, finite, and imperfect deeds of ours can ever hope to atone for the infinity of our sin. As John Stott concludes, "If we are ever to be forgiven, we must repay what we owe [see Anslem 1903: I:11]. Yet we are incapable of doing this, either for ourselves or for other people. Our present obedience and good works cannot make satisfaction for our sins, since these are required of us anyway. So we cannot save ourselves." (Stott 1986: 119)

On the other hand, **Rom 5:6** states, *"Christ died for the <u>ungodly</u>."* That is why **v. 17** says, *"While seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners."* The point is that being righteous and being a sinner is not an "either/or." Rather, according to Christianity we are *both* righteous and sinners *at the same time*. Martin Luther understood that the heart of the gospel is that, in Christ, we are *"simul justus et peccator,"* which is Latin for "simultaneously just [righteous] and sinners." R. C. Sproul describes this: "He was saying from one perspective, in one sense, we are just. In another sense, from a different perspective, we are sinners; and how he defines that is simple. In and of ourselves, under the analysis of God's scrutiny, we still have sin; we're still sinners. But, by imputation and by faith in Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is now transferred to our account, then we are considered just or righteous. This is the very heart of the gospel." (Sproul 2019: n.p.) Sproul explains: "If I had to trust in my righteousness to get into heaven, I would completely and utterly despair of any possibility of ever being redeemed. But when we see that the righteousness that is ours by faith is the perfect righteousness of Christ, then we see how glorious is the good news of the gospel. The good news is simply this, I can be reconciled to God, I can be justified by God not on the basis of what I did, but on the basis of what's been accomplished for me by Christ.

But at the heart of the gospel is a double-imputation. My sin is imputed to Jesus. His righteousness is imputed to me. And in this two-fold transaction we see that God, Who does not negotiate sin, Who doesn't compromise His own integrity with our salvation, but rather punishes sin fully and really after it has been imputed to Jesus, retains His own righteousness, and so He is both just and the justifier. . . . So my sin goes to Jesus, His righteousness comes to me in the sight of God." (Ibid.)

This has tremendous implications for Christians. That is why Paul confronted Peter about being "*straightforward about the truth of the gospel.*" There are several important implications of this:

First, only the gospel takes the Law seriously. Legalists *think* that they are serious about the law by placing themselves either under the Law of Moses or under man-made rules and regulations. However, they really do *not* take the law seriously at all. The reason is because they only obey the law partially and, even then, only inconsistently.[10] For example, Jesus said that the entire Law is summarized in two commandments: "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND" and "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" (**Matt 22:37-39**; see also **Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:25-28; Gal 5:14**). The fact is that no one obeys either of those commandments all the time or even most of the time. Do we really love God with *all* our heart, *all* our soul, *all* our mind, all the time? And to love our neighbor as ourselves would mean that we would have to spend the same amount of time, thought, effort, and money seeking the well-being of others as we do seeking our own well-being. No one does that.

No one, that is, except Jesus. He alone loved God the Father with all his heart, all his soul, and all his mind, and he alone loved his neighbor as he loved himself. Doing that cost him his life on the cross. But because he alone fully obeyed both commandments, he alone was qualified to take our sin upon himself and impute his righteousness to us. Because Jesus' righteousness has been imputed to me, God views me as righteous! That means I no longer have to—or can—"work" to gain righteousness, since Jesus has done all the work for me. Theologically, this means that if I put myself back under the Mosaic Law or under any set of rules to try to become righteous before God or to gain God's favor, I am thereby *rejecting* what Jesus did for me. Although we are to *"work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling"* (**Phil 2:12**), we do so on a completely new basis: we follow and obey God, not to *earn* his favor but out of gratitude and joy of having already *received* his favor! And we follow God's guidance and obey him remembering that, now, *"it is God who is at work in [us] both to*

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[10] Neither in Galatians nor anywhere else does Paul characterize his opponents as people who are obedient to the law. Although in **Gal 3:10** he talks of those who *"are of the works of the Law,"* that phrase "did not mean something like 'those are the people who fulfill the law'" (Silva 2007: 799). In fact, in **Gal 6:13** he says they *"do not even keep the Law themselves."* Moisés Silva concludes, "It is obvious that Paul, if pressed, would have to admit that his Jewish opponents obeyed many specific commands, but that is a different issue from the question whether they could be appropriately *characterized* as people who obey the law" (Ibid.).

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will and to work for His good pleasure" (**Phil 2:13**). We are no longer on our own. That is what makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world.

Second, if we take this truth deep within us, it necessarily affects our relationships with others. If we really understand that we are sinners, then we can never look down on anyone again. We can never see ourselves as "better" or more "righteous" or "holy" than others—because we realize our righteousness is not our own but is Christ's, whereas our sin is our own. Thus, the gospel does not divide but unites people. As N. T. Wright observes, "The point of justification by faith, in this context, is . . . to insist that all those who share this Christian faith are members of the same single family of God in Christ *and therefore belong at the same table*." (Wright 2000: 234) That was what Peter did not understand in **Gal 2:11-14**.

The gospel has other important implications for our lives. As we realize that Christ has taken our sin and the punishment we deserved onto himself, that gives us a boldness to come before God *"by the blood of Jesus"* (**Heb 10:19**). It also gives us boldness to confront sin, evil, and hypocrisy in the world, just as Paul himself did. In the same way, when bad things happen to us, and when we suffer, we realize that, as sinners, we don't deserve any good thing at all, so we do not get angry at God; we also realize that, in suffering, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus who was *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"* (**Isa 53:3**). On the other hand, we can also realize that, because Jesus bore our sin, he is using our sorrows and suffering to bring about good in our lives and, through us, in the lives of others, just as God brought about great good for humanity through the sufferings of Jesus. In short, only the gospel gives a true picture of people. Further, only the gospel gives us the transformative power we need to become like Jesus, because we have been freed from the law to live for God (**v. 19**) and we are no longer on our own, but Christ is living inside us (**v. 20**). Therefore, as we draw on Christ and remember who we are (simultaneously righteous and sinners) we should no longer become proud (when we think we are doing well) or despair and become angry or depressed (when we are not doing well or when bad things are happening to us and we are suffering).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Paul's life demonstrate the reality of his conversion?

2. Should our lives demonstrate the reality of our conversion? If so, why should this be the case and in what ways should our lives demonstrate the reality of our conversion?

3. What role(s) does God play in a person's conversion?

4. What is "legalism"?

5. Do our churches today have any legalistic rules and requirements similar to the circumcision that the Judaizers were requiring the Galatians to undergo? If so, what legalistic practices do our churches today require and how should we deal with such legalism?

6. Why can Christians be said to have liberty in Christ Jesus and can do whatever they want, yet that does not mean that they have a license to sin?

7. Why is caring for the poor so important? What are specific things we should do as individuals and as churches to care for the poor?

8. What are ways in which Christians today do not act "in line with the truth of the gospel" (similar to Peter who had stopped eating with Gentiles)? How should we, as individuals and churches, deal with this?

9. How does Christianity differ from all other religions in the world?

10. What are the reasons why it is impossible for anyone ever to be able to earn his or her own salvation by obeying laws or doing good deeds?

11. What does it mean to be "simultaneously righteous and a sinner," and what are implications of this?

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D. <u>Gal 3:1-4:31—The faith/law distinction:</u> This is fundamental and goes all the way back to Abraham.

These two chapters are among the most important chapters in the entire Bible. They are of great importance because they give us a theological summary of God's plan of salvation. In doing that, these two chapters tell us the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Law of Moses, they discuss the purposes of the Law, and discuss Israel and the church in relation to the Old and New Covenants.

- **<u>3:1-5—</u>**<u>The fundamental question: Are you perfected by the flesh (law), or by the Spirit (faith)?</u>

[1]You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? [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? [3] Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? [4] Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? [5] So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

In these verses Paul is again doing what he did in **chapters 1** and **2**—he is contrasting Christianity and every other religion in the world. That is why **vv. 2** and **5** contrast the only two alternatives: the Spirit and faith versus the *"the works of the law."* Man-made religion is based on *"the works of the Law,"* i.e., trying to follow a set of rules. In **v. 3** Paul equates *"the works of the Law"* with *"the flesh."* On the other hand, Christianity is based on *"hearing with faith,"* i.e., believing the gospel and trusting in what Christ has done for us. Throughout these five verses Paul emphasizes the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that makes Christianity unlike any other religion. The Spirit is God (**Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor 3:17**). If a person does not have the Spirit, that person is not a Christian (**Rom 8:1-17; 2 Cor 3:5-6**). The Spirit was poured out, beginning on the Day of Pentecost, after Jesus had completely fulfilled the Law through his perfectly obedient life, his sacrificial death, his resurrection, and his ascension back to the Father. In other words, in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ did *everything* necessary to reconcile us to God. There was *nothing* left for us to do on our own. Consequently, the Spirit can only be "received" (**v. 2**), not earned by our own imperfect works. The Spirit is *received* when a person comes to faith in Christ. The Spirit then *remains* in the believer throughout the believer's life. This means that the Mosaic Law and man-made rules are just as ineffective for our sanctification or *"being perfected"* (**v. 3**), i.e., remaining saved and living a faithful life, as they are for our justification or *"receiving the Spirit"* (**v. 2**), i.e., our becoming saved in the first place. This is also indicated in **v. 5** which says that God *"provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you."* "Provides" and "works" are both in the present, active tense. Thus, **v. 5** is talking about the ongoing work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. In other words, we receive the Spirit and come to Christ by faith and are kept faithful through the Spirit by faith. To say that people come to Christ by faith but then are kept by works or kept by the law is to deny the gospel itself.

Some people might think that Paul's emphasis on justification and sanctification by faith alone, apart from doing the works of the law, contradict what James says in **Jas 2:24** that *"a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."* However, Paul and James do not contradict each other but complement each other. This is so for a number of reasons:

- Paul and James "are talking about different things: Paul of the declaration of our righteousness, and James of the demonstration of our righteousness. . . . Both Paul and James are referring to the sinner's righteousness before God, but Paul is focusing on the initial reception of that status and James on the way that status is vindicated before God in the judgment." (Carson and Moo 2005: 633) "The difference between Paul and James consists in the sequence of works and conversion: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works" (Moo 1985: 102). Burdick puts it this way: "James was combating a superficial faith that had no wholesome effect in the life of the professed believer. Paul, on the other hand, was combating legalism—the belief that one may earn saving merit before God by his good deeds." (Burdick 1981: 185)
- Because James and Paul are focusing on different issues or combating different false ideas concerning true, Christian faith, they are using the idea of "faith alone" (i.e., faith apart from works) in different senses, even though they both agree on what true, saving faith is like: James is describing "faith alone" as being not true, saving faith; Paul uses the idea of "faith alone" as describing true, saving faith: "James's 'faith alone' is far from being genuine Christian faith: this 'faith alone' is mere talk without action (vv. 15-16) or head knowledge without heart knowledge (v. 19). This is not Christian faith. And with this Paul would have no argument; he also stressed that it is faith 'expressing itself in love' [**Gal 5:6**] that counts." (Moo 1989: 1157)

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"The kind of faith that James says is 'dead' (that is, mere intellectual assent, 2:14-17) is not what Paul would have recognized as real faith (that is, 'faith working through love', Gal. 5:6)" (Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 255).

- "Paul's treatment of 'faith and works' is related to the question of whether Gentile Christians must do 'the works of the law' – mainly circumcision, sabbath and food laws. James' argument does not have Gentiles or such 'works of the law' in view at all. . . . They are in fact engaged in argument not with each other but with different opponents – Paul with those who would impose 'works of the law' on Gentiles, James with people who have become sluggish in their Christian living" (Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 255).

Carson and Moo emphasize the importance of listening to both the perspectives of Paul and James: "When faced with legalism, with the attempt to base salvation on human works, Paul needs to be heard—as he was so powerfully at the time of the Reformation. But when faced with quietism, with the attitude that dismisses works as unnecessary for Christians, James needs to be heard—as he was equally powerfully in the time of the Wesleys." (Carson and Moo 2005: 633)

- **3:6-9—**Only those who are of faith (whether Jews or Gentiles) are the true sons of Abraham.

> ***6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.***

In **vv. 1-5** Paul had established not only the necessity but also the exclusivity of faith (as opposed to "the works of the law") both for justification and for sanctification. Now, beginning with Abraham, he goes on to discuss the relationship between faith and law, grounding his argument in the great sweep of redemptive history. This becomes the dominant perspective throughout the rest of **chapter 3** to the end of **chapter 4**. This redemptive-historical perspective includes the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Law of Moses, the purposes of the Law, and Israel and the church in relation to the Old and New Covenants. This redemptive-historical perspective is necessary because "the Galatians' error was, at a foundational level, historical-theological in character. Misguided regarding the place of the Sinaitic [Mosaic] covenant in the plan of salvation, they were hoping for incorporation into the people of God (Abraham's descendants) through the wrong means (works of the law)." (Silva 2007: 793)

In **v. 6** Paul begins by quoting **Gen 15:6**. In **Genesis 15**, God had promised Abraham offspring like the stars in the sky even though Abraham was childless, was an old man in his 80s, and his wife was past the age of being able to conceive and bear children. Yet Abraham *"believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."* Abraham's faith was expressed in the context of the Abrahamic Covenant. The covenant had first been given by God to Abraham in **Gen 12:1-3**. It was later restated in **Gen 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18** and was confirmed to Abraham's son Isaac (**Gen 26:1-5, 24**) and to Isaac's younger son Jacob (**Gen 28:3-4, 13-15; 35:11-12**). The Abrahamic Covenant unfolds throughout the OT and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Consequently, it can be considered as the theological backbone and blueprint of the rest of the Bible. The Abrahamic Covenant and the statement that Abraham *"believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"* are the keys to Paul's discussion in **Galatians 3-4**. The Abrahamic Covenant contained three core promises: promises related to land, seed (the blessing of offspring), and global blessing (i.e., promises relating to the blessing of other peoples through Abraham's seed).[11]

Whereas **v. 6** refers to the "seed" blessing of the covenant, **v. 8** quotes **Gen 12:3** concerning the covenant's promise to bless all the nations through Abraham's seed. **Verse 8** also says that God *"preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham."* Jesus alluded to this in **John 8:56** when he told the Jews, *"Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."* Because the Abrahamic Covenant ultimately was directed to blessing the entire world, Paul's application for us is found in **v. 7** (*"those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham"*) and **v. 9** (*"then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer"*). In other words, as Paul states here and will reiterate throughout **chapters 3** and **4**, Abraham's true seed is spiritual, not physical; his true children are those who have faith, just as Abraham had faith. Just as God had promised Abraham that

[11] The Abrahamic Covenant and Christ's fulfillment of it are discussed at length in Menn 2009-2018: 14-15, 30-34 and Menn n.d.: Gen 15:1-18-"The Greatest Prophecy in the Bible."

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his seed would be numerous like the stars in the sky (**Gen 15:5**), so that has been fulfilled by Christ's church (i.e., Abraham's true spiritual seed), which includes people *"from every tribe and tongue and people and nation"* in the world (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**). **Verses 7** and **9** establish that, both in the OT and in the NT, God has always had only one plan of salvation, namely, salvation by grace through faith. The reference to Abraham's having heard the "gospel" and the fact that Abraham's true sons are *"those who are of faith"* show that. The only difference between Abraham and us is that Abraham looked *forward* in faith to the work of Christ on his behalf, whereas we have looked *backwards* in faith to the work of Christ on our behalf.

- **3:10-14—**No one is justified by the law but is under a curse.

> ***[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 THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." [11] Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." [12] However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." [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"— [14] in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.***

The word "For," which begins this paragraph, shows that **vv. 10-14** are connected with **vv. 6-9**. Nevertheless, "There is a marked transition from verse 9 to verse 10. Paul moves from the point that the children of Abraham are children by faith alone, to demonstrating that the law brings a curse, and that those who seek to be justified by their obedience to the law, will indeed find themselves under the curse of the law! Notice the contrast that Paul makes here between 'the men of faith' (in verses 7-9) with 'all who rely upon the law,' in verse 10. It is an 'either/or' choice. Either you are justified by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, or else you are under the curse of the law." (Riddlebarger 2003: n.p.)

Recall that it was people claiming to be Christians—the Judaizers—who were requiring other Christians to put themselves back under the Law of Moses after receiving Christ. John Piper comments, "The reason the book of Galatians has such a radical, life-changing message is that it pronounces a curse from God not on atheistic or agnostic outsiders but on professing Christians who try to serve God in a way that diminishes his grace and cultivates their own pride" (Piper 1983a: n.p.). The life-and-death divide between divine blessing and divine curse "is not between church people and non-church people, nor is it between those who call Jesus 'Lord' and those who don't. It is between those, on the one hand, who have been crucified with Christ and now in poverty live in continuing reliance on the living Christ, and those, on the other hand, who have never really died to self-reliance and whose religious activity, though 'moral' and intense, is all an exercise in self-reformation." (Ibid.) Consequently, everyone who professes to be a Christian must honestly and regularly examine himself or herself to see whether we are truly honoring, glorifying, and relying on Christ in us or are really magnifying ourselves (see **2 Cor 13:5**).

These five verses begin with the curse but then go on to tell us the only remedy for the curse—the person and work of Jesus Christ and the blessing that he brings. There are three background issues going on here which have all been mentioned earlier. First is the issue of legalism. In the specific context that occasioned Paul's writing to the Galatians, legalism was the claim of the Judaizers that one may be saved by faith in Jesus but must be kept by the Law of Moses. That is a problem with many churches today, even if circumcision is not the specific legalistic requirement in question. Second, legalism is a specific application of a more general issue, namely, the fact that there are only two types of religion in the world: man-made religions that are based on the premise that one's salvation (God's favor) is earned by one's own efforts in doing good deeds or following man-made rules and regulations (which may not necessarily be the Law of Moses), i.e., the religion of "works," versus Christianity, which is based on what Christ has done for us, i.e., the religion of "grace." Both of these issues were discussed above regarding **Gal 2:1-5, 15-21**, and **3:1-5**. They are related to the third issue—the issue of Jewish exclusivism—which was discussed above regarding **Gal 2:11-14**. Legalism or any form of works-based religion effectively overturns the New Covenant and places people back under the Old Covenant. Further, this has implications regarding our behavior: only the gospel is truly inclusive; but legalism of any sort (whether it is the Judaizers in Galatia or man-made works-based religions today), by its very nature excludes those who do not meet the proper legalistic requirements or who are not members of the proper race or tribe.

The problem of any works-based religion (whether related to salvation or sanctification) is highlighted by Paul's quotation in **v. 10** from **Deut 27:26** that whoever does not abide by and perform *"<u>all things</u> written in*

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the book of the law" is cursed. James indicated the same thing in **Jas 2:10** where he said, *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in <u>one point</u>, he has become guilty of <u>all</u>."* The fact is that no one ever has or can perfectly obey the law; consequently, everyone is under the curse.[12] In **v. 11** Paul quotes **Hab 2:4** (*"The righteous man shall live by faith"*). Kim Riddlebarger notes that Habakkuk is saying, "It is only through faith that one receives righteousness and will live" (Riddlebarger 2003: n.p.). Since that is true, it is "evident" (clear; plain; obvious) that no one can be justified by obedience to the Law.[13]

Paul reinforces this in **v. 12** by quoting **Lev 18:5** (*"he who practices them [God's statutes and judgments] shall live by them"*) to make the point that *"the Law is not of faith."* It might appear that **Lev 18:5** is asserting that one may be saved by doing the works of the Law (since both **Hab 2:4** and **Lev 18:5** use the word "live"). However, Paul is setting this verse in opposition to **Hab 2:4**. The reason is that Paul is looking at faith versus works and the law in the context of redemptive history. He introduced this earlier in this chapter by referring to Abraham, and he will expand on this throughout the rest of the chapter. When Paul says *"the Law is not of faith,"* he is saying that the entire Mosaic Covenant (including the Law which was part of that covenant) "belongs to a different redemptive epoch than does the gospel" (Silva 2007: 804; see also Garlington 1997: 101). Paul will go on to point out that the Law of Moses came 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant and could not annul that covenant which was based on Abraham's *faith* (**Gal 3:17**); thus, in one sense, the Law came *after* the principle of faith.[14] On the other hand, **Gal 3:23-25** establish that the Law came before the coming of Christ and was designed to *lead us* to faith in Christ; thus, in another sense, the Law came *before* the time of faith. In either case, the Law is separate and distinct from faith and, therefore, *"the Law is not of faith."*

More important than the *timing* of the Mosaic Covenant and the Law with respect to faith is the fact that the Mosaic Covenant and the Law had entirely different purposes than the gospel. In **v. 10** the quotation from **Deut 27:26** pointed out that "works" and "the Law" relate to "doing," as opposed to "faith" which relates to "hearing" (**Gal 3:2, 5**) and "believing" (**Gal 3:6**). Todd Bordow summarizes, "The principle of the Mosaic law and the principle of the Gospel are opposed to each other. The means by which the typological and temporary blessings of the Mosaic covenant would come was through the works of the Law. The rewards for obedience were the typological blessings of the land of Canaan. The curses would be judgment on the people through exile out of the land. But then Christ came. That which the Mosaic covenant pointed to had arrived. That which was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham had arrived. Now the principle of the gospel is opposed to that of the Mosaic Law. Now we are under grace. This is Paul's point in Galatians 3. The merit that earns the blessings of this covenant is not our obedience, but Christ's obedience. All the benefits of this covenant come to us through faith. We receive the benefit of this covenant not through our works, but through faith. And God continues to administer the benefits of this covenant by the means of faith. Thus all the blessings Christ won for us, including our sanctification, come to us through faith." (Bordow 2018: n.p.)[15]

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[12] John Piper makes the important point that, in the context of Galatians, "The curse in verse 10 is not because you *fail* to do the works of the law. It is because you *do* them. The advice of the Judaizers to supplement faith with 'works of the law' has exactly the opposite effect from the one intended—it brings a curse, not a blessing. It was when Peter started *keeping* the dietary laws that Paul said he was out of sync with the gospel and transgressing the law. It was when the Judaizers wanted to *keep* the command to circumcise Titus in 2:3 that Paul said the truth of the gospel was about to be compromised. The problem with the Judaizers is not their failure to follow the detailed statutes of the law; the problem was that they missed the larger lesson of the law, namely, that without a new heart (Deut. 30:6, 7) and without the enablement of God (Deut. 4:30, 31; 5:29; 29:4) and without faith (Ex. 14:31; Num. 14:11; 20:21; Deut. 1:32) all efforts to obey the law would simply be legalistic strivings of the flesh." (Piper 1983a: n.p.)

[13] Paul had earlier made the same point in **Gal 2:16** (see also **Rom 3:20**). Silva adds that Paul's earlier quotation of **Gen 15:6** (*"Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"*) and the quotation here from **Hab 2:4** (*"The righteous man shall live by faith"*) may in fact be dealing with the same thought—the nature of true, saving faith: "The prophet [Habakkuk] was exhorting the people of Judah to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, whose faith was not a momentary act, but rather a whole life of persevering obedience (see esp. Gen. 22, which is the basis for James 2:21-24). Faith involves waiting for fulfillment and thus is always in danger of being shaken; therefore, steadiness and constancy are of its essence." (Silva 2007: 802)

[14] The "faith" at issue here is not just a general principle or even "faith in God in general," but is faith in Jesus Christ, belief in the gospel. **Gal 3:8** indicates this when it says that God *"preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham"* (see also **John 8:56**, *"Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad"*).

[15] It is important to realize that The Mosaic Covenant did not forgive sins or give eternal life. The New Covenant would be an everlasting covenant in which God would write his law in His people's hearts, His people would truly know the Lord, and He would forgive their sins and remember them no more (**Jer 31:34**; see also **Jer 32:38-40; 50:4-5; Ezek 11:14-20; 36:24-32; 37:15-28**). The New Covenant which Jesus inaugurated in his blood (**Luke 22:20**; see also **1 Cor 11:25**) gives eternal life (**Rom 6:22**). The "newness" of the New Covenant "must not be underestimated; it incorporates novel

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Rom 10:4 tells us that *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."* The Greek word for "end" is *telos,* which means termination, completion, or goal. Zodhiates explains the meaning of *telos* in **Rom 10:4**: "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. This means that the Law as a demanded obligation has come to an end because Jesus has fulfilled its demands and imparted His righteousness to those who believe. Christ has freed believers from its tyranny. The standards of righteousness come to us now not from without by imposition, but from within by the Spirit who writes the Law upon our hearts." (Zodhiates 1993: *telos,* 1376-77) Since this (Christ; the gospel) is the eschatological end-point of the Law, it is what the entire law of Moses was pointing to. Garlington concludes by explaining why Paul's quote of **Deut 27:26** in **Gal 3:10** reveals how the coming of Christ into the world changes the redemptive-historical relationship of the Law, God's blessing, and God's curse: "It is role reversal resulting from the eschatological situation that opens an avenue of understanding to the problem posed at the beginning of this essay, that is, whereas Gal. 3.10a pronounces a curse upon anyone who would attempt to live by the Torah, the biblical text to which Paul appeals, Deut. 27.26, affirms just the opposite: the curse falls not on those who do the Law, but on those who fail to do it (Gal. 3.10b). . . . That is to say, in their very keeping of the law, the opponents have not kept it, because they have not 'upheld' it in its eschatological design, that is, to point Israel to Jesus of Nazareth as the one who has done away with the barriers of separation between nations. Their 'infidelity' thus consists in their retention of a Torah that *ipso facto* was nationalistically restrictive. To state it yet another way, it is because the opponents retain their identity as Jews of the Mosaic stripe that they have failed to 'do the law'." (Garlington 1997: 120)

By seeking to retain their Jewish distinctiveness based on the Law of Moses, the Judaizers were acting contrary to the eschatological function of the law which was designed to apportion blessing and curses according to one's stance toward and relationship with Jesus Christ. The Judaizers' (or any legalist's) attempt to supplement God's grace through faith by adding legal requirements to what Christ alone has done is contrary to the gospel and is contrary to the purpose of the law itself (which was to reveal our absolute dependency on Christ alone). Therefore, even if a person was able to *perfectly* follow any additional legal requirements, he or she would still be under God's curse because he or she would be acting against God, against Christ, and against the purpose of the law by trying to earn his or her salvation by his or her own works. Thus, from a theological and motivational standpoint, adding any "works of the law" to what Christ alone has done places one under the curse. Of course, from a practical standpoint the fact that no one (except Christ) has been or ever will be able to fully obey the law also places the person attempting to do so under the curse. The *only* alternative which can bring life is God's grace alone through our faith alone in what Christ alone has done.

Verses 13-14 give us the solution to the inadequacies of the law and the curse it brings: Christ and what he accomplished on the cross. In **v. 13** Paul quotes from **Deut 21:23** (*"cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"*). The Greek word translated as "tree" is *xulon* which literally means "wood." In this context it refers to the cross and is so used in **Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29**; and **1 Pet 2:24**, all of which refer to Jesus hanging on the cross. By bringing the two quotes from Deuteronomy together in this passage (i.e., **Deut 27:26** in **v. 10** and **Deut 21:23** in **v. 13**), Paul is saying that *Jesus bore God's curse for us* on the cross. This means that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by himself paying the penalty for our sins that otherwise we would have to pay (but never could). Because of that, God will never hold our sins against us (since Christ has borne them and the punishment they deserve on himself). "It is only because of Christ's becoming a curse *for* us, therefore removing the curse *from* us, that we can be justified by faith and become Abraham's children" (Riddlebarger 2003: n.p.). The reason he did that is stated in **v. 14**, namely, that in Christ we would have the blessing of Abraham, specifically, the promise of the Holy Spirit.[16] In other words, Christ became a curse for us so that we would receive the blessing promised to Abraham, because when we are united to Christ by faith we are the true children of Abraham.

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dimensions that reflect a radical discontinuity with the past (cf. Jer. 31:32): a complete removal of sin (Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36: 29, 33); an inner transformation of heart (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26); an intimate relationship with God (Jer. 31:34a; Ezek. 36:27)" (Williamson 2007: 180). The typological nature of the different aspects of the Old Covenant and their fulfillment in Christ and the church are discussed in detail in Menn 2009-2018: 26-93.

[16] The original promise to Abraham did not mention the Holy Spirit. However, "Paul conceives of the fulfillment of that promise as constituted above all in the bestowal of the Spirit upon those who have faith. It is manifest that in Paul's thinking the blessing of justification is almost synonymous (it is certainly contemporaneous) with the reception of the Spirit. Thus all of the blessings of the promise, the forgiveness of sin, the imputation of righteousness and the 'right standing' before God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, come to us only through the doing and dying of Jesus Christ and are received ***only*** by means of faith." (Riddlebarger 2003: n.p.)

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On the other hand, to reject the complete sufficiency of Christ and what he accomplished on the cross—to maintain that anything other than or in addition to faith in what Christ has done is necessary for one's salvation (as the Judaizers were doing)—is to place oneself under a curse. Garlington explains why: "Deut. 21.23 and 27.26 correspond to [Paul's] own curse of Gal. 1.8-9, which could be rendered, 'Cursed be any man who is fundamentally disloyal to the gospel'. There is, one might say, not only 'the curse of the law', but as well 'the curse of the gospel', a curse pronounced against those who would revert to the law. So ironically, the curse of the gospel is the eschatological curse of the law imposed on those who prefer it over the Christ of Paul's proclamation." (Garlington 1997: 119)

There are two important practical aspects of this:

- First, in **v. 14** Paul recounts that God had promised to bless the Gentiles (or "nations") through Abraham (see **Gal 3:8**; see also **Gen 12:3; 17:4-6; 18:18; 22:18; Acts 3:25**). After talking about the blessing of Abraham that would come to the Gentiles, Paul then says *"so that <u>we</u> would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."* Even though Paul himself was a Jew, he was equating himself with the Gentiles—even calling himself a Gentile. That demonstrates the radical, equalizing power of the gospel. As Paul will later say, *"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"* (**Gal 3:28**; see also **Col 3:11**). This brings home why the Judaizers and Peter were so wrong in **Gal 2:11-14**. Their Jewish exclusivism was directly contrary to the gospel. The same is true of exclusivism of any sort in the church and among Christians (e.g., exclusivism based on race, tribe, socio-economic background, or other similar considerations).
- Second, what puts us in God's blessing or under God's curse "is not so much what you do as the spirit in which you do it. Circumcision may be a 'work of law' [**Gal 2:1-5**] or an act of love which flows from faith [**Acts 16:3**]. Subjecting yourself to certain dietary restrictions may be a 'work of law' [**1 Cor 8:7**] or a free act of love which comes from faith [**Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 8:13**]. Sunday School teaching, preaching, anti-abortion sit-ins, nuclear freeze demonstrations, metro-foodshare involvement, your own job—all these *may* be 'works of law' which we do in our strength, to move God's favor our way, or they may be done in humble reliance on the strength which God freely supplies that in everything he may get the glory. The decision of curse or blessing hangs on *how* you obey [or, one might say, *why* you obey] and who gets the credit." (Piper 1983a: n.p.)

- **<u>3:15-24—</u>**<u>The purposes of the law.</u>

In the next three subsections Paul continues to discuss the significance of the Covenant with Abraham and the Law of Moses in their redemptive-historical framework. It is important to observe that God's dealings with Abraham and Moses were based on two different principles. To Abraham God gave a *promise*; to Moses God gave a *law*. A *promise* is God's saying, "I will…"; a *law* says, "you shall…" and "you shall not…" A *promise* is to be *believed*; a *law* is to be *obeyed*. Further, when the Covenant with Abraham was ratified God himself was the guarantor that the covenant would be fulfilled (see **Gen 15:7-18**; Menn n.d.: Gen 15:1-18-"The Greatest Prophecy in the Bible"). On the other hand, the Israelites swore that *they* would fulfill the Law of Moses (**Exod 24:3**). Paul's point is that Christianity is the religion of Abraham. As we will see, the law serves a purpose, but the promise and the law should not be confused or mixed.

- **<u>3:15-18—</u>**<u>The law cannot annul the covenant with Abraham.</u>

> ***[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. [16] Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. [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. [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.***

The word for "covenant" is the Greek word *diathēkē,* which is the same word used for a person's "will" or "testament." When Paul begins this section by saying that he speaks in terms of human relations, a person's will is what his readers would have had in mind. The significance of this is that no one other than the testator can set aside or change a person's will and "under some ancient legal systems, even a testator could not cancel a

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valid will nor add a codicil" (Mikolaski 1970: 1098). This is significant in three related ways:

- First, since a human will could not be set aside or changed, how much more must God's covenant remain unalterable.
- Second, in **v. 16**, although the word "seed" (like the word "sheep") can refer to a group or an individual, Paul specifies that the covenant with Abraham did not refer to Abraham's natural seed (descendants) but finds its fulfillment in one special seed, namely, Christ. Paul's point is that, even if the Israelites had been capable of fulfilling the law (which they were not), they would not have been the fulfillment of the covenant. Instead, "the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled by a personal deliverer, not by a legal code followed by many" (McClelland 1989: 1013).
- Third, **vv. 17-18** point out that a promise and a law are two different categories of things; they have different purposes and functions. The "testament [God's "will" or covenant and promise to Abraham] belongs to Abraham and to his seed. It comes by way of a gift and invests those taking part in it with the rights of inheritance. The testator designates his heir and arranges that at a predetermined time he shall receive the specified promise (Gal. 4:2)." (Zodhiates 1993: *diathēkē,* 427). Since inheritance is based on promise and faith, a law given later to someone else [Moses and the nation of Israel] cannot invalidate a previously-ratified covenant and promise and the rights of inheritance given by that covenant and promise.

- **3:19-22—**The law reveals our sinfulness.

[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 would come to whom the promise had been made. [20] Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. [21] Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. [22] But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Since Paul has just told us what the law cannot do, he now explains what the purpose of the law is. In **v. 19** he says that the law *"was added because of transgressions."* Riddlebarger explains, "Paul is not giving us the *cause* as to why God gave the Law, 'because of transgressions,' but instead, Paul is revealing to us the effect of God's giving to us the law, literally 'to make wrongdoing a legal offense.' This means that the law was not given to us to correct our sinfulness. Instead the law was given to us to demonstrate our sinfulness." (Riddlebarger 1998a: 4-5) This is indicated by Paul's use of the word "added." In other words, people already were sinners before the law was "added," but the law revealed that our sins actually were "transgressions," i.e., a revolt against the holy will and authority of God himself.

Paul then shows the inferiority of the Law of Moses compared to the promise given to Abraham. He does this in three ways:

- First, he points out that the law was only temporary. The Law of Moses was in effect only *"until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."* That "seed," of course, was Christ. This means that those who try to put Christians back under the Law of Moses fundamentally do not understand salvation history and God's plan of redemption. The temporary nature of the Law of Moses is an important part of the redemptive-historical perspective that Paul began stressing in **chapter 2** and the beginning of **chapter 3**.
- Second, the reference to the "mediator" in **vv. 19-20** probably refers to Moses (see **Exod 20:19; 32:10-14; Deut 5:5**). The point here appears to be that "the law was given to the people through indirect, intermediary means, rather than directly from God, as in the case of the promise made to Abraham. Thus, in this sense, Paul can say that the law is inferior to the promise." (Riddlebarger 1998a: 5) Further, "this mediator represents the people as those who are under obligation to uphold the Law. He does not mediate for God (who is 'one') but for the people (who are 'many', v. 20). Because he is mediator of a covenant on behalf of the many ('seeds') this covenant is not in the line of the promise which was given to Abraham on behalf of the one ('seed'). Hence the Law is only temporary, instituted until the coming of the one seed (v. 19b)." (Belleville 1986: 55-56)
- Third, the law was *not* able to *"impart life"* (see also **2 Cor 3:6**); if the law had been able to impart life, *"then righteousness would indeed have been based on law."* This is an important point, both for the Judaizers of Paul's day and any kind of legalist today. The Law of Moses or any man-made laws, rules, or regulations only tell people what they are supposed to do or not do. However, the law does not give people the ability to obey the law. The law does nothing to change the sinful desires of the heart from which sin

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proceeds (see **Matt 15:16-19; Mark 7:14-23**). Indeed, as Paul points out in **Rom 5:20** and **Rom 7:5, 8, 11** that the law actually stimulates the desire to sin and thereby increases transgressions! Consequently, the law cannot and does not save people.

In **vv. 21-22** Paul ends this subsection where he began it in **v. 19**. In **v. 21** he notes that the law is not contrary to the promises of God. Instead, as he had indicated in **vv. 17-18**, Paul is stating in **vv. 21-22** that the purpose and function of the law are not contrary to but are different from the purpose and function of the promise. God's law, as stated in the Scripture, had revealed his will. It thereby shows that "all men and women are the children of Adam, who constantly and consistently, whether in thought, word and deed, willfully, rebelliously and continuously, violate the revealed will of God, and in effect taking them captive to the bondage of sin. The law renders all of us 'prisoners' of sin." (Riddlebarger 1998a: 6; see **Rom 3:9-20**) Because we are all sinners who cannot escape from our sinfulness on our own, we are all rightly under the condemnation of God.

The universality of humanity's problem (our enslavement to and imprisonment by sin) is consistent with the universality of the promised rescue: *"that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."* In other words, because all people are kept in bondage to sin, one purpose of the law is to cause us to see both our sinfulness and our inability to save ourselves. When we see that "we cannot go to heaven on the basis of anything in us or because of anything that we have done" (Riddlebarger 1998a: 8), then a second purpose of the law comes into play: the law shows us that, in order to get to heaven, we need to look outside of ourselves—we need a savior. In short, according to **v. 22**, the law thereby points us to the solution to our problem, namely, *"the promise of faith in Jesus Christ."* Our inability to keep the law and the law's own inability to impart life make the promise of faith in Jesus Christ not only desirable but absolutely necessary! This dual purpose of the law (i.e., revealing our bondage to sin and pointing to our means of escape through faith in Christ) should cause us to "feel" the weight of our sins and our helplessness more acutely but, at the same time, see Christ and our hope of salvation as more sweet. There is a practical implication of this in our relationships with others, "It is only when God's wrath and vengeance are hanging as grim realities over the heads of one's enemies that something of what it means to love and forgive them can touch our hearts" (Bonhoeffer 1997: 157).

- **3:23-24—**The law was a custodian to lead us to Christ.

  [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. [24] Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

These two verses emphasize what had been said in **vv. 19-22**, namely, that the law kept us in custody and was only temporary until Christ came (**vv. 23-24**). Note that **vv. 23-24** repeatedly contrast "the law' and "faith." Paul has made this distinction again and again throughout **chapter 3**. By continually showing that "the law" and "faith" are in opposition to each other, he is showing that the Judaizers (or any law-or-works-based religion) are contrary to the very nature of Christianity itself, in which salvation and one's relationship with God are not based on the law or one's works but are based on the promise of God and are received by God's grace through faith alone.

These verses add one more important detail concerning the nature of the law, namely, that the law was our "tutor" (or "schoolmaster" or "custodian" or was "in charge" of us). The word "tutor" ("schoolmaster"; "custodian"; "in charge") is the Greek word *paidagōgos.* A *paidagōgos* "was a domestic slave within the household, whose task it was to oversee the activities of the children in the family from infancy to puberty. . . . He was also responsible for inculcating proper behavior and for teaching good manners. This supervisory role involved rebuke and punishment for wrong conduct. . . . The child was under the control of his *paidagōgos* all his waking hours. When, however, he reached the age of maturity he was released from his *paidagōgoi*; they no longer 'ruled over' him." (Belleville 1986: 59-60; see also Danker 2000: *paidagōgos,* 748).

The reference to the law as a *paidagōgos* again highlights Paul's redemptive-historical perspective. As with a *paidagōgos* in Greco-Roman society, "The Law [held] us in an authorized custody. It hem[med] in our freedom and supervise[d] every aspect of our lives. . . . We [were] 'under' its authority. It [was] a necessary supervision because we [were] also held in the custody of sin's prevailing influence." (Belleville 1986: 60) Being *"under a paidagōgos"* (**Gal 3:25**) is consistent with and equivalent to being *"under the law"* (**Rom 6:14-15; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 3:23; 4:4-5, 21; 5:18**), *"under guardians and managers"* (**Gal 4:1-2**), *"under the elemental things of the world"* (**Gal 4:3**), and *"under a curse"* (**Gal 3:10**), because we were *"under sin"* (**Gal 3:22**).

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That was the state of people (specifically, OT Israel) before Jesus came to earth. Israel was a minor child in God's plan of salvation and, because of its innate sinfulness, needed the custody and discipline of the law to prepare it for the coming of the Messiah and savior, Jesus Christ. In a more general sense, that is also the state of all of unregenerate humanity who seek to rely on man-made laws, rule, regulations, and their own works to try to obtain God's favor. Paul therefore turns to the epoch-changing nature of Christ's coming into the world in the next section.

- **3:25-4:7—**In Christ we are no longer slaves or children under a custodian, but are redeemed, adopted, sons and heirs of the Father.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.
4 1Now 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, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

In this section, Paul announces the effect Christ's coming into the world has with respect to our relationship to the law. He then goes on to demonstrate the effects Christ's coming into the world has with respect to our relationships with God and other people.

Verse 25 makes the momentous announcement, *"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."* In other words, "the age of majority has now arrived. The age of law as *paidagōgos* is past." (Belleville 1986: 60) Faith is able to do what the law never could do. The reason is that the *object* of our faith—Jesus Christ—was able to do for us what we never could do for ourselves. He was *"born under the law"* (**Gal 4:4**), but he alone never sinned and perfectly fulfilled the law. That is why the ultimate purpose of the law was to *"lead us to Christ"* (**Gal 3:24**). We are no longer *under* the law because we no longer *need* the law to supervise us as our custodian. The law has been fulfilled by our new, true Lord with whom we are united by faith (i.e., we are now *"clothed with Christ,"* **Gal 3:27**; *"in Christ Jesus,"* **Gal 3:28**; *"belong to Christ,"* **Gal 3:29**). What Christ did is the central fact of history. Consequently, the entire program of the Judaizers—to convince Christians to, in effect, put themselves back under the Law of Moses by submitting to circumcision and other Jewish practices required by the Law—not only is foolish, because the age in which those practices were required has now passed, but amounts to overturning the entire plan of salvation history and the very purpose of the Law itself!

While **Gal 3:25** shows us that justification by faith in Christ means we are no longer *"under the law"* but are *"in Christ,"* **Gal 3:26—4:7** give us four results of what being in Christ means for us in our relationships with God and with others.

- First, in Christ we are all *"sons of God"* (**3:26-27; 4:5-7**).[17] In context, Paul's use of "we" **Gal 3:25** and "you" in **Gal 3:26-27** primarily refers to Jews and Gentiles. Riddlebarger observes, "It is Jesus Christ who unites Jew and Gentile into one body through faith alone. But it is the Judaizers who instead seek to divide Jew and Gentile. This explains, in part, why the efforts of the Judaizers to divide what God had joined together in one body, were seen to be so utterly destructive by the apostle." (Riddlebarger 1998b: 1-2)

  Paul's calling all who are in Christ *"sons of God"* has equal applicability to women as it does to men; indeed, it is particularly significant for women. The reason is that in OT Israel, only the sons inherited their father's property; daughters could only inherit if a father died without any sons (**Num 27:1-11; Josh 17:3-6**). Now, in Christ, women have equal status with men as *"sons of God"* and are *"fellow heirs of the grace*

[17] Paul refers to baptism in **Gal 3:27** because "it is baptism which marks our entrance into Christ's church since baptism is the visible sign and seal of an invisible spiritual reality, namely regeneration and the forgiveness of sins. . . . Therefore, through faith in the promise God makes to his people, the one baptized is to be regarded as regenerate and as though their sins have been forgiven." (Riddlebarger 1998b: 2) Or, to put it another way, faith *secures* our union with Christ; baptism *signifies* it.

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of life" (**1 Pet 3:7**). In **2 Cor 6:18** Paul applies the Davidic Covenant to the church. In that verse he quotes **2 Sam 7:14**, where God made a promise concerning David's son Solomon (*"I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me"*). However, Paul changes the wording of the promise to *"I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me."* He does this to emphasize the equality which all people—males and females—now have as God's "sons" in Christ.

Gal 4:5 states another important aspect of this when it talks about Jesus redeeming us *"that we might receive the adoption as sons."* Adoption speaks of our being incorporated into God's family. Thus, adoption goes beyond justification (salvation). Justification relates to our change of "legal" status before God, i.e., we who were condemned as sinners are now found "not guilty" because Christ bore our guilt and paid the price for our sin himself. Adoption also has a legal dimension, i.e., we are now legally members of a new family. But adoption goes beyond that. Whereas justification deals with God in his capacity as our judge, adoption deals with God in his capacity as our Father. The ideas of family, love, closeness, and affection are all connoted by the concept of adoption. As adopted sons of God, "we who are by nature children of wrath and under God's curse, not his promise of blessing, can now draw near to God in intimate fellowship" (Ibid.: 7).

The concept of adoption is central to Christianity itself. This is another reason Paul's discussion throughout Galatians has had a redemptive-historical focus. Thus, adoption is the goal of predestination (**Eph 1:5**). The fullness of God's redeeming work in Christ is seen in adoption (**Gal 4:4-5**). The extent of God's love (in turning slaves into sons) is revealed in adoption (**Gal 4:6-7; 1 John 3:1**). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is expressed in terms of adoption (**Rom 8:15**). And the ultimate consummation of God's plan for us is discussed in terms of adoption (**Rom 8:23**).

There are practical implications of this. To meditate on the importance and centrality of adoption—and specifically of God's adopting *us* into his family—should cause us to become grateful, devoted, and faithful Christians. Further, our faithfulness should not only be based on our gratitude for what God has done to us, but our lives of faithfulness should be lived for the sake of our Father and for the sake and benefit of our new, adoptive family.

- Second, in Christ we are all one (**3:28**). The radical nature of Christianity, which undercuts the entire theology of the Judaizers, is stated in **v. 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"* (see also **Col 3:11**). Paul is stating very clearly that there are no racial, ethnic, tribal, gender, or socio-economic limits to Christ's kingdom or barriers or divisions within Christ's kingdom. In the Old Covenant, Israel was God's "chosen people" (**Deut 7:6**). Under the Old Covenant, Jews and Gentiles were divided. In the physical Temple there was an actual wall separating Jews from Gentiles. There also were separate areas for men and women, priests and lay people. In the new, true temple of the church, the division between Jews and Gentiles has been eliminated. Together as *"one new man"* the church is *"growing into a holy temple in the Lord"* (**Eph 2:11-22;** see also **Rom 3:22; Gal 2:11-14**). In Christ all are equal, regardless of sex, ethnic background, economic status, language, or other physical characteristics (**1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Rev 5:9; 7:9**).

This is paralleled by the fact that there are no geographic limits to Christ's kingdom. The book of Revelation points out that Christ has purchased with his blood men and women out of *"every tribe and tongue and people and nation"* (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**). In **John 4:21, 23** Jesus said, *"An hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . But an hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."* Jesus also said, *"Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst"* (**Matt 18:20**). In Christ, people do not have to go to a building (the Tabernacle or Temple) to get close to God; instead, God has come to his people. As a result, now in Christ the church *is* the Temple of God (**1 Cor 3:9, 16-17; 2 Cor 6:16-7:1; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12**; see also **Rev 13:6** where the church is called "His tabernacle").

The church is to be a universal kingdom of equals. In Christ we are united with all of God's people, past, present, and future. We are part of a great family and kingdom that knows no geographic or sociological boundaries. This must be the case since everybody—regardless of ethnic group, tribe, gender, nation, language, or any other distinction—is "in the same boat": we are all sinners, unable to save ourselves by anything in ourselves or anything that we do. We are all completely dependent on the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. We all must depend entirely on what he has done for us. Consequently, we cannot "look down" on or discriminate against anyone else in Christ. That, of course, was why Paul had to oppose Peter to his face in **Gal 2:11-14**. As we saw when we discussed that passage, this issue goes directly to the heart of the gospel. Unfortunately, this issue continues to be a big problem for the church around the world today.

- Third, in Christ we are all Abraham's seed (**3:29**). God had promised Abraham offspring or descendants

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("seed") *"as the dust of the earth"* (**Gen 13:16**), or *"as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore"* (**Gen 22:17**; see also **Gen 15:5**). What Paul has done throughout **Galatians 3** is argue that in the Abrahamic Covenant, Abraham's true, ultimate "seed" is spiritual (from faith), not physical (from physical descent). He makes the same point in **Rom 4:11-18** where he states that the promise to Abraham was made *"not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith."* He reiterates that in **Rom 9:6-8** where he says that *"they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel,"* and *"it is not the children of flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants ['seed']."* That is why Paul has had a redemptive-historical perspective: he has been emphasizing that the Covenant with Abraham—which occurred approximately in 1400 BC—went far beyond Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. It always had in mind Jesus Christ and those of us who are united to Christ by faith—*"from every tribe and tongue and people and nation"* in the world (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**). That is why the Abrahamic Covenant can be viewed as the theological backbone of the entire Bible.

- Fourth, in Christ we are all heirs according to the promise (**3:29; 4:7**). Because Christ is the true seed of Abraham (**Gal 3:16**), all those who are in Christ are also Abraham's true seed and heirs to all the blessings of the promise to Abraham (**Gal 3:29**; see also **Gal 3:18**). Just as he had done in **Gal 3:24-25** regarding the *paidagōgos,* in **Gal 4:1-7** Paul discusses our status as "heirs" in light of the practices of Greco-Roman culture. Under Roman law, a minor, "although theoretically the legal owner of his inheritance, was prevented during his minority from managing that inheritance. . . . While the minor is 'under guardians and stewards' he, like the slave, lacks the capacity of self-representation and self-determination." (Belleville 1986: 62-63) In **Gal 4:3** the reference to *"the elemental things of the world"* suggests "the imposition of regulations and controls that displace self-determination but, like the Law, are not able to impart life (cf. 3.21)." (Ibid.: 68) Or, as Riddlebarger puts it, "the 'basic principles' of the world . . . is the notion that we can be declared righteous before God based upon merit or rewards earned through obedience to the law" (Riddlebarger 1998b: 5). Gentiles exalt these external rules, regulations, and ideas into "gods" even though they are "no gods" (see **Gal 4:8**), just as Jews exalt the Law of Moses into a god.

Now the situation is entirely different. We have seen that the Law was never able to impart life and was only a temporary guardian until Christ came. We receive Christ—and the righteousness he imputes to us—by faith. But Christ knew that even faith on its own does not give us the transforming power we need to live holy lives. Consequently, he told the disciples to wait to receive the *"power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"* (**Acts 1:8**). When the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, our "redemption from slavery" truly became complete. The OT Law was external, written on tablets of stone. Now, as **Gal 4:6** says, *"God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts."* The Holy Spirit lives inside us (**Ezek 36:26-27; John 14:16-17**), the law of Christ is written on our heart (**Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10**), and we ourselves are *"a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts"* (**2 Cor 3:3**). Consequently, "Like the elementary principles of the world, [with] the coming of faith in Christ, the Law's function as guardian and custodian ceases and the Spirit becomes the internal guiding principle." (Belleville 1986: 70)

Christ has brought a tremendous redemptive-historical change in the world: people have been freed from their enslavement to sin, to the law, and to the elemental, controlling things of the world; in Christ people are no longer minors, but adults; and men and women of every tribe and language and nation have been adopted and united as equal members in one great family and kingdom as sons and heirs of God. Yet Christ has done even more than that. **Gal 4:6** says that God has sent his Spirit into our hearts, *"crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* The Aramaic word "Abba" is a term of close, personal affection. Richard Bauckham states, "That unique form of address shows that "the primitive church was aware that in this form of address to God it had a distinctive privilege which it owed to Jesus. In that case it was Jesus' own relationship to God as Abba which he shared with his disciples: their sonship derived from his own." (Bauckham 1978: 249) As a result, *"We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus"* (**Heb 10:19**). In no other religion or worldview do people have an intimate, personal relationship with the almighty God as Jesus gives us. Because of who Jesus is and what he has done, there are now no barriers between us and other people or between us and God himself. In light of this, to try to erect "barriers" such as the requirements of the law or the "elemental things of the world" not only is going in the wrong direction but amounts to a blasphemy against the person and work of Christ.

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- **4:8-20—**Appeals to the Galatians.

Paul has just completed the central section of this book which has reviewed the entire scope of redemptive history. He has shown that in Christ we are no longer slaves or children bound under the Law of Moses or "the elemental things of the world" but are redeemed, adopted, sons and heirs of the Father. However, he is dealing with people (the Judaizers) who want to persuade Christians to go backwards. Therefore, he now makes two appeals to the Galatians to help them see the folly of what they are being asked to do. If we understand the basic issue—that the gospel is the exact opposite of every other religion in the world—we will see that Paul's appeals are as relevant to us today as they were to the Galatians, even though the specific challenges to the gospel today may be different from what the Judaizers were saying the Galatians should do.

- **4:8-11—**An appeal to their status in Christ.

> ***[8] However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. [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 again? [10] You observe days and months and seasons and years. [11] I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.***

Before they came to Christ, the Galatians had been pagans. As such, they *"did not know God"* (**Gal 4:8**). Paul makes the same point in **Eph 2:12** where he says, *"Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* As such, the Galatians were like every non-Christian in the world: *"Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. . . . For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."* (**Rom 1:21, 25**) They followed pagan religious rituals and celebrated pagan "special or holy days." While the specific religious practices of the Galatians may be different from non-Christian religious practices today, there is no difference *in kind* in bowing down to statues of ancient pagan gods versus fasting during the month of Ramadan or trying to earn God's favor by "being a good person or doing good deeds." All such activities are spiritually worthless.

In **Gal 4:3** Paul had said that *"while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world."* Now in **v. 8** he points out that those *"elemental things"* which enslaved us *"by nature are no gods."* In **v. 9** he goes on to say that the *"elemental things"* which enslaved us are *"weak and worthless."* Riddlebarger points out, "The proof that "the basic principles of the world" was a reference to works-righteousness, is the fact that once the Galatians had returned to the "basic principles," immediately, legalism reared its ugly head. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that these false teachers were demanding that their converts observe special feast days and dietary laws in addition to submitting to circumcision as a means of obtaining or perhaps maintaining a justified standing before God." (Riddlebarger 1998c: 3)

The Galatians had abandoned their pagan religious practices for Christianity. However, the Judaizers wanted to bring the rites and ceremonies of *Judaism* into the church. Paul's argument in **vv. 9-10** is that observing Jewish rites such as circumcision, food laws, and the special *"days and months and seasons and years"* of Judaism *are on the same level* as worshipping pagan idols or trying to appease the spirits of the mountains, rivers, and trees. As he said in **Col 2:16-17**, *"No one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ"* (see also **Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10:9-16; Rom 14:1-17; 1 Cor 8:1-9:4; 10:23-30; 1 Tim 4:3-5; Heb 9:9-10**). To a large degree, our *freedom* in Christ is our *freedom from* bondage to such legalisms (which are found in all other religions).

The essence of Paul's argument and appeal is that *"now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again [to practices and things that cannot give life but only enslave you]?"* This is *always* a challenge to the Christian. When most Christians hear the term "backsliding," they think of falling back into particular sins. The backsliding that Paul is discussing here is far more important than Christians committing certain sins. It is "theological or spiritual backsliding." The issue involves returning to some form of "works righteousness," i.e., a mindset or practice of religion by which we think we can earn or keep God's favor by doing certain deeds or following certain rituals other than or in addition to trusting fully in what Christ has done for us. We need to understand that this type of thinking is the "default mode" of all human beings, including Christians. That is why it is always a danger we must be aware of.

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In dealing with this, we need to remember what David Powlison calls the "most basic question which God continually poses to each human heart," namely, "Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight? It is a question bearing on the immediate motivation for one's behavior, thoughts, and feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question. Who or what 'rules' my behavior, the Lord or a substitute?" (Powlison 1995: 35) In other words, we continually need to be asking ourselves, "Who is my true *functional* Lord?" "*Why* am I doing what I am doing?" and "What am I *truly and practically* basing my salvation on?"

The problem with all of us ultimately is theological. Our focus of attention naturally revolves around ourselves. That inevitably leads us to look to ourselves and what we do as primary in obtaining and keeping God's favor, rather than focusing on Christ. Again, the issue goes to the heart of the gospel: "The Gospel says, 'God accepts you just as Christ is. God has "contraconditional" love for you.' Christ bears the curse you deserve. Christ is fully pleasing to the Father and gives you His own perfect goodness. Christ reigns in power, making you the Father's child and coming close to you to begin to change what is unacceptable to God about you. God never accepts me 'as I am.' He accepts me 'as I am in Jesus Christ.' The center of gravity is different. The true Gospel does not allow God's love to be sucked into the vortex of the soul's lust for acceptability and worth in and of itself. Rather, it radically decenters people—what the Bible calls 'fear of the Lord' and "faith"—to look outside themselves." (Ibid.: 49)

That is the essence of Paul's appeal in **vv. 8-11**. We have come to know God through Jesus Christ; we are no longer slaves or children bound under the Law or Moses or "the elemental things of the world" but are redeemed, adopted, adult sons and heirs of the Father. In light of that, how can we go back to a mindset and practices that bind us as children and slaves? To do that fundamentally denies what Christ has done and denies our true status in Christ. That issue faces all of us, both as individuals and as churches.

- **4:12-20—**An appeal to their personal relationship.

> ***12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; 13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 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. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. 18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— 20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.***

Paul now appeals to the Galatians based upon his personal relationship with them. Paul speaks of his bodily illness in **v. 13**. In **v. 15** he says that the Galatians *"would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me."* That indicates that his bodily illness was a problem involving his eyes (which may be Paul's *"thorn in the flesh"* referred to in **2 Cor 12:7-10**). Despite Paul's physical problems, which were a "trial" to the Galatians (**v. 14**), they *"received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself."* Thus, Paul had a close relationship with the Galatians which he appeals to. He still refers to them as *"my children"* (**v. 19**).

However, this close relationship had been adversely affected by the Judaizers (**v. 16**). "In contrast to the way they had received the gospel from Paul when he first preached it to them, the Galatians had become uncomfortable with the truth, since the truth will force them to admit they are wrong and if they accept Paul's gospel they will be forced to remove the Judaizers from among their midst. Since Paul was confronting them with this truth, apparently, some of them who were formerly close to Paul, now regarded him as an enemy." (Riddlebarger 1998c: 5) There is a lesson for us in this. We cannot simply "argue" the gospel into someone. Instead, we should try to develop personal relationships with people which will help to facilitate our witness to them. Nevertheless, we must remember that the ultimate issue is not the relationship itself but the truth of the gospel. We must always "speak the truth in love" (**Eph 4:15**) even if a personal relationship is adversely affected by the truth.

This subsection brings out another point. In **v. 12** Paul begs the Galatians to *"become as I am, for I also have become as you are."* This is consistent with the approach to people he stated in **1 Cor 9:20-22** (*"To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews . . . to those who are without law, as without law . . . to the*

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weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some"). He illustrated this principle in **1 Cor 8:13**, *"If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."* The point of becoming like others is to be able to relate to them. As we relate to people our compassion, love, and teaching should lead them to Christ.

To *"become as I am"* means that our lives should truly reflect Christ. We should all be able to say with Paul *"be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ"* (**2 Cor 11:**1; see also **1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17**). That is why Paul told the Galatians in **v. 19**, *"I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you."* That, ultimately, is the goal of our lives, that we would be *"conformed to the image"* of Jesus Christ (**Rom 8:29**). To be "conformed to Christ's image" means that we think like Christ thought and act like he acted; his values become our values and his priorities become our priorities. This involves every aspect of our lives. In order for this to happen, Christ must be the most important focus of our lives. We need to be people of the Word, so that we know God's values, priorities, and will deeply and intimately. This is the process of sanctification. It is a lifelong process. But the result will be that when people see, speak, and interact with us, they will see, hear, and experience Christ himself speaking and acting through us. There is no higher calling in life than that.

- **4:21-31—**Summary: The whole law/promise distinction is typologically epitomized in Hagar (Ishmael) and Sarah (Isaac); ironically, Israel is Ishmael and Christians are Isaac!

  21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 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. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 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 OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."
  28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 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. 30 But what does the Scripture say?
  "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,
  FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN."
  31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Paul summarizes his entire argument concerning the law and the promise by again going back to Abraham and reviewing redemptive history. Now, however, he looks at the law and the promise typologically.

In **vv. 21-23** he begins by observing that Abraham had two sons: Ishmael by Hagar (a slave woman) and Isaac by Sarah (a free woman). He adds that Ishmael was born according to the flesh (see **Gen 16:1-15**), but Isaac was born according to the promise of God and contrary to fleshly ability (see **Gen 17:15-19; 18:1, 10-14; 21:1-3**). In **vv. 24-28** Paul then makes his allegorical or typological argument. He says that Hagar and Sarah represent two covenants. Hagar is explicitly identified with the Mosaic Covenant (the covenant of law) from Mount Sinai; she corresponds to the physical, earthly Jerusalem, and her children are in slavery (**vv. 24-25**). In light of Paul's earlier discussion in **chapter 3** and the first part of **chapter 4**, those children in slavery would be the Judaizers who still are bound by the law. The covenant Sarah represents is not specifically named (nor is Sarah herself named), but it evidently is the covenant of God's grace and his promise which is based on faith (see **Gal 3:17**). Paul specifically contrasts the *"present Jerusalem"* and its slavery to the law with *"the Jerusalem above [which] is free"* and adds that *"she is our mother"* (**v. 26**). In **v. 28** he concludes the comparison by saying, *"And you brethren [i.e., the Galatian Gentile Christians], like Isaac, are children of promise"* (see also **v. 31**). Given the argument Paul has made throughout **chapters 3-4**, the second covenant represented by the free woman would be the Abrahamic Covenant. However, Paul's argument is that the Abrahamic Covenant finds its fulfillment in Christ; thus, the true fulfillment of the promise to Abraham is the New Covenant, which was prophesied by Jeremiah (**Jer 31:31-34**) and inaugurated by Jesus (**Luke 22:20**).

Paul's contrasting *"the present [physical] Jerusalem"* (**v. 25**) with *"the Jerusalem above"* (**v. 26**) demonstrates that the new Covenant is what Paul has in mind. The prophets had prophesied the restoration of

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Israel and Jerusalem under the leadership of God's anointed king, who would reign from Jerusalem or Mount Zion (e.g., **Isaiah 60-62, 66; Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 34-37**). Although the people had returned from the exile in Babylon approximately 500 years before Jesus, "the people had returned in a geographical sense, but the great prophecies of restoration had not yet come true" (Wright 1996: 126). The theme of restoration of Israel and Jerusalem was taken up in the NT, but the NT writers apply the concept of restoration to the *spiritual restoration of the new or heavenly Jerusalem* by Jesus. We see this in the fact that **Gal 4:26** speaks of *"the Jerusalem above."* **Gal 4:27** then begins with the word "for" (Greek = *gar*) and quotes **Isa 54:1** which in its OT context was talking about Jerusalem as overrun by its enemies and exiled, only to be restored by God. In other words, Paul is taking an OT reference to physical Jerusalem but is saying that the true fulfillment of that verse is spiritual, in the "Jerusalem above" and her free-born "children of promise."[18]

That is exactly how the rest of the NT views Jerusalem. The prophecies of restoration are fulfilled *in Jesus* (**Luke 1:68; 2:36-38**). The new Zion (the restored Jerusalem and Israel) is not identified with a place or with the Law of Moses but with the person of Christ and his people. Thus, **Heb 12:18, 22** say that in Christ we have *"not come to a mountain that can be touched . . . but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem [i.e., the Jerusalem above]."* Further, while the Old Covenant was still in effect, even during Jesus' earthly ministry Jerusalem was called the "holy city" (**Isa 48:2; Dan 9:24; Neh 11:1, 18; Matt 4:4; 27:53**). However, "after that period, the term 'holy city' no longer occurs, for God took up residence not in Jerusalem but in the church; and at Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled not the temple or Jerusalem but the apostles and all those who repented and were baptized (Acts 2:1-4, 38-39). This exegesis is confirmed in Revelation where John describes the new Jerusalem as the holy city (21:2, 10; 22:19). He explains that this is 'the camp of the saints and the beloved city' (20:9) which Jesus calls 'the city of my God' (3:12). The holy city is the spiritual Jerusalem of the saints." (Kistemaker 2000: 437)

Paul applies this typological allegory in **vv. 29-31**. In **v. 29** he talks about those born according to the flesh persecuting those born according to the Spirit. That is evidently a reference to when Ishmael "mocked" Isaac in **Gen 21:9**, because in **Gal 4:30** Paul quotes **Gen 21:10** where Sarah told Abraham to *"cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."* Ben Witherington comments, "In particular it should be remembered that the 'guardian' [*paidagōgos*] was a slave, and so Paul here uses another slave metaphor to describe the effect of the Law" (Witherington 1998: 338). The clear application for the church is to "cast out" the Judaizers and anyone who adds anything to the true gospel of salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

These additions to the gospel can be of almost any kind: in Paul's day, the Judaizers were requiring faith in Jesus + circumcision and obeying the Law of Moses, including observing special days, months, seasons, and years; in Roman Catholicism salvation is a process involving God's grace and a person's faith + good works, baptism, participation in the sacraments, penance, indulgences, keeping the commandments, and avoiding mortal sin; in classic Pentecostalism salvation involves belief + speaking in tongues; in various churches salvation involves belief + obeying various rules and regulations. These additional requirements may be good things. They may be things that Christians should do. Doing them may be evidence of our salvation and not doing them may be evidence that a person is not saved (see **Jas 2:14-26**). But, while these additional requirements may be *evidence* of salvation, the key is that they cannot be made a *requirement* of salvation.

Salvation (i.e., our justification and adoption) is a gift of God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The corollary is that if we truly are "in Christ" and Christ is the Lord of our life, then we need to live accordingly. It is that to which Paul turns in the rest of the book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does one receive the Holy Spirit?

2. What is "sanctification"? How does it occur?

3. What is the relationship between faith and works?

4. What is the Abrahamic Covenant and why is it so important? What did the Abrahamic Covenant look forward

[18] The redemptive-historical use of **Isa 54:1** is indicated by the fact that the overall literary context of that verse includes reference to Abraham and Sarah in **Isa 51:2**. That is the only place in the OT where Sarah is named outside of Genesis. Further, immediately before **Isa 54:1** is the account of the "Suffering Servant" (**Isa 51:13-53:12**), which is a clear reference to Jesus Christ and what he accomplished on the cross (see Menn 2009-2018: 91-92).

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to and who are Abraham's true seed?

5. What is the importance of motive (i.e, *why* we do what we do)? How can one's motive for doing something make the very same act either a blessing or a curse?

6. What are the purposes of the Law of Moses? What could the law do and what couldn't it do?

7. In what ways does being "in Christ" change our relationship to God, to the Law, and to others?

8. Why is the concept of "adoption" important, and what does it imply for us and for how we live?

9. What roles does the Holy Spirit have in the lives of Christians?

10. What is "theological or spiritual backsliding"? Why can it be worse than backsliding or returning to specific sins?

11. In Paul's allegory, how can Hagar, Ishmael, and physical Jerusalem legitimately be said to represent the Mosaic Covenant, Israel, the law, and slavery and Sarah, Isaac, and "the Jerusalem above" legitimately represent the New Covenant, the church, faith, and freedom? In light of Paul's allegory (and in light of his entire argument in chapters 3-4), why do so many people think they will receive a special blessing by visiting modern Israel and Jerusalem, being baptized in the Jordan River, etc.?

E. Gal 5:1-6:10—Freedom in Christ: You were called to freedom, so walk by the Spirit.

- **5:1-26—**You were called to freedom, so do not submit again to slavery to the law or the flesh but walk by the Spirit.

    - **5:1-6—**Do not submit to the law of circumcision, which shows that you have abandoned the grace of the Spirit for slavery to the law.

      [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.
      [2] Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. [3] And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. [4] You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. [5] For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

This subsection establishes the basic principles of our faith and life which Paul will flesh out in the latter part of **chapter 5** and the first part of **chapter 6**. The foundational principle of our faith is stated in **v. 1**, *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free."* This freedom includes freedom from the struggle of trying to keep the law, freedom from the struggle to try to gain or keep God's favor, and freedom from the guilt and shame of our sins because we know that we are accepted by God because of what Christ has done for us. Thus, it frees us to live as God created us to live, free to live an "abundant life" (**John 10:10**) pleasing to God and fulfilling to us, unencumbered by sin and the man-made rules and regulations that bind so many. Again, this principle separates Christianity from every other religion in the world. It also goes against our "default mode" by which we think we can earn or keep God's favor by doing certain deeds or following certain rituals other than or in addition to trusting fully in what Christ has done for us.

That is why Paul exhorts us to *"keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."* His reference to the *"yoke of slavery"* should cause us to remember what Jesus said in **Matt 11:29-30**: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* By exhorting us to *"keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery"* Paul is talking about how we live our lives, namely, not to live a life of legalism, of rules and restrictions, but to be guided by the Word of God through the inner leading of the Holy Spirit.

In **vv. 2-4** Paul speaks of the specific requirement the Judaizers said that Gentile believers had to submit

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to: circumcision.[19] Paul's point is that our lives are either based on grace or law, faith or works. There is no third alternative and the two concepts—grace/faith or law/works—cannot be combined. If a person opts for salvation by works and the law, then *"Christ will be of no benefit to you"* (**v. 2**). Further, **v. 3** points out that a person cannot "pick and choose" which of the requirements of the law to obey. If you place yourself under one of the requirements of the law then you are *"under obligation to keep the whole law"* (see also **Jas 2:10**). In **v. 4** Paul goes on to state that anyone seeking to be justified by the works of the law has been *"severed from Christ"* and has *"fallen from grace."*

Verse 4, like this entire subsection, is a warning. It does not mean that a person at one time could have been the recipient of God's saving grace but then lost that saving grace and became unsaved. Elsewhere Paul makes it absolutely clear that if one is truly "in Christ" (i.e., by God's grace has been justified and adopted) he or she will not lose his or her salvation. For example, **Rom 8:28-30** speaks of an unbreakable chain from God's predestination to his call to our justification to our glorification. **Phil 1:6** says that *"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."* **Eph 2:6** says that those who have been saved and are in Christ have been raised up and are seated with him in the heavenly places. **Eph 1:13-14** add that those who have believed have been sealed by the Holy Spirit who is the pledge or guarantee of our inheritance to the day of redemption. Jesus himself said, *"I will never leave you or forsake you"* (**Heb 13:5**).

For those who are truly in Christ, Paul is saying that to turn from total reliance on Christ will lead one to fall from *experiencing* his grace. The situation is something like those who are weak in faith in **Romans 14** and **1 Corinthians 8**. In those passages Paul is saying that, in Christ, we have the freedom to eat anything we want. However, some who are weak in faith are not aware of our freedom in Christ. Therefore, they doubt and stumble and feel condemned when they eat contrary to the Mosaic food laws or eat meat sacrificed to pagan idols. They are not experiencing the joy of their salvation that comes from experiencing the grace of the Lord day-by-day as they live their lives. As John Piper says, "The key to freedom is *G*od's *r*escuing *a*nd *c*aring *e*xertion in our lives here and now. We are free when God freely comes to help us and we joyfully trust his help instead of turning to the yoke of law." (Piper 1983b: n.p.) On the other hand, Paul also is warning the church not to follow any way of salvation based even in part on works and the law because such a way is "the broad way that leads to destruction" (**Matt 7:13**) which is antithetical to the "narrow way that leads to life" (**Matt 7:14**), i.e., salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ alone. The Judaizers may appear to be saved but their doctrine reveals that they never truly had been born again at all (see **1 Tim 1:19-20; 1 John 2:18-19**).

Paul brings these issues into greater clarity in **vv. 5-6**. In **v. 5** he says that *"we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."* He is telling us that through the Spirit (not the flesh) and by faith (not the works of the law) those who are in Christ have a solid hope. Our righteousness (right standing) with God is sure and secure because it has been imputed to us by Christ, not something we are striving to attain by our own efforts. As a result, our hope to receive the inheritance will be realized because it, too, is based on what Christ has done, not our own efforts. Thus, "the hope of the righteous is markedly different from those who can only hope in the righteousness of circumcision and ceremony—which in effect, leaves them with no hope. They trust in the flesh and in works. They can only look forward to the punishment they deserve under the curse of the law." (Riddlebarger 1998d: 6)

In **v. 6** Paul concludes this subsection by reminding us that *"neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything."* Again, it is something like his discussion of eating food in **Romans 14** and **1 Corinthians 8**. The kind of food you eat doesn't matter. These things should not be issues upon which some Christians judge and condemn other Christians. The important thing, as John Piper said earlier, is to remember that "is not so much what you do as the spirit in which you do it. Circumcision may be a 'work of law' [**Gal 2:1-5**] or an act of love which flows from faith [**Acts 16:3**]. Subjecting yourself to certain dietary restrictions may be a 'work of law' [**1 Cor 8:7**] or a free act of love which comes from faith [**Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 8:13**]." (Piper 1983a: n.p.) The issues are why we do what we do and to whom do we give the credit.

This leads to the final statement in **v. 6** that the most important thing is *"faith working through love."* This is the corollary to salvation only by faith in Christ, because *"faith working through love"* describes the nature of what that true saving faith is. Just as being circumcised—if done in an attempt to gain or keep God's favor—is a sign that the person is *not* saved, Paul here is saying that *"faith working through love"* is the sign that a person *is* saved. "Faith" is more than just a mental "belief" in something. "Faith" does indeed include an important doctrinal component (see, e.g., **Acts 2:22-24, 32-36; Rom 1:1-4; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 15:1-8**). But faith based on trusting in what Christ has done for us does not mean that "now we can do whatever we want." True,

[19] Although in **Gal 2:3** the issue of Titus's not being circumcised had been mentioned, **Gal 5:2** is first statement that circumcision was the primary issue raised by the Judaizers which was dividing the Galatian church.

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saving faith includes important behavioral components (see, e.g., **Eph 2:8-10; Jas 2:14-20; Matt 28:18-20; John 14:23-24**) and affective or devotional components (see, e.g., **John 15:4-11, 12-15; 17:3; 21:15-17**). In other words, true, saving faith involves our whole life and expresses itself through love. Martin Luther put it like this, "Faith must of course be sincere. It must be a faith that performs good works through love. If faith lacks love it is not true faith. . . . To think, 'If faith justifies without works, let us work nothing,' is to despise the grace of God. Idle faith is not justifying faith. . . . Inwardly it [justifying faith] consists in faith towards God, outwardly in love towards our fellow-men." (Luther 1535: re. Gal 5:6). "Saving faith always gives rise to love and love gives evidence of genuine faith" (Piper 1983c: n.p.). If it does not, then it is not true, saving faith. This is so is because love is from God, God is love (**1 John 4:7-8, 16**), and we are to be like Him (**Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18**). In fact, *"We love, because He first loved us"* (**1 John 4:19**; see also **Eph 5:2**). "If anyone ever asks, 'How does the fact that God loves you result in your loving others?' the answer is: The new birth creates that connection. The new birth is the act of the Holy Spirit connecting our dead, selfish hearts with God's living, loving heart so that his life becomes our life and his love becomes our love." (Piper 2009: 157) Thus, love is the primary sign for whether someone truly has been born again or not.

How central love is to Christian relationships (and to Christianity itself) is seen in the following ways:

- So central is love that Jesus said that the two commandments, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,"* and *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* are the foundation for the entire Bible (**Matt 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28**).
- So central is love that *"the one who does not love does not know God"* (**1 John 4:8**), and *"If someone says, 'I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen"* (**1 John 4:20**).
- So central is love that it is linked with the forgiveness of our sins (**Luke 7:36-50; 1 Pet 4:8**).
- So central is love that the "goal" of Christian teaching is *"love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith"* (**1 Tim 1:5**).
- So central is love that the entire law is fulfilled in the statement, *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (**Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14**).
- So central is love that on the night before He died, the "new commandment" Jesus gave His disciples was *"love one another, even as I have loved you"* (**John 13:34; 15:17**).
- So central is love that *"love for one another"* is the one sign that Jesus gave by which *"all men will know that you are My disciples"* (**John 13:35**).
- So central is love that it is the *"more excellent way"* (**1 Cor 12:31**). If one does not have love, he is "nothing" even if he speaks with the tongue of men and angels, has the gift of prophecy, has all knowledge, and has the faith that can move mountains (**1 Cor 13:1-2**). If one does not have love, he gains "nothing" even if he gives away everything he owns to help the poor and even gives up his own body to be burned (**1 Cor 13:3**).
- So central is love that *"fervent love for one another"* is to be shown *"above all"* else (**1 Pet 4:8**).
- So central is love that it is the first of the *"fruit of the Spirit"* listed in **Gal 5:22-23** and summarizes all of the *"fruit of the Spirit"* (significantly, the *"fruit of the Spirit"* is singular, not plural).
- So central is love that it is *"the perfect bond of unity"* which is to be demonstrated beyond all other things (**Col 3:14**).
- So central is love that Scripture calls it *"the royal law"* (**Jas 2:8**).
- The height of love is self-sacrifice: *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends"* (**John 15:13**).
- The law of love is very practical: *"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets"* (**Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31**).
- The Apostles continually appeal to believers on the basis of love and exhort believers to demonstrate love to one another more and more (**1 Cor 8:1; 16:14; 2 Cor 2:8; 8:24; Gal 5:6, 13; Eph 3:17-19; 4:2, 15; 5:2, 25, 28; Phil 2:1-2; Col 2:2; 3:14; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; Phlm 9; Heb 10:24; 1 Pet 2:17; 4:8; 2 Pet 1:7; 1 John 4:7-11; 2 John 5**).

In **Gal 5:13–6:10** Paul will explicate what *"faith working through love"* looks like in practical terms.

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- **5:7-12—**Do not follow those whose teaching is not from the Lord.

> ***[7] You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? [8] This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. [9] A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. [10] I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. [11] But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. [12] I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.***

These six verses form sort of a lengthy parenthetical comment before Paul resumes his main thought and argument concerning our freedom in Christ and the nature of true, saving faith. These verses point out that the Galatians began well. *"Running well"* and *"obeying the truth"* (**v. 7**) amount to a restating of the principle of *"faith working through love." "Running well"* and *"obeying the truth"* go hand-in-hand and reveal that true, saving faith is a living, active, working faith. It is not simply a mental belief but a faith that is put in practice in daily life. It is like what Paul said in **Phil 2:12-13**, *"[12] So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; [13] for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* Notice that Paul says *"work out"* your salvation, not *"work for"* your salvation (see also **Jas 2:14-26**).

Paul then observes that the doctrine of the false teachers is not from God (**v. 8**) but has the effect of leaven, i.e., it spreads throughout the body until the entire church is contaminated (**v. 9**). Nevertheless, he expresses his confidence that the Galatians will not fall off the right path but will continue to be faithful to the true gospel; on the other hand, the false teacher will be judged by God for his heresy (**v. 10**).

Verses 11-12 are Paul's response to what appears to have been a personal attack against him by the Judaizers. The Judaizers apparently were saying that Paul was not opposed to circumcision (see **Acts 16:3** where he circumcised Timothy for reasons of expediency). Such a claim would be taking what Paul said completely out of context. The Judaizers were attributing to circumcision a role and meaning that Paul never taught or allowed. His point in **v. 11** is that "if I really preach circumcision the way the Judaizers do, then why am I being attacked by them? In fact, their position abolishes the sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross."

In **v. 12** he makes a "cutting" comment against his opponents to the effect that, since circumcision is so important to them, they should not stop there but should go all the way and castrate themselves! This is not entirely mean-spirited, since in **Mark 9:43, 45, 47** Jesus said, *"[43] If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. . . . [45] If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell. . . . [47] If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell."* Further, in **Phil 3:2** Paul called similar false teachers "the false circumcision" or "the mutilation." The Greek word is *katatomē* which denotes "a mutilation, a butchering up" (Zodhiates 1993: *katatomē*, 847). Zodhiates states, "Paul thus calls the Jewish teachers 'butchers,' because after the coming of Christ they taught that the outward circumcision of the flesh was necessary to salvation while at the same time they were destitute of the circumcision of the heart" (Ibid.; see also Danker 2000: *katatomē,* 528 [the word applies to "those for whom circumcision results in (spiritual) destruction"]). What Paul is saying in **Gal 5:12** in essence is, "the teaching of the Judaizers amounts to spiritual mutilation; therefore, since cutting the flesh is so important to them, they should be consistent and do to themselves physically what their teaching will do spiritually to anyone who believes and follows it."[20]

- **5:13-15—**Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh; instead, love one another (which fulfills the law).

> ***[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. [14] For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." [15] But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.***

In these verses Paul picks up the main thrust of the argument he began in **vv. 1-6** regarding how we

[20] Paul's argument is reflected in the OT. **Deut 23:1** says, *"No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord."*

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should live our lives in light of the fact that our salvation and lives are based entirely on faith in Christ and not on the works of the law. **Verse 1** had begun, *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free"*; **v. 5** had spoken of the fact that our lives now are *"through the Spirit, by faith"*; and **v. 6** had concluded by mentioning the overall importance of *"faith working through love."* These themes will be developed and explained in **Gal 5:13–6:10**.

In **v. 13** Paul reiterates that the gospel calls us to freedom. He then describes this freedom in a two-fold way: *"do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* This amounts to a description of what *"faith working through love"* means. The first part of the description (*"do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh"*) addresses the fact that Christian liberty cannot be an excuse to justify sinful behavior. The term "flesh" is used in different ways in different contexts. Sometimes it refers to our humanness, sometimes to our physical body. In this context, "the flesh" denotes "a human being's innate and natural capacities, tendencies, and realities. In other words, my 'flesh' is just who I am as a human creature apart from any changes that might be effected in me through divine intervention or re-creation. Since I am innately a rebellious sinner, hostile to God and to everything He is and values, the concept of 'flesh' will usually have a negative connotation. It denotes my innate wickedness, evil, and rebelliousness. We could accurately paraphrase Paul's concept of the 'flesh' in this context as 'innate human sinfulness.'" (Crabtree 2001: n.p.) Paul is pointing out that the gospel is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin. He made the same point in **Rom 6:1-2**: *"[1] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? [2] May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"*

Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin"* (**John 8:34**; see also **Titus 3:3**). Jesus was saying that the practice of sin actively enslaves the person who commits sin. The reason is that sin itself is a power, and it is active (**Gen 4:7** [*sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you"*]; see also **Rom 6:12; 7:8, 11**). Further, the active power of sin is living inside of us (**Rom 7:17, 20-21, 23**). It dwells in the "heart" of people, i.e., in our innermost being, the essence of who we are (**Gen 8:21; Matt 12:34; 15:18-19; Mark 7:20-23; Luke 6:45**). This is known as the power of "indwelling sin." Paul calls it a "law" that is inside of us (**Rom 7:21, 23, 25**). He calls indwelling sin a law within us because "it is a powerful and effectual indwelling principle" which inclines and presses us to act in accordance with what it wants, and every sin we do "increases the principle and fortifies the habit of sinning" (Owen 1979: 7, 27). Indwelling sin desires to rule us (**Gen 4:7**); it reigns and lusts (**Rom 6:12**); it acts unrighteously (**Rom 6:13**); it can master us (**Rom 6:14**); it takes opportunity and produces lusts of every kind (**Rom 7:8**); it deceives and kills (**Rom 7:11**); it wages war and can take us prisoner (**Rom 7:23**).

Even though the law of indwelling sin is within us, the power of sin over us has been broken by Christ (see **Rom 6:6-22**). Now grace reigns through Christ (**Rom 5:21**); we have been freed from sin (**Rom 6:7, 18, 22**); sin no longer has the power to master us (**Rom 6:14**). Instead, God has given Christians a greater power—the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit we no longer have to obey the promptings of the sin within us but now have the ability to resist the temptations to sin and to live in conformity with God's will (**Rom 6:17-18; 7:6; 8:12-14**). Paul's point is that to use our freedom in Christ to obey the "inner law" of sin is the exact opposite of acting in the freedom of faith. It would put us back in slavery just like trying to obtain justification or sanctification through submission to the "outer law" of rules and regulations would put us in slavery. Both are equally contrary to the gospel and are also contrary to what true saving faith means and implies.

The second clause of **v. 13**, *"but through love serve one another,"* gives the "positive" side of what freedom in Christ and true, saving faith mean. Observe the paradox of freedom in Christ: our freedom is not to indulge ourselves and our selfish desires but is a freedom to serve others in love just as Christ served us (see **John 13:3-17**). Why is serving others in love freedom but serving the flesh slavery? "Because *love* is motivated by the joy of sharing our *fullness*, but the *works of the flesh* are motivated by the desire to fill our *emptiness*. The meaning of 'flesh' in the book of Galatians is not the physical part of man, but man's ego which feels a deep emptiness and uses the means within its own power to fill that emptiness. If it is religious, it may use law; if it is irreligious, it may use booze. But one thing is sure: the flesh is not free. It is enslaved to one futile desire after another in its effort to fill an emptiness which only Christ can fill. . . . When we love, we are not enslaved to use things or people to fill our emptiness. Love is the overflow of our fullness. Therefore, love is the only behavior that we can do in freedom. When God frees us from guilt and fear and greed and fills us with his all-satisfying presence, the only motive left is the joy of sharing our fullness." (Piper 1983c: n.p.) That is why **1 Cor 13:5** says that love *"does not seek its own."*

Verse 14 summarizes that the entire law is fulfilled by the statement, *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself."* "'Love your neighbor as yourself' is not a command to love yourself. It is a command to take your natural, already existing love of self and make it the measuring rod of your love for others." (Ibid.) To fully do this we would need to spend the same amount of time, thought, energy, and money acting for the well-being of

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others as we spend acting for our own well-being. This is a very high calling—but this is what Jesus did for us, and we are to be conformed into his image (**Rom 8:29**). This is what the gospel—and what true, saving faith—means and implies for our lives. **Verse 15** gives the counterpart to this, namely, that if you devour one another, you will be consumed by one another. That is a picture of what wild animals do to each other when they are starving. However, in Christ we are not starving but have been justified, adopted, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

In sum, these verses remind us that Christ fundamentally changes us. "The cross liberates from the power of sin, propitiates God's wrath, washes away the guilt and stain of sin, reconciles believers to God, and achieves cosmic victory over deadly spiritual foes" (Demarest 1997: 196). When one comes to Christ, he or she receives a new heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), the mind of Christ (**1 Cor 2:16**), and the Spirit from Christ (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**). Being saved and united with Christ gives Christians an intimate, personal relationship with God through Christ: we can *"draw near with confidence to the throne of grace"* (**Heb 4:16**; see also **Heb 7:19**) because Christ is "in" believers (**John 14:20; 17:23; Rom 8:10; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; 1 John 3:24; Rev 3:20**) and believers are "in Christ" (**Rom 8:1; 12:5; 16: 6, 7, 9-10; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 4:10, 15; 15:18, 22; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:17; 12:2; Gal 1:22; 3:28; 6:15; Eph 1:3; 2:6, 10; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 2:14; 4:16; 1 Tim 3:13; 2 Tim 3:12; Phlm 23; 1 Pet 5:14**). Being saved and united with Christ gives Christians a new motive and means of living. Christ's values and priorities become our values and priorities; he is working in us and through us to make us just like himself (**Rom 8:29; Phil 2:12-13**). Being saved and united with Christ creates a new humanity (**John 3:3; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15**): we are adopted into God's family as his children (**John 1:12; Rom 8:14-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph 1:5; 2:19; 1 John 3:1**) and become deeply related to each other as brothers and sisters (e.g., **Matt 12:50; Acts 1:16; 6:3; 11:29; 12:17; 16:40; 18:18; 21:7, 17; Rom 14:10; 1 Tim 5:1-2**). We are therefore no longer under the external law or enslaved to the power of indwelling sin but are led by the Word of God through the Holy Spirit. Our lives are characterized by *"faith working through love"* which manifests itself as we *"through love serve one another"* by *"loving our neighbor as we love ourselves."* This is how the gospel and true, saving faith look as they are lived out in real life.

- **5:16-26—**The deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are contrasted.

> ***16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 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 may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, 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. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.***
> ***25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.***

By beginning with the word "But," a word of contrast, this major subsection picks up where **v. 15** left off. It shows us how *"through love [we can] serve one another"* and not be *"consumed by one another."* This subsection contrasts what living according to the flesh is like versus living according to the Spirit.

We noted above that the "flesh" refers to our old, "natural," sinful nature which includes the power of indwelling sin. **Verses 16-17** are telling us that when we come to Christ God does not eradicate our old nature but gives us something new and more powerful—the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is received by faith as part of our new birth (**Gal 3:2-5, 14;** see also **Ezek 36:27; John 3:5-8; 14:16-20; 2 Cor 3:3; Gal 4:6; Titus 3:5-7**). The Spirit uses the Word of God and the Body of Christ to enable us to resist the power of indwelling sin and to develop a new nature, one that progressively becomes more like Christ (i.e., the process of sanctification).[21] Consequently, in each Christian there is an inner conflict, because only Christians have two natures (flesh and

[21] "The regenerating or renewing activity of the Spirit of God is analogous to circumcision in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. Circumcision was the outward, tangible sign that one had been chosen to receive God's blessing as a child of Abraham. Under the New Covenant–the Gospel–there is also an outward, tangible sign that one has been chosen to receive the blessing of Abraham. But physical circumcision is not this sign, because the true sign that one is an heir of the true inheritance is not made by human hands, but by the hand of God. The true circumcision is the mark left on our inner beings–our 'hearts'–by the regenerating work of the divine Spirit." (Crabtree 2001: n.p.)

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spirit).[22]

This inner conflict between the flesh and the Spirit is the subject of this entire subsection. Concerning this inner conflict, Kim Riddlebarger makes this important point: "Many times Christians are told that the struggle with sin and any perception of lack of victory, or lack of continual progress, are reasons to doubt the assurance of their salvation, or God's favor towards them. But as Paul makes very clear, it is only the Christian, indwelt by God's spirit, who experiences a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh or 'indwelling sin.' Non-Christians are only 'in the flesh,' hence God's Spirit is not provoking such internal conflicts. Thus the struggle with sin is perhaps the clearest sign that one is actually converted! . . . This is why we must draw our assurance of salvation and God's favor toward us primarily from the promises given to us in the Scriptures, rather than attempting to draw assurance from our own progress in holiness. Some of those who have progressed the farthest in sanctification are also those most dissatisfied with the progress they are making in the Christian life. . . . While we will indeed make progress, it is at times very difficult to gauge it." (Riddlebarger 1998e: 3) John Piper adds, "Conflict in your soul is not all bad. Even though we long for the day when our flesh will be utterly defunct and only pure and loving desires will fill our hearts, yet there is something worse than the war within between flesh and Spirit; namely, no war within because the flesh controls the citadel and all the outposts. Praise God for the war within! Serenity in sin is death. The Spirit has landed to do battle with the flesh. So take heart if your soul feels like a battlefield at times. The sign of whether you are indwelt by the Spirit is not that you have no bad desires, but that you are at war with them!" (Piper 1983d: n.p.)

Concerning the specifics of this inner conflict, **vv. 16-17** and **24** speak of the "desire" of the flesh and the flesh "setting its desire" against the Spirit. The words in Greek are the noun *epithumia* and the verb *epithumeō,* which are often translated as "lust" since they denote strong desire, longing, craving, and lust (Danker 2000: *epithumeō, epithumia,* 371-72; Zodhiates 1993: *epithumeō, epithumia,* 627). The word "passions" (Greek = *pathēmasin*) in **v. 24** is equivalent to *epithumia*. This "lust" does not refer only to sexual or bodily desires but to all sinful desires of our fallen nature. The use of these terms is consistent with the active, powerful nature of indwelling sin. **Verses 19-21** give examples of these passions and lusts. Paul is not giving us an exhaustive list of such fleshly desires but rather representative examples. Note that the passions, desires, and lusts listed in **vv. 19-21**, when fully played out, result in the devouring and consuming one another Paul had mentioned in **v. 15**. Note also that the flesh's sinful passions and desires occur in all areas of both the inner thought-life and the outer, acted-out life: sexual (immorality, impurity, sensuality); religious (idolatry, sorcery); interpersonal (enmities, strife, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, carousing); and personal (jealousy, envying, drunkenness). Paul concludes that *"those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (**Gal 5:21**). The word "practice" (Greek = *prassontes*) suggests things done repeatedly or habitually (Zodhiates 1993: *prassō,* 1209). In other words, the person's life has a worldly, self-centered orientation; it is not a life based on the love of God and the love of one's neighbor. Just as *"faith working through love"* (**Gal 5:6**) is evidence that a person has been born again and is in Christ, so a life characterized by *"the desire of the flesh"* is evidence that the person has not been born again and is not in Christ. That is why, in speaking of this same inner conflict between flesh and Spirit in **Romans 8**, Paul said, *"The mind set on the flesh is death . . . [7] because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, [8] and those who are in the flesh cannot please God"* (**Rom 8:6-8**).

Verses 22-26 contrast letting "the flesh" control our thoughts and actions by showing us the opposite way to live (notice how **v. 22** again begins with the word "But"). This is *"liv[ing] by the Spirit"* and *"walk[ing] by the Spirit"* (**v. 24**). **Gal 5:6** had stressed the centrality of *"faith working through love."* **Gal 5:14** augmented that by saying, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* The only way to do either of those things is to live and walk by the Spirit. To live and walk by the Spirit is characterized by bearing the *"fruit of the Spirit"* (**vv. 22-23**). Paul is clearly contrasting the *"fruit of the Spirit"* with the *"deeds of the flesh"* (**v. 19**): "The 'works of the flesh' are what you do when you 'gratify the desires of the flesh.' The 'fruit of the Spirit' is what appears in your life when you 'walk by the Spirit.'" (Piper 1981: n.p.) Living and walking by the Spirit and living according to the desires of the flesh are the only two alternatives. Paul indicates that in **v. 16** where he says that as we walk by the Spirit new will *not* carry out the desire of the flesh (see also **Rom 8:1-14**).

What is living and walking by the Spirit? **Gal 5:18** speaks of being *"led by the Spirit."* The Spirit is portrayed active, the initiator; the Christian follows His lead. **Verse 17** (ESV) speaks of *"the desires of the Spirit are against [the desires of] the flesh."* This indicates that the Spirit has his own desires. The Spirit implants his desires in our minds in order to transform our "hearts," i.e., our "inner beings," our true selves. The Spirit works to transform "the entirety of my inner reality defined by: the knowledge and understanding of reality I possess;

[22] This is not identical but analogous to Jesus who possessed two natures, human and divine.

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the beliefs I hold; the perceptions, outlooks, and attitudes within me; the commitments I have made; the values I hold; the desires and passions which drive me; and the priorities which obtain in my thoughts, attitudes, actions, and desires. In short, my inner being is the entirety of my subjective life and experience." (Crabtree 2001: n.p.) He may do this directly but typically does this through the means of grace: the Word of God; the Body of Christ; prayer; and the Sacraments. "Walking in the Spirit is participating in the means of grace—Word and Sacrament—as well as things such as prayer and fellowship, the result of which is growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and progressive conformity to his image." (Riddlebarger 1998e: 2)

Verses 16 and **25** speak of "living" and "walking" by the Spirit. Here the role of the Christian is emphasized, namely, we are to actively follow, obey, and live out the beliefs and desires that have been planted in us by the Holy Spirit. Jack Crabtree summarizes, "Dramatically different passions will necessarily translate into dramatically different deeds. What Paul means, therefore, when he says 'walk by the Spirit' is this: to walk by the Spirit is to so conduct oneself that one's life and actions are lived in conformity to the passions and desires which the Spirit of God has miraculously implanted in the heart (subjectivity) of those who are heirs of eternal life. In other words, to 'walk by the Spirit' is to strive to be good in accordance with the hunger and thirst for personal goodness which the Spirit of God has created in the hearts of His elect." (Crabtree 2002: n.p.) Or, as Piper puts it, "*Walking by the Spirit is what we do when the desires produced by the Spirit are stronger than the desires produced by the flesh*" (Piper 1981: n.p.).

To do this, we must be in an intimate, personal relationship with God in Christ, by the Spirit, through faith. Jesus talked about this in **John 15:5** where he said, *"He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit."* Consequently, to "walk by the Spirit" means to stay connected to Christ so that we will receive, know, and then carry out his thoughts, values, attitudes, and desires that are implanted in us by the Holy Spirit. The result will be that we will *"bear much fruit,"* namely, the *"fruit of the Spirit."* We do this—and thereby the Spirit reigns over our flesh—by faith. **Gal 2:20** states, *"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*[23] **Gal 3:5** similarly says, *"Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"* **Gal 5:5** adds, *"We through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."* Piper puts it like this: "*You walk by the Spirit when your heart is resting in the promises of God*. . . . Resting in the promises of God is the pipeline of the Spirit. . . . By meditating on the trustworthiness and preciousness of God's promises until our hearts are free of all fretting and guilt and greed. This is how the Holy Spirit fills and leads. . . . The Spirit does his mighty work in us and through us only by the hearing of faith. We are sanctified by faith alone. The way to walk by the Spirit and so not fulfill the desires of the flesh is to hear the delectable promises of God and trust them, delight in them, rest in them." (Piper 1983d: n.p.). He suggests the following steps to help us consciously walk in the Spirit and know that we are doing so: (1) *Acknowledge* that we are helpless to do good apart from the enablement of the Holy Spirit; (2) *Pray* that God will cause us to know the Spirit's leading and to walk in his ways; (3) *Trust* by faith that the Spirit will in fact deliver us from the power of sin as he has promised and will work in and through us in accordance with his will; (4) *Act* in the way we know is right; and (5) *Thank* God for any virtue attained or any good deed performed. (Piper 1981: n.p.) By resting in God's promises and doing these things we can have assurance that we are walking by the Spirit.

Two other aspects of walking by the Spirit should be mentioned:

- First, **v. 24** says that *"those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."* **Gal 2:20** had said, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."* The difference is that **Gal 2:20** is talking about what happens when we come to Christ by faith. Our old self has been crucified with him (**Rom 6:5-6**), we have been buried with him (**Rom 6:4**), and have been raised with him to our new life in him (**Rom 6:8, 11; Eph 2:5-6**). Now that we are in Christ, we are not the ones being crucified (passive), but we actively crucify "the flesh" (our old, sinful nature and power of indwelling sin). Paul is borrowing Jesus' imagery: *"If anyone wished to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me"* (**Luke 9:23**; see also **Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:27**). We crucify the flesh by listening to the Spirit, trusting the Spirit, and obeying, living in, and walking by the Spirit instead of listening to, obeying, and walking in the desires of the flesh. We do this day-by-day in all the moral decisions we make.
- Second, **v. 25** says, *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."* **Verse 16** also had said to *"walk by the Spirit."* However, the words for "walk" in the two verses are different. The regular word for "walk" is used in **v. 16**, but in **v. 25** the word (Greek = *stoicheō*) speaks of being "drawn up in a line" or "holding to, agreeing with, following, or conforming to a person or thing considered as the standard for

[23] Note that the word "flesh" in this verse is not referring to the old, sinful nature but to his body.

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one's conduct" (Danker 2000: *stoicheō,* 946). Crabtree suggests that to "walk by the Spirit" might be translated "walk in harmony with those desires which the Spirit creates within His elect" (Crabtree 2001: n.p.).

"Crucifying the flesh" and "walking in line or in harmony with the Spirit" are like the two sides of repentance: we turn *from* the bad and turn *toward* the good. Both are necessary. Thus, we need to be ruthless ("crucify"!) in turning from sin and evil whenever our flesh's passions, desires, and temptations rear their ugly heads. Likewise, we must be disciplined in following the Spirit. We need to *"set our mind"* on the things of the Spirit (**Rom 8:5-6**), *"seek the things above"* (**Col 3:1-2**), and *"dwell on these things"* (**Phil 4:8**). We need to be regular in employing the means of grace such as Bible study, prayer, and the church. In short, the Spirit wants to reign over our whole life—our time, money, what we read and watch, our interaction with others, etc. In this way, we will *"not carry out the desire of the flesh"* (**Gal 5:16**).

Two other aspects of the *results* of walking by the Spirit should also be mentioned:

- First, **Gal 5:18** says, *"If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law"* (see also **Gal 5:23**). This entire epistle has been an argument against those who would put Christians under the law. Earlier Paul had pointed out that, in Christ, we are no longer under the curse of the law because *"Christ . . . become a curse for us"* (**Gal 3:13**), and we are no longer enslaved by the law because Christ has set us free (**Gal 5:1**). Here Paul has been talking about *"walking in the Spirit"* versus fulfilling the *"desire of the flesh."* In **v. 17** he was saying that the person in the flesh wants to do the deeds of the flesh, but the law opposes and constrains that *"so that you may not do the things that you please."* However, the law is not opposed to anything a person who is *"led by the Spirit"* desires to do, so the person led by the Spirit can do *anything he pleases* (i.e., *"against such things there is no law,"* **v. 23**). The reason is that the Spirit implants new "passions and desires" in our heart and, *as long as the person is obeying and following the Spirit*, those new passions and desires are all God-honoring.
- Second, the *"fruit of the Spirit,"* which is the result of living and walking in the Spirit, is in the singular, even though it has multiple aspects. This indicates a singularity of purpose and direction of one's life, which is glorifying God in Christ (**John 16:14-15**; see **1 Cor 6:20**). The use of the singular also indicates that all of the fruit grow up together and therefore all should be seen as a person grows in Christ. The fruit are all interdependent. The fact that the fruit of the Spirit is headed by love suggests that the other fruit (joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) are all descriptions of love or of a life lived by *"faith working through love."* In fact, the growing up of all the fruit together is a sign that they are of the Spirit. On the other hand, a person not being led by the Spirit may have some of these characteristics (e.g., peace or joy) from his or her own natural temperament or efforts but at the same time also be characterized by pride or anger or covetousness or lack of self-control. That is why Jesus said that a tree is known and judged by its fruit (**Matt 7:16-18; 12:33; Luke 6:43-45**).

  The use of the word "fruit" is a metaphor of botanical growth. That suggests that growth in Christlikeness, as in a tree or plant, will be gradual, but such growth will be inevitable. Further, the fruit of the Spirit is internal—the fruit are a change of the heart and character of the person. But even though they are internal they will inevitably change the external behavior of the person in all areas of life. Thus, just as the *"deeds of the flesh"* involve and affect all areas of life, so also the *"fruit of the Spirit"* involve and affect all areas of life. However, the results of the two, both within an individual and among people, will be radically different.

Finally, **vv. 25-26** give a summary conclusion to this entire subsection. **Verse 25** tells us that *"if we live by the Spirit,"* i.e., if we have been regenerated, justified, and received our new life by the Spirit, then we ought to *"walk by the Spirit,"* i.e., hear, understand, obey, and live out what the Spirit is telling us. In **v. 26** Paul contrasts this with "boasting, challenging, and envying" one another. All of those things put ourselves at the center, either by magnifying ourselves (boasting), opposing others (challenging), or wanting to be like others (envying). Or to think of it another way, by boasting or challenging we think of ourselves as *better* than others, but by envying we think of ourselves as *worse* than others. Any way one looks at it, the Holy Spirit is not our standard with which we need to agree, follow, and conform. The person who is walking by the Spirit is not motivated either by feelings of superiority or inferiority but does *"nothing from empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard[s] one another as more important than yourselves"* (**Phil 2:3**). While **vv. 19-21** gave perhaps more graphic examples of the *"deeds of the flesh"* than does **v. 26**, boasting, challenging, and envying reveal that the *"desire of the flesh"* can be very subtle. We can try to justify these things. In fact, unless we are diligent we may even fail to see that we have fallen prey to the desire of the flesh. Our life is a spiritual battle. The only way we will overcome is through day-by-day dependence on the Holy Spirit.

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- **6:1-10—**Specific applications of *"faith working through love"* and *"walking in the Spirit."*

While the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22-23**) are specific *results* of walking in the Spirit, the rest of Paul's discussion of *"faith working through love"* and *"walking in the Spirit"* have been general principles. He gave specific examples of what the *"deeds of the flesh"* look like in **Gal 5:19-21** and **26**. The only specific example he gave earlier of *"faith working through love"* and *"walking in the Spirit"* was remembering the poor (**Gal 2:10**). Now Paul gives specific examples of *"faith working through love"* and *"walking in the Spirit."*

- **6:1-5—**Bear one another's burdens.

> ***[1] Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. [2] Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. [3] For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. [4] But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. [5] For each one will bear his own load.***

Verse 1 contrasts the attitudes of boastfulness, arrogance, and envy mentioned in **Gal 5:26** and mentions the proper response Christians should have when others sin, namely, to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness.[24] This flows logically and naturally from the gospel of grace not works that Paul has explained throughout this epistle: "Christians who walk in the Spirit should be willing to come to the aid of those who are struggling with sin since they, of all people, should understand that if God was gracious to them, calling them to faith in Jesus Christ even though there were unworthy sinners, then, they too, should be gracious to others called by Christ into his glorious kingdom through the gospel of Christ crucified." (Riddlebarger 1998f: 2) In fact, our response to others (especially other Christians) who sin reveals whether we really understand the gospel or not.

This can be a big problem in many churches. Often, the first resort (rather than the last resort) of many church leaders is to excommunicate people who have committed certain sins (such as getting pregnant outside of marriage). A church's integrity must be upheld, but often the attitude of church leaders is one of vindictiveness and harshness instead of compassion and gentleness. They often do not exhibit the fruit of the Spirit or recognize that the person who sinned may need help that only a loving church family can give. Their goal is not restoration, but punishment.[25]

It is interesting that in **v. 1** Paul uses the phrase *"such a one"* for the person who has sinned. He uses that phrase on two other occasions in the NT to refer to a person who had engaged in a major sin, the man in **1 Cor 5:1** who had been sleeping with his father's wife. The church in Corinth had not wanted to do anything about the problem, so in **1 Cor 5:5** Paul said, *"I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* Note that the ultimate purpose for "delivering the man to Satan" (i.e., excommunication) was a restorative one: *"so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* The man evidently repented and bore the fruit of true repentance because **2 Cor 2:6-8** tell us, *"[6] Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, [7] so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. [8] Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him."* In other words, the discipline had the desired result, so Paul is saying that the church should readmit him to fellowship, forgive and comfort him, and reaffirm its love for him.

Verses 1 and **4** exhort each of us to *"look to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted"* and to *"examine his own work."* Since this is in the context of sin and temptation, what Paul is doing is restating Jesus' principle in **Matt 7:2-5** that *"in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. [3] Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."*

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[24] The verse says that those who are "spiritual" should restore the person. "That simply means that you should be 'led by the Spirit' (5:18), 'walking by the Spirit' (5:16, 25), 'bearing the fruit of the Spirit' (5:22). It is not a reference to upper-echelon Christianity, but normal Spirit-filled Christianity. Spiritual people are ordinary people relying on an extraordinary Spirit." (Piper 1983e: n.p.)

[25] Principles of church discipline are discussed in Menn 2017: 9-12. Principles and practical guidelines of forgiveness and reconciliation are set forth in Menn 2007-2017.

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Verse 2 continues and expands on the thought of **v. 1** when it tells us to *"bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."* A burden is "anything that threatens to crush the joy of our faith—whether a tragedy that threatens to make us doubt God's goodness [e.g., sickness, or unemployment, or loss of a loved one, or loneliness, or rejection], or a sin that threatens to drag us into guilt and judgment" (Piper 1983e: n.p.). Bearing one another's burdens again is the logical and natural outgrowth of the gospel and the nature of the church. It is the logical and natural outgrowth of the gospel since Christ has born our burden—the burden of our sin with its shame and guilt and penalty which we never could pay. His sacrifice for us is our example for how we should treat others. As he said in **John 13:34-35**, *"[34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* Bearing one another's burdens also is the logical and natural outgrowth of the nature of the church. All believers have been adopted into God's family (**Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5; 2:19**). Therefore, the church is a family (**Matt 12:49-50; 2 Cor 6:18; Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 4:17**). Dhati Lewis puts it like this, "The church is not *like* family; it *is* family. . . . This can be seen by the fact that the word *disciple*, so prevalent in the early part of the New Testament, disappears after the book of Acts. It is replaced by the term *brother* in the rest of the Bible." (Lewis 2015: n.p.) In fact, the church as a household or family is one of the most developed descriptions of the church in the NT. The importance of this is that *families take care of each other*. We need to ask ourselves, "Do I see my brothers and sisters in Christ as my *real* brothers and sisters?" and "Do all of the people in our church feel like they are the beloved members of a loving and caring family?" In short, are we treating our brothers and sisters in Christ with the same love, concern, and *practical* help in bearing their burdens as we would treat our earthly brothers and sisters?

In **v. 2** Paul refers to *"the law of Christ."* This and **1 Cor 9:21** are the only specific uses of that phrase in the NT. However, *"the law of Christ"* is implicit throughout the NT. The "law of Christ" is not only the teachings of Jesus but also that of the NT writers (see, e.g., **John 14:24-26; 16:12-15; 17:8, 18-20; 1 Cor 14:37; Gal 1:11-12; Eph 2:20; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6, 14; Heb 2:3; Rev 1:11**). The law of Christ includes "both general principles and some detailed demands" (Moo 1984: 30). It is "not a code or series of commandments and prohibitions, but is composed of the teachings and the apostles and the directing influence of the Holy Spirit. Love is central to this law, and there is strong continuity with the law of Moses, for many specifically Mosaic commandments are taken up and included within this 'law of Christ.' . . . Also prominent in the context ([Gal] 5:16-26) is the fruit-producing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Coupled with the centrality of the Spirit in Paul's teaching about what it means to live as a Christian, this strongly suggests that the directing influence of the Spirit is an important part of this law of Christ." (Moo 1993: 368-69) In short, "The Law of Christ is not vague or nebulous. It has been revealed in the indicative and the imperative, which is given concrete expression in the ethical teaching of Jesus (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount) and in the apostolic exhortations to live in accordance with our union with Christ (e.g., Eph. 4-6; Col. 3, etc.)." (Irons 2002: n.p.)

The OT Law never could do what Jesus and the law of Christ can do (**Gal 2:16; 3:2-5, 11, 21**; see also **Acts 15:10-11; Rom 8:1-4**). "The external code of the Law was unable to produce righteousness, and in fact only stirred up sin and brought forth death (Rom. 7:5, 8-10; 2 Cor. 3:6)" (Ibid.). Jesus alone brings "life" (**John 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 68: 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 20:31**). He said that if we "abide" or "continue in" his word, then we *"will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (**John 8:31-32**). His word transforms us from the "inside-out" into the image of Christ Himself (see **Rom 8:29; 12:2**). John Piper puts it this way, "Moses gave us a law but could not change our hearts so that we would freely obey. Our pride and rebellion was not conquered by Moses. But when Christ summons us to obey his law of love, he offers us himself to slay the dragon of our pride, change our hearts, empower us by his Spirit, and fulfill his law." (Piper 1983e: n.p.) Consequently, "When the New Testament writers were faced with ethical issues in the various churches to which they wrote, it would have been relatively easy to appeal to the Ten Commandments. This they did not do. Let us state this fact as a rule of thumb: the New Testament basis for ethical decisions is no longer Moses on Sinai but Christ on Calvary. . . . In dealing with ethical issues, indeed all matters of decision making (ethical or otherwise), the question we should ask ourselves is, 'What course of action or behavior is consistent with the gospel?'" (Goldsworthy 2000: 96) Thus, to be led by, live in, and walk by the Holy Spirit is to obey and fulfill the law of Christ.

Verses 3-4, like the last part of **v. 1**, stress self-examination. **Verse 3** is implying that some of us do not want to bear other people's burdens because we think we are above that and do not want to demean ourselves to help others (particularly others trapped in sin). What **vv. 1, 3-4** are all saying is "Do not compare yourself to others; compare yourself only to Christ." The gospel reveals that we are helpless and are no better than others. Because I know that without Christ I can do *nothing* (**John 15:5**), I can bear the burdens of others freely,

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without condescending, without arrogance, in a spirit of love and compassion.

It may appear that the reference to "boasting" in **v. 4** contradicts **Gal 5:26** which says we are not to become boastful. That is not correct. The point in **v. 4** is to not compare yourself to others, which can lead to boasting if you think you are superior to others. Rather, look to yourself and look to Christ. If you do, you will see that your only reason for boasting is *"in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (**Gal 6:14**; see also **Rom 15:17-18; 1 Cor 1:31**). Similarly, **v. 5** (*"For each one will bear his own load"*) does not contradict **v. 2** (*"Bear one another's burdens"*). **Verse 5** is talking about the judgment. We all have been placed in particular circumstances and given certain responsibilities in this life. We will be held accountable to God at the judgment for what we have done. We cannot shift that accountability to others. In **v. 2** "Christians are being enjoined to help each other bear up under the vicissitudes of life. In [**v. 5**] Christians are told that each person must assume responsibility for his particular duties in life; they have no right to shirk their responsibilities or to expect others to perform them." (Zodhiates 1993: *phortion,* 1452) In fact, if we willingly and joyfully *"bear one another's burdens"* now, then we can look forward to the judgment because we will have been "good and faithful servants" (**Matt 25:21, 23**) who have *"fulfill[ed] the law of Christ."*

- **6:6-10—**What you sow you will reap, so let us do good to all people while we can.

> ***6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.***
> ***7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.***
> ***8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.***

The underlying principle of the directions in this subsection is *"whatever a man sows, this he will also reap"* (**v. 7**). This principle is so important that Paul prefaces it both with a command (*"Do not be deceived"*) and a statement (*"God is not mocked"*). This principle is found throughout the Bible (see, e.g., **Job 4:8; Prov 1:31; 11:18, 25; 14:14; 21:13; 22:8; Jer 17:10; Hos 8:7; 10:12-13; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:37-38; 2 Cor 9:6; Eph 6:8; Jas 3:18**). It is in accord with the repeated statement that God judges people and nations and repays them "according to their deeds [or "ways" or "works"]" (**Judg 1:6-7; 9:22-24, 56-57; 2 Sam 12:9-12; 1 Kgs 2:32-33; 20:35-42; 21:17-19; 2 Chron 6:23, 30; Job 34:11; Ps 18:24; 31:23; 62:12; Prov 24:12; Eccl 12:13-14; Isa 59:18; Jer 17:10; 25:14; 32:19; Ezek 7:3, 8-9, 20, 23-24, 27; 9:10; 11:21; 16:43, 59; 18:30; 22:31; 24:14; 33:20; 35:6, 11, 15; 39:24; Hos 12:2; Joel 3:5-7; Obad 15; Zech 1:6; Matt 16:27; 25:14-30; Luke 12:47-48; John 5:28-29; Rom 2:1-6; 12:19; 1 Cor 3:8, 11-15; 2 Cor 5:10; 11:15; Gal 6:7-8; Eph 6:8; Col 3:25; 2 Tim 4:14; Heb 10:26-27; 1 Pet 1:17; 2 Pet 2:20-22; Jude 14-15; Rev 2:23; 14:13; 20:11-13; 22:12**). This principle relates back to the issue underlying this entire epistle, namely, salvation by grace through faith as opposed to salvation by rules, regulations, and works. The reason why is: "Works are an index of the spiritual condition of a person's heart. . . . Yet the judgment is not a balancing of good works over bad works. Rather, works are seen as unmistakable evidence of the loyalty of the heart; they express belief or unbelief, faithfulness or unfaithfulness. The judgment will reveal whether or not people's loyalties have been with God and the Lamb or with God's enemies." (Ngundu 2006: 1576)

These verses apply the principle of sowing and reaping in three areas: Christian ministry (**v. 6**); Christian holiness (**v. 8**); and Christian service (**vv. 9-10**):

- Christian ministry. **Verse 6** states that the church has an obligation to give back materially to those who have nourished it spiritually (see also **Matt 10:9-10; Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:7-14; Rom 15:27; 1 Tim 5:17-18**). The importance of the church's obligation to provide for good leaders is seen in **1 Tim 5:18**, which quotes both Moses (see **Deut 25:4**) and Jesus (see **Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7**). The NT does not state the amount or specific method by which the church should pay its pastor. According to **1 Tim 5:18** the *amount* of compensation is, in part, based on how well the church leader does his job (i.e., *"rules well"* and *"works hard"*), but it will vary from place to place depending on the particular circumstances. This can lead to abuses by both church leaders and the congregation: church leaders can become greedy, overpaid, and lazy; the congregation can become stingy and demanding. Consequently, it is important for church leaders and congregations to see themselves in partnership, to have the *"mind of Christ"* (**1 Cor 2:16**), and be led and walk by the Spirit.
- Christian holiness. **Verse 8** fleshes out the principle of sowing and reaping, both negatively and positively. "Sowing to the flesh" is catering to the "desires of the flesh" as was discussed in **Gal 5:16-21**;

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"sowing to the Spirit" is being led by, living by, and walking by the Spirit as was discussed in **Gal 5:16-18, 22-25**. This verse is pointing out that we are *always* sowing either to the flesh or to the Spirit. Nothing in life is neutral. The issue is not simply doing good deeds versus doing bad deeds. The *motives* for why we do what we do are of supreme importance. Recall what John Piper said earlier: the most important thing "is not so much what you do as the spirit in which you do it. Circumcision may be a 'work of law' [**Gal 2:1-5**] or an act of love which flows from faith [**Acts 16:3**]. Subjecting yourself to certain dietary restrictions may be a 'work of law' [**1 Cor 8:7**] or a free act of love which comes from faith [**Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 8:13**]. Sunday School teaching, preaching, anti-abortion sit-ins, nuclear freeze demonstrations, metro-foodshare involvement, your own job—all these *may* be 'works of law' which we do in our strength, to move God's favor our way [i.e., 'sowing to the flesh'], or they may be done in humble reliance on the strength which God freely supplies that in everything he may get the glory [i.e., 'sowing to the Spirit']. The decision of curse or blessing hangs on *how* you obey [or, one might say, *why* you obey] and who gets the credit." (Piper 1983a: n.p.) By stating that if one sows to the Spirit one will *"reap eternal life,"* **v. 8** is pointing out that how one lives has *eternal consequences*, not just consequences for this life on this earth. Christians need to be aware of this. "What is at stake in this text is eternal life; not merely sanctification, but also final salvation. Whether you go to heaven or whether you go to hell depends in some way on whether you grow weary in well-doing or not." (Piper 1983f: n.p.) The reason is as Onesimus Ngundu stated above, "Works [i.e., how you live your life] are an index of the spiritual condition of a person's heart" (Ngundu 2006: 1576).

- Christian service. In **vv. 9-10** the focus shifts from personal holiness to serving others by doing good to them. This may seem tiring, but in **v. 9** Paul encourages us by again reminding us of the principle of sowing and reaping: *"in due time we will reap."* He does not mention the specific harvest we will reap: it may be in this life; it may be in our eternal life; or it may be in both. He adds the important caution that we will reap *"if we do not grow weary."* This is highlighting what Jesus said in **Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21** where he gives promises to the one who "overcomes." To "overcome" means to be faithful—loving and serving—all the way to the end. It "consists now in conquering by maintaining her [the church's] faithful witness in the face of trials (e.g., [Rev] 2:9-11, 13; 3:8; 12:11); in overcoming the powers of evil (e.g., [Rev] 6:8 in relation to 6:9-11); in subduing sin in her members' lives (see [Rev] chaps. 2-3); and in beginning to rule over death and Satan by identification with Jesus (cf. [Rev] 1:5–6, 18). The church's endurance, then, is part of the process of conquering." (White 2000: 175) **Verse 10** highlights that Christians need to serve and do good to all people, both believers and unbelievers. However, because we are family (*"the household of the faith"*) we should especially serve and do good to our brothers and sisters in Christ (see also **1 Thess 3:12**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does "freedom" in Christ mean and imply? Freedom from what? Freedom to what?

2. What does "imputed righteousness" mean and why is it important?

3. Many people say they believe in salvation by God's grace through faith but are really struggling to work hard enough to earn or keep God's favor that they do not *experience* God's grace. How can we help such people understand what salvation by grace through faith means and experience God's grace as they go through their lives?

4. Describe the nature of true, saving faith? What does it involve?

5. How is love related to faith?

6. How important is love to Christianity? Why is this the case? Are our churches and Christians universally recognized as places and people of love? If not, why not? If not, what can we do about this?

7. What is the power of "indwelling sin"? How can we overcome it?

8. Why is "serving one another through love" freedom, not servitude? On the other hand, why is serving the "desires of the flesh" slavery, not freedom?

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9. What does a person receive, and what is he or she freed from, when he or she becomes united to Christ by faith?

10. Why is the "inner conflict" between flesh and Spirit in the Christian a good thing?

11. What is the Holy Spirit desiring to transform in the lives of Christians? What means does he use to do this?

12. What is "walking by the Spirit"? How can we do it?

13. Why is it significant that the "fruit of the Spirit" is in the singular, not the plural, even though the "fruit of the Spirit" has several different aspects?

14. What are the ways in which we as individuals and churches can "bear one another's burdens" and thereby fulfill the law of Christ?

15. "Bearing one another's burdens" is a logical and natural outgrowth of the fact that the NT describes the church as a family, and families take care of one another. Do I see my brothers and sisters in Christ as my *real* brothers and sisters? Are most Christians (and churches) treating our brothers and sisters in Christ with the same love, concern, and *practical* help in bearing their burdens as we would treat our earthly brothers and sisters? Do all of the people in our church feel like they are the beloved members of a loving and caring family? If not, what can we do to change things so that, as individuals and churches, we are walking in the Spirit as a family?

16. What is the "law of Christ"?

17. Why is the statement that "God will judge us by our deeds (or works)" consistent with salvation by grace alone through faith alone instead of salvation by law and works?

18. How does the principle of "sowing and reaping" apply to Christian ministry, Christian holiness, and Christian service?

F. Gal 6:11-18—Summary and conclusion: Those who want to circumcise you are hypocrites and are not acting from proper motives anyway; may God's mercy and grace be on those who only glory in the cross of Christ.

[11] See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. [12] Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. [14] But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [15] For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [16] And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.
[17] From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. [18] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

Paul's comment in **v. 11** about *"what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand"* is consistent with what he said in **Gal 4:15** about how the Galatians *"would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me."* It indicates that his bodily illness was a problem involving his eyes (which may be Paul's *"thorn in the flesh"* referred to in **2 Cor 12:7-10**). The rest of this concluding section not only summarizes important aspects of what he has discussed in the rest of this epistle but also contains important substantive information.

In **vv. 12-13** Paul returns to the main issue that prompted this epistle: the Judaizers and their teaching that to be a Christian meant that belief and trust in Jesus alone was not enough, but that a person needs to believe in Jesus + be circumcised, obey the Law of Moses, etc. Paul is pointing out that the Judaizers are hypocrites: they do not even keep the Law themselves. They are like the Pharisees of whom Jesus said in **Matt 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"* (see also **Luke 11:46**). Further, they were preaching the need of circumcision so that *"they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ."* In essence, the basis of their theology was a *worldly*

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one: they were primarily concerned for their own physical safety and wellbeing. As such, the basis for their theology was directly contrary to what Christ said when he told his disciples, *"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (**Matt 10:28; Luke 12:4**), and *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"* (**John 15:20**).

These two verses raise another important issue which Paul also discussed earlier in the epistle. Specifically, these verses again are showing that Christianity is unlike every other religion in the world. At its essence, Christianity is not a religion of outward ceremonies but is something inward and spiritual. Outward ceremonies are simply the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace the Lord gives us. Christianity is divine (what God has done for us), not human (what we do for God). The proponents of all man-made religions focus on human works, not on the cross of Christ. Paul stated in **1 Cor 1:23**, *"We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness."* The Judaizers were endeavoring to escape the cross of Christ. However, if there is no cross, there is no gospel. Every time we look to the cross, we should be thinking, "I am only here, and I am only saved, because of *you*." That is why Paul said that he could never boast in anything *"except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (**v. 14**).

There is a practical implication of this which Paul alludes to when he says that through the cross *"the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* (**v. 14**). In saying this, Paul is renouncing "the standards of the world, the values of the world and his intellectual identification with the way that the world thinks about matters of sin and grace—in other words, he is renouncing the 'basic principles of the world' championed by the Judaizers in which it is understood that people reach heaven by 'being good,' and avoid hell by not doing anything terrible." (Riddlebarger 1998g: 6) Paul understands what complete allegiance to Jesus means. He knows the truth of what Jesus said, *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you"* (**John 15:19**). James expressed the same understanding in **Jas 4:4**, *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."*

Paul proved the reality of the world's being crucified to him and he to the world by the radical change of life which occurred when he came to Christ. Before coming to Christ, he had been rich and powerful, a persecutor of Christians (**Acts 7:58-8:1; 9:1-2; 22:3-5, 20; Phil 3:4-6; 1 Tim 1:13**). Yet from the time of his conversion, God showed him *"how much he must suffer for My name's sake"* (**Acts 9:16**). And suffer he did. He went from being a persecutor of Christians to being persecuted (and ultimately being beheaded) because he was a Christian (see **2 Cor 11: 23-33**). Hence, in **v. 17** he says, *"I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus."* These *"brand-marks of Jesus"* are actually badges of honor.

Verse 15 repeats the substance of what Paul had said in **Gal 5:6** that the essence of Christianity is not the outward ceremonies. However, in **v. 15** he changes the description of the essence of Christianity from *"faith working through love"* to *"a new creation"* (see also **2 Cor 5:17**). *"Faith working through love"* and *"a new creation"* are like two sides of the same coin: *"faith working through love"* reveals the new reality of who and what we are to the world; *"a new creation"* describes the new reality of who and what we are in Christ. We are called *"a new creation"* because we can only be united with Christ by undergoing a new birth (**John 3:3, 5, 7**). That changes Christians. When one comes to Christ, he or she receives a new heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), the mind of Christ (**1 Cor 2:16**), and the Spirit from Christ (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**). These give Christians an intimate, personal relationship with God through Christ (**Heb 4:16**; see also **Heb 7:19**) and a new motive and means of living. Because Christ is in us and we have a new heart, new mind, and new Spirit, his values and priorities become our values and priorities. He is working in us and through us to make us just like himself (**Rom 8:29; Phil 2:12-13**). Being saved and united with Christ creates a new humanity (**John 3:3; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15**); believers are adopted into God's family as his children (**John 1:12; Rom 8:14-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph 1:5; 2:19; 1 John 3:1**) and become deeply related to each other as brothers and sisters (e.g., **Matt 12:50; Acts 1:16; 6:3; 11:29; 12:17; 16:40; 18:18; 21:7, 17; Rom 14:10; 1 Tim 5:1-2**). One day, Christ will return and renew the entire world and all of creation; Christians will receive glorified new bodies and will inherit the new heaven and the new earth (**Rom 8:18-23; 1 Cor 15:35-57; 2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 21:1-11**). In Christ we are, indeed, *"a new creation."* No other religion in the world can do this.

In **v. 16** Paul says, *"And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."* The "rule" of which he speaks is faith and trust in Christ alone through which we *"walk by the Spirit."* Jesus promises, *"My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you"* (**John 14:27**). Paul likewise prays that *"peace and mercy be upon them."* We should be aware that the church will only experience peace and mercy when we walk by this rule; peace and mercy are impossible when we depart from it.

Paul then goes on to say *"and upon the Israel of God."* The phrase *"the Israel of God"* is a further

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definition of the *"new creation"* (**v. 15**) and *"those who walk by this rule"* (**v. 16**). In other words, Paul is talking about the church—both Jewish and Gentile believers united in faith. His entire concern throughout this epistle has been on the unity of the church (see **Gal 3:28**) which is Abraham's true seed (**Gal 3:29**). Consequently, there is no basis to suggest that Paul is now radically shifting his focus to single out either the nation of Israel or only Jewish Christians (see Beale 1999b: 204-33; Köstenberger 2001: 3-24; Longenecker 1990: 298-99; Robertson 2000: 38-46).[26] Bernard Ramm summarizes, "If this expression meant the Jewish people, or even Jewish Christians he would be directly contradicting himself. The true people of God are not the Judaizers who wish to circumcise their converts, but those who glory in the cross and are new creations in Christ. Further, the peace and mercy invoked in this passage *on the basis of this rule* is invoked upon those who walk according to it (and as the parallel Greek construction demands) upon the Israel of God. It is inescapable that the *Israel of God* means the true people of God (in contrast to the Judaizers) who glory in the cross and count the new birth as that saving act of God and not circumcision." (Ramm 1970: 263-64)[27]

Paul concludes his epistle in **v. 18** by calling his readers "brethren" and praying for the "grace" of the Lord Jesus Christ to be upon them. This is fitting, since he has been arguing that only the true gospel unites us as brothers and sisters regardless of our backgrounds, rather than dividing us. He began the epistle with "grace" (**Gal 1:3**), and the entire epistle has been an acclamation of the importance, necessity, and centrality of grace. Thus, his ending should remind us that from beginning to end, our lives are based on and should reflect *"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of outward ceremonies do our churches have? What is the proper role of outward ceremonies?

2. What does it mean that "the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"? Do you think that this is really true in a practical sense of many professing Christians? If not, what can be done to help it become a reality?

3. What does it mean to be "a new creation"?

4. Paul prayed for "peace and mercy" to be on those who "walk by this rule" (i.e., have faith and trust in Christ alone through which we *"walk by the Spirit"*). Do you think most Christians regularly experience peace, regularly are peacemakers, and regularly show mercy? If not, why not? If not, what can we do to help them become people of peace and mercy?

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[26] Even grammatically, Greek word *kai*, which is usually translated "and" (as it is here) can have the meaning of "even," or "namely," or "that is" if the context warrants it, as it does here; see, for example, **John 1:16; 1 Cor 3:5; 8:12; 15:38** (Swavely 2015: n.p.; LaRondelle 1983: 108).

[27] Menn 2009-2018: 49-59 discusses in detail how the church is the new, true, spiritual Israel.

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